

The Ground Zero of Secularization: Hermeneutical Context and Challenge to Christian Mysticism

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We all live in an age wherein the prefix “post” is very much in vogue: postmodernism,² postmetaphysics, poststructuralism, postexistentialism. The aforementioned prefix signifies an overcoming of sorts, i.e, the end of the era of a dominating current or trend, particularly that of a totalitarian or total and integrated systematic whole. It is now the age of fragmentation symptomatic

¹ Estas páginas las dedico a la memoria del amigo entrañable, Prof. Jesús Castellano Cervera, OCD (1941-2006), hijo eminente de Santa Teresa de Jesús, brillante teólogo y liturgista, reconocida autoridad sobre la espiritualidad carmelitana y amado profesor. No tuve la suerte de estar en su aula, pero mi amistad con él ha sido una gran experiencia de aprendizaje. Puede decirse que era como un maestro para mí.

² “Although the term ‘postmodernism’ had been used by a number of writers in the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of postmodernism cannot be said to have crystallized until about the mid-1970s when claims for the existence of this diversely social and cultural phenomenon began to harden within and across a number of different cultural areas and academic disciplines, in philosophy, architecture, film studies and literary subjects. The legitimacy of this debate was established in two directions, effecting a conceptual stereoscopy. First of all, each discipline produced more and more conclusive evidence of the existence of postmodernism within its own area of cultural practice; secondly, and really more importantly, each discipline drew progressively upon the discoveries and definitions made in other disciplines. With the appearance of Jean-François Lyotard’s *La Condition postmoderne* in 1979, and its translation into English in 1984, these different disciplinary diagnoses received an interdisciplinary confirmation, and there no longer seemed room for disagreement that

of our present-day situation³ wherein man seems to have lost the very world he was living in and thus, had to change his own mental structures.⁴ Hegelian idealism would call this *aufhebung* and would interpret it as part of a continuous dialectical process of the self-realization of the *geist* or spirit in history.⁵ Others from an artistic or aesthetic point of view would understand it in terms of decadence,⁶ both in a positive and negative way. Thus, pointing out that it (decadence) is an ambivalent concept especially in art.⁷ In more scientific terms, it is indicative of a paradigm

postmodernism and postmodernity had come to stay," S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, 2nd ed., Oxford-Cambridge, Ma.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, 5-6. Also: J. Sosnoski, *Modern Skeletons in Postmodern Closets: A Cultural Studies Alternative*, Charlottesville-London: University Press of Virginia, 1995. From the viewpoint of God in present literature and the implications herein of postmodernity, see: P.K.Kurz, *Gott in der modernen literatur*, Munich: Kösel-Verlag GmbH & Co., 1995, 115ss.

³ A. Tassi, *Modernity as the Transformation of Truth into Meaning*, in: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985), 185.

⁴ A. Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, 1957, 2.

⁵ Above all, see A.V. Miller (trans.), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. For a competent treatment of this notion in English, see: Q. Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 2nd ed., New York: Fordham University Press, 1993, 20, 60, 107, 115-116, 145; M. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, 282-288, 551-553.

⁶ For example: D. Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

⁷ "Decadence... amounts to a reformation of the aesthetic code whereby art brings forth its meaning. Christian and classical values are very much in the process of being rejected and replaced during the so-called decadent period; the challenge to the classical notion of art as representation... is evidence of this upheaval... Decadence... is less a period of transition than a dynamics of transition. An interference of mimesis and poesis in the late nineteenth century makes up a large part of this dynamics. Dynamics implies movement, and by introducing a more pronounced element of poesis into the novel, decadent writers move away from mimesis as an aesthetic base. Again, Ortega y Gasset's concept of dehumanization aptly describes the decadent element in the transition from romanticism to modernism. What is meant by dehumanization, according to Ortega y Gasset, is a distortion of natural forms, an obscuring of recognizable, human elements in art, such as straightforward, realistic presentations of human situations in the novel and drama." Ibid., 14-16. For a study on mimesis in historical narra-

shift,⁸ which is epistemological in nature⁹ and is applicable to all fields including art.¹⁰ But in practical terms, it is indicative of a shift in values in favor of a new kind of humanism. "Man today wants above all to be human. Not a superman, but equally not a sub-man. He wants to be completely man in a world as human as possible. Is it not surprising how man has got the measure of the world, has ventured on the leap into outer space just as he had previously ventured on the descent into the depths of his own psyche? Is it not surprising that he has consequently taken under his control much – indeed, almost everything – for which God, superhuman and supra-mundane powers and spirits were supposed to be responsible, and has truly come of age?"¹¹

One author labels our present age as the "After-God" era.¹² In this era, only a shadow of God's spirit¹³ remains and that only rumors of angels¹⁴ of transcendental can be heard. In this light, it is interesting to listen to these words of theologian P. Tillich with soft refrains of Nietzsche, known for his "death of God" philosophy:¹⁵ 'And one can become aware of the God above the God of

tives, see: P. Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit. Vol.I: L'histoire et le récit (L'ordre philosophique)*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983.

⁸ Cf. T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd. ed. & enlarged, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

⁹ For a study on how the change in episteme has affected the history of human discourses, see: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. from the French original, New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

¹⁰ For an extremely radical viewpoint, see: R. Argullol, *El fin del mundo como obra de arte*, Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, S.A., 1990.

¹¹ H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, transl. E. Quinn, New York: Image Books-Doubleday, 1984, 26.

¹² Cfr. D. Cupitt, *After God: The Future of Religion*, New York: Basicbooks, 1997.

¹³ Cfr. Several Authors, *Shadow of Spirit. Postmodernism and Religion*, eds. P. Berry & A. Wernick, London: Routledge, 1992.

¹⁴ Cfr. P. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, Expanded with a New Introduction, New York: Anchor Books-Doubleday, 1990.

¹⁵ Nietzsche's atheism is motivated above all by moral concerns. God was a moral obstacle to man's freedom. "The old God could no longer do what he formerly could. One should have let him go. What happened? One altered the

theism in the anxiety of guilt and condemnation when the traditional symbols that enable men to withstand the anxiety of guilt and condemnation have lost their power. When 'divine judgement' is interpreted as a psychological complex and forgiveness as a remnant of the 'father image,' what once was the power in those symbols can still be present and create the courage to be in spite of the experience of an infinite gap between what we are and what we ought to be. The Lutheran courage returns but not supported by the faith in a judging and forgiving God. It returns in terms of the absolute faith which says Yes although there is no special power that conquers guilt. The courage to take the anxiety of meaninglessness upon oneself is the boundary line up to which the courage to be can go. Beyond it is mere non-being. Within it all forms of courage are re-established in the power of the God above the God of theism. The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."¹⁶ This is symptomatic of, as already stated, a shift in values. It is an axiological stand. It is a position that is made concrete in what we choose, in what we place in our experiential scale of values. Specialists have called this phenomenon, with institutional and sociological implications, 'secularization'.¹⁷

conception of him: at this price one retained him. Yahweh the God of 'justice' – no longer at one with Israel, an expression of national self-confidence: now only a God bound by conditions. The new conception of him becomes an instrument in the hands of priestly agitators who henceforth interpret all good fortune as a reward, all misfortune as punishment for disobedience of God, for 'sin': that most mendacious mode of interpretation of a supposed 'moral world-order'.... A God who demands – in place of a God who helps, who devises means, who is fundamentally a word for every happy inspiration of courage and self-reliance.... Morality no longer the expression of the conditions under which a nation lives and grows, no longer a nation's deepest instinct of life, but become abstract, become the antithesis of life – morality as a fundamental degradation of the imagination, as an 'evil eye' for all things.", F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1968, no. 25, 146.

¹⁶ P. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1980, 189-190.

¹⁷ In the discussion that follows on secularization, I have taken into account my previous article: "The Lack of Spirituality in Secularization. An Experiential Paradigm from a Philippine Setting," in: *Studies in Spirituality* 9 (1999), 203-229.

The secular is what is opposed to what is godly. It is equivalent to what is worldly. We are all citizens of what H. Cox calls 'The Secular City'.¹⁸ In fact, to be secularized is to be more of a citizen of this world rather than a citizen of heaven and just a mere passer by in this material world. It denotes being profane, that is, to be "outside the temple" or outside the tutelage of instituted religions and the gods or divinities they preach. "Secularization... marks a change in the way men grasp and understand their life together, and it occurred only when the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living exposed the relativity of the myths and traditions men once thought were unquestionable... If the Greeks perceived the cosmos as an immensely expanded *polis*, and medieval man saw it as the feudal manor enlarged is a field of human exploration and endeavor from which the gods have fled. The world has become man's task and man's responsibility. Contemporary man has become the cosmopolitan. The world has become his city and his city has reached out to include the world."¹⁹

Secularization is the institutionalized attitude of men, derived from secularism (or the attitude of promoting aggressively the decline of religion) but must not be identified with it, that has displaced the God or a God-centered lifestyle from His or its central or highest spot in the scale of values. Unfortunately, there are certain ecclesial and theological circles who deny its existence and its importance or even consider the mere mention of "secularization" as a threat to religion confusing it with secularism.²⁰

As a term, secularization started off in the legal sphere (wherein a cleric or religious ceases his institutional commitment and becomes a lay person or wherein church property is transferred to the state) and now it is a philosophical and theological term that best describes the new pervading perspective of contemporary men who seeks to be free, who seeks to exercise his rational powers free from the tutelage of any institutionalized religious or

¹⁸ Cfr. H. Cox, *The Secular City: A Celebration of its Liberties and an Invitation to its Discipline*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ B. Wilson, "Secularization: The Inherited Model" in: Several Authors, *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 11.

sacral order. In other words, to be secularized is to be distinguished from the religious, the spiritual and even metaphysical or transcendental. It is a process that is similar to the move of those first philosophers of ancient Greece who gave up the gods and their temples for "divinities", i.e., causes and principles that underlie the cosmos.²¹ It is a desacralization process that helps us define our history.

Secularization admits many degrees: from total displacement or banishment or mere relegation or demotion in the scale of values not only of God, but what man has "traditionally" placed in his axiological center stage. But what is clear is that God or a God-centered culture or lifestyle, expressed institutionally and socially by membership in a clear and visible denomination, no longer occupies center stage, but rather occupies a vague spot which we can call 'x'. Secularization is placing God and 'His' institutions in spot 'x'. 'X' no longer marks the spot as in the case of old pirates' treasure maps, but that 'x' is just any variable. It is ambiguous, vague and even totally bereft of content or meaning, but definitely it is not center stage. God is just one of the other values. He or It is an optional commodity in an almost infinite supermarket of values.²²

²¹ Writes an author summarizing the essence of presocratic philosophy: "La tradición filosófica presocrática participa en gran parte de la problemática mitológica en la que se inspira, a pesar de la racionalización y secularización que introduce. El problema de Dios, más bien de lo divino, se presenta en conexión con el cosmos, y la cosmovisión está fusionada con la teología natural. Lo divino es un concepto que connota la idea de lo perfecto y de lo necesario, mientras que el hombre forma parte del cosmos, de lo mudable y contingente. La relación con la divinidad está frenada por la crítica a la religión política (a sus antropomorfismos) mientras que se mantiene la vinculación entre lo divino y el mundo desde una interpretación algeorizante del mito." J. A. Estrada, *Dios en las tradiciones filosóficas. Vol. 1: Aporías y problemas de la teología natural*, Madrid: Editorial Trotta, S.A., 1994, 56-57.

²² 'Divinization as the dissolution of subjectivity within the immanent, amniotic satisfaction, is the final goal and object of postmodernity. Cyberspace is the realization of a metaphor used repeatedly by postmodernity. Cyberspace is the realization of a metaphor used repeatedly by Derrida, Irigaray, and Kristeva – the Knora, the plenitudinous womb, dark, motile, and uninformed, from which all things issue. But this God is only available, and this religion can only be accessed, by those with sufficient financial backing. The postmodern

Secularization is a rational attitude, very much in line with the Kantian notion of enlightenment. It is the culmination of the enlightenment, in the collective experiential level with regards to the question of the transcendental. It is a deliberate decision stemming from man's use of his rational faculties: traditionally named as the intellect and free will. It is a decision guided by axiological considerations: value paradigms (fads and models) by which man evaluates and makes his decisions. Secularization is a decision based on these value paradigms. It is deliberate. It is rational. It is mature. In secularization, man finally comes of age.²³ In itself, it should be taken positively as advocated by Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx: 'For me secularization is increasingly a concept which is not properly understood. I understand secularization as a historical and cultural phenomenon in which the world and society are planned within a rational cognitive horizon. Human beings plan the world and work with a view to a future, and in this way a source disappears from which religion was in fact nourished in the past. I understand secularization in the sense of terrestrial autonomy. The bishops and Rome see secularization as the cause of all evils. They blame secularization for having dulled the religious sense, and so on. Clearly secularism has done that, but it is quite a different phenomenon from secularization.'²⁴

In the philosophical and theological sense, secularization is the attitude that displaces God from the centrality of our experiences. In other words, God is no longer among man's priorities in his scale of values, thus affecting man's mode of experiencing. It is difficult to characterize this phenomenon in a precise manner.

condition is indissolubly associated with 'a shift in the way in which capitalism is working these days.', G. Ward, "Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace," in: Several Authors, *The Postmodern God. A Theological Reader*, Malden-Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, xvi.

²³ Cfr. D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, New York: Macmillan, 1959; Id., *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York: Macmillan, 1963.

²⁴ E. Schillebeeckx, *I am a Happy Theologian. Conversations with Francesco Strazzari*, transl. J. Bowden, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1994, 43. Curiously the renowned Belgian theologian restated the traditional axiom of *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* as *Extra mundum nulla salus*. Idem., *Church. The Human Story of God*, New York: Crossroad, 1993, xvii ff.

At this stage, the following words of Dominique Morin are in order: "This phenomenon of secularization is thus very complex: it proves to be simultaneously the source of atheism and the source of reflection which may help believers to deepen their thought. Seen closely, it is never a simple phenomenon, but has two aspects, one negative and one positive. The negative aspect is its rejection of the religious enterprise; the positive aspect is the access of human beings to their autonomy. Because religion is rejected, the modern world is structured on values which are no longer specifically Christian, even if they have derived from the Christian world. But positively, this means that men and women come of age are responsible for their world. Christians do not have any special knowledge from God which is not given to others. They too must take responsibility in full freedom, along with the risks inherent in any choice. Initially sensitive to the threat of secularization, which they identified with de-Christianization, Christians have ended up recognizing a legitimate tendency in it."²⁵

Secularization, thus, can be positive. It is not to be understood or confused with secularism whose strongest consequence is the so-called death of God phenomenon.²⁶ Secularization, associated with secularity, "denotes the conviction of being able to live a human life in full freedom while affirming the existence of God and his presence in the world, a presence which while real is very

²⁵ D. Morin, *How to Understand God*, transl. J. Bowden, New York: Crossroad, 1990, 18-20.

²⁶ The following words from J.A.T. Robinson are worth taking into account in this light: "For in place of God who is literally or physically 'up there' we have accepted, as part of our mental furniture, a God who is spiritually or metaphysically 'out there'. There are, of course, those for whom he is almost literally 'out there'. They may have accepted the Copernican revolution in science, but until recently at any rate they have still been able to think of God as in some way 'beyond' outer space. In fact the number of people who instinctively seem to feel that it is no longer possible to believe in god in the space-age shows how crudely physical much of this thinking about a God 'out there' has been. Until the last recesses of the cosmos had been explored or were capable of being explored... it was still possible to locate God mentally in some terra incognita. But it now seems there is no room for him, not merely in the inn, but in the entire universe: for there are no vacant places left.", *Honest to God*, London: SCM, 1963, 13-14.

discreet and infinitely respectful of human freedom.’²⁷ This freedom could be an opportunity for man to detach himself, to examine himself and his world from a more “objective” perspective free from any tutelage or from any institutional vigilance. It is indeed a crisis situation, crisis in the sense of opportunity or transition. It is an opportunity for man to purify his faith, his beliefs, his practices and redefine his relation with the world and with history.²⁸

Given the scenario described above, grace is no longer “cheap,” but costly; man is now more cognizant of his own merits and abilities. Man can resolve his own problems without recurring needlessly to God. He does not have to attribute to God all of his problems, trials and the solutions to the same; God is not the perennial shoulder to cry on. Man becomes an even more involved protagonist in his history and not merely resigned to the fates or just passive to the events as if they were the unfolding of Divine Providence.²⁹

It can be said in the light of what has been expounded on above that man has truly become a ‘man’. In other words, he has come of age. He has become responsible, committed, determined and especially cognizant of his own greatness and even of his defects. He can say as Job says to God: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.’ (Job: 42, 2-6) Finally, man could stand naked before God, before his destiny to take the beating (Gen. 3: 8-24). He ceases to fear God in a pathetic paternalistic fashion. He could face God respectfully or not. The decision is his. The ball

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ J. Martín Velasco, “Sacralización y desacralización en la historia de las religiones y en nuestro tiempo,” in: Id., *La religión en nuestro mundo. Ensayos de fenomenología*, Salamanca: Sigueme, 1978, 30.

²⁹ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller & I. Booth, New York: Touchstone, 1995, 43ss.

is in his court. However, a word of caution is in order. Clearly, 'what Christians need is some assistance in finding their way in and through their involvement in secularization and other forces of current society.'³⁰ In the light of the above, we find the following words of theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg enlightening:

Christian theology in the secular world must not give up central elements in God's transcendence of the world and in his salvation or allow them to fade into the background for the sake of assimilation to the secular understanding of reality. On the other hand, Christianity may not be content with just securing the existence of the dogmatic content of the tradition. That would be merely to oppose a counter-world of faith to the secular world, not to bear witness to God as the creator and reconciler of this world of ours. It is a temptation for church and theology to regard as an opportunity for faith the readiness of human beings to succumb to the irrational, to an irrationally affirmed counter-world, as a result of a feeling of alienation in the secular world of culture. Flight from the meaninglessness of the secular world into irrationality can just as well turn to other religious and ideological elements and groups as to the church. The exotic attraction of such groups – like the Hare Krishna people, the New Age movement and also anthroposophy – is greater than that of the churches, which seem conventional alongside it. A church and theology which rely on a readiness to escape into the irrational on the part of those who are homeless in the secular world could very soon prove to be the loser. Rather, the opportunity for Christianity and its theology is to integrate the reduced understanding of reality on the part of the secular culture and its picture of human nature into a greater whole, to offer the reduced rationality of secular culture a greater breadth of reason, which would also include the horizon of the bond between humankind and God.³¹

This is our context. Its hermeneutical significance cannot be underestimated. Some would insist that secularization is

³⁰ J.Gustafson, "A Look in the Secular City" in D. Callahan (ed.), *The Secular City Debate*, New York-London: The Macmillan Co., 1966, 15.

³¹ W. Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World* trans. J. Bowden, New York: Crossroad, 1989, 56-57.

exclusive of first world settings, whereas the third world setting are only beset by poverty and related problems. This is a rather extremist position. First and foremost, secularization is in itself an experiential poverty in terms of spirituality, in terms of a profound relationship with the Absolute taken as God, Lord, Savior, Spouse within the context of the Life of the Spirit. In the same vein, poverty, in its material sense, is exacerbated by a lack of profound experience of God in the Life of the Spirit. This Life of the Spirit is not an escapist option in relation to material poverty. The Life of the Spirit does not deny the reality of material and socio-political injustices, depravation, and want. However, material poverty in itself is a call to a superficial notion of religiosity, manifested in folk religiosity, totally alienated from reality and from a realist viewpoint and which degenerates the options provided by the Life of the Spirit (like devotions and the like) into ambivalent attitudes towards morality (for example, a Robin Hood mentality, prevalent graft and corruption, abuse of human rights and political power, the emergence of dictatorial political dynasties all with a clean conscience and even with the blessing of Church authorities identified with upper classes thus excusing them and declaring the poor culpable) and even sheer superstition. The latter is in itself an escapist attitude. Secularization does not only result in atheism, agnosticism or nominal Catholicism as in the case of first world settings. Secularization would also bring about superstition, lack of profundity in faith, a pragmatic religiosity, and a purely exterior and ambivalent religiosity and morality. Doubtless this demands further reflection.³² However, it is important not to polarize the first and third world settings by generalized or sweeping affirmations with regards to secularization. Such a polarization would even result in the rather divisive notions of a 'first-world god' and 'third-world god'.³³ This would in turn bring about the categories

³² See my initial attempts on this regard: "The Lack of Spirituality in Secularization. An Experiential Paradigm from a Philippine Setting," in: *Studies in Spirituality* 9 (1999), 203-229. In this essay, I deplored the lack of profundity in religiosity. This lack of profundity is in effect a lack of spirituality.

³³ Writes E. Schillebeeckx: "Gustavo Gutiérrez & Jon Sobrino have repeated in a number of publications that talk of God in developing countries is basically different from talk of God in prosperous countries. The conversation partner of

of 'first-world spirituality' and 'third-world spirituality'. Purely social, political and economical modes of classification and evaluation need not impose themselves in determining concepts in spirituality. Such modes of classification can only provide the necessary experiential and concrete context. They could never be the content or hermeneutical criteria in the areas of philosophy, theology, and especially spirituality. The call to profundity, the call to spirituality transcends these contextual barriers and differences.

The Contemporary Mystical Challenge for the Christian of the New Millennium

It is within this secularized condition, I believe, that we should understand the famous statements of the likes of André Malraux: "The twenty first century must be mystical or it will not be the twenty first century" and Karl Rahner, called by some to be the mystical theologian or theologian of mysticism of the twentieth century: "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic', one who has 'experienced something, or he will cease to be anything at all."³⁴

On the contrary, I argue that all Christians are mystics by nature and not only of this new millennium. The essence of Christianity is and has always been mystical, but we, men and women of the past up until our secularized present, have not been fully conscious of it. To be a full-fledged mystic, there is a need for a special kind of consciousness of oneself as not only having

the Western theologian is the secularized person, the agnostic or the atheist. By contrast the conversation partner of the theologian in the Third World is the non-person, the one who is poor and oppressed. Although this observation is acutely correct from a particular perspective, it is nevertheless a half-truth, but precisely in being so it is a challenge to Western thought about God. Poverty in its most oppressive form is in fact the social condition of by far the majority of the world's population. Moreover, we know that this is not a matter of fate or natural law, but the consequence of all kinds of interactive human factors of a cultural, socio-economic and political kind – of a system which can, however, be changed.", *Church*, 53-54.

³⁴ K. Rahner, "Christian Living Formerly and Today," in: id., *Theological Investigations*. Vol. VII, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971, 15.

an experience of God (the so-called phenomena), but in being the experience of God in one's totality, presupposing one's finitude and culpability, and projections towards infinity as a person. More on this later. At the outset, I think this notion should be clear in our minds. Correspondingly, it would be wise to rephrase Rahner's dictum in the following way: "The devout Christian of the future will either be greatly conscious of the mystical nature of his faith and all its implications and of his being the experience of God, given his rational, finite and culpable finitude or he will cease to be anything at all."

We do not only have experiences of God. We do not only experience anything. We ourselves are the very experience. God does not only make Himself experientiable to man, but has become man in Jesus Christ; and in His indwelling in each of us assumes our finitude without being culpable, but shares our history, our journeys from the Mystery and towards a definitive and eschatological embrace and union with the same Mystery. He has become experience, for man is the experiential mode of being God especially viewed from the perspective of the Incarnation, Life and the Mysteries of the Reality of God in person, of God as a human person, finite and thought not culpable undertook upon Himself the consequences of man's culpability: Jesus Christ.

**"Surely the LORD is in this place – and I did not know it"
(Gen. 28:16): Approaching God in the New Millennium**

Much has been written about mysticism. It is an ambiguous term about an ambiguous reality that has been present in human consciousness since the dawn of history. In fact, quite a number of influential men and women in human civilization and history have been mystics or visionaries or those who have delved into the occult. Generally, studies about mysticism have focused on what we call mystical phenomena: ecstasies, ruptures, locutions, visions, dreams. The upsurge of empirical studies especially in the field of psychology has sought to determine the cause of such a phenomena classified as rare, irrational or beyond all that is rational. Thus, people who have these experiences are labeled indiscriminately as rare, irrational, extra-rational and even, psychologically unbalanced, crazy and the like. Others have gone to the extent of attributing

mysticism to drugs, sexual cravings and other pathological states. This is the result of mysticism without spirituality, pure psychology, pure manifestations of the extraordinary, of the bizarre, of the unexpected.

On the other hand, mysticism has been linked with religion or better yet, man's religious search and, in the wake of present day new age mentality, forms part of man's esoteric world. Psychology and other allied sciences can only study and treat the phenomena, i.e., the external manifestations. Clearly, the empirico-psychological approach acknowledges that the essence of mysticism is esoteric and to understand it, there must be an approach towards the esoteric and that the external phenomenon lead to the enclosed world of man. The empirical and psychological approach has brought about a kind of mystical discourse what we call *mystographics* or the description of mysticism.³⁵

But aside from the empirical and psychological approach, and the other approaches that it inspires such as the sociological, cultural and even literary, there is what we may call the essential approach wherein the varieties of mystical experiences are not given importance, but rather the essential sameness found in various traditions and individuals.³⁶ This means that a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Hindu experience the same thing, but the experience is differentiated by cultural, historical and sociological considerations and factors highlighted by the empirical approach.

Personally I am inclined to accept the essential approach though I am cognizant of the risk of reducing to essentials, i.e., the negation of all valid differences and particular characteristics. Essentially, Christian mystics experience the same thing and in

³⁵ For what follows on the types of mystical discourses, I have followed to a certain extent but without adopting to a considerable degree their schemas and theses: I. Behn, *Spanische Mystik*, Düsseldorf, 1957. Cfr. B. Jiménez Duque, *Teología de la mística*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1963, 8; Id., *Mística: La experiencia del misterio*, Valencia-Mexico-Santo Domingo: Edicep, 1995, 10.

³⁶ For the essentialist and empiricist approaches, see: D. Carmody and J. Carmody, *Mysticism: Holiness East and West*, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 6ss.

the same key as the mystics of other traditions and even those who share their Christian condition, but neither should we forget the individuating varieties with each subject of the experience. This is why we can speak of Christian mysticism. In this work, we are after the essence of Christian mysticism. The essence is the *whatness* and from the essence, we can derive the nature or the very same essence in terms of operation in as much as this very same operation is made concrete in the phenomena. To speak of the essence of the mystical is to produce a *mystological* discourse. *Logos* means word; it is the interpreting word. To be mystological is to speak and interpret christian mysticism, especially from an objective viewpoint or from the perspective of a christian non-mystic, a sympathetic outsider. This is the initial framework of this book.

The essence of mysticism (mystology)³⁷ is more important than what the analysis of phenomena (mystography) could offer us. However, essence should not mean something closed. Essences are to be viewed as something open: not only to change nor to varieties, but mysticism should be viewed as something dynamic. It is an experience, hence it is dynamic and should be understood

³⁷ Mystology may admit two general variants. The first is the general discourse of what mysticism is all about in terms of its essence, which necessarily focuses on the experience itself or mysticism as an experience. This is what this present work is basically all about. This first variant can further be subdivided into: a) *mystontology* or which treats of mysticism in terms of its being and becoming as a reality and b) *mystonoetics* which focuses on the cognitive dimension of mysticism which is truly dominant. The other is of the analytical or linguistic type, i.e., it sets the limits of ordinary human language and the conditions to be able to speak of mysticism. This second kind (may) take(s) its cue from the first Wittgenstein in his classic *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "The sense of the world must lie outside of the world." (6.41); "How the world is, is impletely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world." (6.432); "Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is." (6.44); "the contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling." (6.45); "There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical." (6.552); "The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said..." (6.53); "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." (7). I am following this translation: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. C. K. Ogden, London-New York: Routledge, 1990.

above all in terms of process and even progress. Process is actuality or everything is in act,³⁸ whereas progress is the degree by which this act takes place. Taking our cue from the existentialist movement in the 1960's especially from Sartre, "Existence precedes essence".³⁹ The dynamics of the process are of vital importance. They give the experience a fresh and existential meaning. Before mysticism, there are mystics who made mysticism possible. These mystics experience. And these experience have varieties⁴⁰ worth examining, though the variety should not be the main focus but the fact, the act of experiencing. Our brand of essentialism is experiential. In other words, we advocate an experiential essentialism.

Experience is the act of existing, which is concrete and varied and are seen and studied as phenomena. Essence is the universalizing abstraction from this variety. It is the hermeneutical result of the study. But beyond this heuristic level of understanding essence, essence is the very reality of the experience or the very act of existing itself. Essence is the experience in as much as it is real.

In mysticism, we are after real experience or experiences viewed as phenomena. Phenomena does not in any way guarantee that the experience is real. To be real is not just to be empirically placed or conditioned as something really taking place in the positivist sense nor is it just the power of capacity of being narrated. To be real is to be authentic, sincere, truly rooted in reality, which for outsiders is esoteric. However, for those who at least have a sympathetic comprehension or working knowledge

³⁸ Some of the main notions of process theology prove helpful in our reflections, see: J. Cobb & D. Griffin, *Process Theology. An Introductory Exposition*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

³⁹ Cfr. J.P. Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" in W. Kaufmann (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoevski to Sartre*, New York-Scarborough: New American Library, 1975, 345-369. For an introductory study of main existentialist themes, the interested reader may consult the following studies written in English: W. Barrett, *Irrational Man. A Study in Existentialist Philosophy*, New York: Anchor Books, 1990; E. Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, New York: Grover Press, n.d.

⁴⁰ Cfr. W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: Mentor, 1958.

of mysticism it is transcendental. The *esoteric* is the empiricist appreciation of mysticism, whereas the transcendental is the *essentialist* (experiential essentialists as we want to call ourselves) appreciation of the same.

The transcendental goes to the very root of experiencing and is not just limited to the empirical and positivist notion or even the abstracted or ontological notion of experience in as much as experience is the context or the data for intellectual knowledge. The root of experiencing is primarily sensed as the very possibility of experiencing and is primarily interpreted as the very context of experiencing.

Experience and the Mediation of Mysticism: Towards the Challenge of Mystagogy

Experience, in this light, is a mediation. It is the mediation of reality (substantive) itself in order to be real (quality) and/or the mediation of the real (substantive) in order to be reality (quality). Reality (substantive) becomes real (quality) if it is in touch with itself through experience, i.e., it is authentic, sincere (and not just verifiable and falsifiable as the positivists and Popper would say). The real (substantive) is reality (quality) if it is concrete, varied, culturally, historically and sociologically conditioned.

Mysticism is an experience. We have to understand it within the context just explained. Mysticism is a particular way of experiencing, it is a particular way of mediating: *esoteric* (for the empirical viewpoint) or *transcendental* (for the experiential essentialist approach).

It is the mediation of the Mystery,⁴¹ the real and the reality in itself (as substantive), to be real and reality (quality). *Mystikós* is derived from the verb *myo* or to close (especially one's eyes and

⁴¹ See: R. Callois, *L'homme et le Sacre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950; M. Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane*, Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuscherlag, 1957; E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1978; G. Lafont, *Dieu, le temps et l'être* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986); P. Konrad Kurz, *Gott in der modernen literatur*; R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, transl. J.W. Harvey, London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

mouth). The *mystikós* is somebody who is initiated into the mystical rites of a particular secret religious sect. Thus, a *mystikós* receives a mysterious kind of knowledge. He has to close his eyes, not because of the secretive nature of this knowledge, but because it implies a new way of seeing things, an obscure or dark way of perceiving the truth or a supernatural way of perceiving the truth beyond the grasp of the light of ordinary modes of cognition. Thus, the *mystikós* enters into a kind of darkness, for it is dark and mysterious according to the light of ordinary modes of cognition. The mysterious has its own supernatural light which the natural or the ordinary cannot perceive. Thus, the natural is in the dark or the supernatural light is too much for the ordinary mode of cognition thus, making it necessary for one to close his eyes. The *mystikos* also closed his mouth for obvious reasons: not to reveal what had transpired, the secret teachings he has received and the secrets of his organization or group.

We have just given the etymological origins of the term mysticism. Better said the etymological definition of the term. But we refuse to even give a working or functional or real definition of the term. This is what this book is all about: to lay the foundations for an understanding of the essence of Christian mysticism. To define it would be to limit it or to express its essence in a few words which is a grave injustice to its richness. As an experience, mysticism mediates the Mystery making it real (quality) for man within the realm of reality (substantive) and making it reality (quality) for man amidst the real (substantive).

For the truly Christian mystic, his textual mediation of what he existentially experienced is only in part mystographic and mystologic. It is above all *mystagogic*⁴² or that it initiates others

⁴² See especially K. Rahner, "Die Notwendigkeit einer neuen Mystagogie," in: *Handbuch der pastoraltheologie*, II/1, Freiburg, Herder, 1966, 269-271; M. A. Schreiber, "Mistagogia. Comunicazione e vita spirituale," in: *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 28 (1971), 3-58; J.D. Gaitán, "Experiencia y pensamiento. Reflexiones para una teología viva," in: *Revista de Espiritualidad* 36 (1977), 125-144; L. Borriello, "Nota sulla mistagogia o dell'introduzione all'esperienza di Dio," in: *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 32 (1981), 35-89; G. Siegwalt, "Théologie systématique et mystagogique," in: *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse* 62 (1982), 251-299.

into the very experience in itself: *Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*: To contemplate and to share with others what is contemplated. St. Thomas Aquinas puts it beautifully: "In the same vein, it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, thus it is better to give to others, the fruit of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate."⁴³ And if we might add, it is also better to teach others to contemplate for themselves than just share what he has contemplated. We have to share the results of the contemplation too. In doing so, we share the very act, the very lifestyle of contemplation wherein the Christian treats God directly, views all reality from the real in itself, all the real from the Supreme Reality within the context of union and communion, learning to value the relativity of all creation from the absoluteness of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the very Mystery made present and who allows Himself to be experienced, who is available in His transcendence to man within the experiential coordinates of the history of salvation. Contemplation is the attitude, the privileged viewpoint that allows a direct and loving relationship, in terms of union and communion, within this life, with the Absolute, who is God, who relates with man in the spirit and as Father, Brother and Spouse within the dynamics of love.

The great Christian mystics are also Mystagogues. Mystagogy is the vocation of Christian mysticism. It is the fulfillment of the Christian calling. Christianity is, above all, a calling and a free response to the call. The response ultimate consists in sharing, in Mystagogy. The Christian mystical experience initiates, leads, teaches, immerses by sharing.

"Surely the LORD is in this place –and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16), words spoken by Jacob, soon to be named Israel who was fleeing for fear of his brother Esau's revenge. Like Jacob we all flee from our responsibilities, from the consequences of our actions, from the intensity of our own reality and the reality that surrounds, from God. And yet, like Augustine we realize that we cannot escape from God.

⁴³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.188, a.6, corpus articuli. For excellent overviews as to Aquinas's spirituality, see: J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel*, Fribourg: Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, 1996; A. González Fuente, "La teología espiritual en Santo Tomás de Aquino," in: *Teología Espiritual* 45 (2001), 7-42.

Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality: Going on from the Collective Ruins of 9-11

Most of us if not all, especially since the tragedy of September 11, 2001 passing through 11M of Madrid onwards other collective disasters, probably have reached this same conclusion: Death is like God given that we cannot escape from it. The ruins of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and the site where the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center once stood are our present day parthenons. The Madrid train stations of Atocha and others are no longer stops for passengers, but are stops for contemplative men and women to reflect that mankind has converted the great structures of his own city, as a monument to the struggle for a better life, into parthenons: memorials of the dead more appropriate for seas of candles and flowers in improvised shrines rather than for the tools of present-day working man.

Given the sensibilities of our times it would not be far-fetched to infer that the idea of a parthenon is equivalent to the idea of ruins amidst a new and flourishing civilization. The parthenon does not have the same meaning as it did in ancient and even medieval times: that of the super evident presence of God in those bygone super sacral ages. Monuments like the parthenon in Athens are ruins of our proud and self-centered civilizations. But from their ruins once again we, those whom our fallen brethren have left behind, again hear the rumors of the transcendental. All around the world millions have gone to church or religious services to grieve their dead and to pray for safety against the faceless enemy called terrorism – even though almost all fingers point to Bin Laden and the Taliban government. These services did not or could not prevent the inevitability of the U.S. led retaliation.

And yet, one thing is certain since September 11, 2001 there has been a renewed consciousness or experience of God: in the wake of suffering, in the wake of the first war of the third millennium. We realize that we are not invincible and are far from being self-sufficient. Even as we wage war, with super weapons and amidst the fears of bio-chemical warfare, we know that all these bombardments would not end terrorism. Even months

after the Allied triumph in Iraq, people continue to lose their lives with continuous terrorist attacks allegedly masterminded by forces loyal to the already captured Saddam Hussein. As many pacifist sectors protest the Allied retaliation, many Moslem groups are planning to wage a *jihad* (commonly translated as "holy war" thus, perverting its significance of asceticism or efforts or exercise to live Islam accordingly). Not a few brand it as a religious war while others label it as "the" war against the enemies of humanity. Some people would even clarify that though it is not a religious war, it is a just one. Many have even resorted to racist and religious hate crimes in the U.S. mainland and other countries. Certain circles debate whether the Allied retaliation is justice or terrorism or just sheer revenge to show America's might. What is certain is that our lives are changed forever. All philosophizing and theologizing have to part, from now on, from the wounds inflicted in the human race by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. 9-11 was not the end, but just the beginning, especially of a renewed collective sense of vulnerability and even fragility in the wake of advances in technology and in the arms race. 9-11 brought about collectively tragic events such as 11-M in Madrid, Spain. The train station at Atocha is a new ground zero, especially for Europe, just as Bali, Indonesia, serves the same purpose for Asia.

Our new collective parthenon is Ground Zero-from which all other parthenons such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Bali, etc. are consecrated in our collective consciousness in its sense of vulnerability and in its crying out for transcendental meaning or justification (theodicy) in the wake of such tragedies, where the World Trade Center twin towers used to stand. For those of an earlier but still contemporary generation, their new parthenon was Auschwitz which spelled uncertainty, suffering, the silence of God, fragmentation, incoherence, irrational discursiveness. Ground Zero would evoke the experiences of inadequacy, insecurity, incompetence, living in fear (to the extent of being pathological) for being exposed to the elements and the forces of man, facing the unknown (given that terrorism is the masked enemy). We come to realize that:

We have not only forfeited faith; we have lost our faith in the meaning of faith. All we have is a sense of horror. We are afraid of man. We are terrified at our own power. Our proud

Western civilization has not withstood the stream of cruelty and crime that burst forth out of the undercurrents of evil in the human soul. We nearly drown in a stream of guilt and misery that leaves no conscience clean. What have we done with our power? What have we done to the world? The flood of wretchedness is sweeping away our monstrous conceit. Who is the Lord? We despair of ever regaining an awareness of Him, of ever regaining faith in the meaning of faith. Indeed, out of a system of ideas where knowledge is power, where values are a synonym for needs, where the pyramid of being is turned upside down – it is hard to find a way to an awareness of God. If the world is only power to us and we are all absorbed in a gold rush, then the only god we may come upon is the golden calf. Nature as a tool box is a world that does not point beyond itself. It is when nature is sensed as mystery and grandeur that it calls upon us to look beyond it.

The awareness of grandeur and the sublime is all but gone from the modern mind. Our systems of education stress the importance of enabling the student to exploit the power aspect of reality. To some degree, they try to develop his ability to appreciate beauty. But there is no education for the sublime. We teach the children how to measure, how to weigh. We fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe. The sense for the sublime, the sign of the inward greatness of the human soul and something which is potentially given to all men, is not a rare gift. Yet without it, the world becomes flat and the soul a vacuum. Here is where the Biblical view of reality may serve us as a guide. Significantly, the theme of Biblical poetry is not the charm or beauty of nature; it is the grandeur, it is the sublime aspect of nature which Biblical poetry is trying to celebrate.⁴⁴

Contemplating the void in our innermost beings left by Ground Zero and other disasters that have stained the pages of our history, most recently the tragedy in Madrid, because of the effect they have in our morale and in our sense of meaning as residents of this world, let us review the context of man's efforts in this search for sense of meaning.

⁴⁴ A. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 36-37.

First of all, man has recourse to his reasoning powers which find their highest expression and use in *philosophy*. Literally meaning, love or friendship with wisdom, philosophy is man's search for the ultimate meaning of his existence and is the sum-total of all his efforts to transform his existence (his "being there") into life ("being there for someone and for something"). Philosophy is man's aspiration of *union* with (The) Real (substantive) that makes everything into reality (adjective) and with the (Ultimate) Reality (substantive) that becomes real (adjective).

The immediate reaction of man confronted with *theology* vis-à-vis philosophy in his search for meaning is that these two disciplines are opposed to each other not only in methodology, but in terms of presuppositions. Theology is man's search for meaning from faith, whereas philosophy is unassisted by the supernatural virtue of faith. In a sense, this is true. Pure reason is a solitary faculty. Theology reminds man that in his search, in his approach to God he is not alone; God accompanies him along the way. Theology adds a personal dimension to the real that makes everything into reality or that becomes reality and the (Ultimate) Reality that becomes real. This (The) Real and (Ultimate) Reality, taken as substantives, is God. Theology adds this dimension. Theology enriches the notion of union into *communion* since God is a Person. This personal dimension demands, invites towards and offers communion. Theology is the opening of the encounter between God and man. Theology has been commonly understood as man's rational effort to reach the personal meaning of his life in God basing himself on God's allowing Himself to be experienced in the *cognitive* sense: Revelation. Revelation is God's uncovering (phenomenology) and interpreting (hermeneutics) to man. This cognitive sense, together with its phenomenological and hermeneutical moments, does not exhaust the entirety of God's kenotic condescension to man in terms of experience. Revelation is the intelligibility of God's making Himself experientiable to man, who is, as already mentioned, the experiential mode of being God. In Revelation, God becoming experiential in man becomes *intelligible* especially in the culminating moment of Revelation in Jesus Christ. This brings us to a renewed notion of theology, often called God-Talk of man talking about God. In this God-Talk, in all actuality, it is God who talks. God is the one who talks. We only

participate in this talk. Thus, theology, in the positive or human sense and because of its thrust towards communion, is man's intimate, collaborative and committed participation through words and action in God's experiential self-disclosure intelligible in and through Revelation.

Since theology is the starting point of the meeting with God, in terms and communion, *spirituality* is the *dynamism* of the same communion, which presupposes the notion of union. Spirituality is the "Spirit" of man's search for meaning (union) and the personalization of this search together with the participation in the intelligible divine act of self-disclosure (dynamism). This Spirit is dynamic and transforming in terms of man's meeting with God, enriching this meeting (the process side) into an encounter (the end result of the process).⁴⁵

Philosophy is the basis of man's approach to God; *theology* is its concreteness and process of realization; *spirituality* is the dynamism of this search in as much as it is a process and made concrete. Theology gives philosophy a specific and even fundamental direction, philosophy gives theology not only buttress but principle, firmness and the horizon for development. Spirituality does not cap these two, but rather gives them life, elan, power, release and even ambiance. Spirituality insists that the Personal meaning of life of human existence (God) is not a fossil or a dead remnant of the past, but is very much alive since eternity in our present, in the tensions of the present moment as we journey towards our eschatological destiny.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ I have especially taken into account the vision of K. Waaijman, *Spirituality*, transl. J. Vriend, Louvain: Peeters, 2002; F. Ruiz, *Caminos del Espíritu: Compendio de Teología Espiritual*, 5th ed., Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1997) M. Dupuy *Spiritualité*, in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, XIV, Paris: Beauchesne, 1990, 1142-1173; U.-B. Fringelli, *Spiritualität ist immer persönlich. Der Weg zu Christus in uns*, Freiburg-Basel-Vien: Herder, 2002.

⁴⁶ "In our quest for forgotten questions, the method and spirit of philosophical inquiry are of greater importance than theology, which is essentially descriptive, normative, and historical. Philosophy may be defined as the art of asking the right questions. One of the marks of philosophical thinking is that, in contrast to poetry, for example, it is not a self-sufficing pouring forth of insight, but the explicit statement of a problem and the attempt to offer an answer to a

The theological for St. Thomas Aquinas, captured in the expression *Sacra Doctrina*, which is not theology in the positive sense, but the encounter between the initiative of the transcendental and the response of the immanent with faith and reason has a preference for the intellectual, although it is moved by love or charity, given that the intelligence or cognoscitive potency or faculty is the human quality most appreciated by God.⁴⁷

Going further, the initiative of the transcendental is condensed in what we have previously labeled as 'God-Talks' (theology in the primordial sense), while the response of the immanent is condensed with faith and reason, which correspond to philosophy and theology in the positive sense or as human endeavors (love of wisdom by man and God-Talk by man). John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* makes this appeal:

Deprived of what revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so runs the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being.

problem. Theology starts with dogmas, philosophy begins with problems. Philosophy sees the problem first, theology has the answer in advance. We must not, however, disregard another important difference. Not only are the problems of philosophy not identical with the problems of religion; their status is not the same. Philosophy is, in a sense, a kind of thinking that has a beginning but no end. In it, the awareness of the problem outlives all solutions. Its answers are questions in disguise; every new answer giving rise to new questions. In religion, on the other hand, the mystery of the answer hovers over all questions. Philosophy deals with problems as universal issues; to religion the universal issues are personal problems. Philosophy, then, stresses the primacy of the problem, religion stresses the primacy of the person.", A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 4. This paragraph, though we do not totally agree with everything it says, is worth taking into consideration. It reflects the present epistemological differences between philosophy and theology.

⁴⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In X. Ethic*, lect. 13.

This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal – not, I trust, untimely – that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The *parrhesia* of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.⁴⁸

Hopefully, as we rebuild from Ground Zero, the Ground Zero we all carry within, its ruins may not lead us to measure and weigh its former beauty and grandeur, but to revere, to adore, to sense wonder and awe at the sublimity of rebuilding (spirituality), of rediscovering the profound greatness of the human spirit in as much as it is called to rediscover the Mystery (mysticism), the very sublimity in its most transcendental instance as a gift within, a gift to be received, assimilated and shared (mystagogy) in the course of history as Mystery. This gift presupposes the gratuity from above, that allows itself to be experienced and revealed (theology). This new wonder and awe, this new sense of adoration and reverence is an act of wisdom and love (philosophy). It opens up a new hope, which in turn becomes concrete in new expectations, new possibilities, new avenues of realization.

All in all, hope is the presence of new alternatives. Hope indicates that there is something beyond the dead-end and that there is no need to turn back, but there is the imperative of going forward retracing the steps taken. This retracing is a self-examination, a probing into the depth of the process, into the underlying mystery behind the dynamism.

In this light, it is necessary that philosophy be more philosophical than it is; it is also necessary that theology be theological than it is. The direction that these two (philosophy and theology) is metaphysical, transcendental. The guiding path for such a direction can be found in mysticism in as much as it is contextualized in spirituality. This guiding path presents itself as an adventure of the dark night, for it is a journey towards the very heart of the Mystery in its experiential and cognoscitive acces-

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio. On the Relationship between Faith and Reason*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, ¶ 48.

sibility and transcendence (especially in revelation).⁴⁹ Spirituality in this case is rooted in the mystery (in the mystical) and provides the path of realization for mysticism, for the mystery in order to be lived out in its transcendence and within the immanence of history, the narrative of life of man as protagonist of the great narrative of experience.

Spirituality contextualizes man as protagonist in relation to God, emphasizing the dynamic aspect of God and man: the Spirit. Thus, spirituality seeks to understand the relationship between the divine and human spirit. Spirituality seeks to bridge the abyss through mysticism, through an immersion in the mystery given that there must be a primordial compatibility between man and God. This compatibility is in a spiritual level wherein man is realized as a spirit open to God and God as Spirit open to man. The meeting becomes the fulfillment of mysticism, for it is a meeting of love wherein God and man become lovers and spouses, at the same time, especially from the Christian viewpoint, God remains the Father of man and man the child of God.

⁴⁹ The theological for St. Thomas Aquinas, captured in *Sacra Doctrina*, which is not theology in the positive sense, but the encounter between the initiative of the transcendental and the response of the immanent with faith and reason has a preference for the intellectual, although it is moved by love or charity, given that the intelligence or cognoscitive potency or faculty is the human quality most appreciated by God, *In X Ethic*, lect. 13.

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This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal-not, I trust, untimely - that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The *parrhesia* of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.' *Fides et Ratio*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998, ¶ 48.

The Absolute, in the linguistic level, is primarily an axiological term from which all human tending is derived and which gives direction to the same. Philosophy identifies this Absolute with "God", primarily as a principle and later on in its contacts with Revelation affirms the personality of such a principle. Theology is the full reception and assimilation of this Revelation and accepts this God as revealer and as Lord. Spirituality, in turn, makes philosophy more philosophical (more rooted to the principle in its transcendence) and makes theology more theological (in accepting the Revealer in his transcendence within human history interpreting the same as salvation of history) by its dynamic process of living out life as a spirit in relation to the very Power and Force of God, which is His Spirit, in terms of love towards the plenitude of union and communion wherein God is fully experienced in love, in terms of participation, as Father, Brother and Spouse or Lover. God's immense and immeasurable love opens itself to different experiential shades of meaning that do not exhaust the significance, but only point out to its transcendental essence, which goes beyond human comprehension and language and yet, nevertheless, is real, is a reality, is experientiable. Only that which is real and that which is reality is experientiable and vice-versa! The more transcendental, i.e., the more it is ineffable or incomprehensible or immeasurable, the more it is real, the more it is a reality and the more it is experientiable. □