Encountering God through friendship: Re-presenting the doctrine of the Holy Triune God through the mystical theology of Egide van Broeckhoven, S.J.

Author: Chrysostom B. Exaltacion

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ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH FRIENDSHIP
Re-Presenting the Doctrine of the Holy Triune God
Through the Mystical Theology of Egide van Broeckhoven, S.J.

A Thesis
Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
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By: Chrysostom B. Exaltacion, S.J.
Co-Mentors:
Rev. Dr. Andre Brouillette, S.J.
Rev. Dr. Brian P. Dunkle, S.J.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: .......................................................... 1
A. The Context for the Thesis ............................................. 2
B. The Structure of the Thesis ............................................. 4

CHAPTER ONE: The Man Behind the Diary ......................... 6
A. His Life ............................................................. 6
B. His Works .......................................................... 11
C. His Influences ...................................................... 13
D. His Mysticism ...................................................... 16
Conclusion ............................................................ 19

CHAPTER TWO: A Theology of Friendship ......................... 21
A. Entry 1: March 17, 1962 ............................................. 22
   1. Analysis of the Text .............................................. 23
      a. Desire as the Starting Point of One’s Search for, Encounter with, and Understanding of God .................................................. 23
      b. Revelation as Fundamental to One’s Awareness of the True Object of One’s Desiring: God ................................................. 26
      c. Friendship as a Means for God’s Revelation ............................ 31
   2. Brief Summary of the Entry’s Main Points ....................... 33
B. Entry 2: February 10, 1962 ........................................... 34
   1. Analysis of the Text .............................................. 35
      a. Friendship as a Perfect Expression of Trinitarian Love .......... 35
      b. Friendship’s Mission is the Extension of Trinitarian Love for Creation ................................................................. 39
         1) Ratzinger’s Meditation on God’s Descent from Heaven .......... 41
         2) Von Balthasar’s Theology of Christ’s Descent into Hell .......... 42
   2. Brief Summary of the Entry’s Main Points ....................... 45

CHAPTER THREE: Embodying Friendship ......................... 47
A. Living Out the Theology of Friendship ........................................ 47
   1. Knowing the Desire of the Other ............................................... 49
   2. Revealing God to the Other ..................................................... 51
   3. Loving the Other in Holy Friendship ......................................... 52
B. The Challenges of Embodying Holy Friendship ............................. 56
   1. Attachment to the Law as a Manifestation of
      One’s Fear to Risk Loving ...................................................... 58
   2. Losing that Pilgrim’s Spirit ..................................................... 61
   3. The Denial of Death .................................................................. 63
      a. Goizueta’s Insights on the Denial of Death ......................... 64
      b. Teilhard de Chardin’s Theology of the Paschal Mystery of Christ .... 66

CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 68
Journey Home ................................................................................ 71
BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................. 74
INTRODUCTION

As Christians, our mission is to share with all humanity the gift we receive from the God we profess. “What you receive as a gift, give as a gift” (Matthew 10:8). Since we receive Christ as the gift – that is, God’s very gift of self – we are to give Christ as the gift. However, I believe there is an art in gift giving. Although the treasure is the gift itself, the way the gift is presented does count, making the gift more attractive to the receiver. For many times, human as we are, what is essential becomes invisible to our eyes, to borrow the words of Antoine de Saint Exupery.¹ Therefore, in presenting Christ to the new millennium – where science and technology seem to be more attractive than God; where power, fame and fortune seem to satisfy the aching void in one’s heart – how, then, do we make God’s gift more appealing to humanity today? Knowing our recipient – the receiver of the gift – can better help us in realizing our Christian mission of sharing Christ to the world.

In today’s world, we see the modern person as someone whose desire seems to multiply exponentially – from a wide range of material goods to a deeper level of emotional gains. However, deep down in one’s heart, beneath the surface of such dreams and ambition, is the real desire to belong. One longs to find home, where one feels truly accepted, loved and empowered to love. Some manifestations of such desire sometimes take place at the little pubs one goes to, in the school clubs or support groups one joins in, or in counseling sessions one attends. The message is clear: the modern person wants to belong. What every person desires is a friendship that will draw him/her to a community of love where one can grow more as a person – a friendship where one can truly find home. For Christians, such friendship can only come from a personal God who is love: the Holy Triune God, made flesh in Jesus Christ – our true gift.

A. The Context for the Thesis

The Holy Triune God is, for us Christians, the only One in whom our hearts can truly find rest. Our call is to share to the whole of humanity this Gospel of truth: the Good News that is the love of the Holy Triune God for humanity, made known most profoundly in Jesus Christ. In proclaiming the Good News of our Christian faith, however, we are reminded by C.S. Lewis to speak the language of our audience – a language that the hearers of the Word can relate to and understand. In other words, we are to speak the language that has relevance to their present life, to their current Sitz im Leben. In the words of C.S. Lewis:

We must learn the language of our audience… You must translate every bit of your theology into the vernacular. This is very troublesome… but it is essential. It is also of the greatest service to your own thought. I have come to the conclusion that if you cannot translate your own thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts are confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood your own meaning.  

In the history of evangelization, one of the Church’s traditional ways (or languages) of presenting the doctrine of the Triune God to both believers and non-believers is to start with how God comes to meet us in salvation history: revelation. Our preaching the Good News usually begins with how God unfolds who God is and what God does as attested in Scriptures, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and as reflected in the Creed. And if one desires to go deeper into the understanding of the Christian doctrine of God, we, then, present him/her with the historical study of the development of the theology of God. This approach, however, seems to be more effective particularly to those who grew up in an atmosphere that is non-hostile to religion. Then again, in our contemporary world that is becoming more and more indifferent to the word God, how, then, do we present – or shall we say re-present – the Christian doctrine of

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3 C.S. Lewis is quoted by Alister E. McGrath in Studies in Doctrine; See Alister E. McGrath, Studies in Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 357.
the Triune God? In a world where people are in dire search for life’s meaning but see religion in general – and Christianity in particular – as a chain-binding promulgator of law rather than a gospel,⁴ what new approach can we use in order to present this priceless, life-giving gift of Godself in Christ to today’s humanity?

Because the Triune God is, first of all, an inexhaustible Mystery, Christians are never to cease seeking ways to better understand this infinite Object of our faith. And with our ever-changing world and ever-developing cultures, new ways of re-presenting the same faith are necessary if such faith is to be a living one. It is in this context of finding a new way to re-present the Christian doctrine of the Triune God to modern thought that I write this thesis.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to show that one of the great ways to proclaim the Gospel of our salvation – that is, to communicate the mystery of the Triune God – to humanity today is from a mystic himself/herself. For this reason, I present Egide van Broeckhoven – a Belgian Jesuit priest who is known for his mystical spirituality – and his theology of the Holy Triune God. Knowing that our faith relationship with God is a way of life – that is, the way we see God is inseparable from the way we live our lives – we can say that, by looking at how van Broeckhoven lived his life, we can have a glimpse of his understanding of the Triune God he confessed. The privileged access we have as regards how van Broeckhoven lived his life is in a collection of his diary entries compiled into a book entitled A Friend to All Men: The Diary of a Worker-Priest. It constitutes a valuable resource from which we can extract a theology of the Holy Trinity needed for this purpose. His diary is a storehouse of precious theological gems: a prayer journal that reflects a unity of his experience of God, his experience of friendship, and the

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apostolate he engaged in.  However, to say that a better way to re-present the Trinitarian doctrine of God to modern thought is through the mystic way does not mean an abandonment of the Church’s traditional ways of evangelization. On the contrary, van Broeckhoven’s mystic way is a great supplement to, rather than an invalidation of, the Church’s rich tradition of Gospel proclamation.

B. The Structure of the Thesis

If I were to summarize the whole journal writings of Egide van Broeckhoven into one statement, it would be his diary entry dated December 9, 1960 that says, “I sought God. I left all things for Him, and that is how I found my friend. Now every time I seek my friend, it is God whom I found.” This three-part statement, I believe, captures his entire journey of knowing and finding God through his friendship with others: seeking God as the starting point of his journey; letting go of everything as his means to realize such desire; finding God in a friend and a friend in God as the end of his journey, of coming home at last. Such is the basis for the title of the thesis: Encountering God Through Friendship. Friendship is the image that best captures van Broeckhoven’s process of seeking, finding, knowing, and understanding God, himself, and others. As will be outlined in the following sections, van Broeckhoven’s theme of friendship is the point of synthesis for our understanding of both God and humanity, so that his theology of the Holy Triune God is truly inseparable from his view of the human person. In the words of Peter G. van Breemen, S.J., van Broeckhoven gradually “grew to understand that people rather

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than nature are the preferential *locus* to find God. Thus friendship emerged more clearly as the focus of his search for God.”

This present study of Egide van Broeckhoven’s theology of the Holy Triune God – his theology of friendship – is primarily addressed to all Christians. It seeks to lay the foundations of van Broeckhoven’s approach to Gospel proclamation and to serve as a concrete guide for Christians to follow in their mission of evangelization, particularly in *re*-presenting the doctrine of the Trinity to both believers and non-believers.

We propose to explore the theology of Egide van Broeckhoven on the Triune God under three main chapters. In Chapter One, I will present a brief summary of the life of Egide van Broeckhoven. This includes: (1) a short biography, (2) his works, (3) the influences that shape his faith relationship with and understanding of the Triune God, and (4) his mysticism. In Chapter Two, which is the core of the thesis, I will dedicate to exploring van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship – that is, his theology of the Holy Trinity as extracted from his writings. In this section, I will examine two selected entries from his diary that best capture his Trinitarian theology. This survey will also include other sub-entries that support the major entries in order to provide us with a better grounding of van Broeckhoven’s theology. In Chapter Three, I will present the relevance of van Broeckhoven’s mystical theology of friendship in the contemporary world. It shows how an ever-ancient doctrine of the Triune God is at the same time ever new in an ever-changing generation. It explores some *pastoral* applications of his theology, the main part of which is the *re*-presentation of the doctrine of the Triune God to modern thought – that is, to both believers and non-believers. Lastly, in the *Conclusion*, I will end the present study with a brief summary of the key insights of van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship and a personal note to deepen this theology.

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7 *A Friend to All Men*, 6.
CHAPTER ONE

The Man Behind the Diary

In the preface of the book, *A Friend to All Men: The Diary of a Worker-Priest*, Peter G. van Breemen, S.J. tells us of his knowledge about his fellow Jesuit, Egide van Broeckhoven, whom he never met personally: “I know his friends, his spiritual director, his provincial, the fellow-Jesuits with whom he shared his life and ideals. People who knew him well told me about him.”¹ In the same way, I only knew about the man behind the diary through the introductions of van Breemen and Georges Neefs in the book, and through the selected journal entries of van Broeckhoven. However, this will not be a hindrance to our task of delivering the essential knowledge about the person of van Broeckhoven, as the editing committee of the diary has assured the readers of publishing the vital information of van Broeckhoven’s life. In this chapter, I will present a short biography of van Broeckhoven, his works, the influences that shaped his theology, and his mysticism.

*A. His Life*

Born on December 22, 1933 in Anvers, Egide van Broeckhoven was orphaned six days after his birth, when his mother died on December 28.² There was nothing mentioned about his father both in the biographical sketch of the book and in the journal entries. What we know is that his foster parents in Schilde raised him. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, during his high school years at St. Francis Xavier High School in Borgerhout, Anvers, “he discovered in a unique way how God is all and how God is all-transcendent”³ – an experience that evoked his

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² This whole section is a narrative following the order of the brief biography of Egide van Broeckhoven as presented in the introduction to the book by Georges Neefs, 13-14.
³ Ibid, 5.
desire for a contemplative life. On September 7, 1950, at age sixteen, he entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Tronchiennes where he spent five years: two years as a novice and three years as a student of classical studies. In 1955, he started his three-year philosophy studies in Louvain, followed by a two-year degree in classical languages (especially Latin) at the University of Louvain. It was during these years (beginning in 1958) that he started keeping a diary, journaling his experiences of God in prayer and in and through the people he encountered, lived with, and served.

As he progressed in his academic and spiritual formation, he began to feel a strong desire to serve in the “apostolate to intellectual atheists in the West and in Eastern European countries” — a desire that was somehow prompted by his reading of Teilhard de Chardin’s works. For this reason, he asked and received permission from his superiors to study science at the University of Louvain. Unfortunately, he failed the examinations in 1960. This failure, however, did not extinguish the fire in him. It never became an obstacle to his passion to find, love, and serve God in others.

As he continued his Jesuit formation, this time as a young regent, he taught Latin to fourth-year students of the St. John Berchmans High School in Brussels. Two years later, he started his four-year theology course in Heverlee, Louvain. While studying theology, he continued to establish contacts with the poor, more concretely through his frequent visits to the working-class neighborhood of the port of Anvers. A year before he completed his theology, he was ordained a priest on August 8, 1964. After finishing theology, with a burning desire to live

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4 *A Friend to All Men*, 112, endnote 15.
6 *Regency* is a stage in Jesuit formation right after *First Studies* (philosophy studies). Jesuit regents are usually assigned to teach in some Jesuit schools (often Jesuit high schools).
7 Ibid, 117, endnote 59.
with and serve the poorest of the poor, van Broeckhoven began his life of service for God as a worker-priest in Anderlecht.

In her article, *Towards a Critical Spirituality of Organization*, Emma Bell recounts that “the origins of the worker-priests can be traced to initiatives launched in the pontificate of Pope Pius XI (1922-39) whose central purpose was to enable Catholic religion to permeate all spheres of human life, public as well as private… It was in this ecclesiastical context that the worker-priest movement emerged.”

Responding to this call of mission, especially after World War II, a group of Roman Catholic priests in France and Belgium formed the movement in order to “reach the working class, who had become largely alienated from the church. The worker-priests set aside their clerical garb and left their clerical dwellings to take jobs in factories and on construction sites, sharing the living conditions and social and economic problems of their coworkers.” However, due to the increasing radicalism of some worker-priests in their political involvement with the fight against issues of racism, housing, labor rights, and peace, both Pius XII in 1954 and John XXIII in 1959 ordered the discontinuation of the movement. However, it was approved once again by Paul VI in 1965, this time in its modified form.

Looking for a place to live as a worker-priest in various neighborhoods of Brussels, van Broeckhoven eventually found “a place in Anderlecht, near the Midi train station, in September 1965.” During the span of more than two years, from August 1965 to December 1967, he worked in four different factories in Anderlecht, one of them in Alost, smelting iron, “making

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10 See Ibid.

11 See Ibid.

12 *A Friend to All Men*, 116, endnote 45.

13 See Ibid, 115, endnote 32.
molds in sand,” saying Mass in Bon Air (the name of a parish and a neighborhood in Anderlecht), chatting and sharing meals with his co-workers of different cultural and religious backgrounds, visiting their families, and listening to their complaints and struggles, dreams and hopes. In August 1966, he took a time off from the factory to do his Tertianship program in Tronchiennes, near Ghent. Afterwards, he returned to his factory work in January 1967.

Living the call to be a worker-priest was never easy for van Broeckhoven. At one point, he was fired for having been accused of dishonesty – of hiding his identity as a priest from the company (the first factory he worked in). At another point, he and other workers were laid off by the company (the third factory he worked in), which made him quite glad that he belonged to those who were dismissed – giving him a sense of solidarity with those who lost their jobs. With regard to the physical challenges he encountered in the factories, his work brought him serious accidents that caused him severe injuries – accidents that prefigured the death he was to suffer as a worker-priest. On one occasion, his thumb was crashed into the machine, leaving him a “broken – detached thumbnail.” On another occasion, a drop of molten iron dripped into his thumb, “burned deep into the flesh.” This was followed by another “drop burned through the glove to the thumbnail.” Lastly, a steel plate fell on his toes with his “skin cut to the bone,” leaving him with a cut tendon. Despite these challenges, both emotional and physical, van Broeckhoven never abandoned his suffering brothers and sisters in the factories. Although there

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14 *A Friend to All Men*, 79.
15 See Ibid, 117, endnote 65.
16 Egide van Broeckhoven had established “bonds of friendship with the poorest among them, Muslims, Greek Orthodox, people uprooted from their own traditions.” See Ibid, 111.
17 See Ibid, 14. See also endnote 75, (Ibid, 118). Note that Tertianship is the last stage of Jesuit formation before taking the Final Vows in the Society of Jesus.
18 Ibid, 96.
19 Ibid, 84. See also his entries of January 27, 1966 (Ibid, 85) and February 21, 1966 (Ibid, 88).
20 Ibid, 89.
21 Ibid, 89.
22 Ibid, 100. See also the related entry of September 15, 1967 (Ibid, 100).
was an occasion, towards the end of his life, when he doubted his call as a worker-priest, van Broeckhoven still “decided to stay with his friends, because he felt that was his place – they were so poorly cultured, so needy, so displaced, so lonely.”

On December 28, 1967 came the final hour of van Broeckhoven’s life. At this point, it would be more appropriate to quote at length the exact account of those who witnessed the tragedy that took his life:

What exactly happened? Egide was ordered, along with G., his buddy on the job for the last few months, to bring some twenty- by five-foot metal plates down a movable ramp and to detach the clamps holding them to the crane. The plates were stacked vertically between iron supports. At a certain point one of the clamps holding a plate got stuck, and Egide went behind the stack to get it off. At this moment, one of the supports broke, the others gave way, and the whole stack of plates, weighing several tons, toppled over. Under the weight, Egide was thrown violently back against a vertical plate behind him. The blow broke his spine; he died instantly, his arms stretched out over the plates. He had just had his thirty-fourth birthday.

This brief account of his whole life of love for God and neighbor remains, borrowing the words of Breemen, “the only draft, unquestionably complete but expressed in actions, of what he would have liked to put into the book.” Nevertheless, it somehow captures the essence of his spiritual odyssey – his journey to God through his friendship with others, especially the poor. The whole life of van Broeckhoven was a “synthesis of contemplation and action” – the two perpendicular elements of love of God and love of neighbor that concretely meet and form the Cross of Christ: the perfect symbol of self-emptying love. This love is what truly strengthened and empowered van Broeckhoven to embrace the Cross as well, realizing his desire to become a man of God – to

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23 See A Friend to All Men, 7.
24 Ibid, 108.
26 Ibid, 5.
seek God, to encounter God, and to communicate God.27 In fact, for van Broeckhoven, the Cross is the symbol of God’s friendship, as expressed in John 15:13 that he quoted in one of his articles: “There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”28

B. His Works

Egide van Broeckhoven kept a spiritual diary “during the last ten years of his life”29 – a spiritual journal that comprised “twenty-six notebooks filled with entries often hard to decipher,”30 all of which were originally written in Flemish.31 This journal shows the depth of his spirituality expressed in his very simple, yet so profound, prayers, which include his five parables:32 (1) the city (symbol of the inner life); (2) the diamond (symbol of the wounds of love); (3) the pearl (symbol of total renunciation); (4) the sea (symbol of the transcendent God who comes to us); and (5) the dawn (which ends the night). However, because of the financial and technical difficulties in publishing all his journal entries, the committee responsible for his notebooks decided to issue a partial publication of his diary.33 Nevertheless, the result of this compilation – the book, A Friend to All Men: The Diary of a Worker-Priest, which is the primary source of this present study – still captures what is essential in his entries for our purpose. The publishing committee decided to include in this book some excerpts of few other works of van Broeckhoven: an article entitled Interpersonal Relationships as a Means of Approaching Non-Believers; and the unfinished (that is, unrealized) Book of Friendship.

27 A Friend to All Men, 106. The account of December 17, 1967 reflects Egide van Broeckhoven’s dynamic process of being a man of God. He wrote: “Moses – Abraham – Jesus. In the environment which I have chosen: seek God – encounter Him – communicate Him. Be the mainstay of my brothers.”
28 Ibid, 67.
29 Ibid, 9.
31 Egied van Broeckhoven, Dagboek van de Vriendschap (Bruges: Uitgeverij Emmaüs (Desclée De Brouwer), 1971).
32 See Ibid, 19-22. Note that van Broeckhoven did not use the term parable. The editors use the term to describe five of van Broeckhoven’s entries as mentioned above.
“Interpersonal Relationships as a Means of Approaching Non-Believers.” This article of thirty-four pages was actually published in the January 1965 issue of a private magazine intended for “theology students in the scholasticate at Heverlee.”34 It comprises three main parts: (a) Deus intimior intimo meo; (b) Deus intimior intimo tuo; (c) The Apostolate is Friendship.35 The main point of this article – the excerpt of which is published in the collection, A Friend to All Men – is the incarnation of authentic love, a love that is “expressed in a concrete way by a total commitment in the concrete situation of him whom we love.”36 Such love is concretely experienced in the person of Jesus Christ: his life, death and resurrection. Non-believers, on the other hand, can encounter and experience this incarnate love of God in Christ through the apostolate of friendship lived out by the faithful. Lastly, the article somehow lays out van Broeckhoven’s plan for his book on friendship to which we now turn.

“Book of Friendship.” At the outset, Egide van Broeckhoven was driven to communicate the love of the Holy Triune God to humanity. In the entry of March 31, 1961, he wrote: “My vocation is to teach men the mystical depths of friendship.”37 His sense of mission to bring the message of God’s friendship to humanity is rooted in his “most original discovery, lived existentially,”38 as reflected in his entry of May 23, 1967: “I have discovered my fundamental experiences… the friend lost in God and thereby completely rediscovered in Him.”39 Thus, he desired to publish the Book of Friendship. Its initial outline – the first sketch of which has nine undated sheets – is as follows: (0) Introduction; (1) The Search for God in Our Own Inner Life; (2) The Inner Life of Christ: the Father; (3) In Search of God in Others’ Inner Life: Friendship;

34 A Friend to All Men, 116, endnote 54.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 66.
37 Ibid, 32.
38 Ibid, 96.
39 Ibid.
(4) Forms of Trinitarian Love; (5) Corollaries for the Apostolate; (6) Conclusion. From the theme or title of each part, we can already have a glimpse of van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship: his theology of the Holy Triune God. It is from this outline of his unfinished and unpublished book that I will pattern my present study as an attempt to further his theology for the benefit of both believers and non-believers.

C. His Influences

The major influences that shape Egide van Broeckhoven’s faith in and understanding of the Triune God are the mystics he admired and tried to emulate: St. John of the Cross, the two Flemish mystics Hadewijch and Blessed John of Ruysbroeck, and the French scientist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In the collected journal, we can see traces of the spirituality of these mystics whose writings van Broeckhoven used in order to express his very own spirituality. Some of the writings reflected in his diary are as follows: St. John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*; Blessed John of Ruysbroeck’s *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, *The Sparkling Stone*, *The Book of Supreme Truth*; Hadewijch d’Anvers’ *Poèmes des Béguines* and some of her letters; and *The Divine Milieu* of Teilhard de Chardin. Among these mystics, however, John of Ruysbroeck – particularly his doctrine of God – had the most impact on van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship, especially on his understanding of the Holy Triune God. Ruysbroeck gives an account – in a form of mystical prayer – of his understanding of God.
In *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*. In this spiritual book, he argues how one may view the nature of the Godhead. To quote at length:

The most high Nature of the Godhead may thus be perceived and beheld: how it is Simplicity and One-foldness, inaccessible Height and bottomless Depth, incomprehensible Breadth and eternal Length, a dark Silence, a wild Desert, the Rest of all saints in the Unity, and a common Fruition of Himself and of all saints in Eternity… All this is observed and beheld without differentiation or division in the simple Nature of the Godhead. And according to our perception these attributes abide as Persons do, in manifold distinctions. For between might and goodness, between generosity and truth, there are, according to our perception, great differences. Nevertheless all these are found in oneness and undifferentiation in the most high Nature of the Godhead. But the relations which make the personal attributes remain in eternal distinction. For the Father begets distinction. For the Father incessantly begets his Son, and Himself is unbegotten; and the Son is begotten, and cannot beget; and thus throughout eternity the Father has a Son, and the Son a Father. And these are the relations of the Father to the Son, and of the Son to the Father. And the Father and the Son breathe forth one Spirit, Who is Their common Will or Love. And this Spirit begets not, nor is He begotten; but must eternally pour forth, being breathed forth from both the Father and the Son. And these three Persons are one God and one Spirit. And all the attributes with the works which flow forth from them are common to all the Persons, for They work by virtue of Their Onefold Nature.45

In the first part of the text just quoted, Ruysbroeck talks about the nature of the Godhead as an Abyss – an “inaccessible Height and bottomless Depth, incomprehensible Breadth and eternal Length, a dark Silence, a wild Desert”46 – where everything rests without differentiation or division. In this Abyss, opposing elements – such as eternal and temporal, impassible and passible, transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic, personal and impersonal, knowability and incomprehensibility – are all present in the nature of God. For Ruysbroeck, “to a fathomless Nature of God belong fathomless virtues and activities”47 – one and undifferentiated. This view of God’s nature may, at first, seem to be leaning toward modalism, because it tends to picture the

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45 *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, 98-100.
46 Ibid, 98.
47 Ibid.
divine being as a bare monad that denies the existence of the real, eternal relations of the three Persons in one God. However, John of Ruysbroeck recognizes that when we refer to God’s nature as an Abyss, it does not mean that there are no real distinctions within the Godhead, especially with regard to the three Persons. On the contrary, he acknowledges that although “all these are found in oneness and undifferentiation in the most high Nature of the Godhead… the relations which make the personal attributes remain in eternal distinction.” It is true that, for Ruysbroeck, these distinctions within the Godhead abide “according to our perception,” but he corrects this himself with “eternal distinction.” Hence, this does not imply a disavowal of the *immanent* three-ness of Persons in the oneness of God. The point he is driving at is the reality of human finitude in viewing God and God’s nature. As a mystic, Ruysbroeck’s image of God’s nature as an Abyss is another way of saying that God is truly *Mystery*. As he puts it, the human person “shall raise his enlightened eyes, by means of the illuminated reason, to the intelligible Truth, and mark and behold *in a creaturely way* the most high Nature of God and the fathomless attributes which are in God.” We will find traces of Ruysbroeck’s mystical view of God in van Broeckhoven’s entries, but in a modified form.

Other influences that shape van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship include Gregoire de Saint-Joseph’s *Spiritual Writings* and Rene Voillaume’s “The Love of Chastity” in *Au coeur des masses*. However, the main influence that truly defined and made van Broeckhoven’s experience and understanding of God more concrete are the people that he worked with and shared his life with: the factory workers, together with their families and friends, and the whole neighborhood where he spent his life as a worker-priest. In his friendship with them – “this

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid, 98. (emphasis added).
51 See *A Friend to All Men*, 112, endnote 14.
52 See Ibid, 115, endnote 38.
concrete and total friendship… the only authentic way… by which the kingdom of God is growing in this world”53 – he learned in the most profound way what his Christian and priestly life is all about.

D. His Mysticism

What does it mean to say that Egide van Broecenhoven is a mystic? The term mysticism embraces different meanings depending on its use. In the Catholic tradition, mysticism, as defined in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, generally means “the experience of a loving knowledge of God.”54 It is both an experience and a process. As an experience, it is “a loving knowledge of God which is born in a personal encounter with the divine… an awareness of the presence of God… and an experience of being drawn into union with God.”55 As a process, however, it refers to “a way of life which is built upon one’s direct experience of God,”56 whose love grasps and transforms the soul.57

Expounding this general definition of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill – in writing about the life, works, and mystical theology of John of Ruysbroeck in her book *Ruysbroeck* – maintains that there are at least two kinds of mystics. According to Underhill, the first kind “deals almost wholly with the personal and interior experiences of the soul in the states of contemplation, and the psychological rules governing those states; above all, with the emotional reactions of the self to the impact of the Divine,”58 but without attempting to describe more about the ultimate Object of his or her love and desire: God.59 On the other hand, the other kind of mystic “as ardent in his love – cannot, on the one hand, remain within the circle of these subjective and personal

53 *A Friend to All Men*, 111.
55 Ibid, 694.
56 Ibid.
57 See Ibid, 695.
59 See Ibid.
conceptions, and, on the other, content himself with the label which tradition has affixed to the Thing that he has known. He may not reject the label, but neither does he confuse it with the Thing.⁶⁰ In other words, this kind of mystic is never content with describing only one’s “private experiences and ecstasies, but accepts the great vocation of revealer of Reality.”⁶¹ In revealing God and God’s nature, one not only tells us of a picture of eternity and the universe, but most importantly of how one sees the human person and human life in general.⁶² Sharing to us the experience of God in this way and teaching us how to actualize such experience in our own lives, one becomes “a mystic of an apostolic type.”⁶³ This second kind of mystic just described in no doubt depicts Egide van Broeckhoven. The following entries in the diary reflect van Broeckhoven’s own understanding of mysticism and of being a mystic:

The special call of the Jesuit is to be a mystic: to bring Christ to men by seeking to reach into the inner depths of their lives, starting from the depth of his own, and to do this in an active manner (that is, not in a way which is purely contemplative).⁶⁴

The lights that God gave me during the night: that He is the innermost depth of man and that we can know Him by reaching this depth.⁶⁵

In the above texts, van Broeckhoven indicates that in order for one to be a “revealer of Reality” – that is, to bring Christ to humanity – one must first have a deep encounter with God that can only be experienced “from the depth of one’s own.” This mystical language may seem to imply a tendency towards pantheism: that God is the inner depth of the human person. But this is not what van Broeckhoven means. To say that God is the inner depth of our being is, for van Broeckhoven, another way of saying that the “inner depth of the person is nothing other than the

⁶⁰ Ruysbroeck, 53.
⁶¹ Ibid, 55.
⁶² See Ibid, 55-56.
⁶³ Ibid, 55.
⁶⁴ Entry of January 6, 1960. A Friend to All Men, 27.
To sum it up, the first condition to being a mystic is to know and encounter God by finding God’s presence in one’s own life and circumstances.

The second condition for van Broeckhoven’s mysticism is the ability to differentiate the object of the experience from the experience itself. As van Broeckhoven puts it:

“Fear has come over me, the fear that all my mystical intuitions are nothing but illusion and error. Lord, I want nothing but what You want. The deepest night is dearer to me than the brightest day where You are not.”

In the passage just cited, van Broeckhoven emphasizes how a mystic should not confuse the “experience” of God with God. In the words of Underhill, the second type of mystic does not “content himself with the label which tradition has affixed to the Thing that he has known. He may not reject the label, but neither does he confuse it with the Thing.”

The third condition is the ability to become a revealer of Reality through friendship. In the words of van Broeckhoven:

“My vocation is to teach men the mystical depths of friendship.

I must live more fully the deep life which is in me... I must do this in two ways: by a prayer which loses itself wholly in God, and by an in-depth contact with * and with all those whom I can reach in depth.

For van Broeckhoven, a mystic is one who teaches others one’s experience of God through friendship. As revealer of Reality, the mystic not only tells others of such Reality, but also enables them to experience it in their own lives. This is possible through one’s “in-depth contact” with others – that is, through one’s friendship with them.

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68 *Ruysbroeck*, 53.
70 Ibid, 51-52. Note that the asterisk (*) in the diary denotes the names of persons whose identities were kept private.
Lastly, the mystic according to van Broeckhoven is one who realizes that every human person is a “preferential locus to find God.” He writes:

Slowly but surely I am becoming possessed by the idea that every human contact has a mystical dimension.

Each contact has a mystical value, because in the encounter of two persons there is already present the beginning of the encounter of heaven; already, and for a long time now, this has been obvious to me in the experience of friendship, but now it is becoming clearer to me in every human encounter.

Besides, there are the two deepest desires of the mystic: to be at home with himself and to encounter others in their home, that is, in both cases: at home in God.

These last texts somehow summarize van Broeckhoven’s mysticism: God is truly present, indwelling every person. For this reason, every encounter with a person is an encounter with God. However, one can only realize the mystical value of such encounter – that is, the reality of God revealed – if one sees the other as a friend. Yet these encounters are not revelation in the proper sense of the word. Van Broeckhoven makes it clear that “the world, the friend, love are indeed the point where we encounter God, but not yet God Himself.”

**Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter presents the basic knowledge about Egide van Broeckhoven. First of all, we have learned how his life is a “synthesis of contemplation and action” – of his love of God and his love of neighbor – as concretely lived out in his vocation as a Jesuit and as a worker-priest. It is a life of spirituality that empowered him to become a “revealer of Reality” who is God, through his friendship with others.

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71 *A Friend to All Men*, 6.
72 Entry of October 6, 1961. Ibid, 34.
74 See the undated entry following the August-10-1967 entry. Ibid, 99.
75 Ibid, 5.
We have also learned about the people that influenced van Broeckhoven’s understanding of the Holy Triune God, especially John of Ruysbroeck. As we shall see in the next chapter, van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship – especially his understanding of God’s divine Being – has traces of Ruysbroeck’s doctrine of God. For Ruysbroeck, God’s nature is an Abyss to which “belong fathomless virtues and activities”76 – an Abyss wherein all opposites are one and undifferentiated, without the denial of their real distinctions, especially the real distinction between the three Persons.

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76 *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, 98.
CHAPTER TWO

A Theology of Friendship

The main issue we are going to address in this chapter concerns the basic approach of Egide van Broeckhoven to the doctrine of the Holy Triune God through his theology of friendship. I will present his methodology regarding the Trinitarian doctrine by following the outline he lays out in his unfinished project, the *Book of Friendship*. However, I will use the following themes to capture the movement of his outline: (1) desire\(^1\), (2) revelation\(^2\), (3) friendship\(^3\), and (4) mission\(^4\). To explore van Broeckhoven’s framework, I will examine two selected entries from his diary, including other sub-entries that support the two major entries in order to provide us with a better grounding of his theology. In addition, I will also employ some works of theologians and philosophers that will support and elucidate the insights from van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship.

The reason for choosing these two entries in the diary is that both texts will give us: (1) a grounding of van Broeckhoven’s understanding of the Trinitarian doctrine; and (2) the methodology of his theology of friendship. The first journal entry we are going to explore is the entry of March 17, 1962. This text highlights van Broeckhoven’s understanding of the divine nature of God – that is, God’s inner life in eternity (the immanent Trinity) – and its relation to God’s self-revelation in salvation history (the economic Trinity). The second one is the entry February 10, 1962. This entry underlines the element of divine friendship in the relations of the three Persons within the Godhead, and how this divine friendship extends itself to creation. Each

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\(^1\) This corresponds to the starting point of van Broeckhoven’s outline of the Book of Friendship: “The Search for God in Our Own Inner Life.” See Egide van Broeckhoven, *A Friend to All Men: The Diary of a Worker-Priest*, Translated by Thomas Matus (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1977), 116, endnote 52.

\(^2\) This points to the section called “The Inner Life of Christ: the Father.” See Ibid.

\(^3\) This denotes both sections, “In Search of God in Others’ Inner Life” and “Forms of Trinitarian Love.” See Ibid.

\(^4\) This corresponds to the section, “Corollaries for the Apostolate.” See Ibid.
presentation begins with the text, followed by an analysis of the text, and ends with a brief summary of the main points derived from the study of the text.

\textbf{A. Entry 1: March 17, 1962}

In my prayer, God has drawn me to Himself in an unforgettable manner. I lost myself to the mysterious allurement of that God for whom one can give up everything.

Prayer was the attraction that once drew me to the Carthusian life and filled me with joy (I had that on my mind for a long time); it was the prayer of those evenings in the woods around Schilde, the prayer that expressed my deepest longings during high school; it was prayer (the encounter) that, during my philosophy studies, led me into the night of friendship, prayer that I found once again in Airifagne; but this time it was prayer as it had never been before – pure and free of every hang-up.

Prayer brought me naturally to the idea of going to live in a Carthusian monastery; I felt I would be happy there, that I would find all I was looking for. (This prospect gave me a feeling of intense happiness, like what I felt when I had my first heart-to-heart talk with *.) I felt the beginning of a slight trouble in my prayer, coming from distractions that otherwise had no effect on it (this trouble took the form either of an idea that presented other images to my mind or of various arguments related to the content of my prayer).

… My principal encounter with God was not with the Father or the Son; it was with the Divine Being without relation to the Father or the Son; the thought of the Father or the Son (as distinct persons, etc.) rather constituted something that turned me away from what was essential, because I was inclined, on my own initiative, to mix the Persons with the Godhead by means of human representations. Thus there was a danger that the human concepts of the Father and the Son, which I mingled with my encounter with God, would eventually confuse everything. This does not mean that the encounter did not present itself as an encounter with the Trinity; there was nothing anti-trinitarian in it, but the Trinity was not expressed formally in the encounter; or in other words, this encounter was in no way in contradiction with what I have read in Ruysbroeck about how the Father creates our inner being in the image of His Son. All this was there without the representation of any image.

A further development of this encounter brought me an unlimited sense of happiness and opened up an infinite vista before me. I somehow saw the Father turning His face (the Son) toward me, and in His eyes I recognized the eyes of my friend; we looked at one another, his eyes in mine, in the eyes of God.

In all this I felt the infinite transcendence of the encounter with God, but yet I felt how, at the same level of this transcendence, the encounter with the friend was also clothed with an immensity, a depth, and a breadth in which we could love each other endlessly; and so I lived the encounter with my friend in a way infinitely pure. There was
nothing in it that turned me away from God; everything drew me closer to Him; and in this way I found myself united to my friend at an infinite depth. In complete purity, our encounter was turned toward the mystery of the Father in the Son, the mystery that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. Here was the most profound expression, the very essence of that love of friendship which, by loving him, leads the friend to God.

And so I saw that the deepest renunciation (lived as such, lived as an infinite expanse where one can breathe freely), required for the deepest and most unconditional quest for God, is no different from the deepest love, the deepest friendship. Spontaneously, all this appeared to me still easier to realize in the Carthusian life.

Although the idea of the Carthusian life presented itself spontaneously to my mind many times, it was not, however, essentially linked to the encounter I had had. This idea was a spontaneous reflection of myself, not of God in me.⁵

1. Analysis of the Text

In the above entry, three key elements are present: desire, revelation, and friendship – each will be analyzed sequentially.

a. *Desire as the Starting Point of One’s Search for, Encounter with, and Understanding of God*

In the first paragraph, van Broeckhoven talks about his desire to live a Carthusian life: “Prayer was the attraction that once drew me to the Carthusian life and filled me with joy.”⁶ This desire had been present since his childhood years, in “those evenings in the woods around Schilde… during high school… during my philosophy studies… [and] once again in Airifagne.”⁷ In the previous chapter, we mentioned that he discovered at the early age of fourteen or fifteen “how God is all and how God is all-transcendent.”⁸ Ever since this experience of God, he had always longed to join the Carthusian life, even before entering the Society of Jesus. As reflected in the above text, this longing – this *desire* – for a contemplative life that gave him “a feeling of intense happiness”⁹ can be seen as the starting point of his journey towards his insatiable search

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⁵ *A Friend to All Men*, 38-40.
⁶ Ibid, 38.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid, 5.
⁹ Ibid, 38.
for, deep encounter with, and profound understanding of God. From here, we can infer that our *desire* is the starting point of our search for, encounter with, and understanding of God.

In another diary entry, van Broeckhoven writes: “I have come to understand that desire is the one necessary condition for man to possess God; for God is already close to us. If one has something without desiring it, he does not truly possess it.”\(^\text{10}\) This last statement seems paradoxical: “If one has something without desiring it, he does not truly possess it.”\(^\text{11}\) For how can we long for something (or someone) that we already possess? Van Broeckhoven emphasizes in this statement the sense of *awareness*. For instance, he mentions that “God is already close to us”\(^\text{12}\) – that somehow we already *possess* God, as God indwells each human person as accorded by the Christian faith. However, we can only appreciate God’s presence in us – working in and through us – if we first recognize it: by being aware of it. Without awareness, we cannot truly encounter, and eventually grow in knowledge of, God who is already within us. Desire implies awareness. However, awareness in this case can mean two things: the awareness of one’s *desiring* and the awareness of *what* one desires. To *desire* is one thing; *what* one desires is another thing.

The awareness of our *desiring* – our longing for something (or someone) – is the first step towards our search for God. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “Desire is the emptiness that love comes to fill. He who desires is in the condition to receive – Love.”\(^\text{13}\) Although one may not know at first that it is really love that one desires, for van Broeckhoven, this “Love” alone, who is no other than God, can truly fill the aching void – that emptiness – in every human heart. In his

\(^\text{10}\) Entry of August 28, 1961. *A Friend to All Men*, 32.
\(^\text{11}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{12}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.
case, although his desire starts with his longing to enter the Carthusian life, he eventually recognizes that it is not the true object of his desiring; God is. He writes:

Although the idea of the Carthusian life presented itself spontaneously to my mind many times, it was not, however, essentially linked to the encounter I had had. This idea was a spontaneous reflection of myself, not of God in me.\textsuperscript{14}

In the end, he realizes that his one true desire is God, as expressed in another entry: “The desire that I describe here can sometimes be so pure and so strong that it would leave all in order to reach that toward which it is drawn: the inner life of God present in us and in others.”\textsuperscript{15}

However, he also acknowledges that this very act of desiring is actually God-given. It is God who initiates that desire in us: “God has drawn me to Himself.”\textsuperscript{16}

For this reason, van Broeckhoven sees desire as an expression of “the very essence of grace”\textsuperscript{17} – a free, gratuitous gift from God. This God-given desire that only love (God) can fill actually finds expression in the words of St. Augustine: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”\textsuperscript{18}

To emphasize this point further, we can also say that the human person is the question to which God is the answer.\textsuperscript{19} In other words, we as a question correspond to our very nature that desires the infinite: the incomprehensible Mystery (to use Rahner’s term) – the God of love who alone is the answer to the question that we are. However, as mentioned earlier, to desire is one thing; what one desires is another thing.

\textsuperscript{14} A Friend to All Men, 40.
\textsuperscript{15} Entry of September 22, 1961. Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 38.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{19} Karl Rahner famously wrote: “Man is the question to which there is no answer.” See Karl Rahner, Christian at the Crossroads (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 11. I modify Rahner’s statement to elucidate van Broeckhoven’s and Augustine’s thoughts as presented above.
The awareness of what one desires is essential here. We already mentioned that for van Broeckhoven it is really love (God) that every human person truly desires. However, this object of our desiring usually takes different forms, often as the embodiment of created goods – wisdom, truth, goodness, and beauty – or worldly aspirations, such as power, fame, and fortune. To discern God in these forms is never simple for us whose human nature is finite and tainted by original sin. For this reason, we tend to mistake the created for the Creator, and so desire and love the gifts rather than the Giver of gifts, leaving us always discontent, for these gifts never ought to satisfy our insatiable longing for “Love” who is God. Thus, we need to be told of the “what” of our desiring, without which our hearts will never find rest. Yet God alone can reveal to us the true object of our desiring: Godself. Hence, we need God’s revelation.

b. Revelation as Fundamental to One’s Awareness of the True Object of One’s Desiring: God

Egide van Broeckhoven maintains that the “inner depth of the person is nothing other than the divine origin and the divine destiny of man, his being-from-God and being-for-God.”

In other words, God is at the center of our being – the God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. However, God reveals Godself to us most profoundly in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the above entry, van Broeckhoven recounts how his encounter with God in prayer “was turned toward the mystery of the Father in the Son, the mystery that shines in the face of Jesus Christ.”

For him, Christ alone can reveal to us this truth about ourselves: that we are made for God and that our innermost desire is God. It is because God “the Father creates our inner being in the image of His Son,” Jesus Christ. Above all, Christ alone can reveal to us who God is and what

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21 See *Confessions*, 43.
23 Ibid.
God does, as he is the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, “the divine Word, revelation of the Inner Being of the Trinity.” But what does Jesus reveal about God?

The Christian faith testifies to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ by the Spirit reveals to us that God is love, and that this God of love who is our salvation is a Tri-unity. In other words, Jesus by the Spirit reveals to us that God is Trinity: three Persons in one God – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father reveals Godself to us in salvation history in and through the Son by the Spirit, as attested in Scriptures. In the words of van Broeckhoven, “the preaching of the historical Christ, of the salvation brought by His death and His life, is the final concrete form, proper to every expression of love, of the divine life which is in us and which we know by faith.” As regards the entry we are exploring, how does van Broeckhoven understand the nature of God? How does he see the relation between God’s self-revelation in salvation history and God in Godself?

In the above entry, van Broeckhoven writes: “My principal encounter with God was not with the Father or the Son; it was with the Divine Being without relation to the Father or the Son.” Here, van Broeckhoven is referring to his vision of the divine nature – the Godhead – wherein the three Persons are totally one. At first glance, one may see in this statement a trace of Ruysbroeck’s doctrine of God: that in the Godhead – the divine Abyss – all are one and undifferentiated. In fact, van Broeckhoven acknowledges Ruysbroeck’s influence on his view

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24 Entry of November 16, 1958. A Friend to All Men, 23.
27 The Catholic tradition holds that who God is becomes intelligible to us through God’s self-revelation in salvation history. However, how God is revealed to us in the economy of salvation (economic Trinity) is actually rooted in the very nature of God’s inner life in eternity, that is, God in Godself (immanent Trinity). In other words, God is revealed to us as Trinity, because God’s inner life is first and foremost the divine life of eternal communion of the three Persons within the Godhead. To use the words of a German Lutheran theologian in the nineteenth century, Isaak Dorner, “The economic Trinity . . . leads back to immanent distinctions in God himself, all the more so because in the world of revelation we have to do not merely with a teaching of truths, but with the true being of God.
of God. As he puts it, “this encounter was in no way in contradiction with what I have read in Ruysbroeck.”28 When van Broeckhoven talks about “the Divine Being without relation to the Father or the Son,”29 one may initially think that he has a tendency to lean toward a modalist view of God – a view that treats the Father, Son, and Spirit as referring to the “three modes of the activity of the one, undifferentiated being of God.”30 However, the fact is that he does acknowledge that God in Godself is Trinity. In the same entry, he writes: “This does not mean that the encounter did not present itself as an encounter with the Trinity; there was nothing anti-trinitarian in it.”31 He also hints at the existence of the Son before creation, when he talks “about

29 A Friend to All Men, 39.
29 Ibid, 38.
31 A Friend to All Men, 39. It must be noted that the current theological reflections and discourses concerning the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity are moving in different directions. In his book Retrieving Nicaea, Khaled Anatolios argues that there are at least three trajectories in contemporary discourses regarding the Trinitarian doctrine. The first trajectory is “Kant’s objection that trinitarian doctrine says nothing intelligible about God’s intrinsic being” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 3) – a trajectory prompted by Friedrich Schleiermacher and adopted by recent theologians such as Piet Schoonenberg, Catherine LaCugna, and Roger Haight. This approach maintains that the “meaning of trinitarian doctrine resides rather in what it says about our relation to God, namely, ‘the being of God in Christ and in the Church.’ ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit’ in this schema refer to how the presumably singular divine essence interacts with the world, not to eternal differentiations within the divine essence itself” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 3), so that one can say that the “trinitarian doctrine does not really mean that God is Trinity” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 3). The second trajectory insists that “the form of God’s salvific self-communication to the world coincides with the form of divine being” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 4). This approach is best captured in Karl Rahner’s famous axiom: “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity” [Karl Rahner, The Trinity, translated by Joseph Donceel (Great Britain: Burns & Oates, 1970), 22]. In fairness to Rahner, his axiom is, as Neil Ormerod puts it, never intended to deny the “reality of the immanent Trinity. Rather it was an affirmation of the fact that distinctions we encounter in the economy of salvation are real distinctions within God” [Neil Ormerod, The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2005), 14]. However, the fact that his axiom makes the reality of the immanent Trinity dependent on the economy of salvation is inadequate. To make the economy of salvation the ground for the reality of the immanent Trinity is equivalent to saying that both the economic and the immanent Trinity are metaphysically identical, so that, in the words of Ormerod, “If there is no economy then there is no immanent Trinity” (Ormerod, The Trinity, 24). The third trajectory consists in “the search for an appropriate creaturely analogy” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 6) – a category to which Augustine’s psychological analogy and Richard of St. Victor’s social-love analogy seem to belong. Anatolios argues that one of the dangers of such approach is the tendency for creaturely analogues to “become the primary location of trinitarian meaning” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 6). As he puts it: “When the meaning of trinitarian doctrine is located principally in some particular creaturely analogue, it becomes separable from other aspects of the Christian mystery. Instead of trinitarian meaning being embedded in the whole nexus of Christian faith, it tends to be reduced to the features of the analogue itself. One can after all espouse ‘relationality’ or wonder at the mind’s differentiated unity in the acts of
how the Father creates our inner being in the image of His Son.”32 In one particular passage, he recognizes the real distinction between the three Persons in the eternal Godhead: “I looked for what made the love of my friend eternally young, and I found You… by penetrating into the eternal youth of Your love, the unexplored land to which my desire rise: the Life of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit of love.”33 This “unexplored land” refers to the inner life of God – the inner life of the Father, Son and Spirit in eternal communion. To sum it up, he truly acknowledges the real and eternal distinctions of the three Persons in the Godhead.

One of the main reasons why he sees the Divine Being as “without relation to the Father or the Son” is that he was made aware in his prayer of the danger of human representation. As he puts it, “the thought of the Father or the Son (as distinct persons, etc.) rather constituted something that turned me away from what was essential, because I was inclined, on my own initiative, to mix the Persons with the Godhead by means of human representations. Thus there was a danger that the human concepts of the Father and the Son, which I mingled with my encounter with God, would eventually confuse everything.”34 Van Broeckhoven is actually aware of the problem of using creaturely analogies and metaphors – that is, those “human concepts” and “human representations” – when referring to the reality of God. Although he uses creaturely analogies and metaphors in many of his entries in order to help us understand who God is and what God does – for instance, the five parables mentioned in chapter one, and his predominant use of the image of friendship – he is aware and cautious of the limitations and the danger of using such analogies or “human representations” for God. This explains why his knowing and willing without actually confessing and worshiping the Triune God as Father, Son, and Spirit. In that case, one could capture the meaning of trinitarian doctrine without ever subscribing to Christian faith. At the very least, the doctrine of the Trinity is then in danger of becoming simply another item in the list of Christian beliefs” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 6-7).

32 Entry of March 17, 1962. A Friend to All Men, 39.
encounter with the Divine Being in this particular entry is “without the representation of any image,” that is, without mixing “the Persons with the Godhead by means of human representations.” For van Broeckhoven, the three Persons are totally one – inseparable and undivided – yet their distinction within the Godhead abides in eternity.

As a believer, van Broeckhoven embraces the Christian revelation that proclaims God’s self-communication in salvation history in and through Jesus Christ by the Spirit, as rooted in Scriptures and Church tradition. Such revelation, as we mentioned earlier, is fundamental to our awareness of the true object of every person’s desiring: God. However, the problem arises when we talk about non-believers. How does one who has no access to God’s special revelation in history become aware that the true object of one’s desiring is God? It is here that the role of human friendship in Christ comes to the fore as the means for God’s self-revelation to both believers and non-believers.

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35 A Friend to All Men, 39.
36 Ibid. In line with this view, I do agree that one must be aware of the limitations of creaturely analogies and metaphors so as not to confuse “the model with what is being modeled” [See Alister E. McGrath, Understanding the Trinity (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), 54]. In other words, we must not mix the signifiers (that is, the analogies and/or metaphors) with the reality that they signify (that is, the reality of the Triune God). For these analogies and metaphors are meant to break down at a certain point. However, to dismiss these analogies and metaphors as irrelevant is questionable. I believe that Anatolios does not mean that we must dismiss creaturely analogies and metaphors when talking about the Triune God. On the contrary, he warns us to be cautious in appropriating our analogies and metaphors to God. As Anatolios puts it, “Any attempt by creatures simply to infer the nature of the divine on the basis of creaturely realities will inevitably amount to a projection of created features onto the divine and will thus amount to a mythology” (Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 282). I certainly believe that creaturely analogies, especially human analogies properly used in their context, can best express the Trinitarian doctrine and its relevance to our life. The fact that both the Old and the New Testaments use creaturely images – e.g. Rock, King, Light, Water, Bread – is enough evidence of their effectiveness to help us understand who God is. In his book Understanding the Trinity, Alister E. McGrath is convinced that “Personal language is the most helpful and reliable medium available for communicating the nature, character and purposes of God… The basic point to realize is that anthropomorphic ways of thinking about God are concessions to our weakness. In other words, God knows how difficult it is for us to think about him, and so he gives us vivid learning aids in order to help us picture him in our minds” (McGrath, Understanding the Trinity, 78-79). The point here is that creaturely analogies and metaphors have their expressive powers and limitations. Their purpose is to point us to the reality they ought to elucidate, and not to reduce that reality to their schema.
c. Friendship as a Means for God’s Revelation

In the current entry we are exploring, we have shown how God’s revelation can be seen as the expression of God’s friendship with creation, especially to humanity. In other words, God in Godself – the immanent Trinity – expresses the divine love for creation, as van Broeckhoven puts it, through “the mystery of the Father in the Son… that shines in the face of Jesus Christ”37 – the economic Trinity. This expression of divine friendship in Christ can only reach non-believers through those who incarnate Christ in their very lives. In the words of van Broeckhoven, “We must not only proclaim the message of salvation to men; we must ourselves become this message, just as Christ became for our sake the message of salvation.”38 Becoming Christ for others is, for van Broeckhoven, “the most profound expression, the very essence of that love of friendship which, by loving him, leads the friend to God.”39 As van Broeckhoven puts it, “I sought the deepest meaning of the look of my friend, and I found Your face”40; and “I somehow saw the Father turning His face (the Son) toward me, and in His eyes I recognized the eyes of my friend; we looked at one another, his eyes in mine, in the eyes of God.”41 Here, we see the two sides of the equation. On the one hand, through our friendship with others, they find God in us, which allows us to lead them to God. On the other hand, through that same friendship with others, we find God in them, which allows us to deepen our love for and understanding of God.

For van Broeckhoven, friendship is the most profound way of encountering God in every person. He writes: “In all this I felt the infinite transcendence of the encounter with God, but yet I felt how, at the same level of this transcendence, the encounter with the friend was also clothed

37 A Friend to All Men, 39.
38 Ibid, 69.
40 Ibid, 28.
41 Ibid, 39.
with an immensity, a depth, and a breadth in which we could love each other endlessly; and so I lived the encounter with my friend in a way infinitely pure... And so I saw that the deepest renunciation... required for the deepest and most unconditional quest for God, is no different from the deepest love, the deepest friendship." With this passage, van Broeckhoven contends that only by becoming a friend to others can we lead them – and they lead us – to God.

The point we are emphasizing here is that van Broeckhoven locates his Trinitarian theology in Christian anthropology – the latter being the point of reference for a deeper understanding of the former – of which the common ground for both is his theology of friendship. First of all, the divine friendship within the Godhead extends to creation, and to humanity in particular, as reflected in one of his entries: the “Holy Spirit... is the love of the Father and the Son... The Father, in virtue of His love for the Son, gives the Son over to those whom He loves... the saving love of Father and Son is transformed in them into a love which makes redemptive suffering give way to the joy of friendship in the Spirit.” This same divine friendship incarnated in human friendship is the way in which humanity can recognize, experience, and understand more profoundly who God is. It is because God’s transcendence is God’s very immanence in creation through friendship. In the words of van Broeckhoven:

This experience of the pure transcendence of God is not itself entirely pure; indeed, our deepest experience of God’s transcendence is had [sic] only in the deepest immanence. But as soon as we lose touch with this, our religious experience breaks up into two fragments – the experience of immanence and that of transcendence.

It is precisely by the experience of the divine transcendence that we must continually deepen our experiences of God in the immanence of creatures.

In another diary entry, van Broeckhoven writes: “He [God] is the innermost depth of man and... we can know Him by reaching this depth.” For this reason, he contends that every human

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42 A Friend to All Men, 39-40.
44 Entry of February 8, 1962. Ibid, 36.
contact has a mystical value, for in every “encounter of two persons there is already present the beginning of the encounter of heaven,” and “friendship is [that] messenger of love from heaven.” In other words, every encounter with a person is a potential encounter – or the beginning of an encounter – with God, for God is truly present, indwelling every person. Yet such an encounter can only become the means for God’s revelation if it is an encounter shared in and through friendship in Christ.

2. Brief Summary of the Entry’s Main Points

To conclude this section, we have shown how our search for, encounter with, and understanding of God somehow correspond to the adopted framework of van Broeckhoven’s *Book of Friendship*: (1) desire, (2) revelation, (3) friendship, and (4) mission – although this last point is not highlighted in this entry. First of all, we illustrated how desire is the starting point of our journey towards God, as desire is, according to van Broeckhoven, “the one necessary condition for man to possess God.” It is that *emptiness* that only love can fill, so that “he who desires is in the condition to receive – Love,” that is, God. For this reason, we argued that the one true object of every person’s desiring is God. Secondly, since we could never truly know on our own the true object of our desiring, as human nature is finite and tainted with original sin, only God’s self-revelation in and through Jesus Christ by the Spirit can enable us to see who we really are and what our innermost desire truly is, as “the Father creates our inner being in the image of His Son.”

Hence, van Broeckhoven argues that revelation is fundamental to one’s awareness of the true object of one’s desiring: God. For Christians, God reveals Godself to us in

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49 Ibid.
Jesus Christ by the Spirit. In and through his life, death and resurrection, Christ reveals to us that our deepest desire is God, who is love, and this God of love is Trinity – a faith confession that van Broeckhoven truly embraces, as reflected in the above entry. Finally, we recognized that God’s self-revelation in salvation history could reach non-believers in and through the friendship that believers offer to them. This human friendship rooted in the divine friendship is only realized when believers, Christians in particular, “incarnate” Christ in their very lives. Yet in the process of this same friendship, believers also find – and therefore deepen their love for and understanding of – God in others.

Van Broeckhoven sees the Threeness of Persons and the Oneness of Godhead as constitutive of the Church’s tradition concerning the Holy Trinity and looks to bring that tradition to the modern world, especially to non-believers. However, what is quite distinct in his approach to the Trinitarian doctrine is his emphasis on the role of friendship in our understanding of the Triune God. This element of friendship, which begins with the divine friendship and moves toward human friendship, is explored in details in the entry that follows.

B. Entry 2: February 10, 1962

Friendship is not complete until the others do their share, in and for love, to unite the friends one to the other. Here we come face to face with the specific work of the Holy Spirit in the community of love. For this is the work of the Spirit in the love of the Trinity: He is the love of the Father and the Son and in this way he unites the One to the Other.

Such must be our trinitarian love for other men: to unite them to one another by the force of our love. And this is done best when one considers them friends: the love of the Father who saves is thus extended in the love of the Spirit who brings friendship to its fulfillment.

The Father, in virtue of His love for the Son, gives the Son over to those whom He loves; and if they receive the Son, the saving love of Father and Son is transformed in them into a love which makes redemptive suffering give way to the joy of friendship in the Spirit. Henceforth, in virtue of their love, they will bring friendship to other men, and the friends will see their friendship fulfilled when the others love them in return.
This is the love of the Spirit in the community of the three Persons, a love which never ceases to be the love of the Father in its origin and the love of the Son in His coming forth from the Father and returning to Him.\textsuperscript{51}

1. Analysis of the Text

The key point of this entry is the role of friendship in the relations of the three Persons within the Godhead, and how this friendship extends itself to creation. Along with this point is the theme of mission.

In the above entry, van Broeckhoven starts with an assertion that “friendship is not complete until the others do their share, in and for love, to unite the friends one to the other.”\textsuperscript{52} From here, we can see that friendship is the expression of the mutual act of loving so that its very foundation is love, as it is a friendship “in and for love”. Yet this love is God, since this love is the Holy Spirit. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “the Holy Spirit… is the love of the Father and the Son and in this way he unites the One to the Other.”\textsuperscript{53} As such, friendship is “the specific work of the Holy Spirit in the community of love… the Spirit who brings friendship to its fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{54} For this reason, we can say that friendship is the most beautiful expression of the Trinitarian love of God. It is that perfect expression of the divine love of the three Persons within the Godhead.

a. Friendship as a Perfect Expression of Trinitarian Love

For van Broeckhoven, friendship is differentiated from comradeship, which is companionship that shares in one’s activities or views. Friendship, according to him, “seeks what is deepest in the other person and is ready to sacrifice anything, just to reach this depth… hidden

\textsuperscript{51} A Friend to All Men, 36-37.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 36.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 36-37.
in the mystery of love which is God.”\textsuperscript{55} For this reason, he sees friendship and “falling in love” as correlative,\textsuperscript{56} so that friendship is the very expression of love that accepts or has “the ability to bear easily (not in the name of moral considerations but out of love) people’s little idiosyncrasies,”\textsuperscript{57} as echoed in Christ’s commandment to love even one’s enemies. This understanding of friendship as rooted in love, who is God, is articulated in two of van Broeckhoven’s parables: the parable of the city and the parable of the diamond.

In the parable of the city, van Broeckhoven sees friendship as \textit{holy}. He writes: “In holy friendship, it is like breaking through the fortifications of a walled city. The city puts up a stubborn defense. But a friend is waiting inside, deep within the other person… Thus the friend’s chief task is to break into the city… he is in a hurry to be with his friend in the intimacy of his home.”\textsuperscript{58} In this allegory, we see that it is out of a person’s love for the other that one goes out of one’s self to meet the other. This meeting or encounter of two persons is, for van Broeckhoven, the beginning of an encounter with God who indwells each person.\textsuperscript{59} But for this encounter to take place, the friend needs to break into the walled city – to break down that stubborn defense that the other person puts as a wall of self-protection for fear of being vulnerable, and therefore of being hurt. Yet only a love that goes out of itself – that is, a self-emptying love – is capable of such a task of breaking walls in order to unite oneself to the other. This love is what makes friendship \textit{holy} – a divine friendship.

In another parable – the parable of the diamond – van Broeckhoven writes:

A friend is like a house made of diamond: within there shines a bright light of great beauty. But one cannot get in without breaking down the outer wall: this is a painful

\textsuperscript{55} Entry of November 16, 1958. \textit{A Friend to All Men}, 23.
\textsuperscript{56} See Ibid, 60. In the entry of May 19, 1965, van Broeckhoven correlates “friendship” with “falling in love.”
\textsuperscript{57} Entry of February 5, 1960. Ibid, 29.
\textsuperscript{58} Entry of March 2, 1959. Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{59} This view finds echo in another of van Broeckhoven’s entry, dated January 15, 1963. He writes: “Every human contact, however superficial it may be, is the beginning of a contact with God.” See Ibid, 45.
operation also for him who breaks it down, for he wounds himself as well. But once the wall is down, the light inside, like a red flame, shines with a new brightness.

He will break down several walls, one after the other, and he will wound himself more and more deeply. But he does not act like one who casually breaks a beautiful vase and then walks away without caring in the least.

His wounds grow deeper and deeper, until he comes to the last wall; he already senses the light through it, and it seems to him that if he breaks through the wall, the light will go out.

And yet he must break down this last wall too: this is the price he has to pay in order to find the deepest, most intimate center of the friend, the divine Trinity.

This allegory of the diamond, in line with the parable of the city, points to that self-emptying love that goes out of itself and risks wounding itself just to break down the walls that shroud the presence of the other, in the hope of encountering and experiencing the other. This self-emptying, self-surrendering love of a friend for the other enables one to find and love the other. And in finding and loving the other, one is finding and loving “the deepest, most intimate center of the friend, the divine Trinity.” Again, this act of self-emptying love is what makes friendship holy.

In light of these two parables, we can have a glimpse of van Broeckhoven’s understanding of love that makes its expression, friendship, holy. For him, love, on the one hand, is “incompatible with a turning-in upon oneself, and… on the other hand, it tends to go out from itself, to express and to incarnate itself in the concrete situation.” For this reason, a real friend refuses “from the very start to love his friend for his own sake or in view of his private good,” but for the sake and the good of the other. Here, we can see the two dimensions of love as

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61 The suffering that is integral to this self-emptying love rooted in God becomes a redemptive suffering. In the words of Joseph Ratzinger, it is “suffering, not as curse, but as a love that transforms the world”; [Joseph Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 58.]
62 *A Friend to All Men*, 20.
63 Ibid, 113, endnote 17.
64 Ibid.
understood by van Broeckhoven: the *universal* and the *incarnate*.\(^{65}\) With regard to its universal dimension, “love requires that the friend be loved in view of the good of others.”\(^{66}\) In other words, the friendship or love of two persons is not meant to be contained between themselves alone. Love between two persons must always be in the context of others.\(^{67}\) Van Broeckhoven expounds this point more clearly in one particular passage from the diary, dated November 23, 1962. He writes:

> I have come to see that the great obstacle to the apostolate which we have to overcome consists in the very great resistance we offer one another by our fears and our turning in upon ourselves. Each one of us, within his little circle of friends, turns in upon himself in two ways: the individual does nothing spontaneously to enlarge the circle, and the group itself does not grow spontaneously in the friendship it already has. Thus the individual remains secure in what he is and what he has.\(^{68}\)

What van Broeckhoven emphasizes here is that the love between friends must be seen in the larger context of others – that is, “in view of the good of others.”\(^{69}\)

With regard to its incarnate dimension, “love requires a commitment expressed through concrete acts, a ‘going-forth’ from oneself which culminates in the gift of self.”\(^{70}\) In other words, in order for love to be true to its nature, it must become a total emptying of self for the sake of the other. In fact, this dimension of love is concretely and perfectly expressed in history, when God offers God’s very self to us by becoming one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “The preaching of the historical Christ, of the salvation brought by His  

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\(^{65}\) *A Friend to All Men*, 113, endnote 17.  
\(^{66}\) Ibid.  
\(^{67}\) This universal dimension of love – a love that is not meant to be contained between two persons alone – finds concrete expression in the Trinitarian love. This also points to the foundational question in Trinitarian doctrine: “Why three Persons?” Ratzinger illustrates in his book, *The God of Jesus Christ*, how the concept of one or two Persons in the Godhead is untenable (Ratzinger, 34-35). In line with this theme, Richard of St. Victor, using his “social Trinity” model, also argues that “the idea of the ‘sharing of love’ can only be sustained if there are three persons within the Godhead”; [Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 4th Edition (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 177.]  
\(^{68}\) Entry of November 23, 1962. *A Friend to All Men*, 44.  
\(^{69}\) Ibid, 113.  
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
death and His life, is the final, concrete form, proper to every expression of love, of the divine life which is in us and which we know by faith.”\textsuperscript{71}

This understanding of love – with its universal and incarnate dimensions – gives us a glimpse of the very nature of divine love. In the divine love, the Persons within the Godhead love each other with perfect love – a love that has no walls or obstacles so that each Person gives itself fully to the other. As reflected in the above entry, “This is the love of the Spirit in the community of the three Persons, a love which never ceases to be the love of the Father in its origin and the love of the Son in His coming forth from the Father and returning to Him.”\textsuperscript{72} Yet this Trinitarian love – since it always goes out of itself for the sake and the good of the other – is able to love that which is other than itself – that which is other than Godself. Hence, there is creation. To put it more concretely, “the Father loves the Son in view of the salvation of the world, and He loves Him with a love that saves by means of the inevitable sufferings of redemptive love.”\textsuperscript{73} From here, we can say that the purpose – that is, the mission – of divine friendship is to extend that Trinitarian love to that which is other than Godself: creation, particularly humanity. Friendship is like the arms of Trinitarian love reaching out to humanity.

\textit{b. Friendship’s Mission is the Extension of Trinitarian Love for Creation}

In the above entry, van Broeckhoven invites us to extend that Trinitarian love to creation, particularly to all of humanity, through our embodying of \textit{holy} friendship. This embodiment is the key to allowing others to encounter – and eventually to know, love, and understand – the Holy Triune God that we profess, as this holy friendship draws them to God. In other words, “Love thus finds its fulfillment when the love of the Father and the Son encounters no obstacle; then perfect love, the joy of fulfilled friendship, can circulate through the friends’ hearts and

\textsuperscript{71} Entry of October 17, 1964. \textit{A Friend to All Men}, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 113. (emphasis added).
unite them in a love whose horizons are infinite, in an encounter of all for all that nothing can limit. It is in this way that the Spirit, over and beyond all the sufferings of saving love, can unite all men and the whole world in the perfect joy and unity of the three Persons."  

To put it simply, the task of holy friendship is to overcome those obstacles – those walls – that hinder the fulfillment of Trinitarian love for humanity. How, then, do we concretely embody this holy friendship in our life?

God has given Godself as the perfect embodiment of holy friendship in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ’s incarnation – in which the perfect union of God with humanity is achieved – is the perfect embodiment of holy friendship. Through the incarnation, God is truly with us, among us, one with us in the flesh. Christ’s *concrete* embodiment of holy friendship is explicated in depth by van Broeckhoven in a report he gave on May 14, 1967:

> This is what I discovered when I was fired, and Br., one of the poorest, said to me: ‘Egide, if you get into a scrape, you can always count on me; come stay with me until you’ve found a job.’ – At that moment, I was at his level, completely accessible, because I was in the same boat with so many other fellow workers.

> This is what motivated Christ to become the least of all men; otherwise, the little ones would never have come to really love Him. He who exalts himself above the level of another man cannot really be loved by him.  

In the passage just cited, van Broeckhoven stresses the importance of solidarity as the key element of holy friendship. In other words, Christ is able to perfectly embody holy friendship with humanity – to be and to live among us – because Christ is able to go to our level: to be in perfect solidarity with humanity, except sin. To use the words of Scripture, Christ Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in

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74 *A Friend to All Men*, 113.
75 Ibid, 109-110, endnote 94. This text is part of the report given by van Broeckhoven on May 14, 1967 for the meetings organized by an Abbey of Tronchiennes.
appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (NAB, Philippians 2:6-8).

For van Broeckhoven, solidarity is grounded in a love that is found in mutuality, not in domination or conquest over others. Power, as we understand it in the worldly sense, is that of superiority and control over others. This distorted notion of power does not deem equality with the other for fear of losing itself in and for the other. For this reason, it has no freedom in itself. On the other hand, authentic power, in the divine sense of the word, leads to mutual loving. It is because authentic power is not afraid to lose itself in and for the other, for it knows that “to give oneself” is not to lose oneself; it is the essential realization of oneself,” as Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it. For this reason, authentic power is free and is able to bestow freedom for the other to be and to become. It is capable of that self-emptying, self-surrendering love—a love that is found in mutuality—that leads to solidarity.

In order to elucidate van Broeckhoven’s understanding of solidarity as a key element of holy friendship, we are going to explore the theologies of two renowned theologians: Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) and Hans Urs von Balthasar. In what follows, we will explore the notion of solidarity using: (1) Ratzinger’s meditation on God’s descent from heaven; and (2) von Balthasar’s theology of Christ’s descent into hell.

1) Ratzinger’s Meditation on God’s Descent from Heaven

In his book, The God of Jesus Christ, Ratzinger reflects on the section of the Nicene Creed that speaks of Christ’s coming down from heaven. He argues that this creedal line—“He

76 It must be noted that mutuality does not necessarily mean equality. For instance, a human person—by God’s grace—can mutually respond to God’s love for him or her. However, one can never equal God’s love for him or her, as the Creator’s love for a creature is always greater than the creature’s love for the Creator. In other words, a creature’s love for the Creator is always dependent on the Creator’s love for the creature.

came down from heaven” – may sound offensive to some of us, for it seems to imply *condescension* rather than equality. In the words of Ratzinger:

> We do not like the idea that someone descends to another: we want, not “condescension,” but rather equality. We find the words of the Magnificat, “Deposit potentes de sede” (He has cast down the mighty from their throne), much more to our liking than the “descendit de caelis”—although in fact the two are inseparable, since it is precisely the descending God who is the dethronement of the powerful and the raising up of those who were formerly the last, so that they now become the first.\(^78\)

This tendency of some of us to see God’s descent from heaven as a display of God’s superiority and control over creation comes from a distorted notion of power, as explained above. On the contrary, God’s descent from heaven, according to Ratzinger, points to that self-emptying love of the Holy Triune God for creation – particularly humanity – which allows God to be in solidarity with us, that is, to become truly one of us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This solidarity, as he puts it, is “the movement of God’s being into the being of man and, even more than this, the movement out of glory into the Cross, the movement to those who are the last and who thereby become the first.”\(^79\) This is the movement of holy friendship that perfectly expresses the Trinitarian love for creation, particularly humanity.

2) **Von Balthasar’s Theology of Christ’s Descent into Hell**

Hans Urs von Balthasar expounds this theme of God’s solidarity with humanity in his book, *Mysterium Paschale*. For von Balthasar, God’s external kenosis – that is, the self-emptying love of God that expresses itself in creation and reaches its climax in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is actually the concrete manifestation of God’s *internal* kenosis: the “eternal ‘event’ of the divine processions.”\(^80\) In other words, God’s *kenosis* is the very essence of Trinitarian love – “‘given’ in the self-gift of the Father, ‘rendered’ in the thanksgiving of the

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\(^78\) *The God of Jesus Christ*, 60.

\(^79\) Ibid, 62.

Son, and ‘represented’ in its character as absolute love by the Holy Spirit—\(^{81}\) which is revealed in salvation history, so that “the unconditional, gracious, sacrificial love of Jesus Christ expresses not just the mystery of being—finite being—but the mystery of the Source of being, the transcendent communion of love which we call the Trinity… the love which God is shines through to the world.”\(^{82}\)

The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, according to von Balthasar, form one whole act of God’s kenotic love for humanity, so that God’s kenosis can be seen as “the revelation of the entire Trinity.”\(^{83}\) He sees the incarnation as “ordered to the Passion,”\(^{84}\) so that God can be in solidarity with the entire creation, even unto death, and in this way “he will no longer be a God who judges his creatures from above and from outside. Thanks to his intimate experience of the world, as the Incarnate One who knows experientially every dimension of the world’s being down to the abyss of Hell, God now becomes the measure of man.”\(^{85}\) In a similar vein, Gregory of Nyssa sees Christ’s death not as a consequence of his birth, “but that the birth was undertaken so that he could die.”\(^{86}\)

However, the very heart of von Balthasar’s reflection is Christ’s descent into hell. He writes: “Because the Descent is the final point reached by the Kenosis, and the Kenosis is the supreme expression of the inner-Trinitarian love, the Christ of Holy Saturday is the consummate icon of what God is like.”\(^{87}\) But we can only understand the importance of this descent when we grasp the meaning of hell. Using the OT notions of Sheol or Hades, von Balthasar describes hell

\(^{81}\) Mysterium Paschale, 5.  
\(^{82}\) Ibid.  
\(^{83}\) Ibid, 30.  
\(^{84}\) Ibid, 12.  
\(^{85}\) Ibid, 13-14.  
\(^{86}\) Ibid, 21.  
\(^{87}\) Ibid, 7.
as the place where “communication with God is at an end,”88 where one is being in solidarity “with the unredeemed dead.”89 As von Balthasar emphasizes it, “among the dead, there is no living communication. Here solidarity means: being solitary like, and with, the others.”90 In the realm of the dead, communication – and therefore communion – is absent.91

Since Christ is the Logos – the Word who is the eloquence of the Father, and whose nature is to communicate life and so enables communion with God and others – he is the only one who can communicate life in the realm of the dead. And Christ is able to do so only by being in solidarity with the dead, that is, by truly being dead through dying (in this case, on the Cross). For, as von Balthasar puts it, “the Son cannot really be introduced into Hell save as a dead man, on Holy Saturday. This introducing is needful since the dead must ‘hear the voice of the Son of God’, and hearing that voice, ‘live’ (John 5, 15).”92 However, von Balthasar argues that Christ, though he is dead, can still communicate with the dead because “the Lord can cross (deambulare) this deepest Hell, since he is not bound by any of the bonds of sin, but is, rather, ‘free among the dead’.”93 This is the key to von Balthasar’s theology: by being in solidarity with humanity, except sin, God in Christ becomes totally one with us, even with the greatest of sinner in hell, so that we can say that God has literally been everywhere that humankind can possibly be – a theme that finds expression in Psalm 139: “If I ascend to the heavens, you are there; if I lie down in Sheol, there you are” (NAB, Psalm 139:8).

To sum it up, the reflections of both Ratzinger and von Balthasar help us understand how van Broeckhoven views solidarity as the key element of holy friendship. Solidarity, to use van

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88 Mysterium Paschale, 75.
89 Ibid, 161.
90 Ibid, 165.
91 Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, archbishop of Manila, also expounds Balthasar’s theology during his sharing delivered on Holy Saturday at the Holy Week Triduum at Loyola School of Theology in Quezon City, Philippines on March 30, 2002.
92 Mysterium Paschale, 175.
93 Ibid, 176.
Broeckhoven’s words, means being “in the same boat” with the other – that is, to be at the same level with the other, completely accessible to the other – “otherwise, the little ones would never have come to really love Him. He who exalts himself above the level of another man cannot really be loved by him.”

Yet solidarity is only possible when the barriers or obstacles between persons are overcome. For this reason, we can only be truly one with the other in mutual loving when we embody holy friendship, whose task is to overcome those obstacles – those walls – that hinder the fulfillment of Trinitarian love for humanity.

2. Brief Summary of the Entry’s Main Points

To conclude this section, we started with the assertion that friendship is the perfect expression of Trinitarian love, since it is the expression of love who is God, “the Holy Spirit… the love of the Father and the Son.”

As such, friendship is “the specific work of the Holy Spirit in the community of love… the Spirit who brings friendship to its fulfillment.” This friendship, which is different from comradeship, has the ability to risk losing itself in and for the other, and even has the courage to break down those walls – those masks, those stubborn defenses – that the other person puts up for self-protection, so as to unite oneself to the other. It is because this friendship is rooted in – and is that expression of – the self-emptying, self-surrendering love of God that makes it holy. From here, we asserted that the task – that is, the mission – of holy friendship is the unity between the Creator and the creation: a unity that transcends the gap between the Holy Triune God and humanity, and the gap between persons. Lastly, we argued that solidarity is the key element necessary for us to concretely embody this holy friendship in our lives. Using van Broeckhoven’s understanding of solidarity, we have seen that only when we

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94 A Friend to All Men, 110.
95 Ibid, 36.
96 Ibid, 36-37.
are in the same level with the other can the other love us truly. For this reason, van Broeckhoven sees solidarity as the motivation for God’s incarnation in Christ. He writes: “This is what motivated Christ to become the least of all men; otherwise, the little ones would never have come to really love Him. He who exalts himself above the level of another man cannot really be loved by him.” 97 This view, as we have shown, finds expression in Ratzinger’s meditation on God’s descent from heaven and von Balthasar’s theology of Christ’s descent into hell – both reflections point to God’s kenotic love for creation, particularly humanity, in Christ by the Spirit.

To embrace this act of solidarity with others in one’s life is van Broeckhoven’s invitation for us in order to truly embody the holy friendship necessary to unite ourselves to others, and eventually to unite others to the Holy Triune God. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “It is only when love is expressed in a concrete way by a total commitment in the concrete situation of him whom we love, to the extent that we seek the concrete inner life of the other, that we draw near to him in the concrete expression of his own inner being, it is only then that love is truly authentic, existential, deep, without limit, extending beyond time: eternal, and beyond matter: spiritual.” 98

This is the challenge that our vocation calls us to live out not only as individuals, but as a community – as a Church – as well: the embodying of holy friendship.

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97 A Friend to All Men, 110.
98 Ibid, 66.
CHAPTER THREE
Embodying Friendship

“My vocation is to teach men the mystical depths of friendship.”¹ This has been Egide van Broeckhoven’s sentiment from the outset. And he realized this vocation by embodying holy friendship in his life as a Jesuit and as a worker-priest, as reflected in his journals. Through his writings, van Broeckhoven invites every Christian to realize this vocation of embodying friendship in one’s life. As he puts it:

Book about friendship: lived experiences, not a philosophical treatise but transparent experiences where each man can recognize his own experiences and see them clearly there until he finds God in them. Thus not an exhaustive study but experiences of life.²

This present chapter aims to show the relevance of van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship in our present context. In this chapter, we are going to explore the importance of living out van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship as a way to re-present an ever-ancient yet ever-new doctrine of the Holy Triune God to the modern world. First, I will consider the dynamics involved in living out the theology of friendship in the contemporary world according to van Broeckhoven’s methodology of desire, revelation, friendship, and mission. Second, I will look at some of the challenges, according to van Broeckhoven, that Christians face – as individuals and as a Church – in embodying holy friendship.

A. Living Out the Theology of Friendship

In the previous chapter, we have explored the four elements that are essential to van Broeckhoven’s approach to his theology of friendship: (1) desire, (2) revelation, (3) friendship, and (4) mission. In this section, we will attempt to make these elements of his theology more

concrete in the context of our contemporary world – elements to be applied in our life as individuals and as a community, the Church.

In the entry of October 17, 1964, van Broeckhoven writes:

If Christ today still has something to say to men, it will be an answer to their deepest desires, not a message that goes over their heads and doesn’t reach their hearts…

Thus we have got to find out how men of today desire God with their whole heart, with their whole being, in their whole life; or better yet, how God is making them desire Him. How can we do this if we have not come to know the men of our time deeply, with a knowledge that only love can give? How can we love them if we do not go to them; if we do not imitate at least partially that total self-giving that moved God to make Himself man, so that men will let us approach them?  

From the passage just quoted, we can identify the following dynamic process: As persons called to be “revealers of Reality,” who is God in Christ, we are to: (1) go out to the world in order to meet and encounter the people: *mission*; (2) love them by encountering them: *friendship*; (3) know them and their desires by loving them: *revelation*; and (4) and allow them to seek God – the one, true object of their search – by knowing them: *desire*. In this process, we can see a reversal of the framework of van Broeckhoven’s theology: mission, friendship, revelation, and desire. However, we cannot start with mission without knowing the holy way of friendship. We cannot deeply engage in holy friendship without knowing the person and the person’s desires. For this reason, we must start with the dynamics of (1) knowing the desire of the other, (2) revealing God to the other, and (3) loving the other in friendship, before we can go out on mission. Yet one must note that these four themes – desire, revelation, friendship, and mission – should not be seen as separate entities. They are, in fact, inseparable from each other as they work *integralely* as one dynamic process.

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1. Knowing the Desire of the Other

In the Gospel according to John, the first statement that Jesus utters at the beginning of his public appearance is the question, “What are you looking for?” (NAB, John 1:38). Later in the Gospel, in Jesus’s first resurrection appearance, Jesus asks the question, “Whom are you looking for?” (NAB, John 20:15). As we can see, there is a movement from a what (that is, a thing) to a whom (that is, a person) in the way Jesus understands the natural process of the human search for God. This movement of searching illustrated in the Gospel of John finds resonance in van Broeckhoven’s understanding of the human desire for God.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, van Broeckhoven sees the awareness of one’s desiring as the first step towards one’s search for God: “I have come to understand that desire is the one necessary condition for man to possess God… If one has something without desiring it, he does not truly possess it.” He then argues that love, who is God, is the true object of one’s desiring: “Desire is the emptiness that love comes to fill. He who desires is in the condition to receive – Love.” But because this true object of one’s desiring usually takes different forms, one may not easily discern God in them due to one’s finite and debased human nature. As a result, one usually starts with desiring the what – that is, the created. Only through God’s revelation in Jesus Christ – and through the believers’ resolve to incarnate Christ in their lives – does one move to desiring the who – that is, the Creator: God, the true object of one’s desiring. Yet van Broeckhoven respects this slow process or movement from the what to the who of one’s searching. For this reason, we need to start with knowing and respecting the what of one’s desiring. In other words, we need to come to the person as one is, “in the concrete situation of

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4 This is an idea borrowed from Fr. Nicholas King, S.J. – a visiting professor at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry – in his presentation of The Gospel of John during one of his lectures at the BC-STM in 2014.

5 Entry of August 28, 1961. A Friend to All Men, 32.

6 Ibid.
him whom we love, to the extent that we seek the concrete inner life of the other, that we draw near to him in the concrete expression of his own inner being.”

As C.S. Lewis argues, we need to “learn the language of our audience.”8 Knowing the language of the person can lead us to know the what of that person’s desiring. But in order for us to learn the language of the person we are engaging, we first need to be with that person. This entails knowing that person’s concrete situation, needs, struggles, dreams, and hopes, as these elements vary from person to person. The children, the youth, the homeless, the factory workers, the non-believers, the migrants, the sick and the dying, and even the rich – each of them desires something according to one’s circumstances in life. For this reason, we must somehow enter their world and ask ourselves the questions that they ask. For instance, we must enter the world of children if we want to understand what children really need. We have to get involved with the youth culture if we want to understand the youth’s passions and struggles.

There is a big difference between knowing about the person and knowing the person. To know about the person, we do not need to be with that person, as we can find information about that person from external sources like books and media documents. However, to know the person compels us to be with that person. It is because by knowing the person – that is, by being present with the person – we are already loving that person. For we are knowing the person “with a knowledge that only love can give,”9 to use van Broeckhoven’s words. And in being loved, the person encounters God, for “every human contact, however superficial it may be, is the beginning of a contact with God.”10 Through our knowing and loving the person, we are leading

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7 A Friend to All Men, 66.
8 Alister E. McGrath, Studies in Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 357.
that person to desire God – moving from the \textit{what} to the \textit{who} of desiring. In our embodiment of knowing and loving, God is revealed to the other.

\textbf{2. Revealing God to the Other}

We have just argued that in the process of knowing the person, we are already loving the person. And it is in our knowing and loving that we reveal God to the person. Yet this loving must be concretely expressed in words and deeds so as to lead the person to experience God. This calls for embodying holy friendship. Through this embodiment of holy friendship, God is revealed. Van Broeckhoven describes this whole dynamics of embodying friendship in the following entry:

The search for God is their deepest desire: that is, they want to discover by experience (and thus learn to trust life) that at least someone, really and concretely, takes what lives deep within them seriously (who takes them, just as they are, seriously, who accepts that inalienable ‘me’ that each of them is…); that they are loved and valued by someone who respects them, who really encounters them, who judges them worthy of being loved for just what they are. This desire for love is already an experience of God.

It often happens that when someone reaches deep into a person and touches the basic desire, he himself is shaken to his foundations. He then touches the fine line between trust in life or despair, faith in the living, existential God or unbelief, the desire for love or disillusionment. What they ask is not an encounter with impersonal goodness (someone who is charitable) but with one who loves their concrete being, who acknowledges that they are worthy of being loved, even if it is only a single meeting with such a person. Such an encounter will then become for them a profound experience that will sustain them throughout their lives, that will give them back trust in life, in love, in God.\textsuperscript{11}

The above passage shows how every person desires to be loved in concrete ways: to be taken seriously as one is, to be respected as a person in one’s concrete circumstances, and to be acknowledged as someone who is worthy of being loved. Since this “desire for love is already an

\textsuperscript{11} Entry of October 14, 1964. \textit{A Friend to All Men}, 52.
experience of God.”\textsuperscript{12} once the person experiences the embodiment of such loving, then the movement from the what to the who of that person’s desiring will happen. This concrete act of loving – the embodiment of holy friendship – reveals God. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “Such an encounter will then become for them a profound experience that will sustain them throughout their lives, that will give them back trust in life, in love, in God.”\textsuperscript{13} But what kind of God is revealed in this experience of holy friendship?

Through our embodiment of holy friendship, the beloved experiences a personal God who is love: a God who “meets with him in his own home ground,”\textsuperscript{14} a God who wants to be “in the same boat” with the beloved – that is, to be in solidarity with the beloved. In other words, it is a God whose “total self-giving… moved God to make Himself man.”\textsuperscript{15} Hence, our embodiment of holy friendship will eventually reveal to the beloved that this God made man is no other than Jesus Christ, “the divine Word, revelation of the Inner Being of the Trinity”\textsuperscript{16} – God’s very gift of self whom Christians are called to follow and to incarnate in their lives.

3. Loving the Other in Holy Friendship

One learns who God is by experiencing what God does. But God acts in and through nature, most particularly in and through the human person, as van Broeckhoven gradually “grew to understand that people… are the preferential locus to find God.”\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, we can say that in the experience of holy friendship with another person, one experiences and sees God as a loving friend who never gives up on the beloved, risking to be wounded just to break those walls – those obstacles – in order to be one with the beloved. In a word, God loves and cares for us in

\textsuperscript{12} Entry of October 14, 1964. A Friend to All Men, 52.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Entry of January 25, 1959. Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{15} Entry of October 17, 1964. Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{16} Entry of November 16, 1958. Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 6.
and through the people around us. In the words of van Broeckhoven: “Friendship and the love between two persons are the words God needs in order to express His love for us and we need in order to express our love for Him.”

First of all, to say that friendship and the love between persons are “God’s words” that express God’s love for us and our love for God means that every loving relationship is a conversation with God, wherein God communicates Godself to us, and we become channels of God’s self-communication. As van Broeckhoven puts it, “All our life is nothing but a single conversation which God holds with us. All friendship is only one conversation, or it should be.” Yet if our life in friendship and love is but one single conversation with God – the source of life and love – then this conversation must not be interrupted. Otherwise, we will experience death. For it is only in communication – and therefore communion – with God and others that our personhood – our identity as a person – grows and develops. As von Balthasar suggests in his theology of the descent into hell, “among the dead, there is no living communication.” For this reason, we are called to foster an uninterrupted conversation with God through an unbroken friendship with one another. We can only know what real conversation is when we learn how God communicates with us. Van Broeckhoven illustrates this point as follows:

There is indeed a need for moments of silence also, but a silence charged with the full force of all words, a silence capable of filling all words now and in the future. Every word which is true and existential cannot be such unless it is broken by silence (if not, it is nothing but talk), and all true silence is not such if it interrupts the conversation.

In an eternal present, God speaks to us His Word; but not in a way that breaks His silence, that silence charged with all the force of His personal presence; He also keeps silent, but not in a way that interrupts the conversation. What is true is that we interrupt it if we do not listen.

Prayer ought to be this blending of words and silence not to break the silence with verbiage, nor to abstain from speaking or praying and thus cut short the conversation…

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19 Ibid.
God, when He speaks never breaks His silence… A conversation includes two equally important things: words and silence. Both must not only alternate according to a suitable rhythm, but the words must also be spoken in a way that does not break the silence. We cannot give ourselves to idle talk: this would mean breaking the silence for fear of finding ourselves silently present one to the other in a personal encounter.

But neither does silence interrupt the conversation.

All our life is nothing but a single conversation which God holds with us. All friendship is only one conversation, or it should be.21

From the above passage, at least three points are essential. The first point is that our conversation with God and with one another must have both words and silence. On the one hand, words allow us to express ourselves to the other. On the other hand, silence allows the other to express itself to us. Van Broeckhoven underlines the importance of silence and the purpose of words as follows: “Moments of silence have a great importance in a conversation, because they show clearly that the words have no other raison d’etre than to express the presence of one person to another.”22

The second point is that God speaks God’s Word to us without breaking the silence. There is a big difference between to talk and to speak. When we talk, according to van Broeckhoven, we can ignore a lot of things that are truly essential in life, “but when you truly speak, this is impossible; the silence in a true conversation continually leads those who speak back to the existential fullness of their situation.”23 In other words, when we truly speak, it is our very being that communicates to the other, with or without words. It is our very being – “open, transparent, and present one to the other”24 – that speaks so that the conversation is not broken.

The last point is that conversation is only interrupted when we do not listen. Listening is the most important element in a conversation. We are actually listening to God when we are

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21 Entry of March 8, 1965. A Friend to All Men, 55-56.
22 Ibid, 57.
23 Ibid, 56.
24 Ibid, 57.
listening to the other person, for God acts and speaks to us *in* and *through* the other person. When we do not listen to the other, we are somehow not allowing God to speak to us. It is here that sin comes to the fore. It is sin, which takes different forms, that interrupts God’s conversation and thus disrupts our relationship with God and others. On the contrary, to listen is to be “open, transparent, and present one to the other”\(^{25}\) – that is, to be silent and humble enough to allow God to speak to us in and through the other person, to allow God’s truth and love to reveal itself to us in and through the other. In fact, listening is growing in wisdom, as reflected in Scriptures: “Oh, that you would be altogether silent; that for you would be wisdom!” (NAB, Job 13:5).

As a way to conclude this section, allow me to use a sermon by St. Augustine that somehow captures the methodology of van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship. This sermon points to this one dynamic process of desire, revelation, friendship, and mission. In Sermon 34, Augustine writes:

> There is not one who does not love something, but the question is, what to love. The psalms do not tell us not to love, but to choose the object of our love. But how can we choose unless we are first chosen? We cannot love unless someone has loved us first. Listen to the apostle John: *We love him, because he first loved us.* The source of man’s love for God can only be found in the fact that God loved him first. He has given us himself as the object of our love, and he has also given us its source. What this source is you may learn more clearly from the apostle Paul who tells us: *The love of God has been poured into our hearts.* This love is not something we generate ourselves; it comes to us *through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*\(^{26}\)

From the above text, Augustine maintains that each person always has an object to love. The real question is what that object is. This resonates with van Broeckhoven’s view with regard to the dynamics of human desiring. We have shown that, for van Broeckhoven, it usually starts with a

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\(^{25}\) *A Friend to All Men,* 57.

what – that is, anything created – and moves toward the who – that is, the Creator – of one’s desiring. This movement, we argued, only happens when the person is known and loved for what and who one is, irrespective of one’s life circumstances, culture, religion, and living condition. This is reflected in Augustine’s text: “But how can we choose unless we are first chosen? We cannot love unless someone has loved us first.”27 In other words, a person can only love if there is, first of all, an experience of being loved. The Christian faith tells us that it is God who has loved us first. As Augustine puts it, “The source of man's love for God can only be found in the fact that God loved him first.”28 However, as we argued earlier, God always acts most particularly in and through the human person. For this reason, we can say that, in holy friendship, God is loving the person in and through our knowing and loving that person. This is the task of holy friendship: to know and love the person as one is – the way God loves each person. Yet to know and to love a person is to be present with that person, learning the person’s “language” in order to know the what of that person’s desiring. Only by knowing and loving the person in this way can we be allowed to enter that person’s world, and eventually allow that person to encounter God – the who of one’s desiring – in and through us. For this reason, van Broeckhoven writes: “One cannot come to know the desire which the world has for God except by encountering the world: this is the Incarnation of Christ.”29 This is our call. Our vocation. Our mission.

B. The Challenges of Embodying Holy Friendship

Van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship is an invitation to go forth and share the greatest gift we receive – Godself in Jesus Christ. For van Broeckhoven, our mission as

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27 Sermo 34.
28 Ibid.
29 Entry of November 25, 1964. A Friend to All Men, 55.
individuals and as a Church is “to establish God’s kingdom, to carry the Good News to them,” especially to the “dechristianized masses” – the poor, the marginalized, and the outcast – with whom our evangelical preference should go. Yet this mission can only be fulfilled by embodying holy friendship. For it is through such embodiment of holy friendship that we incarnate Christ in our lives. Such is the mission of the Church and of every believer: to go out and proclaim Christ to the world by their lives. As van Broeckhoven puts it:

It is completely unimportant to find out how or when to go toward our fellow men; the important thing is to go, however imperfect and lacking in mature reflection our steps may be. And what is important above all is to go toward some person. This is also the only thing that others want of us, the only thing that enriches them, that moves them, that makes them happy. This is what the Christian message proclaims: that men must love one another. Often it takes a negative situation to make this truth more evident. This way of going toward other men is what the apostolate is all about.

Yet, according to van Broeckhoven’s understanding of mission of embodying friendship, going forth toward others entails that we become like the people we engage in. Van Broeckhoven argues that “the only way we can really reach these poor people who are such strangers to the Church, and the only way to love them, is to become like one of them (just as Christ Himself the first of all gave us an example); therefore we must go to work like them, be of no account like them, defended by no one just as they are.” In short, we must be in solidarity with the people we engage in. However, such a mission is easier said than done. Three of the main reasons that hinder this mission of embodying friendship are, according to van Broeckhoven, (1) the fear to risk loving, which manifests itself in one’s attachment to the law, (2) losing that pilgrim’s spirit, and (3) the denial of death.

30 Refer to the entry called “Why I Went to Work in a Factory.” A Friend to All Men, 109.
31 Van Broeckhoven uses this term to refer to the marginalized and outcast – both believers and non-believers – in society and in the Church.
32 Entry of November 7, 1963. A Friend to All Men, 46-47.
1. Attachment to the Law as a Manifestation of One’s Fear to Risk Loving

In line with the Christian faith, van Broeckhoven holds that “the essence of God’s kingdom is love. Thus the beginning and end of our apostolate has got to be love. Our first duty is not to proclaim the history of salvation sent by God, but first of all to be a bit of that history ourselves. The Church should become in us the tangible reality of God’s love for the concrete world of today.” 34 Moreover, it is in and through the people we engage in, love, and serve that we can find God. Van Broeckhoven writes: “God… could be found only in the reality of the world of today, preferably among the poorest of the poor. He cannot be found in artificial situations. He is wherever the world is in need of saving… He lives in the friendship we give one another, but especially in the friendship we receive from the people we go to live with.” 35 This is our mission, our call to love.

However, to love is to risk, and to risk involves facing the unknown, embracing the uncertain. In loving, we risk losing our sense of identity, security, certainty, and control. It is because in loving, we become vulnerable to the people we love. For this reason, we are and will always be changed when we love. On the other hand, the law – which represents the beliefs we hold, the traditions we embrace, and the convictions in life that we imbibe – gives us that sense of identity, certainty, security, and control. For the law usually provides us with something clear – “black and white” – that we can easily and directly point to whenever we are confronted with uncertainty. Yet love and law are never meant to deny or oppose each other. On the contrary, as Scriptures says, “love is the fulfillment of the law” (NAB, Romans 13:10), and the law protects

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34 Refer to the entry called “Why I Went to Work in a Factory.” A Friend to All Men, 109.
love from being overpowered by the whims of human folly. In the words of Raniero Cantalamessa, “love is the strength of the law and the law is the defense of love.”

However, the problem arises when we become afraid to risk, when the fear of losing that sense of identity, security, certainty, and control takes over us. As van Broeckhoven writes it, “He who is not strong enough to accept the criterion of love takes refuge in the law.” With this fear, which manifests itself in being inordinately attached to the law, we lose our ability to be flexible and creative, making us more rigid and uncompromising—symptoms that are characteristic of someone who is not living life. To lose oneself in love is the great challenge we all face.

One concrete example of this crippling fear of losing oneself in love is found in the life of the Church—a fear that hinders the Church from going to where it should go in order to proclaim God and to further God’s kingdom. The Church today is experiencing great tension between losing itself—that is, letting go of itself that is characteristic of loving as embodied by Pope Francis and those who are not afraid to risk loving—and holding on to itself—that is, clinging to its identity as embodied by those who hold on to the glorious past of the Church tradition, and clinging to power as embodied by those who embrace the clericalist and triumphalistic attitude. However, for the Church to be faithful to its mission as the doorway to God’s salvation in Christ, the Church is called to be the herald of Good News by embodying the love and holy friendship of God for humanity, making itself attractive to all humankind, especially to the non-believers, the poor, the marginalized, and the outcast. As Rahner reminds us, “The nature of Church is misunderstood if it is seen as the promulgator of law or as the educator of human race… The Church is gospel and not law. Gospel announces the good news and promises salvation; law

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makes demands and promises only that they can be fulfilled… The Church’s activity in word, sacrament and life must see itself today as gospel and not simply as law.”

As living members of the Church, we can only proclaim the Good News – God who is love – if we risk losing ourselves in and for the others for the sake of embodying Christ’s love. Only by losing ourselves in love can we further the mystical Body of the Christ who is “the way and the truth and the life” (NAB, John 14:6). Therefore, as part of our loving, of losing ourselves in and for the others, we as a Church are invited to realize the following: (1) As the doorway to God’s salvation in Christ, the Church is called to widen its door, wide enough to welcome all of humankind of whatever race, color, culture, sexuality, life status, beliefs, and traditions; (2) As the bearer of Truth, the Church is called to truly reflect Christ – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – in its teaching, sanctifying and governing life. It is summoned to live out the indiscriminate love of Christ for humanity – to respond to and serve the needs of the least, the lost, and the last in our society, as Christ would do; (3) As the bearer of Good News, who is Christ, the Church is called to be faithful to its proclamation of the Gospel of Christ – the Gospel of love – by embodying holy friendship.

In order to realize its vocation, the Church is called to risk. It is true that as part of being human and of learning how to love, we as a Church run the risk of making mistakes every now and then. But to avoid erring by clinging to the law, we are losing the very essence of love. For us to personify the love of God in Christ, we are to risk loving. However, whenever we err in our risking to love, may we err on the side of charity. Yet this “errring” should not be misunderstood as a justification of the wrong, nor should it be seen as a neglect, a disrespect, or a disregard of the law. Our risking must be grounded in the spirit of the law of love.

39 Fr. Kenneth Hughes, S.J. shared with me this thought during one of our Spiritual Direction sessions in 2016.
2. Losing that Pilgrim’s Spirit

Van Broeckhoven sees a great concern for the Church and all the faithful of today. He sees a paradoxical situation in which “the Good News was sent to the poor and yet the poor do not receive it in spite of the generosity of so many priests.”40 For this reason, he raises a crucial question for each one of us to ask: “If the Gospel is not being preached to the poor, can we still go on saying that the kingdom of God is in our midst?”41 Another concern that he wants to bring to our attention as a Church is the fact that social injustice is everywhere in all concrete aspects, and yet the “Church continues to compromise with capitalists,”42 forgetting that it must “run the risk of committing itself to the service of the weakest social classes.”43 In all this, van Broeckhoven believes that one of the problems lies in our tendency to forget that, as individual believers and as a Church, we are to accompany the others in their movement from the what to the who of their desiring – that our mission is to accompany the others in their journey to God. We tend to forget that we are co-pilgrims with the rest of humanity. Van Broeckhoven presupposes that one possible reason for the Church’s “amnesia” of its mission – in its inability to move forward – is losing the balance between seeing the already and seeing the not yet. He writes:

New theology: its strength, the present moment oriented towards the omega point, in hope, etc.; its weakness and its poverty, the present moment is indeed oriented toward the omega point, but the omega point has already come; this is a troublesome fact for the new theology; it finds it hard to fit it into the system.

The weak point of the old theology was that the omega point had already brought everything into the present; it dispensed from the journey toward omega. But the presence of the omega does not dispense us from the work to be done, the road to be

40 A Friend to All Men, 110.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
travelled; it only makes the journey easier. ‘My burden is light.’ Just as when a friend meets you half-way and makes it easier for you to give him your friendship.44

In this passage, van Broeckhoven shows how Christ – the Omega Point – is both the already and the not yet. On the one hand, we are already with Christ, the Word of God, as Christ has already been present among us since the beginning of creation – “All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be… He was in the world, and the world came to be through him” (NAB, John 1:3,10) – and is still truly and concretely present among us in his mystical Body, the Church. This is a position that, according to van Broeckhoven, the old theology upholds and which the new theology finds difficulty to fit into its system. On the other hand, Christ is still to come – the not yet that draws us to move forward. He is the eschatological fulfillment of everything there is in which all our hopes lie – a position that the new theology embraces and with which the old theology dispenses. For this reason, van Broeckhoven argues that one of the reasons for our inability to fulfill our mission as individuals and as a Church lies in this imbalance of seeing Christ as either already or not yet. He writes:

The omega point in the present moment shows us the direction in which we must journey, and our journeying illumines the night. ‘I am the light of the world.’ The new theology undertakes to illumine the night itself. The old sang and proclaimed the existence of the one light while cancelling the night from its awareness. This is why it has ceased to have any interest for men of today; for all their existence is a night for them.45

For this reason, van Broeckhoven invites us to find a balance in our view of God in Christ. We are invited to see Christ as both present among us in the here and now – showing us the direction of our journey to God, as Christ is the light that illumines our journey through the night – and is still to come, the end of our journey and the fulfillment of all that we are hoping for.

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45 A Friend to All Men, 105.
3. The Denial of Death

One of the most beautiful yet challenging desires of van Broeckhoven is his “commitment to live in a world where God is absent… [and] to make God present there.” However, he also believes that this world where God seems absent – a world that he refers to as *dechristianized* – is also the same world where one can encounter God. It is because, for him, “the heart of this world is man; the heart of man is love; and (the heart of) love is God. Thus losing oneself for the world is losing oneself for one’s friend is losing oneself for God… Thus the world, the friend, love are indeed the point where we encounter God, but not yet God Himself.” With this conviction, van Broeckhoven contends that “There is an encounter with God *only when we risk losing our life*, only when we leave our native land. There is no other friendship but that which is willing to lose the friend in God.”

This condition, “only when we risk losing our life,” as a prerequisite of encountering God denotes *dying*, which is essential in the process of loving. For van Broeckhoven, dying is integral to the act of loving, to embodying friendship. He believes that “the only life that is really alive… consists in those moments when we abandon ourselves to God to the point of losing ourselves, when we lose ourselves for others, when we risk our lives in friendship.” However, according to van Broeckhoven, this dying is not yet available to us as individuals and as a Church. He recognizes in us the “great anxiety of losing ourselves” for the sake of loving. In other words, there is great fear in us of *dying* to oneself, which makes us unable to really go out into the world. For this reason, he writes: “The Church is suffering a terminal illness: she has lost ninety

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47 Refer to the undated entry following the August-10-1967 entry. Ibid, 99.
48 Ibid. (emphasis added).
percent or more of the poor, the ‘little guys.’ Only extreme remedies can cure this condition."

From this instigation, one can see how this fear of dying cripples us to fulfill our mission to
christianize the world – the persons, the structures, and life itself. For this reason, we need to understand the dynamics of fear in order to know how to overcome it. It is here that the contributions of Roberto S. Goizueta and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin can help to elucidate our understanding of the dynamics of this fear of dying that van Broeckhoven refers to – that anxiety of losing oneself. For this reason, we are going to explore: (1) Goizueta’s insights on the denial of death to better understand our human tendency to ignore the reality of our finitude; and (2) Teilhard de Chardin’s theology of the Paschal Mystery of Christ to show us how death not only is truly part of being human, but is, above all, a very essential part of the Christian’s living out the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

a. Goizueta’s Insights on the Denial of Death

In his article, To the Poor, the Sick, and the Suffering, Goizueta proposes that the “fundamental obstacle to Christian faith, thus understood, is what Ernest Becker called the denial of death.” Speaking from his personal experiences, Goizueta starts by saying that our natural human tendency towards life is one of security and control. He maintains that, as human persons, we want to see our life completely planned out, everything entirely foreseen. He writes:

We want to know where we’ll be five, ten, twenty years from now and we want to have control of our future: where we’ll live, what job we’ll have (whether we’ll even have a job), who we’ll marry, how many kids we’ll have, when we’ll retire, where we’ll retire, etc., etc. This is especially true in our U.S. culture, where we’re taught from the time we’re small kids that, if we only strive and work hard enough, we can be in complete control of our lives; happiness means having a large enough bank account or an impressive enough résumé so that we never have to know what it’s like to be insecure, to

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51 Entry of March 1, 1967. A Friend to All Men, 94.
be vulnerable, to be out of control, to be powerless.\textsuperscript{54} Goizueta clearly emphasizes the human tendency to be in control of one’s self – to be the one who determines one’s future, the one who lays out one’s life; in other words, the one who is the master of oneself. However, Goizueta counters this view by saying that “to be a human being, to be alive, is to exist in a situation of inherent insecurity, vulnerability, and uncertainty.”\textsuperscript{55} In other words, to be a human being is to acknowledge that we are creatures – created, and therefore finite – and that there is something or someone greater than ourselves, something or someone in whom we are invited to trust and to whom surrender ourselves. For Christians, it is God: the Creator who made, and is in control of, everything there is.

Yet the opposite is usually the case. We often tend to grab every opportunity to be the captain of our ship. For this reason, Goizueta argues, we try to avoid the things that remind us of our finitude, powerlessness, insecurity, vulnerability, and uncertainty, “by avoiding those people in our communities who themselves live in situations of vulnerability, powerlessness, and insecurity. We thus erect all sorts of walls and barriers, both visible and invisible, to protect and shield us from the most vulnerable people of our societies: the poor, the sick, the elderly, the homeless, the stranger, the alien, the downtrodden. We feel threatened by them because they remind us of what we’d rather forget: namely, that ultimately we’re all in the same boat; none of us is in complete control; none of us knows for sure what the future holds… The lives of the vulnerable, powerless people of our society are the mirrors of our own souls.”\textsuperscript{56}

From this profound reflection of Goizueta, we can see how our fear of dying, which leads to a denial of death, can prevent us from realizing our mission as individuals and as a Church to embody God’s holy friendship for humanity by going out into the world and

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Vatican II: A Universal Call to Holiness}, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 71.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
embracing humanity, especially the dechristianized.

b. Teilhard de Chardin’s Theology of the Paschal Mystery of Christ

Teilhard de Chardin sees the Christian life as a concrete pattern of the Paschal Mystery of Christ: his life (centration), death (decentration), and resurrection (surcentration). For Teilhard de Chardin, life or centration refers to the human person’s “first duty… to build and to find himself, to become himself, to grow as a person.” In other words, life is about our desire and our realization as human persons to grow in our personhood and identity, to be the best of who we are, what we are capable of, and what we can become. For this reason, we find joy in gaining knowledge, building our bodies, honing our gifts, achieving success, and creating healthy relationships. In all this, we experience self-integration: we experience life.

But life, for Teilhard de Chardin, is not meant to be possessed by oneself for the sake of oneself. It is because “one cannot reach the limits of his personal development, nor even arrive at anything like maturity of person, without going out of oneself and uniting with others.” In other words, one cannot reach one’s fullness unless one lets go of oneself (death) in order to unite oneself to the other (resurrection). For it is in communion that life finds its fullness.

This one dynamic process of living, dying, and rising is, for Teilhard de Chardin, the very pattern of the Christian vocation: to embody the Paschal Mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in one’s life. In other words, we gather ourselves (life) only to lose ourselves (death) in the other, who is Christ; for only in losing ourselves in Christ can we be united with Christ (resurrection). Since Christ indwells each person, we are called to live out this dynamic of living, dying, and rising with Christ in our relationship with every person.

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58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
To sum up, both theological reflections of Goizueta and Teilhard de Chardin give us profound insights in understanding the dynamics of what it means to be a Christian: to embody the life, death and resurrection of Christ in one’s life. In Goizueta’s theology of the denial of death, we recognize the elements that hinder us from realizing our mission to embody Christ in our lives – to go out into the world and to live out God’s holy friendship for humanity, especially the dechristianized. These are the elements of insecurity, powerlessness, vulnerability, and uncertainty; in other words, the fear of death, the fear of losing oneself in the other that van Broeckhoven refers to. With regard to Teilhard de Chardin’s theology of the Paschal Mystery, we realize how the life of each person, particularly the Christian, finds its fulfillment when it is lived according to the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. For this reason, we acknowledge that we can never escape dying, as it is truly and essentially part of living life to the full – a life in God.

The three issues that van Broeckhoven raises in our awareness, as individuals and as a Church – attachment to the law, losing the pilgrim’s spirit, and the denial of death – serve as reminders in living out our Christian vocation. We learned how these issues, once ignored, could hinder us from realizing our mission of embodying friendship. Hence, we are invited to strengthen our resolve – by God’s grace – to be living witnesses to God’s love and friendship for humanity by incarnating Christ in our lives through holy friendship.
CONCLUSION

Having reached the end of this research on Egide van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship, it is appropriate to underscore some of its important points for Christian readers to further reflect upon.

We started this present work by saying that the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to the whole world is an urgent task that Christians are summoned to do, both individually and communally: “What you receive as a gift, give as a gift” (Matthew 10:8). It is urgent because the Gospel of Christ that we are to proclaim is the very thing that the world needs today – a world that experiences great violence, trauma, and suffering brought about by religious wars, political unrest, terrorism, and other forms of evil. For the Christian faith, this Gospel – God’s very gift of self to us in Jesus Christ – is the answer to all of humanity’s deepest questions, the fulfillment of every human longing for life’s purpose and meaning, and the very salvation of the world. Yet for the world to receive this Gospel, this gift, Christians are called to be creative in presenting such a gift. It is here that van Broeckhoven’s theology can serve as an opportune model for Gospel proclamation for the following reasons.

Firstly, van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship is not so much a theological speculation on the doctrine of the Holy Triune God as it is a methodology of such a doctrine. For this reason, it focuses more on the practicality of the Trinitarian doctrine in daily living. The fact that this theology of friendship is a result of van Broeckhoven’s lived experiences of encountering God in prayer and, above all, in and through the people he lived with, loved, and served, we can be assured of its great relevance to understanding our present context as a society and as a Church, as it is a living testimony of a theology coming to life.
Secondly, van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship is a non-threatening theology that respects, but at the same time challenges, other world religions in their view of God, humanity, and the world. It never imposes the Christian faith on non-Christians. On the contrary, it invites Christians to accompany others – both believers and non-believers – in their journey to discovering, knowing, loving, and understanding God by: (1) respecting their current life circumstances – cultural traditions, religious beliefs, longings, and dreams; (2) acknowledging the what of their desiring; and finally (3) revealing to them the who of their desiring in and through the Christians’ embodiment of holy friendship.

Thirdly, van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship shows Christians how to deepen their understanding and experience of God by embodying a holy friendship – that is, by incarnating Christ in their lives in concrete terms – that applies the one, whole, dynamic process of desire, revelation, friendship, and mission. Becoming an alter Christus for others is one of the most concrete and effective ways of proclaiming the Good News. It is because, by personifying God’s love in the lives of Christians – “to live in a world where God is absent… [and] to make God present there” by going out to the so-called dechristianized masses and living with, loving, and serving them through friendship – Christians allow themselves by God’s grace to become “revealers of Reality,” who is God. In revealing God, Christians will come to know God, others, and themselves more deeply.

Lastly, such a theology of friendship allows Christians to understand the vocation and nature of the Church more profoundly. Because this theology compels Christians to go out into the world to realize their mission – to be truly present with the world: to be involved, to be in solidarity with the world, especially in those corners where God seems absent – such mission

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points to the reality of the Church: its purpose and its relationship with the world. To make this point much clearer, allow me to use von Balthasar’s exposition of the parable of the leaven. In *Engagement with God*, von Balthasar writes:

The dough to be made into bread is a lifeless lump of dull, inedible matter; but the yeast, too, is by itself completely inedible, despite the fact that it is the principle whereby the lump is to be turned into bread fit to eat. The yeast must be plunged into the dough; it must sink to it and disappear, in order that its energy may be released and the dough transformed into bread. Alone, it is nothing; buried in the dough it is quite the opposite. But, note, separateness, and indeed a strict separateness, is the preliminary to the unity that is being attempted and that alone will result in something palatable. The yeast must by itself go through several stages of processing before it can be fully effective. Only then is it economical to use it and bury it in the three measures of meal in which its effectiveness can be realized.  

This passage points to the fact that only by being in solidarity with the world – by “burying” ourselves in the world, like the yeast buried in the dough; by being present with the world; by being “in the same boat” with the world – can we as a Church fulfill our mission to *christianize* the world. For this is what it means to give Christ as the *gift* to the world. This is the vocation and nature of the Church.

In conclusion, it seems that the basic principles of van Broeckhoven’s theology of friendship that we explored in this present work – with its concrete application to our life as individual believers and as a Church – are enough to ground us in our journey towards embodying holy friendship as a concrete way to *re*-present the doctrine of the Holy Triune God in the contemporary world. However, I am very much aware of the fact that we can never truly exhaust the richness of van Broeckhoven’s theology, as it is a theology about the *Mystery*, who is God. For this reason, I will make a further comment on one specific theme that I deem so

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essential to living out his theology: meeting God on one’s own home ground. It is here that I will explore the idea of our journey home.

Journey Home

We human beings have been in constant search for knowledge regarding the things around us. From the smallest atom to the vastness of the universe, we have been in quest for ways to satisfy our human needs. Looking at how we have recreated the world we live in, we can see our constant search for a perfect fit. Advancement in science, technology, medicine, arts, business, and communication are just some of the manifestations of our great thirst for something more. However, behind this entire quest for something more is the great longing for only one thing: Home.

What is home? What does it mean to have a home? Home is not so much a place to stay as it is a state of belongingness. To have a home means to be received or welcomed. However, the verb to receive implies that something is being offered in order to be accepted. We cannot receive if nothing is being given or offered to us. And when we receive something (or someone), we receive the “whole” of it (or of that person) and not just part of it. It is like someone giving us a pair of shoes. We need to receive not just one piece of it, but the whole pair, so that the shoes can be of use. In the case of a person going home, that person is the one offering oneself to be accepted by the other. And when someone receives that person wholly as one is – not only one’s goodness, beauty, and strengths, but also one’s weaknesses, imperfection, and brokenness – then that person finds home; that person is home at last. Home is a state where we are completely received, welcomed, or accepted as we are. It is a state in which we feel free to be who we really are, without hiding anything – no secrets.

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Generally, most of us will say that our family is our home. But if there are things in us that our family could not accept, do we still have a home? Perhaps some of us might look for friends, teachers, or anyone who would really embrace us as we are. But if we fail to find that someone with whom we feel we belong, do we still have a home? If there is one remaining person in the world who can accept us as we are, it is ourselves. To accept ourselves completely as we are is to find home in ourselves – embracing not only our strengths, goodness, and beauty, but also our weaknesses, imperfection, and brokenness. For only in complete acceptance of ourselves can we truly be home. And only when we truly find home in ourselves can we truly find home in others as well. It is because by being able to embrace ourselves as we are, we can also embrace others as they are. As that old adage goes, one cannot give something that one does not have.

This point that I am driving at actually finds expression in one of van Broeckhoven’s diary entries. He writes: “One cannot truly love his friend unless he meets with him on his own home ground. Besides, these are the two deepest desires of the mystic: to be at home with himself and to encounter others in their home, that is, in both cases: at home in God.” The point that van Broeckhoven emphasizes – the same point which I am alluding to – is that our mission to embody friendship starts on our own home ground: being at home with oneself. Our mission to love the others must begin with loving ourselves the way God loves us. Yet this loving of ourselves is not to be mistaken for egoistic love – a self-absorbed, narcissistic love that is actually insecurity in disguise. True love of self comes from an honest acceptance of oneself, embracing both good and bad sides of one’s self. Only then can we be able to genuinely love the others. As the Scripture says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (NAB, Mark 12:31).

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63 A Friend to All Men, 23-24. (emphasis added).
To illustrate my point more concretely, allow me to use one of the Gospel texts that portray the inability of some Pharisees and scribes to love their neighbor as themselves. In Luke 15:1-2, the Pharisees and scribes find it disturbing to see Jesus welcome sinners. They believe that perfect and pious people like them should have no room for sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes. Actually, the reason why they cannot welcome or embrace sinners is because they themselves cannot welcome or embrace their own sinfulness. They themselves are in denial of their own imperfection. They themselves could not accept who they are – imperfect and sinful people like the rest of humanity. For this reason, they find it difficult to love others as they are.

Our genuine love for others springs from our genuine love of self. And loving ourselves compel us to genuinely accept ourselves as we are – the whole of ourselves: our strengths and weaknesses, goodness and sinfulness, beauty and brokenness, sanity and idiosyncrasy, pleasant experiences and bad history. Embracing ourselves as we are – reconciling our lights and our shadows – leads us to self-integration, to wholeness, and eventually to holiness. This is the first step toward embodying friendship: meeting that friend – our very self – on our very own home ground. For it is only in embracing ourselves as we are that we experience God’s embrace for us. It is only by genuinely loving ourselves as we are that we experience God’s unconditional love for us. By finding home in ourselves, we are finding God. For God is our true home. Thus, our mission of embodying holy friendship starts with this journey home.


