Jesus Forsaken and the Open Hand of Thought

A Comparative Reading of Chiara Lubich's Paradise'49 and Uchiyama Kōshō's Sōtō Zen Tradition

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"Putting my right and left hands together as one, I just bow.
Just bow to become one with Buddha and God.
Just bow to become one with everything I encounter.
Just bow to become one with all the myriad things.
Just bow as life becomes life."
Kōshō Uchiyama Roshi

"And the vision of God beneath things,
which gave unity to creation,
was stronger than the things themselves;
the unity of the whole was stronger
than the distinction among the things."
Chiara Lubich, Paradise '49 §18

This article undertakes a comparative phenomenological reading of two radical, twentieth-century spiritual experiences and their charisms: Chiara Lubich's Catholic mysticism centered on Jesus Forsaken and Uchiyama Kōshō's Sōtō Zen tradition transmitted through his disciple Okumura Shōhaku, focused on zazen[1] and the practice of "opening the hand of thought" (*omoi no tebanashi*[2]). While emerging from distinct contexts – Catholic Christianity and Japanese Zen Buddhism – both traditions converge around themes of nothingness, the centrality of life in community, radical authenticity, and the non-dual relationship between suffering and liberation. This study argues that these paths reveal a shared experiential core where emptiness (suffering or separation) and fullness (liberation or oneness) constitute not opposites but interpenetrating, *pericoretic* realities, offering a pathway beyond doctrinal divisions toward a shared and lived spiritual praxis.

Introduction: Towards an Experiential Hermeneutics

The comparative study of mystical traditions faces an inherent methodological tension: how to honor the specificity of each tradition's doctrinal framework while identifying genuine resonances in lived experience. As Rowan Williams observes[3], "the history of doctrine is not so much searching for the perfect formula as searching for the least stupid thing you can say," reminding us that doctrinal language functions as a boundary marker – "whatever you say, it has got to be at least this" – rather than an exhaustive map of transcendent reality.

This essay adopts what might be called an *experiential hermeneutics*, focusing not primarily on doctrinal formulations but on the lived realities these formulations attempt to express: "reality is superior to ideas"[4].

With this in mind, we examine two twentieth-century movements that share a commitment to radical authenticity and experiential practice over institutional form: Chiara Lubich's spirituality of unity, emerging from the crucible of World War II northern Italy, and the lineage of Uchiyama Kōshō Rōshi, also born out of the ashes of 20th century wars, transmitted to the West through his disciple Okumura Shōhaku, representing a purified return to Dōgen Zenji's original Sōtō Zen vision[5].

Both movements arose as responses to perceived institutional sclerosis and a hunger for authentic spiritual practice. Both prioritize experience over doctrine, community over individualism, a commitment to simplicity, poverty and the poor, and paradoxically find fullness in emptiness. Most significantly, both center on practices and teachings that appear, at first glance, to be diametrically opposed – one affirmes Jesus, the suffering God-man on the cross, the other

[1] Zazen (坐禅) means "sitting meditation".
[2] Omoi no tebanashi (想いの手放し): 想 (omoi) represents "thought," "feeling," or "idea." It can encompass a wide range of emotional and mental states. の (no): possessive particle, similar to "of" in English. It connects "omoi" (thoughts/feelings) with "tebanashi" (letting go). 手放し (tebanashi): to release, let go, or abandon something. It implies a deliberate act of giving up control or attachment.
[3] R. Williams, *Address to St Paul's Theological Centre*, 2012 via
[4] Pope Francis to Jesuits in Ireland, June, 2022 via
[5] Okumura Shōhaku, *Realizing Genjōkoan: The Key to Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Wisdom Publications (2010)

advocates letting go of all conceptual grasping – yet converge in their phenomenological structure.

Before studying the possible parallels of these two experiences, the validity of such comparisons needs to be considered first.

Methodology: The Legitimacy of Comparative Mysticism

The comparative study of mystical experiences across religious traditions remains contested terrain. The perennialist position, articulated by Aldous Huxley's Perennial Philosophy[6] and popularized by scholars like Frithjof Schuon[7], holds that mystical experiences across traditions point to a single, ineffable *Ultimate Reality*, with doctrinal differences representing merely superficial cultural variations.

Others, like Steven Katz, have forcefully challenged this approach, arguing that "there are no pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences"[8] – that Buddhist practitioners experience *śūnyatā* precisely because their tradition teaches them to, while Christian mystics encounter the divine Trinity for the same reason. On this view, experience and interpretation are inseparable, making genuine comparison impossible without reducing one tradition's claims to another's categories.

Raimon Panikkar[9] instead offers a middle path through what he calls *diatopical hermeneutics* – a dialogical method acknowledging that different traditions emerge from different *topoi* (places of understanding) yet can engage in mutual interpretation without reduction. Panikkar's concept of *homeomorphic equivalents* suggests that different traditions may develop analogous – not identical – structures addressing similar existential concerns. Thus Trinitarian *perichoresis* and Buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) might be homeomorphically equivalent without being synonymous.

This essay adopts a phenomenologically-informed approach close to Panikkar's vision. We acknowledge that Lubich's experience is irreducibly Christian-Catholic and Uchiyama's irreducibly Buddhist-Zen. Yet both practitioners describe lived realities that challenge conventional dualities, emphasize communal dimensions of ultimate reality, and advocate practices of radical letting-go.

Hence, the question is not whether they experience "the same thing" in some reductionist sense, but whether their testimonies illuminate each other, revealing dimensions each might otherwise miss.

Biographical and Historical Contexts

Chiara Lubich and the Birth of Focolare

Chiara Lubich (1920-2008) grew up in Trent, northern Italy, in a family marked by both religious devotion and anti-fascist commitment. From early adulthood, she exhibited an unusual sensitivity to authentic Christian living, gradually discovering a vocation to consecrated life that did not require monastic enclosure – a radical choice in mid-twentieth-century Catholicism. During the Allied bombing of Trent in World War II, Lubich and her first companions (all women) found refuge in shelters, taking with them only the Gospel, which they resolved to live "word by word" at a time when reading and interpreting the Gospels was the exclusive purview of clergy (and therefore of men alone).

This radically authentic choice of putting each word of the Gospels into practice – a refusal of metaphor in favor of incarnation – became

[6] Huxley, A. (1945). *The perennial philosophy*. London: Chatto & Windus.

[7] Frithjof Schuon, held that mystical experiences provide direct access to ultimate reality – what he called the Absolute, Divine Essence, or Real. His key positions include *Direct Knowledge of the Real* where Schuon argued that authentic mystical experience transcends mental constructs and rational knowledge, offering immediate contact with the Divine Reality that underlies all religious forms. This experiential gnosis (*ma'rifah* in Sufism) represents the highest form of knowledge. *Transcendent Unity* which proposes that while religious forms differ externally, genuine mystical realization reveals their convergence in the same ultimate Reality. The mystic penetrates beyond exoteric differences to the esoteric truth shared by all authentic traditions. *Hierarchical Reality* where Schuon posited a metaphysical hierarchy where ultimate reality (the Absolute) manifests through descending degrees of reality. Mystical experience involves ascending this hierarchy toward the Infinite, moving from multiplicity to Unity. *Intellectual Intuition* by which he distinguished mystical "intellectual intuition" from both reason and emotion– it's a supra-rational faculty that perceives universal truths and the Divine Essence directly. Via *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (1953), *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom* (1959/1978), *Logic and Transcendence* (1975), *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism* (1986), *Esoterism as Principle and as Way* (1981/1990).

[8] Katz, Steven T. "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 22–74.

[9] Raimon Panikkar's "diatopical hermeneutics" is a method for cross-cultural and interreligious understanding. His key positions include *Cultural Situatedness* in which Panikkar argued that all human understanding is rooted in specific cultural-linguistic locations (*topoi*). No universal, neutral standpoint exists from which to judge all cultures or religions – we always interpret from within our own context. *The Hermeneutical Gap* whereby different cultures occupy different *topoi* with distinct myths, symbols, and frameworks that cannot be fully translated into one another. Diatopical hermeneutics seeks dialogue across (*dia*) these gaps without assuming complete mutual intelligibility. *Mutual Transformation*, meaning that rather than one culture interpreting another from its own framework, diatopical hermeneutics requires both partners to risk transformation. Understanding emerges through genuine encounter where both horizons are questioned and expanded, not through imposing one's categories onto the other. *Homeomorphic Equivalents* in terms of which Panikkar sought "homeomorphic equivalents" rather than univocal translations – functional analogues that occupy similar roles in different systems without being identical in meaning (e.g., dharma and "religion" are homeomorphic but not synonymous). *Pluralism Without Relativism* where he advocated "radical pluralism" – ultimate reality itself is pluralistic, not just our perspectives on a single reality. This differs from both absolutism and relativism. Via *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (1978/1999), *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (1979), *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (1993), and *"The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?* (1989).

the movement's defining characteristic for example through the practice of the "word of life", each month taking a phrase from the readings and committing to living it with intensity. As Lubich later recalled[10]:

> "Now, for some time, we had been focused upon the Word of Life, which we were living with a particularly special intensity. The movement had no major structures then, nor had its activities begun, so our whole commitment consisted in living the Gospel."

The experience culminated in what became known as the Paradise '49, a mystical experience unprecedented in Catholic tradition for its communitarian dimension. Uniquely, while this vision was received by Lubich, it was participated in by her first companions, with Lubich serving as the primary recipient and articulator.

Lubich describes her entry into contemplative experience with striking phenomenological detail[11]:

> "I had, therefore, entered into the Bosom of the Father, which appeared to the eyes of my soul […] as an abyss that was immense, cosmic. And it was all gold and flames above, below, to the right and to the left. Outside of us remained what is created. We had entered into the Uncreated. I could not distinguish what was in Paradise but that did not disturb me. It was infinite, but I felt at home."

The content of Paradise '49 centers on a vision of reality transfigured by divine love, where all creation is seen as sustained by and transparent to God. As Lubich describes[12]:

> "And the vision of God beneath things, which gave unity to creation, was stronger than the things themselves; the unity of the whole was stronger than the distinction among the things."

Central to this vision of unity (among all "things" and with God) is Jesus Forsaken on the cross, understood not merely as one moment in salvation history but as the ontological key to all reality. Giuseppe Maria Zanghí, one of Lubich's close collaborators and principal theological interpreters, articulates this radical claim: Jesus Forsaken is not "a moment to pass through to enter the light" – a stage in spiritual development – but "the light itself." This inverts conventional Christian spirituality, which typically views the cross as necessary but preliminary, leading to resurrection as the true goal.

For Lubich, Jesus crying "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*"[13] experiences absolute separation from the Father – becomes, in her daring formulation, "sin," "nothingness," and "hell" – yet precisely in this moment of greatest distance accomplishes ultimate unity both with humanity (and all of creation) and God the Father. This experience of God-forsakenness is God itself. As she writes[14]:

> "He, made *sin*, was made *Nothing*. In him Nothingness is so united to the All (God) that what belongs to one belongs to the other and so Nothingness became *All*: Jesus Forsaken is God. Jesus-sin is God; Jesus-Nothing is God; Jesus-Hell is God […]."

One of Zanghí's important contributions was recognizing Jesus Forsaken as *master of thought*[15] – not merely an object of devotion but an epistemological principle. In his final reflections, he emphasized[16]:

> "[…] for Jesus Forsaken, who is the icon of 'night', of God's absence, 'my night has no darkness'. That is, this dramatic situation, if lived in love for him, immediately becomes gift, source of life."

This theology radically reframes suffering: it is not something to be transcended towards divine union, but the very place where divine union occurs. The theological implications are profound: if God experiences God-forsakenness, then abandonment (nothingness) itself becomes a mode of divine presence. This moves beyond traditional theodicy (explaining why God permits suffering) to a *theopaschite* claim (God suffers in Godself) with ontological consequences.

Uchiyama Kōshō and Okumura Shōhaku: Return to the Source

Uchiyama Kōshō Rōshi (1912-1998) came to Zen practice after studying Western philosophy and religion, bringing an unusual comparative perspective to Sōtō Zen. His tenure as abbot of Antaiji temple (1965-1975) established it as a center for rigorous zazen practice stripped of ceremonial add-ons. It suffices to read the instructions and requirements for staying at the monastery to get a sense of the radicality and authenticity that this lineage pursued and offers[17]. Uchiyama's genius lay in articulating Dōgen's teachings in contemporary language while maintaining their radical edge.

Okumura Shōhaku encountered Uchiyama's writings as a restless university student in the 1960s, disillusioned with conventional life trajectories and the expectation of following in the footsteps of his father in the family business. After his friend's death – "with his own death he showed me impermanence in actuality" [18] – Okumura

[10] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 2
[11] *ibid.,* § 28-30
[12] *ibid.,* § 18
[13] Mt 27:46 and Mk 15:34
[14] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 163
[15] Giuseppe Maria Zanghì, *Gesù abbandonato maestro di pensiero*, Città Nuova (2008)
[16] Giuseppe Maria Zanghì (Oreste Paliotti), *L'ultimo saluto a Peppuccio*, via
[17] See https://antaiji.org/en/practice/residency/
[18] Okukmura Shōhaku's introduction to: Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)

sought ordination at Antaiji. Significantly, Uchiyama initially refused, stating[19]:

> "[…] many meaningless people [are] wearing robes… however, if you want to be a true practitioner of *zazen*, I will accept you."

This emphasis on authentic practice over mere institutional affiliation mirrors Lubich's approach. As The Guardian noted in her obituary: "Unusually for a Catholic movement, Focolare did not begin with the laying down of rules, but instead with Lubich's simple trust in God's love."

Uchiyama's intuition that[20] "the 21st century would be an age of spirituality" led him to send Okumura to establish Sōtō Zen communities in North America[21], prioritizing experiential transmission over textual study. Okumura later reflected[22]:

> "I have the deepest gratitude for his teaching and practice, which always remained focused on the reality of life that includes all being in the universe."

Uchiyama's experience is expressed in his teaching of "Opening the hand of thought"[23] and the centrality of the practice of *zazen*, or "just sitting". As Okumura Shōhaku recounts[24]:

> "We try to keep the same upright, immovable posture no matter what condition we are in, and to trust that above the clouds of thoughts, Buddha's wisdom and compassion are shining like the sun in a clear blue sky. This is what "opening the hand of thought" has come to mean in my life."

In a poem by Uchiyama, the practice of zazen (which he identifies with the "understanding of the universal self") and its underlying essence is visualized as follows[25]:

> "Like a sunbeam on a bright autumn morning,
> I would like to become completely one,
> Body and mind,
> With transparent, wholehearted practice."

And while the focus here is on the lived experience ("just sitting"), a recognition of the fundamental importance of sharing it – much like in the case of Lubich – is also acknowledged[26]:

> "Because we concretely are universal self, there is no particular value in talking about it. Yet if we don't make every effort to manifest it, just knowing about it is useless."

Nothingness as Gateway: The Phenomenology of Emptiness

Jesus Forsaken: The Divine Nothingness

At the heart of Lubich's mysticism stands a radical choice of Jesus Forsaken. This moment of absolute dereliction, traditionally interpreted as the nadir of Christ's passion, becomes for Lubich the apex and key to all reality.

In the Paradise '49, Lubich articulates a vision of radical unity achieved precisely through this moment of absolute separation[27]:

> "Jesus Forsaken is vanity and the Word; he is that which passes away and that which remains because he is Human-Divine, and as human he is everything that is created, which is vanity of vanities, and as Divine he is the fire that consumes in itself all things, nothingness, divinizing it. Jesus Forsaken breathed into himself all the vanities and the vanities became him and he is God. No longer is there emptiness upon earth, nor in Heaven; there is *God*."

This is not mere explanation of suffering, but a metaphysics of transformation. The *nothingness* that Jesus becomes on the cross is not negation but the condition of possibility for divine fullness. As Zanghì puts it:[28]

> "Jesus Forsaken, in fact, is not a moment to pass through in order to enter the light, it is light itself."

Trinitarian Dimensions: The Processions and Jesus Forsaken

The theology of Jesus Forsaken demands careful Trinitarian analysis. In classical Trinitarian doctrine, the eternal processions – the Father's generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit – constitute the divine essence as relational. The Father is only Father in relation to the Son; the Son only Son in relation to the Father; the Spirit the bond of love proceeding from both. These relations are not subsequent to divine essence but *are* the divine essence – God is not first substantial and then relational, but subsistent relations.

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[19] Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Such as the ***Sanshin Zen Community*** in Bloomington (IN), USA
[22] Okumura Shōhaku's introduction to: Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[23] Similar imagery is used in other mystical traditions, see for example Xavier Melloni, SJ via
[24] Okumura Shōhaku's introduction to: Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 83–84
[28] Giuseppe Maria Zanghì (Oreste Paliotti), *L'ultimo saluto a Peppuccio*, via

Lubich's insight radically extends this: Jesus Forsaken on the cross represents not merely the suffering of Christ's human nature but a moment that somehow touches the immanent Trinity itself[29]. How can this be reconciled with divine impassibility? The key lies in recognizing that the distance between Father and Son – the generative distinction that makes Father and Son distinct persons – finds its historical manifestation in Jesus's cry of abandonment. As Lubich articulates[30]:

> "In the Bosom of the Father shadow and light will have equal value, for we will think of the Father thinking of the Son in him and of the Son thinking of the Father in him…
> Three Reals form the Trinity and yet they are One because Love *is and is not* at the same time, but also when *it is not* it is, because it is love. In fact, if out of love I take something from myself and *give* (I deprive myself – *it is not*), *I have love* (it is)."

This paradoxical formulation – "Love is and is not at the same time" – points to the kenotic structure of Trinitarian life itself. Love requires self-gift, which implies a self-emptying (self-naughting). The Father "loses" himself in generating the Son; the Son "loses" himself in returning to the Father; the Spirit "is" this mutual loss-that-is-gift. Zanghí developed this: Jesus Forsaken reveals that within the eternal Trinity there is a kind of "distance" or "distinction" that is simultaneously perfect unity – not despite the distinction but through it.

The cross, then, does not introduce division into God but reveals the eternal divine structure of unity-through-distinction. When Jesus cries "Why have you forsaken me?", the eternal distinction between Father and Son – the distance that makes them distinct persons – becomes historically visible in greatest intensity. Yet this greatest distance is simultaneously greatest unity, because it is accomplished through greatest love.

This helps explain Lubich's otherwise bewildering claim[31]:

> "Jesus Forsaken is the miracle of nullifying that which is. A miracle comprehensible only to one who knows Love and knows that in Love *all* and *nothing* coincide."

If we understand the Trinity as dynamic *perichoresis* – mutual indwelling through self-gift – then Jesus Forsaken reveals this structure at its greatest intensity. The "nothingness" he becomes is not nihilistic void but the self-emptying (*kenosis*) that constitutes divine love itself. God "is" only as self-gift; self-gift requires distinction (giver and receiver); distinction requires a kind of "distance"; yet this distance-in-love is perfect unity.

The implications extend to the economic Trinity (God's action in history)[32]:

> "But between Paradise and Hell there will not be duality. There will be perfect Unity and this will be through Jesus Forsaken.
> He, made *sin*, was made Nothing. In him Nothingness is so united to the All (God) that what belongs to one belongs to the other and so Nothingness became *All*: Jesus Forsaken is God."

Jesus Forsaken accomplishes cosmic reconciliation not by eliminating opposition but by revealing that opposition itself – when lived in love – becomes the structure of unity. This is one of Lubich's most daring theological claims and the point of deepest resonance with Buddhist non-dualism.

The practice corresponding to this theology is what Lubich calls *annullamento:* self-emptying or self-naughting[33]:

> "Yes, it is a nothing that is willed. For I said: "I am," but I make myself nothing, that is: "If there is some good, I make it be nothing; if there is an inspiration, I make it nothing; if there is some evil, I make it nothing (I put it into the mercy of God); if I am, I make myself nothing.""

Lubich describes this practice concretely in terms of becoming "an empty chalice" (*un calice vuoto*). When establishing the "pact of unity" with Igino Giordani, she writes that Jesus "coming into her as in an empty chalice, would have sealed the pact with Jesus in Giordani, who had to be in the same attitude of total openness and willingness. This is exactly what happened: upon her 'nothingness,' since she became an 'emptiness of love' to welcome Jesus-Love, and upon his 'nothingness,' like her, what remained was Jesus alone."

This is not self-negation for its own sake but the creation of space – kenosis in the Pauline sense – for the Other to emerge[34]. And in order to enter into this reality we must be "without a thought" in order to be "totally open"[35]:

> "Jesus Forsaken, because he is not, is.
> We are, if we are not. If we are, we are not.
> We must be "without a thought" because we are children of God. The children of God do not have thoughts. Only when we do not have thoughts will our mind be totally

[29] Depicted beautifully by e.g. Dalí's view from above in "Christ of St John of the Cross" (via) or Jean Georges Cornelius's God-father embracing (and tying himself to) Jesus on the cross in "Jéhovah devient notre Père" (via).
[30] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 159-160
[31] *Ibid.*, § 1024
[32] *Ibid.*, § 162-163
[33] *Ibid.*, Footnote 91
[34] Fabio Ciardi, *Sul nulla di noi, tu*, Nuova Umanità 20 (1998) 233-251
[35] *Ibid.*, § 253-258

> open and constantly receive God's Light and be a channel. Likewise we must be without will to have the capacity for God's will.
> And without memory so as to remember only the present moment and live "ecstatically" (outside ourselves).
> Without flights of imagination so as to see Paradise also with the imagination, because Paradise is the Dream of dreams."

Opening the Hand of Thought: Buddhist Śūnyatā

Uchiyama's central teaching, *omoi no tebanashi* (literally: letting go of thought), offers a structurally parallel practice emerging from a different metaphysical framework. The metaphor is kinesthetic rather than theological: the hand naturally grasps, but true freedom lies in opening (letting go).

As Okumura explains[36]:

> "'Opening the hand of thought' is the very act of zazen. It is the original Buddhist practice of not grasping and clinging, the practice of freedom, as it occurs in this very moment in your mind."

In *zazen* (seated meditation), the practitioner maintains an upright posture while thoughts arise and dissolve like clouds. The practice is not suppression (which would be "forcing the hand closed"), nor indulgence (allowing it to grasp whatever appears) – but a third way: allowing the hand to remain naturally open.

> "I began to see that our thoughts are the same as clouds. In our upright sitting all different kinds of thoughts come up, stay for a while, and disappear. We just let them come up and let them go away, not controlling our mind or preventing thoughts from coming up and passing away, not grasping or chasing after them either."[37]

This practice embodies the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) – not nihilistic void but the absence of inherent, independent existence. All phenomena, including the self, arise interdependently and possess no fixed essence. The practitioner discovers freedom not by escaping thoughts but by recognizing their empty, cloud-like nature.

> "I use the expression "opening the hand of thought" to explain as graphically as possible the connection between human beings and the process of thinking. Thinking means to be grasping or holding on to something with our brain's conceptual 'fist.' But if we open this fist, if we don't conceive the thought, what is in our mental hand falls away."[38]

Uchiyama's poem[39], composed near the end of his life, crystallizes this teaching:

> "Though poor, never poor
> Though sick, never sick
> Though aging, never aging
> Though dying, never dying
> Reality prior to division
> Herein lies unlimited depth."

Okumura's commentary on this poem then emphasizes the non-dual structure:

> "When we think in a conceptual, logical way, first half (poor) and second half (not poor) are opposite and contradicted. But what Uchiyama Rōshi is saying is, poor and not poor, dying and not dying, aging and yet not aging, are interpenetrated within each other."[40]

This interpenetration (*sōsoku* in Japanese, derived from Chinese *xiāngjí*) is not synthesis but simultaneity – *both and* instead of *either or* – the recognition that apparent opposites constitute a single reality viewed from different angles.

The Coincidence of Opposites

Despite emerging from radically different theological, cultural and philosophical frameworks, both traditions articulate a similar experiential structure.

Nothingness as Fullness

For Lubich, Jesus Forsaken – the moment of absolute divine abandonment – becomes the point of greatest divine presence[41]:

> "He, made *sin*, was made Nothing. In him Nothingness is so united to the All (God) that what belongs to one belongs to the other and so Nothingness became *All*: Jesus Forsaken is God."

For Uchiyama, the emptiness recognized in *zazen* is not mere absence but "reality prior to division" – the boundless *Dharmakāya* (truth-body of Buddha) that manifests in and as all phenomena. Both traditions point toward a reality that transcends and includes apparent opposites.

The Non-Dual Nature of Suffering and Liberation

[36] Okumura Shōhaku's introduction, Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 163

Lubich writes[42]:

> "In the Bosom of the Father shadow and light will have equal value […] But between Paradise and Hell there will not be duality. There will be perfect Unity and this will be through Jesus Forsaken."

Okumura articulates the *Mahāyāna* principle[43]:

> "There is no separation between *Samsara* and *Nirvana*, or between delusion and enlightenment. We are living in a single reality, and within this one reality, many things are happening. Our practice is not to escape from delusion (or *Samsara*), but to practice right in the middle of them."

Both resist the dualistic split between a fallen world and a transcendent salvation, instead finding liberation within suffering itself.

Willed Dispossession

Both traditions advocate a deliberate practice of letting go – not passively but actively. Lubich's *annullamento* and Uchiyama's *tebanashi* share this structure: a conscious, repeated act of release that paradoxically requires effort yet aims at effortlessness.

Teleological Orientation

For Uchiyama the key is that there is no goal at all, *zazen* is "just sitting". This is justified since practicing *zazen* with any intention goes directly against the definition of "just sitting" and therefore becomes something else. Even aiming for enlightenment or *nirvana* is considered mistaken since the practice then becomes no longer pure.

> "Decreasing delusion and desire and finally extinguishing them completely is not the purpose of *zazen*. Some Buddhists say *nirvana* (enlightenment) is the complete extinction of delusion and craving, and *zazen* or meditation is practiced in order to reach this state. However, if we assume this type of enlightenment to be the truth of human life, then this is nothing but saying that the truth of life is lifelessness, or death! [...I]sn't seeking to get rid of pain and to attain the bliss of *nirvana* itself a desire or craving? Actually, this too is craving, and precisely because of that the practitioner is caught in self-contradiction and can't escape suffering."[44]

For Lubich, *annullamento* creates space for the Other – for Christ to live in and among the community. The emptiness is instrumental, ordered toward union with the personal God revealed in the Trinity but at the same time genuine and pure in the same way as described by Uchiyama. As she writes[45]:

> "We must be "without a thought" because we are children of God. The children of God do not have thoughts. Only when we do not have thoughts will our mind be totally open and constantly receive God's Light and be a channel."

While this is an apparent semantic difference, in reality, the practice of *zazen* and that of *annullamento* share the absence of doing it "in order to get somewhere else", however Lubich's focus in this, as in everything else, is that it is done "out of love".

Emptiness-for-God vs. Emptiness-as-Such

Here we encounter this essay's central question: can these two orientations be reconciled, or do they represent an unbridgeable metaphysical divide?

From a strictly doctrinal perspective, the differences appear absolute. Christianity affirms a personal, Trinitarian God who enters history in Jesus Christ, and calls humanity into eternal communion. The emptiness Lubich advocates is explicitly kenotic – patterned after Christ's self-emptying (Philippians 2:6-11) – and ordered toward union with a personal God. The practitioner empties herself so that Christ may fill her; the emptiness is not an end but a means, not ultimate reality but preparation for ultimate reality.

Buddhism, particularly in its *Madhyamaka* formulation, denies any permanent, independent, substantial reality – including "God" understood as independent creator. *Śūnyatā* is not preparatory but ultimate; there is no "ground" beneath emptiness, no substantial reality "behind" or "beyond" phenomena. When *Nāgārjuna* states that *nirvana* and *samsāra* are not different, he means that enlightenment consists precisely in recognizing the empty, interdependent nature of all phenomena – not in encountering a transcendent personal God.

Uchiyama's teaching resists teleological interpretation. As Okumura emphasizes[46]:

> "In *Zazen* we see that we are deluded. This is enlightenment. We have to become free, even from the Buddha's teaching, even of enlightenment."

The practice has "no goal, and yet from the beginning we are living within" the reality we seek. To practice *zazen* "in order to" become enlightened would itself be grasping – would be closing the hand of

[42] *Ibid.* § 159 and 162
[43] Okumura Shōhaku, *A good-for-nothing life*, via youtbe
[44] Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the hand of thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[45] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 255
[46] Okumura Shōhaku, *1=0=Infinity*, via youtube

thought around the concept of "enlightenment." Authentic practice relinquishes even spiritual attainment as goal.

This appears fundamentally incompatible with Lubich's orientation. When she writes, "'On the nothingness of me may you seal a pact of unity with Jesus-Eucharist"[47], the emptiness is explicitly for the sake of divine encounter. The "nothingness" makes space for "Someone" – for the personal God who gives Himself in the Eucharist.

Yet the matter is more complex. Consider Lubich's remarkable statement:

> "Yes, it is a nothing that is willed. For I said: "I am," but I make myself nothing, that is: "If there is some good, I make it be nothing; if there is an inspiration, I make it nothing; if there is some evil, I make it nothing (I put it into the mercy of God); if I am, I make myself nothing." It is an act of making-nothing that I do. This making-nothing is important; it is necessary even to make inspirations nothing, even the divine in us, as did Jesus Forsaken, to reach unity, to have Jesus in the midst."[48]

Here Lubich advocates annihilating "even the divine in us" – letting go of even spiritual consolations, divine experiences, inspirations – paradoxically letting go of even the goal of *annullamento*. This resembles the apophatic tradition's *via negativa* and strikingly parallels Uchiyama's injunction to become free "even from the Buddha's teaching, even of enlightenment." Both resist premature closure, even around the tradition's central realities.

Moreover, Lubich's other central lived reality, "Jesus in our midst" is not Jesus as external object but Jesus as the unity constituted by mutual love – "Jesus-us"[49]. The distinction between self and Other begins to dissolve, as Lubich expresses[50] in a letter addressed to Igino Giordani (who was a key part of Lubich's mystical experience):

> "Not feeling unity with your soul, which is mine, for me is dying. I am divided in myself. Between us it is not enough to have just any kind of unity: we need to have the very unity of the Trinity: that unity made of Holy Spirit."

The "I" that speaks is already multiple, already relational, already decentered, already one in the One.

Phenomenologically, both practices describe a similar movement: (1) recognition that conventional ego-consciousness grasps and falsifies reality; (2) deliberate practice of letting go; (3) discovery that this letting-go reveals rather than destroys reality; (4) emergence of a mode of being that is simultaneously empty and full, dying and living, self and other, and finally (5) that this reality necessarily assumes and implies a cosmic or divine unity.

The divergence concerns what is revealed in this letting-go. For Lubich, it is the Trinitarian God – personal, loving, eternally, infinitely and dynamically relational. For Uchiyama, it is *tathatā* ("suchness"), *dharmatā* (Dharma-nature) – impersonal, non-dual, beyond subject-object duality. But are these as opposed as they appear?

Homeomorphic Equivalence

Returning to Panikkar, we might recognize these as *homeomorphically equivalent* – different conceptual frameworks addressing the same existential-experiential reality from within their respective traditions. The question "Is ultimate reality personal or impersonal?" may itself be a conceptual imposition that both traditions (within their cultural, temporal and religious contexts), in their radical moments, transcend.

When Lubich writes "that in Love *all* and *nothing* coincide"[51], she points beyond conventional theism toward a reality that includes and transcends personal/impersonal distinctions. The Trinity, properly understood, is not "three persons" in the modern sense of three centers of consciousness, but subsistent relations – being that is only as self-gift, distinction that is unity, emptiness that is fullness.

Similarly, while *Madhyamaka* Buddhism denies substantial reality to all phenomena, later developments (particularly *Tathāgatagarbha* and some Zen traditions) speak of Buddha-nature in ways that approach the personal. The "original face before your parents were born" of Zen koans, the "mind that is not mind" of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature – these formulations resist both personal and impersonal categorization.

Perhaps the deepest convergence lies here: both traditions, at their most radical, dissolve the conceptual frameworks – including personal/impersonal, theism/non-theism – through which we conventionally understand ultimate reality. Both discover that authentic practice requires letting go even of "correct doctrine" (however without delegitimizing or abandoning it but making it a fundamental part of the authentic experience). Both find that this radical letting-go does not lead to nihilistic void but to fullness beyond conceptual grasp.

The difference that remains is not trivial: Christianity maintains that this reality has definitively revealed itself as Trinitarian love in Jesus Christ; Buddhism maintains that this reality is precisely what cannot be captured in such definitive revelation. This difference should be

[47] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 25
[48] *Ibid.*, Footnote 91
[49] *Ibid.*, § 274
[50] *Ibid.*, § 747
[51] *Ibid.*, § 1024

honoured, not dissolved. Yet both agree that ultimate reality transcends and fulfils our concepts of it ("whatever it is, it is greater than this"), that authentic encounter requires radical self-emptying, and that this emptying reveals a fullness we could not have imagined.

The question of reconcilability thus receives a paradoxical answer: doctrinally distinct, phenomenologically convergent, experientially resonant. Like the two truths of *Madhyamaka* Buddhism or the *coincidence of opposites*[52] in apophatic theology, these traditions may both be "true" without being synonymous – different fingers pointing at a moon that transcends all pointing:

> "As the ignorant grasp the finger-tip and not the moon, so those who cling to the letter, know not my truth."[53].

Christological Specificity vs. Universal Dharmakāya

Lubich's mysticism remains irreducibly Christological. Jesus Forsaken is not a symbol or metaphor but the ontological event through which all reality is transformed. The specificity matters: this particular man(-God), at this particular moment, on this particular cross.

Buddhism, even in its *Mahāyāna* devotional forms, understands the historical *Śākyamuni* Buddha as a manifestation of the eternal *Dharmakāya* – truth-body that was never born and never dies. As Okumura explains[54] Dōgen's teaching on the three bodies of Buddha:

> "*Dharmakāya* is boundless, but *Nirmānakāya* is a manifestation or actualization of absolute Buddha... within a certain place and certain time of the human history."

Community

A further important parallel that both traditions radically emphasize is that of the communal or communitarian dimension of practice, resisting both Western and Eastern individualism.

Okumura articulates the *Mahāyāna* shift from individual liberation to collective awakening[55]:

> "In Mahayana Buddhism people find, to reach Nirvana by oneself personally, is not so meaningful. Because we are connected with all beings… only one person reaching Nirvana is not enough. We need to go to Nirvana together with all other beings."

Lubich expresses a strikingly parallel vision that articulates an inherently and necessarily communitarian nature to her experience[56]:

> "Not feeling unity with your soul, which is mine, for me is dying. I am divided in myself. Between us it is not enough to have just any kind of unity: we need to have the very unity of the Trinity: that unity made of Holy Spirit."

She continues[57]:

> "This because, for us, it is not enough to have individual sanctity, but the sanctification of Jesus among us, of Jesus-us. Therefore to be grafted one into another, as are the Persons of the Trinity, in our brother, in our sister we have to lose even God – exactly like Jesus Forsaken who in his brother, in his sister lost God."

Both traditions locate the ultimate reality not in isolated consciousness but in relationship and interdependence. The Buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and Lubich's Trinitarian *perichoresis* converge phenomenologically: being is always being-with.

Silence, Speech, and the Word

A fascinating convergence emerges around the paradox of silence, or rather its centrality of the experience and its relation to understanding.

Lubich describes her practice with her first companions[58]:

> "Every morning we received Communion, letting Jesus bring about what he desired, while in the evening at six o'clock in church, before the altar of Our Lady, which was to the right of the main altar, we meditated in a rather original fashion. Thinking that Jesus wanted to communicate something of what he had brought about by the new Communion we had received, I invited the focolarine[59] and myself not to think of anything, to nullify every thought so that he could enlighten us."

This practice – creating interior silence to receive divine illumination – structurally resembles *zazen*, though ordered toward receptivity of personal divine communication rather than recognition of empty nature.

Lubich also reflects on Mary's silence and her own vocation[60]:

> "And she kept silent. She kept silent because two could not speak at once. Always the word must rest upon a silence, like a painting upon a background.

[52] See for example Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440): Book I, Chapter 22; Book II, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8.
[53] *Lankavatara Sutra* (translated by DT Suzuki)
[54] Okumura Shōhaku, *A good-for-nothing life*, via youtbe
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 747
[57] *Ibid.*, § 1264
[58] *Ibid.*, § 35
[59] "Focolarine" refers to the female companions of Lubich (followers of the focolare charism)
[60] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 1479-1482

> She kept silent because she was a creature. Because nothingness does not speak. But upon that nothingness Jesus spoke and said: himself. God, Creator and All, spoke upon the nothingness of the creature.
> How then to live Mary, how to give my life the fragrance of her fascination?
> By silencing the creature in me, and upon this silence letting the Spirit of the Lord speak."

For Uchiyama, *zazen* itself is this silence – not preparation for speech but the ground from which authentic action naturally arises. The practitioner does not "do" *zazen* to achieve something else; *zazen* is itself the manifestation of Buddha-nature.

Uchiyama himself makes the explicit comparison:

> "Zazen is to Buddhism what prayer is to the Judeo-Christian traditions. Just as prayer is a giving up of our small petty desires and asking that God's will be done, zazen is also a giving up of our egotistical evaluations of ourselves (whether as superior or inferior) and entrusting our life to the power of *zazen*."[61]

Lubich's theology of the Word (Logos) offers a provocative parallel to Buddhist *Dharmakāya* teaching[62]:

> "Therefore: if the *Word with Silence* is more than Silence, *I will speak and I will write*, *I will communicate everything* using every means.
> But only now do I do it, now that I love *Silence* which is the *Father*, *Being*; now that my Word is not mere word, but *expression of God*.
> The Word with Silence! The Word with Being! is *Love*, the Holy Spirit, the Essence of God! It is the Trinity."

Ripening: Time and Transformation

Both teachers emphasize patience and the organic nature of spiritual maturation.

Uchiyama's metaphor of the persimmon captures this perfectly[63]:

> "The persimmon is a strange fruit. If you eat it before it is fully ripe, it tastes just awful... Buddhist practice is like this too: if you don't let it really ripen, it cannot nourish your life. That is why I hope that people will begin to practice and then continue until their practice is really ripe."

Lubich speaks of contemplation as essential nourishment[64]:

> "My soul cannot live without contemplating: I had tried to pause my contemplation, but my soul languishes: at this point I am living in the Heart of my Spouse within the Wound, that is to say, within the Trinity, in the reality that God has shown me and that he makes me live by participating in his life, in his glory.
> If I pause my contemplation, I feel collapsing all that I lived this summer. And, if I live contemplation, I re-live each reality because in each contemplation everything is recapitulated."

Both understand spiritual practice not as technique producing immediate results but as cultivation requiring seasons of growth. The fruit appears not through force but through faithful presence.

At the same time, Lubich experiences that living this life of unity (in communion, self-giving, contemplation) leads to immediate perfection and participation in the life of the Trinity[65]:

> "Whoever enters into the way of unity does not strain to go up the mountain but, with an initial and total violence that entails the total death of self, the annihilation, done for love, of *all* one's humanity in God (and only annihilation is love), puts him or herself on the mountain's peak, where they can go no higher and where there is rest ("Come to me, all you … and I will give you rest"), and they begin walking along the crest all the way to God.
>
> Whoever lives unity lives as a child of God right from the start. They are perfect like the Father from the beginning, like the Child Jesus was perfect even if a child. And his growth was in perfection's *manifestation*, just as a tree is not more perfect than its seed (already the seed contains the tree), yet in the tree the content is more manifest."

Thus, both ripening, gradual transformation through practice and at the same time, access to experiencing perfection in the fullness of unity immediately.

Toward a Phenomenology of Radical Emptiness

This comparative reading reveals deep resonances between Lubich's theology of Jesus Forsaken and Uchiyama's practice of opening the hand of thought. Both point toward a reality that transcends conventional dualities – presence and absence, fullness and emptiness, suffering and joy, self and other.

The convergence is not coincidental but points to what might be called the phenomenological invariants of radical mystical practice

[61] Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Widsom Publication (2005)
[62] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 527-529
[63] Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Wisdom Publications (2005)
[64] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 620-621
[65] *Ibid.*, § 1283-1284

across traditions: the recognition that conventional ego-consciousness obstructs deeper reality; a practice of deliberate letting-go or self-emptying; the discovery that this emptiness is not void but plenitude; the collapse of duality between suffering and liberation; the essentially communal nature of ultimate reality; the transformation of time from linear progress to deepening ripeness.

At the same time, the divergences remain significant and should not be minimized. Lubich's vision remains thoroughly Christocentric and Trinitarian, Uchiyama's thoroughly Buddhist and non-theistic. Yet both insist on and resist reduction to their doctrinal frameworks. As Lubich's charism emphasizes living "all" of the Gospel – including Jesus's prayer "that they may all be one"[66] – her mysticism opens toward a universality that can genuinely encounter other traditions without dilution. An example of this is Lubich's gradual understanding of the universality[67] (yet supreme challenge) of living and experiencing the "where two or more are gathered in my name"[68].

Similarly, Uchiyama's Sōtō Zen, precisely in its radical commitment to experience over doctrine, creates space for dialogue and an openness to universality. His study of Western philosophy and religions informed rather than compromised his Buddhist practice and his clarity of mission to spread his experience and insights – via Okumura Shōhaku – beyond the confines of Japan and Japanese equally stem from this conviction.

Practical Implications for Contemporary Spiritual Seekers

These traditions offer practical pathways that speak to contemporary alienation without requiring wholesale adoption of pre-modern worldviews.

Both traditions challenge spiritual consumerism – the tendency to collect techniques and experiences without commitment to transformative practice. Lubich's insistence on living the Gospel "word by word" and Uchiyama's emphasis on practice ripening slowly like persimmons offer an alternative to quick-fix spirituality. The message: authentic transformation requires commitment to a specific path, not eclectic sampling.

Both reframe suffering not as obstacle to be overcome but as potential site of liberation. For contemporary seekers overwhelmed by anxiety, depression, or existential despair, Lubich's choice of Jesus Forsaken offers the radical claim that God is present precisely in abandonment – that the experience of God-forsakenness is itself divine presence. Uchiyama's teaching that "though sick, never sick" offers the *Madhyamaka* insight that suffering's absoluteness is conceptual overlay – conventionally real yet ultimately empty of fixed essence. Neither dismisses suffering's reality, but both locate freedom within rather than beyond it.

Western spirituality often emphasizes solitary seeking – the individual's private relationship with the transcendent. Both Lubich and Uchiyama, while valuing contemplative silence, insist that ultimate reality is fundamentally relational and communitarian. For contemporary seekers isolated by social media's *ersatz* connectivity, these traditions model authentic community grounded in shared practice and mutual vulnerability. The *Bodhisattva* vow to reach liberation "together with all beings" and Lubich's "Jesus in our midst" both challenge privatized spirituality.

As interreligious marriages and friendships become increasingly common, many seek spiritual practices that can be shared across traditions without syncretism or reductionism. This comparative study suggests that shared practices – contemplative sitting, shared silence, practices of letting-go – can create genuine communion while respecting doctrinal differences. Families might practice zazen and Eucharistic adoration, recognizing these as different expressions of similar contemplative depth.

Methodological Reflections: Limitations and Possibilities

This study's comparative approach has both revealed insights and encountered necessary limits.

For example, in terms of language and translation, comparing Italian mystical prose with English translations of Japanese Zen teaching inevitably loses nuance. Terms like *nulla*, *śūnyatā*, and "emptiness" carry different resonances that translation flattens. This study has not adequately addressed gender dimensions. Lubich's mysticism emerged from a community of initially predominantly women and emphasizes Mary's silence; Zen monasticism has been predominantly male, though Western *sanghas* are more egalitarian. How do gender dynamics shape these mystical paths? Does Lubich's feminine perspective offer resources for critiquing patriarchal structures in both traditions? Both movements emerged in specific mid-20th-century contexts – post-war northern Italy, post-war central Japan – yet this study has not touched upon how historical trauma shaped their theologies. Further work might examine how experiences of war, fascism, and atomic devastation influenced both traditions' emphasis on suffering and emptiness. As a comparative project initiated from within Christian theological discourse, this study risks subtle colonialism – using Buddhist categories to enrich Christian theology without equal reciprocity. A truly dialogical approach would include Buddhist scholars' perspectives on whether this comparison illuminates or distorts their tradition. Finally the topic of universality, though briefly touched upon, has not been fully explored either. In the case

[66] Jn 17:21

[67] Ján Morovic, Peter Morovic, *Who are Chiara Lubich's 'two or three'?*, Pupilla (2025), https://pupilla.org/preprints/2025-chiaras-two-or-three/

[68] Mt 18:20

of Lubich's experience and the movement that was born out of it, universality is a central area of focus through various dialogues and initiatives, after all "may they all be one" necessarily implies such commitment.

At the same time the analysis also opens up further possibilities to explore. For example, it suggests that interreligious dialogue grounded in shared practice – not merely doctrinal discussion – offers unique possibilities. Monastics from both traditions might engage in extended periods of shared contemplative practice, allowing experiential knowledge to inform theological exchange. Examples such as this exist already, for example the *Casa d'Espiritualitat Sant Filip Neri*[69] in Barcelona (Catalonia) offering *zazen sesshin,* or the Jesuit centre *Cova Manresa*[70] also offering experiences of contemplative meditation inspired by the practice of zazen, as well as other centres such as the *Bodhi Zendo Center*[71] in India.

The convergence around apophatic traditions (negative theology, recognition of conceptual limits) suggests a possible ground for dialogue that doesn't require premature doctrinal agreement. If both traditions recognize that ultimate reality transcends our concepts of it, comparative work can proceed humbly, each tradition helping the other see its own blind spots and unique value.

While this study has employed the phenomenological method informally, more rigorous application of phenomenology of religion (bracketing truth-claims to examine experiential structures) could deepen a comparison.

Conclusions

Perhaps the most profound convergence in both traditions lies in their insistence that ultimate reality cannot be adequately captured in concepts but must be lived. As Lubich repeatedly emphasizes, doctrine emerged from life, not vice versa. This is echoed by Uchiyama: *zazen* is not preparation for enlightenment but enlightenment itself – practice and realization are one.

This study has attempted to honor both traditions' integrity while allowing them to illuminate each other. The risk of comparison is always reductionism – flattening distinct traditions into generic "mysticism." We have tried to avoid this by maintaining that convergences occur at the level of experiential structure and practice, not doctrinal content. Jesus Forsaken is not "really" *śūnyatā*; *śūnyatā* is not "really" Trinitarian *kenosis*. Yet both point beyond themselves toward a reality that – paradoxically – both traditions insist exceeds all pointing.

In a fragmented world hungry for authentic spiritual practice, polarized between fundamentalist certainty and relativistic indifference, these two traditions offer a third way. They demonstrate that deep commitment to a particular path need not breed exclusivism; that authentic experience of one's own tradition can open rather than close toward others; that doctrinal differences, while real, need not prevent recognition of shared depths.

For contemporary seekers, these traditions offer not competing alternatives but complementary witnesses to a reality that, as Uchiyama wrote, has "no bottom" – infinite depth revealed precisely in the act of letting go. Whether that letting go be named *annullamento* or *tebanashi*, whether it reveals Jesus Forsaken or Buddha-nature, whether it speaks in the language of Trinity or *Dharmakāya*, both paths lead to the same threshold: the dissolution of the grasping self and the discovery that this dissolution is not death but life.

The study of comparative mysticism cannot resolve the question of whether these traditions ultimately converge or diverge – such resolution would require the very conceptual closure both traditions resist. But it can do something perhaps more valuable: open space for practitioners of each tradition to recognize in the other not threat but gift, not competitor but companion on the pathless path toward That which exceeds all names yet invites all seekers[72].

In this spirit – humility before mystery, commitment to practice, openness to the Other – we conclude this essay, recognizing it as beginning rather than end, invitation rather than conclusion. The research must continue, but more importantly, the practice must continue – the daily sitting, the daily choosing Jesus Forsaken, the daily opening of the hand of thought, the daily death and resurrection that transforms "my" life into Life itself.

> "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly."[73]

[69] https://casaespiritualitat.barcelona/es/casa-despiritualitat-sant-felip-neri/

[70] https://www.covamanresa.cat/es Note that the Jesuits in particular have a long history of dialogue with Zen Buddhism and of adopting certain practices in their religious life, suffice to see one of the two most famous photos of Pedro Aruppe, SJ sitting in a Japanese style sitting pose (the other famous photo of his is him kneeling in front of St John Paul II).

[71] https://www.jesuits.global/2023/04/03/a-meeting-place-for-christianity-and-zen/

[72] One can relate to this opporrunity even within Christianity itself, e.g. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ: "Jesus says: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' [...] Asia is the way. Europe and the United States are preoccupied with truth, with how to define it. Latin America and Africa are life, and they have values that we have already forgotten, such as family, children, friendship... We need the whole world to find the fullness of Christ." via https://alfayomega.es/en-todo-esta-dios-y-en-todo-se-encuentran-signos-de-su-presencia/

[73] Dōgen via Okumura Shōhaku, *Realizing Genjokoan: The Key to Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Wisdom Publications (2010)

The hand opens. The self empties. And in that emptiness (or is it fullness?) reality as it truly is begins to manifest.

As Lubich writes[74]:

> "Jesus Forsaken is the miracle of nullifying that which is. A miracle comprehensible only to one who knows Love and knows that in Love *all* and *nothing* coincide."

As Uchiyama teaches through his life and death:

> "Though dying, never dying
> Reality prior to division
> Herein lies unlimited depth."

Two paths. One mystery. Infinite depth.

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[74] Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, § 1024