

Crossing Religious Frontiers: Discovering Anew the Interior Life

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O BLESSED NIGHT!

For almost everyone, there have been some experiences in life which have never been forgotten. For most of us, these decisive moments perhaps are few in number, but rare though they may be, they have defined our lives, and they have helped to make us what we are. Philippine was no exception.

“O blessed night!all night long I was in the New World, and I travelled in good company. First of all I reverently **gathered up all the Precious Blood from the Garden, the Praetorium, and Calvary**. Then I took possession of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. **Holding Him close to my heart**, I went forth to scatter my treasure everywhere, without fear that it would be exhausted.....all went well, and no sorrow, not even holy sorrow, could find place in my heart, for it seemed to me that the merits of Jesus were about to be applied in a wholly new manner. The twelve hours of the night passed rapidly and without fatigue, though I knelt the whole time.....I had all my sacrifices to offer: a Mother and what a Mother!, Sisters, relatives, my mountain! **And then I found myself alone with Jesus – alone, or surrounded by dark children** – and I was happier in the midst of my little court than any worldly prince. Dear Mother, when you say to me, *Ecce ego mitte me*, I shall answer quickly. *Vadem....*”¹

Here, Philippine is seeking to elucidate the moment of disclosure which came to her on Holy Thursday, April 3rd, 1806 and which she wrote in her letter on April 4th, 1806 to Sophie. In a way, this letter is the spiritual itinerary of Philippine:

- She enters her heart, **seeing herself gather up all the Precious blood from the Garden, the Praetorium and Calvary** and finally to realize the identity between the two - it is not only to pray but to become prayer. To live at the heart-center, and to experience and to know all things from that center.

¹ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.97-98

- She **held Him close to her heart**. It is in direct reference to this truth that Rumi² sings in one of his *ghazals*³:

Consider this breast as the cave, the spiritual retreat of the Friend. If thou art the companion of the cave, enter the cave, enter the cave.”⁴

Philippine was not only a companion of the cave but a very close friend of the Friend who resided there and she lived from that cave, that center. To live from the center is also to go beyond the world of forms, of traditions, cultures and religions and to realize their inner unity.⁵

- She found **herself alone, alone with Jesus**. Her heart now opened becomes the theater for the manifestation of the different sacred forms, and she is able to discern, through her heart knowledge the inner unity of Being, while at the same time being aware of their outward differences ...**she found herself surrounded by dark children**...different from what she was used to.

CROSSING RELIGIOUS FRONTIERS

Never before has history known so many frontiers as in our contemporary world, and at no period has there been such a frequent violation of frontiers as happens today. The establishment and removal of frontiers is the order of the day. Facing those frontiers and crossing them remains the challenge. This contradictory process is a window to the plight of humanity in these times in a dialectical tension between demarcation of particular identities - geographical, national, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, disciplinary, generic (genre) and so on - and crossing over to the other shore. If the consolidation of frontiers is characterized as ethnicity, tribalism, nationalism, religious identity etc., the crossing of frontiers can be called globalism,

² Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, Mevlânâ/Mawlânâ, Mevlevî/Mawlawī, and more popularly simply as Rumi, was a 13th-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic. Born: October 7, 1207; Died: December 24, 1273, Konya, Turkey

³ *Ghazal* (Arabic/Persian/Urdu:) is understood as a poetic expression of both pain of loss or separation and the beauty of love in spite of that pain. The *ghazals* spread into South Asia in the 12th century by the influence of the Sufi mystics.

⁴ *Kulliyat-i Shams*, Vol 5, *ghazal* 2133, p.12

⁵ This is possible only if the words cultures, traditions, religions – (especially tradition) is defined as coming from the Source and returning to the Source.

multiculturalism, trans-nationalism, religious pluralism etc. However, despite this variety that our world offers us, I believe that there is in truth, only one new experience of real significance which confronts us now more than before, one which our parents and ancestors did not face. That experience is not one of discovering new continents and planets, not one of discovering technology that allows for quicker and better communication, but it is the experience of journeying from one religious universe to another.

Crossing Religious Frontiers, the first part of my address can be seen in many ways but I would like to use the scheme used by Harry Oldmeadow who edited the Journal Crossing Religious Frontiers⁶: He organized the articles under three headings Principles, Perspectives and Encounters. Philippine's spiritual itinerary encompasses these three headings as in her heart, from her heart and with her heart and shows her as a woman of "the frontier in practically every aspect of her life."⁷

Principles: One of the keys to understanding our true nature and our ultimate destiny is the fact that the things of this world are never equal to the range of our intelligence and our will. Intelligence is made for the Absolute and the will for the Real. The essential function of the human intelligence is discernment between the Real and the illusory, between the Permanent and impermanent, and the essential function of the will is attachment to the Permanent or the Real. This discernment and this attachment epitomizes Philippine's spirituality, right from her name which suggests 'Hearts of Oak' to the choices she made right through her life. As a little girl she was free from pettiness and jealousy, dolls did not attract her very much. She loved living things and enjoyed reading about real people. She gave her spending money to the poor and when her parents protested saying, "we give you that for your pleasure" she would say, "This is my pleasure" in a tone which the family came to recognize as final. Philippine did not enjoy boisterous games but was fond of wandering off by herself. She loved solitude not as an escape but to enjoy her own thoughts and to be with God, who was already taking hold of her love and her life. At the age of twelve she knew she wanted to give herself to God and the desire to devote

⁶ Oldmeadow Harry, *Crossing Religious Frontiers*, World Wisdom, 2010

⁷ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.3

herself to missionary work was enkindled in her soul. This remained all through her life. Philippine writes,

“...I was just eight or ten years old, but already I considered it a great privilege to be a missionary. I envied their labors without being frightened by the dangers to which they were exposed, for I was at this time reading the stories of the martyrs, in which I was keenly interested. ...From that time the words *Propagation of the Faith* and *Foreign Missions* and the names of priests destined for them and of religious in far-away lands made my heart thrill.”⁸

This desire was confided to her cousin Josephine Perier who kept her secret. Religious life became the goal of her ambitions. She prayed everyday for light to know God’s will. She remained firm in her will for the Real. When she was seventeen, a young man was brought home, so that she might be settled. She said that the young man was charming and would do but she had made up her mind five years ago that she was going to be a nun. Much to her surprise she got away with it and ever since then there was no more dancing, no more pretty clothes... She was God’s.⁹

Philippine was in love with Christ and sure of His divine support, no matter what the trial of her faith might be. This for her was the Ultimate Reality beyond all determination and limitation. The very fact that the words *Propagation of Faith* and *Foreign Missions* made her heart thrill shows that she was at once interested objectively in the existence of people other than her own and was at the same time aware of her own nature, to cross frontiers as difficult to traverse as that which separates the universe of the American Indians from that of traditional Christianity. What made her brave enough to cross frontiers? And religious frontiers? It was nothing but her choice of the Absolute and her attachment to the Real!

The discernment between the Real and the illusory and a unifying and permanent concentration on the Real is a two-fold definition of what the perennial philosophers call ‘*Religio Perennis*’¹⁰.

⁸ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.23

⁹ All references made to Philippine in this section is taken from: Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.9-30

¹⁰ Lings, Martin; Minnaar, Clinton, *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*. World Wisdom. 2007

According to the contemporary scholarly oriented Traditionalist School, the Perennial Philosophy is "absolute Truth and infinite Presence." Absolute Truth is "the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) that stands as the transcendent

Or in other words, at the heart of every religion and religious experience lies a doctrine or set of guidelines concerning the nature of reality and a method for being able to attain what is Real. Philippine who was so close to the One could see that One resides within the heart of all. At the level of the Absolute, of the Real there is a Unity that underlies diversity of religious forms and practices, a unity which dwells within that deep truth in the heart of all people. The search of this truth that was in Philippine's heart gave her the confidence and eagerness to go 'cross religious frontiers'.

Perspectives: The call to cross religious frontiers for Philippine meant more than some kind of well-meaning superficial 'tolerance' or an invitation to 'spiritual tourism'. For her, it was a call she had heard deep in her heart that she was attentive to in ordinary conversations and that she did not stop asking for..... One day when Abbot Lestrange¹¹ dropped in on the Community and told them about the Mississippi Missions, Philippine was so entranced that she was all for starting off at once and wrote to Sophie whose reply was "I cannot send you now. But keep up your HOPE. Work to be worthy; pray to be chosen..."¹² This could have dampened Philippine's eagerness but she "sang victory in her heart"¹³ She knew that there was an underlying reality and wisdom which united all people. She knew that there was a wisdom that needed to be grasped beyond her own surroundings. This 'eternal wisdom' is in turn the "Wisdom of the Eternal'. If in the previous section the term '*religio perennis*' was used, in this section the term is '*sophia perennis*'¹⁴, simply meaning - Wisdom that resides at the heart of all traditions. Philippine engaged with this wisdom – *sophia perennis* and recognized the value that it held for her and her companions: let us consider three points of merit.¹⁵

source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humankind." Infinite Presence is "the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within the heart of all intrinsically orthodox religions." The Traditionalist School discerns a transcendent and an immanent dimension, namely the discernment of the Real or Absolute, e.q. that which is permanent; and the intentional "mystical concentration on the Real."

¹¹ Abbot Lestrange was the one who preserved and spread the French Trappists abroad during the Revolution

¹² Duffy Gavin. *Heart of Oak – A Sketch of Philippine Duchesne*. Florissant, 1988 p.7

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ The *Sophia Perennis* is true and accessible within each authentic religion according to the internal integrity of that religion.

¹⁵ Oldmeadow Harry, *Crossing Religious Frontiers*, World Wisdom, 2010, p. 92-93

First, is the merit of seeking to know the Eternal Truth. This kind of seeking aims at the full existence of the human state, in other words, that one knows God, knows that everything is from God and in knowing God, that one loves God whose strength overcomes all impediments. Sophie's first reply to Philippine after she arrived the 'new world', mentions this very clearly,

"I did not need your letter to be convinced that your high vocation is from God. The persistency of your desires, the ease with which the plan, apparently so beset with difficulties, was carried out when God's time had come, the way everything concurred to bring about the departure that cost us so much, the strength God gave you to overcome obstacles, all proves to me that in spite of the arguments of human prudence our Lord has called you to found a convent of the Sacred Heart in la Louisiane....."¹⁶

An engagement with the *sophia perennis* in no way requires recourse to comparative recognition of other religions, nor does it require knowledge of other religions beyond one's own. Moreover, it is a mistake to think that knowledge of the *sophia perennis* received through the practice of one's unique religion equates to formal knowledge of other religions. Philippine only knew of her desire to go to the new world and went to 'teach the infidels' and 'savages' .. In her letter to Amelie de Mauduit, she wrote,

"For a long time a very strong and definite attraction has drawn me to the teaching of the infidels. I even thought of going to China, but that is not practicable, as women cannot appear in public there. God has listened to my prayers.....In Paris, I met the Bishop of Louisiana, and it is in his diocese that I shall instruct the savages and found a house of the Society...."¹⁷

Philippine travelled the path to the summit of her own religion without being granted information about the paths which constituted other religions, certainly not those she was waiting to go to. The perspective of her own beliefs was all that she had, but the fact that she so desired to go beyond her own borders speaks of her readiness to let her perspectives be changed!

The second merit of the *sophia perennis* arises from the therapeutic effect that an encounter with truth as expressed in another tradition can have upon one's own understanding of the truth. The recognition of a truth in a 'foreign' religion can awaken and revivify the dormant

¹⁶ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.151

¹⁷ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.146

understanding of an element of one's own religion, which is then more effective in terms of one's own journey.

The most appropriate symbol of Philippine's journey into the Truth of another people perhaps could be seen at the moment when she and her companions reached the point where the waters of the Mississippi mingled with those of the sea, forming a distinctly different color. Their journey was marked with things and events that took them by surprise, the view, the rocks, the night fire flies glowing brighter than the ones in France, the crocodiles, the passengers and even renewing their vows on the Feast of the Sacred Heart! Finally, it was "with deepest emotion that we set foot on this soil which for us, in the eyes of faith and the designs of God, the Promised Land." with a heart filled with gratitude, in spite of the marshy ground, she knelt and kissed the very soil. The soil she was yet to know.

Encounters: In all her encounters she was aware that everyone was 'hospitable', 'charitable', 'kind'. In a letter to Sophie she says, "I have never met more manner and charm than these Creoles possess."¹⁸

In another letter to Sophie she continues to share about the Creoles and she writes.

"The Creoles, who are in the majority in New Orleans, are softer, lighter, and more pleasure-loving. They marry at twelve or fifteen and consider sixteen too late. One of them, after taking music for a month was able to compose. They are like those trees that grow quickly and die early. Their appearance is charming in every detail."¹⁹

What happened to the 'savages' and the 'infidels' that she spoke of earlier? One does not come across those expressions anymore from Philippine. She loved the children who loved their own reality. She now says, in a letter to Sophie "...if our sisters in France imagine us surrounded by savages, they are quite mistaken."

¹⁸ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.169 : Letter to Sophie on June 7 1818

¹⁹ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.171 : in a letter to Sophie on 12 June, 1818

The more the encounter with the people around her grew, the more Philippine learned of the truth in them and she had the courage to share her own. In her first year in St. Charles, Philippine wrote to Sophie and she says,

“In our free school we now have twenty-two children and in proportion to the population this equals a school of one hundred in France. These children have never heard of our Lord, of his birth or his death, nor of hell, and they listen open-mouthed to our instructions. I have to say to them continually, ‘Yes this is really true’”²⁰

The third merit of engaging with the *sophia perennis* - one that has great immediacy in this age of meeting of religions is that we may recognize the Truth in different forms; in other words we may recognize God in our neighbor’s belief, tradition or religion and in recognizing and knowing God in our neighbor that we should love our neighbor as our self.

In the situation where Philippine found herself there was no dearth of opportunity to recognize the Truth in different forms. In her letter to Mother Therese Maillucheu she writes,

“I do not know how to describe the place in which we live. Its population is made up of a mixture of American emigrants from the East, French and Canadian Creoles, German, Irish and Flemish settlers, along with half-breeds who seem to inherit the worst faults of both Indian and white parents. As for real Indians, we never see them because the Americans from the East are pushing them out and making war with them. They are withdrawing further away.....we would attract them more quickly with liquor than with sermons.....”²¹

This was really the Truth in a very different form. This can be seen even more clearly when in her letter to Sophie she says,

“.....People sometimes set fire to the woods and to the wide prairies where the tall grass is very dry. One night the Americans in St. Charles had to keep watch lest the fire spread into the village, for it spreads like a whirlwind. In the autumn we saw fires on all sides and in the woods opposite us on the other side of the Missouri...”²²

In ‘crossing religious frontiers’ we look into the heart of our neighbor. To the degree that we have realized God in our own heart we are able to recognize God in our neighbor’s heart. In the

²⁰ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.197

²¹ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.204

²² Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.205

final analysis it is not that we know God in our neighbor, for the distinction of self and neighbor no longer is real. Rather we might say that both neighbor and self are known in God, by God. In crossing religious frontiers Philippine preserved the religious truth of her own tradition. This gave her the zeal to gain knowledge of the traditions of the people she met. In doing so she discovered anew the meaning of the interior life. She helped people placed under her care to form themselves in the love and knowledge of the Lord in a manner that was, not merely conceptual, but also effective. There is often a risk in being at the frontier and in crossing it, it can feel the furthest and the hardest journey to undertake but such a risk is worth taking in view of the freedom and creativity it implies.

Frontier crossing, of course, is not simply an external event. It is also a spiritual experience. The inner dimension of frontier-crossing is expressed vividly in the experience of separation. Separation is a harsh reality and at the same time a powerful metaphor that captures some of the poignant aspects of our contemporary life. There is a sense of loss of what has been left behind, but what has been left behind continues to be deeply present, shaping the innermost self and identity.

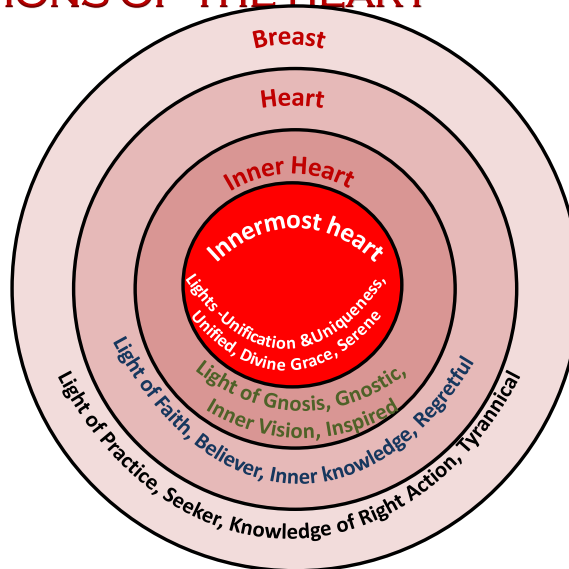
DISCOVERING ANEW THE INTERIOR LIFE

When we address the question of identities and frontier-crossing as a religious phenomenon., we become aware that there are certain types of religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for which frontiers and boundaries have greater significance than for people of primal religions or of other major religious traditions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism. The differences in attitudes to frontiers in the various religious traditions have consequences when it comes to dialogue among followers of these religious traditions. The redeeming element in most religious traditions is the experience of mysticism. The mystic is able to move and commune invisibly across the frontiers. Mysticism can be like the ocean where all rivers meet.

Returning to Philippines' defining moment on the Blessed Night, she says, "Then I took possession of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Holding him close to my heart...."

According to Sufi²³ Psychology and the sufi mystic al Tirmidhi, the heart (referring to it as a place in the body) has four stations; the breast, the heart, the inner heart and the innermost heart. They fit within each other like nested concentric circles. The breast is the outermost circle, the heart and the inner heart are in the two middle circles and the kernel of the heart is at the center. It can be pictured below:

STATIONS OF THE HEART



Each station is also associated with different spiritual stages in Sufism, different levels of knowledge and understanding and different levels of self and levels of the heart in the journey of the soul. I will use this illustration to help us see how Philippine discovered anew the interior life as she moved from the Breast or the outermost heart to the innermost heart and then from the innermost heart to the world.²⁴

²³ A sufi is a mystic who follows the path of love in which God, or Truth, is experienced as the Beloved. The inner relationship of lover and Beloved is the core of the Sufi path. A sufi is a mystic in the Islamic tradition. The word Sufi itself is derived from the Persian word Suf – meaning wool or rough cloth which was worn by the Sufis as a sign of asceticism. The mystical experience of God is a state of oneness or unity with God.

²⁴ Frager Robert, *Heart, Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999

Breast	Heart	Inner Heart	Innermost Heart
Light of Practice	Light of Faith	Light of Gnosis	Lights of Unification and Uniqueness
Seeker	Believer	Gnostic	Unified
Knowledge of right action	Inner knowledge	Inner vision	Divine grace
tyrannical	Regretful	Inspired	Serene

The Breast is directly affected by our words and actions and is nourished by devotion, prayer, charity, service and the practice of fundamental principles found in all traditions and religions. With positive actions, patience, sincerity, steadfast practice of prayer, the breast is cleansed, expands and the Light of Practice grows.

The Arabic word for Breast, *sadr*, means ‘heart and mind’ and in Indonesian it stands for ‘awareness’. The knowledge of the breast is the knowledge of right action, practicing what we know to be right. The knowledge in the breast comes from two sources from outside, and from inside. Rumi refers to these two processes of knowing as the ‘complete intellect’ and the ‘acquired intellect’. The acquired intellect has many levels and each level acquires knowledge from the outside. The complete intellect knows from within.

The intellect is of two kinds:

- The first is acquired from outside. You learn it...from books, teachers, reflection and rote, from concepts and from excellent and new sciences.
- The second is acquired from inside. Your intellect becomes greater than that of others, but you are heavily burdened because of your acquisition so....Seek the fountain from within yourself.

At this first stage we are ruled by our cleverness. This is intelligence without faith in anything outside ourselves. There is no love of God, no sense of inner restraint or even sin, because there

is no inner morality. This is termed the tyrannical self. There is a spark of this in everyone. We may have to look closely to see it because the tyrannical self is an expert in hiding from consciousness. It seems to speak with our own voice and to express our own innermost desires, so we rarely resist it.

The Heart is opened when our outermost heart is cleaned. Actions that harm others or violate universal spiritual principles tend to close or harden the heart. To be a person of the heart means to have a soft, vulnerable, sensitive and knowing heart. Heart knowledge is deepened by experience, experience of faith. Or what is called the Light of Faith. The Light of Faith is like a wonderful lamp that has been covered with many layers of veils. Although the light is full and perfect, we need to remove the veils that obscure it. It is our job to uncover the light that God placed within our hearts and to pray that God help us to make our efforts bear fruit.

At this stage we begin to understand the negative effects of our habitual self-centered approach to the world, even though we do not yet have the ability to change. Our regretful self, our misdeeds now begin to become repellent to us. We enter a cycle of erring, regretting our mistakes and then erring again. The blaming – regretful self is that which has become illuminated by the light of the heart.

The Inner Heart is the place of inner vision and the locus of the Light of Gnosis. Gnosis means ‘inner wisdom’ or ‘knowledge of spiritual truth’. The heart and the inner heart are closely linked and, at times almost indistinguishable. The heart knows and the inner heart sees. They complement each other. If knowledge and vision is combined, the unseen becomes seen, and we become certain in our faith. Those who have knowledge without vision are like scholars who have studied a foreign country for many years but have never visited it. Similarly, those who have vision without knowledge are like the tourists who visit a foreign country but know nothing of the country’s language, history, or customs.

Those who have reached the inner heart are aware of a presence. They worship God as if they saw Him, and if they do not see God they are sure that God sees them. The inner hearts perception is true perception.

At this third stage, we begin to take genuine pleasure in prayer. We begin to experience for ourselves the religious and spiritual truths that so far we have only heard about. We begin to feel genuine love for God and for others. This is called the inspired self because the self is now able to repent not as self-blame but as truly aware of the wrong doing and to vow never to do it again.²⁵ We begin to hear the inner voice of guidance.

The Innermost Heart is infinite in its scope and radiance. It is like a great axis that remains stable as everything else revolves around it. All the heart's other lights are based on the innermost heart's Lights of Unification and the Uniqueness of God. The innermost heart is irrigated with the water of God's kindness, and its roots are filled with the lights of certainty. God cultivates the innermost heart directly, without any intermediary. The deepest truths are understood only through the innermost heart and we reach the ultimate level of understanding. This means to transform oneself, to remove the veils that cover the light and to rest in the Light.

The serene self characterizes this resting. It is content with the present, with whatever is, with whatever God brings us. This serenity and contentment is rooted in the love of God.²⁶

²⁵ There are three aspects to sincere repentance. Repentance of the past is to see clearly our errors without rationalizing or making excuses. Repentance of the present is to make amends to anyone or anything injured by our past errors. Repentance of the future is to vow sincerely never to repeat that mistake again. The sign of God's acceptance of our repentance is that those things that were so attractive to us in the past have become unattractive – God has taken that temptation from our hearts.

Fragar Robert, *Heart , Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999 page 71

²⁶ This whole section is taken from the book

Fragar Robert, *Heart , Self and Soul – The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999

The Soul's Journey

The whole of Philippine's life was a movement from the outermost heart to the innermost heart, from the light of practice to the lights of unification and uniqueness from being a seeker to being one with the one she was seeking, from the knowledge of right action to Divine grace and from the tyrannical self to the serene self.

All of this could happen because she was with "Jesus at all times; and in silence, He molded her to His own shape."²⁷ There were some things in life that she loved and her love put forth what was important to her – the Society and its foundress, she loved and was loyal to Sophie, but refused an offer to go home and see her. She loved her family, but wanted them all to be mission-minded. She loved her sisters, and drove them hard. She loved the Church and took interest in every enterprise, for the propagation of the faith. She followed those from Florissant, who were doing wonders for her Indians. She longed for Heaven for herself and everyone else. Although she loved all this, none of it could satisfy her soul and she craved solitude and the interior life. In 1840, to her deepest joy she was relieved of all authority and left alone with God. At this time she was seventy one and had twelve years to live. Whether she had twelve years to live or had lived thirty six years already in America, Philippine suffered practically every hardship a frontier had to offer.

Poor lodging, shortages of food, drinking water, fuel, money, high postal rates, forest fires and blazing chimneys, climate, cramped living quarters and the privation of all privacy, the crude manners of children, the school children's ingratitude toward the nuns who tried to teach them, loneliness of remote places and a foreign tongue, criticism of people who should have appreciated her work. For February, 1823, she had only one single entry in her journal where she shared a sad story:

"The withdrawal and complaints of two postulants who had no vocation; the worldliness of our pupils who have left school and their forgetfulness of us; the indocility of the present pupils; calumnies circulated about us. All this makes us feel the weight of the

²⁷ Duffy Gavin. *Heart of Oak – A Sketch of Philippine Duchesne*. Florissant, 1988 p.17

cross. And to it must be added our poverty and an illness that has attacked nearly all the religious and a number of the children.”²⁸

She was learning the doctrine of the cross from within her own heart.

In a letter to Amelie de Mauduit on December 28, 1823 she writes about her frontier surroundings,

“...Our convent is built of brick and joins the newly erected parish church, which is also of brick....(our property) consists of a big meadow, a small woodland along a creek, and a garden with a courtyard and a pasture for our animals. We have about 100 chickens, 7 cows, 1 horse....”²⁹

In situations like these Philippine poured out all the treasures of her mind and heart, longing to draw the people she met to the knowledge and love of Christ. She described the most drab situation in great detail, making the place look so beautiful and perhaps anyone reading her description would make them feel that they are missing something and would make them long to go there - to the place which had such ‘abundance’. Perhaps this sprang from her own prayer and awareness of ‘spiritual abundance’. In her first letter in 1824 she writes about her retreat with Father Van Quickenborne. “Those eight days were really a time of spiritual abundance.”³⁰

Her prayer, her life, her love for the Lord was what people wanted more than her work. Once when Father Verhaegan visited the community to talk about the Sugar Creek mission, he met with Mothers Gray and Mathevon. Philippine was sitting in the parlor. They were discussing about the trip, the baggage, the date and reservations for the three travelers. “Three” he said, Father Verhaegen expected four. At the time Philippine was sitting praying silently, tears fell on the darkened toil-worn hands that held her rosary. Fr. Verhaegen looking at Philippine and then turning to Mother Gray said,

“But she must come too....even if she can use only one leg, she will come. Why, if we have to carry her all the way on our shoulders, she is coming with us, She may not be

²⁸ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.261

²⁹ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.272

³⁰ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.272

able to do much work but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us. Her very presence will draw all manner of heavenly favors on the work.”³¹

In the country of her desires it was hard for Philippine to admit that she had been ill again. It was even harder for her to realize that her feebleness cut her off from the activities of the other missionaries. However, this did not stop her from playing with the children, keeping the mission registry, staying up nights nursing sick Indians and mending clothing. For the Indians however, they appreciated her from the moment she set foot in Sugar Creek. They loved her and respected her and brought her all kinds of things like fresh corn, newly laid eggs, chickens, wild plums, sweet, clean straw for her pallet. Mother Mathevon noticed this and this is what she wrote about Philippine,

“She stayed all morning in the church, so Sister Louise would take her a cup of coffee each day, and she drank it at the door of the church. After dinner she went again for three or four hours of prayer. The Indians had the greatest admiration for her, recommended themselves to her prayers, and called her Woman who prays always.”³²

If we describe the process of spiritual regeneration or enlightenment as a whole, or the discovery of the interior life, one could perhaps best qualify it in terms of a circuit, with wisdom calling forth its appropriate method at each stage of the way with the result that this same wisdom will become integrated in the soul as a henceforth undeniable element of one's being. The Way starts from wisdom and ends in wisdom. Jesus offers Himself to us as both ‘Light’ - another name for Wisdom and as “the Way”, another name for Method. The prayer "light up our way, O Lord !" could help us make the journey from the breast to the innermost heart. In other words help discover anew with each moment, our own depths, our interior life. This discovery is helped even further with a companion with whom you can feel a sense of belonging.

³¹ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.427

³² Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.430

Philippine had a depth of affection for Sophie and the bond of intimate friendship drew these two gifted women together. In spite of the difference in age and experience the younger became her mother and guide and the older with a docility almost foreign to her natural character, had become a spiritual child again under Sophie's guidance that had been drawn from the Heart of Christ.

In her first letter Sophie writes to Philippine she invites her to enter more and more fully into the designs of the loving Lord.

“Try to grow each day more worthy of His work by laying a deeper foundation of humility in your soul for out of this will spring gentleness and forbearance with the souls entrusted to you.”

Very early on in the correspondence between them Sophie assures Philippine of being with her till the end..She writes,

“Our Lord, who gave you to us, has set no limits to this charge but that of death. Until then, if I can help you I shall do so with all my heart. I do not belong to myself but to you. Read that sentence again , if you like...”³³

In the same letter Sophie reminds Philippine to embrace the cross as that is the greatest of all treasures. Often in her correspondence Sophie asks Philippine to wait, to act with prudence to take care of her health as well as commends her for her commitment and the details of her letters that delights her and inflames her zeal!

Sophie's letters to Philippine make her aware of what crossing frontiers entails. In her letter of 6th August, 1826 she writes,

“...my dear daughter, do not think of retirement, I have not yet anyone to replace you. Among the three people I am sending you.....You know dear daughter, the first comers must be victims. They must be ground into the foundations that they may support those who come later....”³⁴

³³ Callan Louise, rscj, *Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852*. The Newman Press 1965 pg.85

³⁴ De Charry, Jeanne (Trans – Hogg Barbara). *Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat – Saint Philippine Duchesne, Correspondence Second Part – II – North America (1821-1826)* page.281

Being away from 'home' Sophie shares with Philippine her concerns, the reality of the Society and of course her love,

“It is superiors who are lacking, for we do not know what to with some religious. Alas! We are expiating in full for having accepted some too easily. Now nobody wants them. Several with excellent vocations are sick and pining away and will not live; that is a very painful cross. We must always say Fiat!.....Receive, my dear and old friend, the assurance of my unshakable love in C.J.M, Your Mother and friend, Barat”³⁵

The wisdom of Sophie drawn from the Heart of Christ showed Philippine the way, gave her the methods to cross frontiers and know the God of her heart. Failure though she felt, her human enterprise in a 'new country' was brought to fulfillment by her wisdom and method both operating together. Thus making her failure not the opposite of success but part of success! The Tibetans convey this lesson by the following parable: two men were both trying to get to the City of *Nirvana*, but neither of them could make much headway because one was blind while the other was lame, so they decided to join forces; the lame man climbed on the blind man's back and pointed out the way (this is Wisdom) while the man who had sound legs (this is Method) carried his companion along the road. This sets the pattern of every spiritual life; all the rest is but a matter of variable circumstance and detail.

Philippine let Jesus point the way (Wisdom) and she discovered Him anew as she followed (Method) Him in the hearts of all whom she met. She let the Interior Life capture her as she waited upon the Lord by day and by night.

Towards the end of her life Philippine summed up the spiritual journey of her life in four stations of the Sufi (without her knowing it of course!) in a spiritual notebook. This was her prayer that she had lived nearly thirty five years on the American frontier:

“O my God, I desire to live as a victim offered in a spirit of penance and love. Then let me prepare all that is needed for a sacrifice of love whose perfume will rise even to the Heart of Jesus.

May my whole being be the victim, all that I am and all that I have.

³⁵ De Charry, Jeanne (Trans – Hogg Barbara). *Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat – Saint Philippine Duchesne, Correspondence Second Part – II – North America (1821-1826)* page.286-287

May my own heart be the altar, my separation from the world and all earthly pleasures the sacrificial knife.

May my love be the consuming fire, and my yearning desires the breeze that fans it.

Let me pour on it the incense and perfume of all virtues, and to this mystical sacrifice let me bring all that I cling to, that I may offer all, burn all, consume all, keeping back nothing for self.

O Divine Love, my very God, accept this sacrifice which I desire to offer You at every instant of my life.”³⁶

Her journey to the frontiers took Philippine to her innermost heart, to the Secret of secrets, to the Presence³⁷ in total unity with her God here on earth to whom she gave her all in freedom. In the journey to the soul all mystics meet regardless of caste or creed. Philippine discovered this in her world, we need to discover this anew in ours.

Mystics can say in unison,

“Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love.

Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form.

The wound is the place where the Light enters you”³⁸

This interior light enables in them the art of crossing frontiers, but that art needs to be rooted and inspired by something much deeper. If Being and Nothingness are the ultimate metaphysical polarities, then this needs to be reflected in a fuller understanding and approach to frontiers. One needs to learn to cross the frontier both from the pole of Being or fullness and from the pole of Nothingness or emptiness. In the Indic civilization these two approaches are represented by the

³⁶ Callan Louise, rscj, Philippine Duchesne- Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852. The Newman Press 1965 pg.488

³⁷ The presence referred to here is the Presence of God. The source of the intellect is God's presence within each person. It is this presence that gives us the meaning of our existence.

³⁸The words of the mystic continues:

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about.

Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?

If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?

Vedic and Upanishadic tradition of *puranam* (fullness) on the one hand, and of *sunyata* (nothingness) of Buddhism on the other. The inability to cross over to the different from either pole can weaken our understanding of the world, the Ultimate and the self. It is easier to cross over to the other from the pole of being or fullness. This naturally creates problems. Philippine, without really knowing it activated the ability to cross over from the pole of nothingness or emptiness. She lived from her innermost heart the central Christian mystery of Jesus Christ who offers the revelation of both fullness and nothingness - the total self-emptying. Many frontiers which are found to be difficult to negotiate and cross over could be crossed by making use of the other pole represented in the Christian mystery of emptiness as self-abnegation, so as to reach a deeper perception of the mystery of God, the world and the self. Perhaps here lies something that could become an important program for followers of all religions and traditions in our world today.

Even on her death bed, from her nothingness (but full of the Presence of God) , when she heard the invocation, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph.” Giving her all, she answered, “I give you my heart, my soul, and my life – oh yes, my life, generously.”

18th November, 1852 noon, at the Angelus remembering Mary’s fiat and birthing of a Holy Mystery into the world, Philippine’s life on earth came to an end to a beginning of life, to a deeper and newer discovery and mystery of the interior life. This pioneer spirit lives on in her sisters in the United States of America, in South America through the blessing she gave Anna du Rousier, in the journey to a foundation in Timaru – New Zealand, and in another journey by sea that sailed further west the Society reached the far east and when the church declared her a saint, in her honor the Society not from a ship this time, but in an airplane on the 8th February, 1989 landed on the soil of the spice islands – Indonesia. The pattern of Philippine’s life lives on waiting, falling, moving on....discovering the wound where the Light enters.

AND THE STORY IS NOT OVER.....We are almost toward the end of the second decade of the new millennium and each day we witness more and more the shifting of frontiers, with far reaching consequences for the construction of the self-identity of the followers of the worlds’

major religions especially the two largest religions in the world - Christianity and Islam. A crucial question that faces us today is again a question of frontiers. It is the question of the frontiers with other religious traditions. This is a global problem which calls for a global solution and a global responsibility. This certainly occupies and is still going to occupy our attention. This question is not going to be resolved by the approach of exclusivism, inclusivism or even pluralism that we have chosen so far. The ways in which Philippine chose to live her life calls us to something more, to help us respond to this global reality.

Open integrity: the challenge!

In a general religious environment in which we experience many frontiers being reinforced and others collapsing, and still others meeting and merging, we can learn from Philippine how to develop the spiritual agility and wisdom to deal with frontiers and boundaries. The crossing of frontiers, of religious frontiers, is a larger human experience. To encounter this, requires an attitude of Openness and of Integrity or in other words Open Integrity.³⁹

An openness, firstly to one's own world and a willingness to relate to the world, the larger society, with its questions, truth claims, core beliefs and even interpretations of each other. Many types of identities will increasingly face the question of how to go about the reality of frontiers because openness of mind and heart leads to both the truth of oneself as well as to a new truth that one may very likely be confronted with in the other. It is the present day version of the question of love of neighbor, constitutive of which is the recognition of the other's self-identity: individual, collective, cultural, etc. Secondly, openness to reconciliation, which expresses itself today in the way we face the question of frontiers and boundaries and how we cross over and reach out to the other in her or his otherness.

Besides openness what is required today is integrity. For authentic understanding to take place in crossing religious frontiers it is important to understand the basis of one's own religion first. In other words, what is it that makes my religion and the religion of the other different and

³⁹ For more on Open Integrity, please refer to Philips, Gerardette. *Beyond Pluralism*. Institut DIAN/Interfidei, Yogyakarta, 2013

unique? This is an essential criteria for making the move toward a deeper understanding. The integrity lies in believing totally that the religion I profess is true, unique, different, total and is the best for me, and in no way do I need to shy away, or deny the beliefs that are core to my faith.

The inculcation of the attitude or approach of Open Integrity should become part of the culture and pedagogy of Crossing Religious Frontiers. It amounts to an education of religious communities to the true spirit of universality⁴⁰. By crossing frontiers and communing across them, we will continuously discover new dimensions of our own faith identity rooted in a Presence.

The experimental and open-ended character inherent in every frontier-crossing and encounter will lead us to perceive our faith-identity ever afresh simply because it moves from the center to the periphery and then again from the periphery to the center.

Whatever our identity may be, for each of us, our future lies on the periphery, in the frontier-zones. Encounter with new identities need not signify a threat to one's own identity because it is a communion in difference. We are able to be different because at the core we are one, we are united⁴¹.

“The aim is not to change one's belief but to make space for the other's deeply held belief. Once this space for another's belief is created, the dignity of difference can flourish.”⁴²

And today, we can all be here, celebrating this life of Philippine, looking again at the meaning of our own lives as women and men who belong to a religion, culture, tradition, only because once there was a woman whose heart despite the heaviness, dared to send her best friend to the frontiers. Now, today when the world is in so great a need of women, religious women, can we too like her find one, ‘perhaps our best friend’ whom God wishes to make use of to do great

⁴⁰ The key to understanding each others' religions in its uniqueness and in its universality, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, can be seen from the point of view of Tradition. Tradition meaning, everything comes from the Source and this Source becomes the place for all to return. This is all encompassed in the Breath of God – the Breath of the Compassionate. - *Nafas Al Rahman (Breath of the Compassionate)*

⁴¹ Unity is Unique – *Al Tawhid Wahid*

⁴² Philips, Gerardette. *Beyond Pluralism*. Institut DIAN/Interfidei, Yogyakarta, 2013 pg. 231

things, to reach the frontiers, to go beyond them and to encounter the greatest frontier of all which is the Heart of God in our world today? Perhaps, this encounter, as with Philippine, could be her decisive moment.

I end my address with a story

The master loved one of his disciples very much. This caused the other disciples to become jealous. One day the master who could see the frontiers in the distance called all his disciples and said to them, ‘I see the frontiers in the distance, I invite each of you to go there, cross all borders to reach there and once you are there, write your story in a place where no one could see you. No one at all, soon I will be with you to listen to your story.

When the master met his disciples, they came one by one each with his/her story. Finally, the favorite disciple came with a blank paper. The others laughed and whispered among themselves that the favorite disciple had finally revealed how foolish she was. She could not even carry out the masters ideas.

The master asked each one to describe how they carried out the instructions. The first one said, “I got my paper, my best pens and colored pencils, went into a small house, locked the door, closed the curtains and wrote my story.”, the other one said, “I went to the place which was allotted to us for our stay, locked the door, entered a closet with light just enough for me to see my pen and I wrote my story.” The third disciple also said, “I took enough paper and enough ink in my pen and even blindfolded myself so that even I could not see myself writing my own story.” And the description continued, one went into a cave, one went into a forest, a deserted place and so on.

Last was the turn of the favorite disciple. She hung her head, embarrassed, feeling a failure with her paper blank in her hand. In a low voice, she said, “I got my paper and pen into my room to write my story as you invited us to, but everywhere there was a Presence. I went into the most deserted parts of the forest but the Presence was still with me. Even in the darkest caves the

Presence was there. There was no place I could go where I was not seen. The favorite disciple crossed the frontiers and discovered what was in her innermost heart. The Presence! Then the other disciples realized why she was the master's favorite disciple.

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APPENDIX

SYMBOLS EXPERIENCED IN PRAYER AND MEDITATION⁴³

Symbols experienced in prayer and meditation can have important spiritual significance, although they are not yet the Truth. These symbols have a different symbolic meaning from dream images.

Below are symbols that Philippine experienced. You can add your own to this list from your reading.

ALTAR:	Sacred Space for Prayer & Meditation to ponder an experience
CHALICE:	Self-realization
CROSS:	Threefold symbol of being: transcendental, universal and individual
DAWN:	An opening, the beginning of something new which has not quite arrived
FIRE:	Usually big emotions or dramas
INCENSE:	Pause to experience peace
JOURNEY:	On board a ship is always progress in the spiritual path
LIGHT:	A power
SUNLIGHT	The light of Truth
LIGHT AROUND US:	A sign of progress, of a great power coming from God if the light is from above
MAP:	Fields of inner experience and reality
MOON:	Feminine spirituality, bliss, and the power of vision
MOUNTAIN:	Road leading upwards to the divine and downwards to reality
NIGHT:	A space and time where one surrenders and experiences oneness and unity
RIVER:	Flow of life, the river of life, the movement in your Consciousness
ROCK:	Strength and Stability
TREE:	The picture of life, the life power, the tree of life
WATER:	A condition, a plane of consciousness

⁴³ The meaning of these symbols are known to and adapted from the Sufi tradition – for further reading, refer to Vaughan-lee Llewellyn Sufism: *The Transformation of the Heart*. The Golden Sufi Center, USA, 1995