

Possible Relationship Between Mystagogy and Philosophy and its Bearing on Theology and Spirituality

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“¡Oh, válgame Dios” ¡Cuál está un alma cuando está así! Toda ella querría fuese lenguas para alabar al Señor. Dice mil desatinos santos, atinando siempre a contentar a quien la tiene así. Yo sé persona que, con no ser poeta, que le acaecía hacer de presto coplas muy sentidas declarando su pena bien, no hechas de su entendimiento, sino que, para más gozar la gloria que tan sabrosa pena le daba, se quejaba de ella a su Dios. Todo su cuerpo y alma querría se despedazase para mostrar el gozo que con esta pena siente.”

(Sta. Teresa de Jesús, *Libro de la Vida*, c.16, 4)

STATUS QUAESTIONIS**

Philosophy plays the role of making explicit and, therefore, comprehensible what is implicit in the realities that we live with in, better

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** Fundamental Theology and Philosophy, Mysticism-Mystagogy and Spirituality are no doubt the main coordinates of my researches as of the present. This article is an attempt to synthesize my interest in developing a Philosophy of Experience inspired by the testimonial narratives of the mystics with my doctoral dissertation on St. John of the Cross defended in the Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Philosophy of Science of the University of Salamanca in 1995. Aside from my thesis, this theme has been the central point of interest in my publications starting from 1995 which have led me to study Trinitarian Theology, Theodicy, Metaphysics, Mysticism, Ontology, Spiritual Theology, Philosophy of History, Phenomenology of Re-

said, paraphrasing Xavier Zubiri, this very world of realities. The primal moment of consciousness reveals to man that his existence is at first marked by a seemingly insuperable alienation from his very own realm of society. He has to fight, struggle, work, study, philosophize in order to live. *Primum vivere deinde philosophare*, says the scholastic axiom. It is as if he were a foreigner or even an alien or lifeform from another planet. Philosophy reorients us foreigners/aliens into this shared reality by establishing, highlighting, making explicit and documenting new relationships apparently hidden from the beginning by extreme and sheer implicity or perhaps by the silence of indifference and ignorance. It is in this light that we pen this essay on a topic neglected by most philosophers due to the fact that they are not capable of perceiving how their speculating could have anything to do not with what is just merely immaterial or spiritual, but with spirituality.

Spirituality, in as much as it involves personal participation and commitment, brings together what is material and immaterial. It is a converging point in itself. It is the key to understanding man's totality and the totality of the reality. Spirituality is that element, in any philosophy, that gives life to philosophy for it presupposes a profound assimilation and experiencing of reality on the part of man, the subject of experience as a reality in himself. Spirituality thrives within the realm of the real for it is interested or concerned with what is real in as much as it is experientiable.

From the viewpoint of Spirituality, God, the Supreme Reality, is experientiable. The experientiability of God has been long neglected by traditional Philosophy which relegated God to the role of the impersonal, undifferentiated Πρωτη αιτια or First Cause. The affirmation that God is experientiable necessarily implies his Personality and not just His being impersonal or non-differentiate principle or cause.

At the outset of this article, this writer feels that he is obliged to make a preliminary apology for the clumsiness of its elaboration. This is true of any pioneering work. Likewise it is appropriate to make the following declaration in order to clarify our approach and methodology: it is the duty of the philosopher, especially one who professes to be

ligion (focus on Secularization) and Literary-Cultural Criticism. Likewise this interest in experience has led me to dialogue with various fields such as Psychology (especially Tifenpsychologie), Music, Art and Cultural History and Philology. I hope to continue this project with more studies and publications.

a Christian, to search for truth. We are tasked to confront probably the most sublime truth and the only literary possibility that could flow out of this said truth in its initial stages could only be fragmentary, clumsy, unrefined and simply imperfect. Some have distinguished Philosophy from Theology in the sense that the latter is concerned with God, whereas the former with truth.

But is not God the Eternal Truth Himself? With the paradigm shift (Kuhn) or change of episteme (Foucault) inaugurated at the advent of critical and ideological modernity (Habermas) which is always hermeneutically (Ricœur) in conflict with tradition (Schliermacher, Gadamer), the cultural and sociological wave of secularization¹ evident and described as a Logic of Ideas (Husserl) without abstracting to a mere husserlian transcendental ego and contextualized as hermeneutical facticity (Heidegger), has brought about the radicalization of the difference between Philosophy and Theology. This has led to an emancipation process, after an analysis of substructures and superstructures (Marx), wherein Philosophy ceases from becoming the "*ancilla theologiae*."² For the moment, let us just make the following affirmation: in Theology the Truth necessarily has to be Personal, since God is believed to be a person.

¹ I have taken into account the following words of Swiss theologian H. Küng: "Formerly 'secularization' meant primarily the transference in a legal-political sense of ecclesiastical property to worldly uses by individuals and states. But today it seems that not only certain items of ecclesiastical property, but more or less all the important spheres of human life—learning, economy, politics, law, state, culture, education, medicine, social welfare—have been withdrawn from the influence of the Churches, of theology and religion, and placed under the direct responsibility and control of man, who has himself thus become 'secular'. It is the same with the word 'emancipation'..." *On Being a Christian*. (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 26-27. Cfr. also: W. Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World*. (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

² In the *Summa Theologiae* [S.T.], St Thomas does not insist in the role of *Ancilla Theologiae*. In establishing the difference between "Revealed Theology" and what we nowadays call "Philosophical Theology" or Theology in the Aristotelian sense, the Angelic Doctor recognizes the need for a science that would deal with the salvation of men at the same time affirming the superiority of Aristotelian Theology over the other sciences. Says St Thomas "...in order that men be saved, it was necessary that they be instructed on divine matters by divine revelation. Thus, it was necessary that apart from the philosophical disciplines, which are mastered by the intellect, that there be sacred doctrine which is known by revelation." *S.T., I q.1 a.1, respondeo* (translation mine). Cfr. L. Elders, *La Théologie Philosophique de Saint Thomas D'Aquin*. (Paris: Pierre Téqui Editeur, 1995).

Aristotle was bereft of the notion of a Personal God and yet he named his project Θεολογία or theology.³ In Theology, Truth, the Eternal Truth has to be a Person and not just a mode of being.⁴ This "Personal Truth" reveals Himself and invites (provokes?) a confessional response. Christianity believes that this Eternal Truth took flesh, became a human person in Jesus Christ. Nowadays Philosophy, especially after the impact of the Heideggerian critique of the ontotheological reduction of Western Metaphysics, need not (must not?) reach a "Personal Truth." Neither does (must?) it elicit a confessional response. If philosophy would ever need to confess, it need not confess the truth as something personal or better said, truth as a person. In fact, the truth could be taken by man as mere concepts, values, abstractions and the like. But said confession necessarily becomes a testimony. The truth could only "shine forth" when the testimony is held (proven) to be credible.⁵ Within the light of this testimonial and experiential truth, we

³ The term in the west originated with Plato in the *Republic* II, 379 a. Aristotle in *Metaphysics* VI, I, 1026a, 21b writes that "The divine is present anywhere, it is present in this kind of nature." Both Plato and Aristotle denied the personality of the God of *Logos* (or philosophy), but not of the poets or the God of *Mythos* and *Poiesis*. St Thomas Aquinas in his Prologue to his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* Vol. I affirms: "It (Metaphysics-M.O.) is called divine science or theology inasmuch as it considers (divine-M.O.) substances. It is called metaphysics inasmuch as it considers being and the attributes which usually accompany being... And it is called first philosophy inasmuch as it considers the first causes of things." Trans. by J.P.Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961). Nowadays the challenge is to make Theology relevant and contemporary. Cfr. J.M. de Mesa & L.L. Wostyn, *Doing Theology. Basic Realities and Processes*; D.J.Adams, *Cross Cultural Theology*. (Atlanta, 1987). These are two books whose apparent simplicity are quite deceiving and should be read over and over again to really grasp the profound message behind the words.

⁴ In Catholic theology, Karl Rahner's trinitarian modalism is most remembered. Cfr. K. Rahner, *The Trinity*. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 101, 113. For a general rundown on modalism Cfr. S. del Cura Elena "Modalismo" in Various Authors, *El Dios Cristiano. Diccionario Teológico*. (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1992), 916-922. Aside from Rahner names such as Hegel, Barth, Jenson, Pannenberg and Moltmann should be taken into account. For authoritative introductions on these authors Cfr. W. J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God. The Trinity as Mystery of Salvation*. (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 112-178; X. Pikaza, *Dios como Espíritu y Persona. Razón humana y misterio trinitario*. (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1988), 125-145.

⁵ Cf M. Ofilada Mina, "La credibilidad como base de un discurso de teodicea en un mundo secularizado," in *Philippiniana Sacra* XXXII, 95 (1997), 223-246. This article is my first attempt to contextualize theology and theodicy within a secularized set up.

hope to go beyond the cold and rigid realm of paradigmatic truths as proposed by pure philosophy (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schliermacher, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Foucault, Kuhn) and perhaps adopt some vitalist creativity (Nietzsche) with the aim of overcoming and recreating the same in a renewed comprehension of experience: experience that is intense, authentic, transforming, unifying and loving as related by the subjects of said experiences called to bring forth logically, coherently and validly a literary text of signs, symbols, lexicon, language and words (Saussure).

Against this historical and epistemological backdrop, this writer wishes to make some philosophical reflections concerning mystagogy, a very important dimension in any spiritual or mystical process or experience. Mysticism, in general, has already been studied philosophically.⁶ Likewise, its relation with theology has already been explored, although not fully.⁷ There are epistemological lacunae which could only

⁶ There is an abundance of works written from this perspective. It would be too pretentious to enumerate them all. However, the following may be considered to be a respectable list: J. Baruzi, *L'intelligence mystique*. Ed. by J.L. Viellard-Baron. (Paris: Berg International Editeurs, 1985); G. Berger, M. Blondel and L. Lavelle, *Chant nocturne. Saint Jean de la Croix mystique et philosophie*. (Campin: Ed. Universitaires, 1991); C. de Jesús Sacramentado, "La percepción de Dios en la filosofía y en la mística" in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 5 (1945), 118-130; B. Jiménez Duque, *Mística. La experiencia del misterio*. (Valencia: Edicep, 1995); J. Martín Velasco, *La experiencia cristiana de Dios*. (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1995); N. de Sta. Teresa, "La 'Ciudad de Dios', filosofía de la mística. De S. Agustín a S. Juan de la Cruz," in *La Ciudad de Dios* 169 (1956), 151-178; Idem., *Filosofía de la mística. Análisis del pensamiento español*. (Madrid: Ediciones Studium de Cultura, 1953); R. Piñero Moral, "La inefabilidad mística: Oráculo para la metafísica" in Various, *Actas del Congreso Internacional Sanjuanista III*. (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1993), 351-363; C. Tresmontant, *La mística cristiana y el porvenir del hombre*. (Barcelona: Herder, 1980); M. Zambrano, *Filosofía y poesía*. (Alcalá de Henares: Ed. de la Universidad, 1993); Y. Floucat, *L'être et la mystique des saints*. (Paris: Pierre Tequi, ed., 1995); D.L. Carmody and J.L. Carmody, *Mysticism. Holiness East and West*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1996). As to the discursivity of mysticism, in part I have taken into consideration: M. de Certeau, *La fable mystique. XVI-XVIIe siècle*. Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). These articles have helped me in familiarizing myself with de Certeau's interpretation of mystical language: T. Polo, "Decir 'lo otro' que todavía habla: el lenguaje herido de los místicos" in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 53 (1994), 317-347; Idem., "Un viajero en el país de la mística: Michel de Certeau" in *Teresianum* 42 (1991), 533-559.

⁷ Cfr. the following recent publications: Ch. Bernard, "Teología e mística" in Various, *Vita cristiana ed esperienza mistica*. (Rome: Teresianum, 1982), 137-157; G. Phan Tan Thanh, "Il 'problema mistico'. Variazioni sul tema" in Various, *Compendio di teologia*

be filled by epistemological specifications. A recent work on "Mysticism and Moral Theology" seems to be pointing the way inspite of its too generic and vague historical approach.⁸ But, as far as we know, there has been no published material on mystagogy from the viewpoint of philosophy.⁹

Philosophy, in its highest form, is theology says Aristotle and also St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas was one of the pioneers in recovering the old word Theology following Abelard (although Aquinas used the word sparingly preferring "Sacra Doctrina") in the light of the pagan implications of the term "Theology" given Varro's distinctions. It is the Theology (God-Talk), better said, Sacra Doctrina (the act of God's Talking) as the Angelic Doctor says, that does not have any soteriological concerns for it limits itself with the notion that God is merely a First Principle.¹⁰ It is the Theology that is not necessarily linked to any ecclesial institution as its mouthpiece or intellectual tradition.¹¹

spirituale in onore di Jordan Aumann, O.P. (Rome, 1992), 207-223; Various, *Esperienza mistica e fenomeni mistici*. 3 Vol. (Rome, 1984); J. Martín Velasco, *Espiritualidad y mística*. (Madrid, 1995); S. Guerra "Mística" in Various, *El Dios Cristiano. Diccionario Teológico*. (Salamanca: Secretariado trinitario, 1992), 897-916; B. Jiménez Duque, *Teología de la mística*. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1963); Idem., "Experiencia y Teología" in Various, *Actas del Congreso Internacional Sanjuanista, op. cit.*, 155-176; K. Rahner, "Mística" in K. Rahner-H. Vorgrimler, *Diccionario Teológico*. (Barcelona: Herder, 1996), col. 440; A. Stolz, *Teología de la mística*. (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1952); R. Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane*. (London, 1967); K. Waajiman, "Toward a Phenomenological Definition of Spirituality," in *Studies in Spirituality* 3 (1993), 5-57; J. Dan, "In Quest of a Historical Definiton of Mysticism," in *Ibid.*, 58-90.

⁸ Cfr. D.J. Billy, "Mysticism and Moral Theology" in *Studia Moralia* 34 (1996), 389-415.

⁹ Mystagogy was originally a sacramentological-liturgical concern starting with the initiation of adult neophytes into Christianity. We will not enter into this area of specialization in this article. For a recent evaluation, Cfr. Various Authors, *Mistagogia. La liturgia nos guía hacia el misterio. Phase* 193 (1993).

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.T. I q. 1 a.1* (Cfr. note number 1). See also this excellent article: H. Hoping, "Understanding the Difference of Being: On the Relationship between Metaphysics and Theology" in *The Thomist* 59 (1995), 189-221.

¹¹ Speaking about Revealed Theology, American Jesuit theologian A. Dulles clamours that "theology must serve the Church and be accountable to it. While theology needs to have a measure of autonomy in order to perform its distinctive service, it loses its identity if it ceases to be a reflection on the faith of the Church," in *The Craft of Theology. From Symbol to System*. (New York: Crossroad, 1995), X-XI.

St. John of the Cross affirmed the superiority of Mystical Theology over what he calls "Scholastic Theology."¹² Of course, the Mystical Doctor was working within the context of Soteriological or Revealed Theology. Could we not also affirm that the supreme form of philosophizing be mystical and effectively, spiritual? Should not philosophy speak about the experience of supreme reality? Tradition states that Metaphysics or First Philosophy deals with being in as much as it is being or existing or real. Should not Metaphysics be elevated to the experience of the Supreme Reality, i.e., mysticism? "With regards to the real things, God is the foundational (fundante) reality: *realitas fundamentalis* as I would call it. Foundationality is a characteristic trait of absolutely absolute reality. But it is not a constitutive moment of reality, but it is consecutive to it."¹³

In the same light, it can be held that God is the Apodictic Experience not just as data for an epistemological (scientific) venture or investigation, but more so in the experiential or spiritual level wherein said experience would really be a life event. Of course, this is not meant to deny the pivotal role that an experience of God could play in the ongoing process of establishing the epistemological validity of mysticism.

THE SECULARIZED BACKDROP FOR A RENEWED COMPREHENSION OF MYSTAGOGY

The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has assigned mysticism to the transcendental realm of silence. What is transcendental for the Austrian Philosopher, in the first stage or phase of his philosophical career, is what is beyond the realm of language. After having delved into all the possibilities offered by linguistic philosophy, he had no other recourse. Wittgenstein must have probably realized that Symbolic Logic with all of its pretensions of expressing relationships in the world is pseudo-mysticism. True mysticism is beyond mere relational expressions in as much as these reflect the empirical or observable realm. Beyond the empirical and the symbolical lies a realm

¹² St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* (B), Prologue, 3 (translation mine). I am using this edition: S. Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas*. 5a. ed. de J. V. Rodríguez y F. Ruiz Salvador. (Madrid, 1993).

¹³ X. Zubiri, *El Hombre y Dios*. (Madrid: Fundación Xabier Zubiri, 1984), 172. (translation mine).

of silence which transcends all linguistic limitations: "The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling... There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical. The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said... Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."¹⁴ Given the rise of Postmodernism¹⁵ (which has also drank from the wells of the thought of Wittgenstein), mysticism is considered as "pensiero debole" or weak thought. This weakness springs from the fact that "for some postmodernism suggests the death of God and disappearance of religion."¹⁶

We live in an era posterior to God. The phrase "After God" is definitely not only be the title of a recent work,¹⁷ but it could well be the main characteristic of this age of "posts" not only as far as institutional religion is concerned. They seem to be more likely, as viewed in the present context, cultural remains or skeletons. This writer opts to employ this expression: we live in an era posterior to the Experience of God. Given today's axiological and cultural shifts, God, in as much as He is transcendental, abstract or not experientiable in today's somewhat Tractatus-Wittgensteinian paradigms, does not fit into contemporary man's experiential paradigms and axiological selections.

Mysticism is an authentic experience of God taken as the Absolute Reality who is likewise a Person and thus capable of experiencing, being experienced, relating and above all, loving. This is our working definition. Present day theologians are challenged to deliver the re-

¹⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 6.522, 6.53, 7. I am using the translation of C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1990): Cfr. the following studies: E. Zemach, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophy of the Mystical*" in Various, *Essays on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1993), 359-376; J. Carmona Adorna, "Los gritos de silencio de Wittgenstein" in Various, *Wittgenstein-Heidegger*. (Badajoz: Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1990), 53-56; J. Ma. Ayuso Díez, "El ahogo del lenguaje. Sobre el carácter místico de la ética de Wittgenstein" in *Ibid.*, 151-156.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Vattimo, *La fine della modernità*. (Turin, 1985); For a comprehensive survey Cfr S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture. An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

¹⁶ M. Taylor, "Reframing Postmodernisms" in Various, *Shadow of Spirit. Postmodernism and Religion*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 11.

¹⁷ Cfr D. Cupitt, *After God. The Future of Religion*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

flection on God from this postmodern attack and demonstrate that it is epistemologically a "pensiero forte" or strong thought.¹⁸ A "pensiero debole," which is part of the ongoing crisis of thought, is a frustrated system from the very beginning of the process of converting thought into a system. "System" means an all comprehensive view of reality which affirms, at the same time, reality's facile conversion into a compendium, into a synthetic total picture of reality. This means that reality, in its totality and as a totality, could be captured, comprehended, represented in the intellectual faculties and expressed as such through the prose of direct representation. The "pensiero debole" is incapable of this prose and thus it resorts to presenting reality as something fictional, adventurous, quixotic or too poetic. Thus, a "pensiero debole" can be said to be, by nature, tragic (Nietzsche, Unamuno).

In other words, reality is slipping away from the hands of system builders and building. System building in its primordial stage is proud and haughty (Hegel). It can be enhanced only by nihilist play (Nietzsche) or cultural-artistic and constructive play (Ortega). Reality could thus only be "lived" (and not captured) and "poetized" in a fragmentary manner. The *Zarathustra* of Nietzsche wrote aphorisms in a poetic manner in an attempt to recover and enhance Dionysius whereas Freud, in this century, affirmed triplicity in the fragmentation of man in the ego, superego and the id. Wittgenstein's calculated theses and aphorisms ends in silence. Mysticism, with its cues of silence, poetry, aphoristic way of speech and indirect way of expressing itself, is, mistakenly, taken in this light.¹⁹

From a contemporary platonic point of view, it is pure POIESIS (Ποιησις) or MYTHOS (Μῦθος). From a Wittgensteinian (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) perspective it is tantamount to a brand of transcendentalism wherein the object of thought does not give or reveal itself in the world. Hence, it is outside the world. It is outside of the realms of philosophy and of language, with the latter taken as the guarantee of systematic tautology with the aim of making a synthetical

¹⁸ I admit having been influenced a little by P. Ripa di Meana, "All'ascolto di un 'pensiero forte': la dottrina tomista della Trinità" in *Salesianum* 54 (1992), 9-39.

¹⁹ In a previous work, I have reflected on mysticism as a solution to modernism which is somewhat the predecessor of the current secularized postmodern trend. Cfr. M. Ofilada Mina, "La autognosis por medio de la mística frente al modernismo: Reflexiones desde Miguel de Unamuno" in *Studium* 36 (1996), 121-137.

summation: "How the world is, is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world. Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is. The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling."²⁰ At the end, the "pensiero debole" will experience its own limitations and would find a way out of its imposed (or self-imposed?) dead corner of silence.

Silence, as some critics put it, has been the game of mysticism and mystics. The eminent Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, upon criticizing the mystic as contrasted with the theologian, states that unlike the latter, the former "becomes a specialist of silence."²¹ But Ortega recognized the technical linguistic skill of the mystic. In fact, the whole symphony of silence in today's crisis²² of thought was brewed by masters of language: poets, essayists, playwrights, journalists, etc. The mystagogue must be a master of language given the insufficiency of language to narrate the mystical experience. Ineffability is the great labyrinth in mystagogy and the feared minotaur is indifferent silence that must be overcome at all cost.

MYSTAGOGIA AND THE MAZE OF "PENSIERO DEBOLE"

Silence is demeaning if taken in the sense previously expounded on. The "Pensiero Debole" is nothing else, but the incapability to build discourses. The silence of mysticism is not a failure of discourse nor of thought building, but rather the acknowledgement of the power of the word, of the testimonial word. Said word affirms only the grandeur and infinity of reality that condescendingly allows itself to be experienced. Silence is not abstaining, but rather it is the power of the word in as much as it points to what transcends it, as the *Tractatus* would put it. Better said, it is the power of the reality that lies ahead to be experienced. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* was aware of this and affirmed the beyondness of the experience as something that transcends words or language. The word, given the renovating touch of mysticism

²⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, *op. cit.*, 6.44, 6.45.

²¹ J. Ortega y Gasset, "Defensa del teólogo frente al místico" in *Revista de Occidente* (1964), 459 (translation mine).

²² Cfr. F. Rella, *El silencio y las palabras. El pensamiento en tiempo de crisis*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, 1992).

becomes an invitation to an experience. This is how we should understand the notion of mystagogy.

What is mystagogy?²³ Mystagogy simply put is the act of leading towards the mystical experience. It is the teaching of the mystical experience by initiating the novice in the mysteries. Better said, it is sharing the mystical level with the aim of initiating geared towards the perfection of the craft or experience. Mystagogy presupposes having attained the supreme level, commonly called "union" and yet the mystagogue accompanies the beginners and proficients towards the very same experience. More than accompanying, it is living all over again the very experience by means of words, actions, examples. The mystagogue is no bodhisattva. The former has already reached the highest limit. But the mere fact of reaching this supreme limit signifies that the experience is gratuitous. Being gratuitous, it must be taught, shared, transmitted and breathed. This means that the mystagogue is tasked to construct a discourse. Mystagogy takes concrete form as a discourse. By nature, it is a discourse. Mystagogy, simply said, is the discourse of the mystical experience. The mystical experience is a process towards the union with God, the Absolute Personal Reality. The aforementioned discourse obtains its data from the configuration, guiding principle and execution of the process towards union with God: Spirituality.

Mystagogy assures the authenticity of the mystical experience. Experience cannot be contained. It must be expressed, shared; it must

²³ In spite of its incompleteness and vagueness, I still consider the definition of mystagogue (or one engaged in mystagogy) of F. Ruiz Salvador as the best formulated to date: "The mystagogue... is somebody who has undergone the experience of God and of His mystery and accompanies the one who undergoes the path... The assistance (rendered) does not consist of giving practical norms, but in presenting the very mystery of God and His communion with man making the very mystery mark the content and modalities of the new experience. The art of the mystagogue consists in knowing how to transmit not his own experience, but thanks to this experience, the personal and gratuitous mystery of God reveals itself freely to those who seek God," in S. Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas, op.cit.*, 25 (translation mine); Idem., "Dos Testigos Supremos de Dios: Teresa de Jesús y Juan de la Cruz" in Various, *Actas del Congreso Internacional Teresiano*. (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1983), 1044; Idem., *Místico y Maestro. San Juan de la Cruz*. (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1986), 58; Idem., "El carisma del Carmelo vivido e interpretado por S. Juan de La Cruz. Carisma de S. Juan de la Cruz vivido e interpretado por el Carmelo" in Various, *La recepción de los místicos. Teresa de Jesús y Juan de la Cruz*. (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1997), 587.

be transformed into the basis of a necessary pedagogical activity. Said activity necessarily flows from the experience itself. St Teresa of Jesus (Avila) insisted on the necessity of the expression of the experience: "It is one gift that the Lord gives the favour, and another thing is to understand what this favour is and what grace it is. It is also another thing to know how to say it and make others understand how it is."²⁴

The authenticity of the mystical experience is tantamount to its scientific or criteriological validity. Mystagogy is the confirmation of the authenticity of the experience and thus, elevates the experience to the universal level. The mystical experience is not only for the few, but is for every person given that man is an animal who experiences, i.e., man remembers, interiorizes, assimilates, narrates, shares and explains what is real in as much as it is a reality. What is real becomes truly a reality for man through the mediation of experience. For the mystic, what is real in itself is identified with a Personal, Relational, Experientiable and Loving God. God is not merely an Absolute and Transcendental Reality. He is experientiable not only as a Supreme Value or in the axiological level, but also in the intimate level which is not limited to the interior or profound dimension of man, as the subject of the experience. Rather, the intimate level is that which configures the totality of the subject of experience.

Teaching, sharing and breathing are acts of language. Language is therefore the key in resolving the problematic of the "pensiero debole." Only by acknowledging and manifesting the variations of language can the arrogance of the stiffening mimetic or representational prose be properly addressed and humbled. Mimesis, as representation in the sense of imitation, is too narrow. There must be a call to creativity, wherein representation is transfigured into creative reliving or celebration (liturgy), which easily facilitates itself especially in poetic language. But prose, in this creative process, has to be re-discovered not only as a venue for poetic language, but more as an experiential mode, i.e., its narrative potential has to be unlocked. Present day prose has tended to become too dogmatic. It must be re-channeled as something more experiential, narrative... prophetic.

²⁴ *Book of Life*, 17, 5 (translation mine). I am quoting from this critical edition: *Santa Teresa de Jesús, Obras Completas*. 7th ed. of T. Alvarez (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1994).

The discourse of the mystical experience cannot be weak in the secularized sense which demeans it as not being a part of the present day axiological parameters or which considers this kind of experience as nonsense because it is not something empirically demonstrable. The transcendental nature of experience affirms its truly experientiable nature. And it is not just any experience or experience taken in common parlance as a mere happening or event of empirical significance. Empiricism and narrativity do not form a perfect equation.

The experientiability of mysticism flows from of the Supreme Reality wherein said Reality, inspite of its sheer transcendence, is also intimate, loving and condescending. Mysticism is not a "pensiero debole." On the contrary, it speaks not only of the Strongest or Supreme Reality as a person, as relational and experientiable, but it also affirms the configuration and elevation of the subject of experience into a full experiential participation in the Supreme Reality.

Mystagogy gives a new sense to narrativity. Thus, narrativity is not only limited to what is empirical. Mystagogy enriches the sense of narrativity with the notions of signigicance, authenticity, intensity, transformation in reference to the experience. What is narrated is the experience. In mystagogy, the experience is not just an event (empirical sense), but it is also significant, authentic, intense and transforming wherein the subject of the experience is elevated, given the condescendence of the Supreme Reality, to participate of the Supreme Reality. This then is the fullness of human life. It is not just mere "being there" or existence. It implies being significant, authentic, important and transformed by being elevated in a personal, total, loving and relational manner.

Events make up a narrative. A narrative with a guiding principle or perspective is what we call history. A mystical experience, with or without the accompanying phenomena necessarily of second nature, is more than just an event. It is, as mentioned, personal, relational, loving, transforming, significant, intense, etc. Thus a mystagogical discourse is in effect a history, a history of salvation! The union of God and man or of man with the Supreme Reality, the aim of all mysticism, cannot be understood or expressed except in soteriological terms.

Mysticism is in itself the thought, the language of the experientiability of the Supreme Reality. Mystagogy is the discourse of this thought and of this language. Mystagogy reveals the discursiveness of the authentic and intense experience of the condescending and

elevating Supreme Reality and is the availability, disposition and openness of said discursiveness to a process of human symbolization.

FROM LANGUAGE TO EXPERIENCE: *THEOS* AS EXPERIENCED AND SHARED

It is not our aim to make a thorough linguistic-philosophical analysis²⁵ of mysticism. This can be done on another occasion and by more competent scholars. We prefer to proceed by presupposing the possibility of teaching, sharing and breathing experiences whether they may be fictitious or not. In other words, we are interested in discourse building. This naturally presupposes the question of language. But we prefer not to delve into the intricacies of language and instead we would like to focus our attention on its dynamic character. This can only be encountered in the discursive form of language. In other words, by means of discourse language enters into the games of everyday living and experiencing instead of playing its own solitary game.²⁶ "The mystic is conscious of his own radical incapacity of communicating due to the lack of adequate expressive modes. He is forced to borrow from human language meanings or senses which are beyond the normal-but- the expressive mode is not identifiable with the content, but the latter cannot be understood without the former. The message reaches us through language. Those that have been inseparable from the beginning cannot be separated."²⁷

Many would deem mysticism and mystagogy as fictitious because they speak of an experience of something or somebody that is not in the world. But does He not reveal Himself in the world? We would like to make a side remark on Wittgenstein: How do men know of God if it were not primarily by revelation? It is not that we are denying the validity of the *Quinquae Viae* of St Thomas Aquinas which is an affirmation of the capacity of the human intellect to construct ways (*viae*)

²⁵ For a birds eyeview on this theme Cfr. D. Antiseri, *El problema del lenguaje religioso*. (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1976).

²⁶ Cfr. J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

²⁷ E. Pacho, "Lenguaje y Mensaje" in Various, *Experiencia y Pensamiento en San Juan de la Cruz*. (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1990), 72 & 81; Idem., "Lenguaje técnico y lenguaje popular en S. Juan de la Cruz" in Various, *Hermenéutica y mística. S. Juan de la Cruz*. (Madrid, 1995), 197-219; G. della Croce, "Semantica della parola: il linguaggio mistico di San Giovanni della Croce" in Various, *Juan de la Cruz. Espíritu de Llama*. (Rome-Kampen, 1991), 493-506.

towards God relying on its own merits and capabilities. Neither are we making a fideist statement.

What we wish to affirm is the primacy or primordially of gratuity. Everything is primordially gratuitous: What we are, Who we are, Where we are, Why are we here, etc. From the gratuitous we start reaping rewards based on our own merits. Gratuitousness is, however, only a starting point. It is not the end although it never ceases. It may constantly reappear in our lives as a means. In the very end, everything may be summed up in terms of gratuity, but a gratuitousness that has been deserved given the fact that man has accomplished things on his own merits.

If we were pressed to provide a more concise and exact definition of mystagogy, we would no doubt quote one of the most beautiful phrases inspired by St Thomas Aquinas and which has become one of the mottoes of the Dominican Order: "*Contemplári et contempláta aliis trádere*"²⁸: "To contemplate and to share with others what has been contemplated."

The question of gratuitousness is a question of experience. The mere fact that we exist is in itself gratuitous. We do not just exist (like the so called "non-living" things). We live. We are alive. We are not just vital beings like the plants and brutes. We are capable of experience. An experiential being is a being capable of language. He experiences because his structure is basically linguistic or open to receive communication from others. Because of this, he is capable of expressing himself or finding an objectivized outlet for his experiential-linguistical structure which consists in making others know of what is in him. Thus, he is a being who communicates, a being who shares.

Is it not high time that we start reconceptualizing (or redefining?) philosophy as sharing? Has not the "kairos" of redefining philosophy as a spirituality arrived? Philosophy has long been thought of as a way of life in vulgar parlance or in existentialist inspired terms. Spirituality is nothing else but a directed, firm and guided way of life. It would be deplorable, given the superficiality and weakness of thought of this secularized or postmodern era, to respond in the negative.

²⁸ St Thomas Aquinas, *S.T.*, II-II, q. 188, a.6, *respõndeo*. The exact words of the Common Doctor are "Sicut enim maius est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita maius est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari." Aquinas was talking here of the "perfect" or best religious order, obviously referring to the Dominican Order.

By being conscious always of the notion of gratuity in the act of philosophizing, language and experience can be fused into a singular process of discourse building. In the discourse, language (form) and experience (content) become one in the same discourse wherein the dialectical relationship between language and experience ceases giving way to an interplay of the two dimensions complementing each other to the point of mutual identification.

Mystagogy necessarily involves thought. It is a thought process and thus, the mystagogue is basically a thinker. But his thinking is only concerned with the truth. He is not interested in converting his thought into an ideology or a discourse about his ideas with the aim of mobilizing or moving the readers to any kind of manipulative action. Mystagogy is beyond manipulation or civil mobilization that follows the traditional critical social paradigm of theory-praxis. In between and beneath theory-praxis is a special kind of experience, an experience of gratuitousness that does not in any way require reciprocity nor any kind of manipulation or conventional mobilization. Certainly as a thinker, the mystagogue communicates knowledge, but not a knowledge determined by critical or manipulative interests or interests of the limiting kind which necessarily are particular and thus, run the risk of being fragmentary. The experience of the mystic as narrated by his mystagogy is totalizing: dignifying, transcending and yet intimate and thus truly personal and participatory. There can be no interest as selfishness, critical theory-praxis manipulation and mobilization or as mere fancy. The experience that the mystic calls for compromise, existential assent, love.

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE AND JUSTIFYING IT

Mystagogy is the discursive sharing of the transcending, intimate and personal experience of God. It is not about God in Himself or *per se*. We could say that mystagogy, and mysticism as well, is about God as experienced by man. In fact, we could not engage in theology or God-Talk if we do not presuppose the fact that somehow He is experienced as a mystery of salvation. Philosophy does not necessarily have soteriological concerns,²⁹ which is the realm of a confessional theology,

²⁹ St Thomas Aquinas in *S.T.*, I, q.1, a.1, as already mentioned, distinguishes the theology of Aristotle from that of *Sacra Doctrina* basing himself on the soteriological question. However, there are certain philosophical systems that are concerned with

but it necessarily deals with experience. Likewise it has to be noted that, as in the case of Aristotle, theology is philosophy in its highest form though aconfessional. Experience is our contact with what is termed to be real. What is real is what is experienciable. Reality is the totality of all the experienciable including that which has already been experienced.³⁰ What is experienced should be the content of all philosophical discourses; its form must give the hint that what is contained is experienced.

The mystagogical process is a linguistic process of sharing with the purpose of teaching and leading with the gratuitousness of the sharing process having primordial importance. The mystagogical process presupposes the experience itself. In the mystagogical discourse, phenomenology (description without judgements or prejudices) and hermeneutics (experiential interpretation) are fused into a personal and transcending participation. This fusion is first of all expressed in symbols and these symbols are then fused into a text in such a way that a posterior sifting process would be necessary to distinguish symbol from text.

The very authenticity and intensity of the experience gives the symbolic text or textual symbolism its discursive nature. Discourse is based on power: power or virtue to share, to express and eventually, to justify and to convince in a scientific manner. This power is better conceptualized by authority guaranteed by the authenticity and intensity of the experience based on previous experiences, community and confessional context or acceptance and universal, humanistic appeal. Said authority is better enhanced if the mystagogue possesses philosophical formation. Said formation must be very theological. Theology is not just God-Talk or discourse about God, but it is above all GOD-TALKS. We theologians and philosophers can talk about God because God talks about Himself. The discourse of theologians and philosophers who talk about God, who do metaphysics in its highest form (a mystical

presenting soteriological models such as those in India: Yoga, Vedanta and in China: Dao De Jia (especially Zhuang Zi). In the West one could think of the Neoplatonic School (Plotinus) and even St Augustine, Boethius, the Pseudo-Dionysius, etc.

³⁰ I beg to disagree with E. Schillebeeckx who affirms that experience is always an interpreted experience. Cf. *Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World*. (London: SCM Press, 1980); *Idem., Church. The Human Story of God*. (New York, Crossroad, 1993), 15ss.

metaphysics or metaphysical mysticism) commences by description (phenomenology or purely narrative state) and then it develops as an interpretation (hermeneutics —wherein the narrative becomes a history) geared towards assimilation (experienciologizing —wherein the described and interpreted are fused and assimilated in an experiential discourse) for the reader or listener. But this process necessarily presupposes a previous experienciology or assimilation on the part of the speaker or writer. This is the very foundation of mystagogical discourse as genuine theology: allowing God to talk in talking about Him after having listened and assimilated what God talked about in experience.

If the mystagogue allows God to talk in his experiential discourse then, the authenticity and intensity is enhanced further by:

1. The presence of a living and experiential God and not just a theoretical God;
2. The testimonial character which necessarily accompanies this conceptualization of theology;
3. A richer, more conceptualized, experiential and beautiful language open to inspiration and more applicable universally;
4. A greater attractive force to the secularized man in search of meaning in a secularized world.

The mystic, because he allows God to talk allows the liveliness, vitality of the experience of God in faith and communion to be something more palpable in his text, whereas the philosophy controls the thought and its discursivity and thus gives it the necessary organized manner (at least in presentation) and likewise offers criteria, guidelines for discernment, explanation, justification, interpretation.

The text does not contain the experience shared. The experience is beyond all symbols and texts though said symbols and texts point to the experience itself. The mystagogical discourse is in itself not an end, but only a means. The true mystagogue does not allow that his texts, his writings, his very own testimony would be a substitute to the very experience itself. Experience is the very horizon of the mystagogue, a horizon that does not only seek to fuse with other horizons, but that seeks to disappear in the sense that as one progresses the horizon vanishes or is constantly replaced to give way to a new and enriched one that is likewise enriching, expanding and creative.

We obviously cannot go beyond experience and enter or posit an idealist utopic world of ultra experience. Even science fiction presents us with possible, if not imagined, experienciabiles which need not be

actually experienced. By the mere fact they were imagined by experiential beings or persons, they are in themselves experienciabiles if only in the mind, but not in the shared history or experiential realm of everyone.

Given what we have just affirmed, many may categorize mystagogy as a merely fictional or literary experience found only in texts and that configure the imagination. Thus, God as an experience is only fiction or purely literary as what most mystical-mystagogical texts are.³¹ All mystagogical discourses start by being literary pieces. Literature is not everything that is written, but that what is written about a significant human experience with universal meaning, validation and outreach at the same time of individual intensity and authenticity.

THE THEODICEAL CONVERGENCE POINT OF MYSTAGOGY AS LITERATURE

The challenge is to go beyond the literary or the purely textual (form) and enter what is experiential (content). The presence of the discourse in itself is a call to go beyond the literary and the textual which are particular and historically conditioned in order to go to the universal and criteriological level. This does not imply that we must abandon our interests for forms. Forms are important. They are the modes of presentation and schematization of the experiential content. In the absence of said forms, the subject of the experience would not be comprehend his experience and himself as the subject of the experience. Neither could the experience as experienced by the subject be expressed or shared with others.

But forms, aside from their capacity to impose borderlines, could lead to distortion and/or reduction. The only plausible way to respond to the challenge we have just posed is to look for the form that would enhance and build-up the experiential content taking into account the urgent needs of today's secularized world hurt by the myths of postmodernism and its "pensiero debole."

There is the urgent need for a "strong" form that would speak of the experience of God as something strong, powerful, moving and revolutionizing. This power or virtue springs from the creativity of the

³¹ Cf. D. Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

mystic as a subject of the experience. His being subject of the experience necessarily funnels into a creativity that analyzes, assimilates and recreates circumstances and situations not necessarily by creating new ones, but by giving the circumstances that surround human life a renewed touch. It is our belief that the form of discourse qualified to meet these demands is theodiceal.

Since we are talking about the experiential God, we have to justify this God. We have to be engaged in a Theodicy. Nowadays, the Leibnizian sense of the word would fall short of what the current situation demands.³² Theodicy must be more than just a justification of God amidst evil (Hick, Reichenbach). It must inquire as to whether God is still experientiable. Better said, it must look for ways and arguments in order to affirm that God is indeed and truly experientiable. By asking whether God is still experientiable, man inquires as to whether God is still real or could be considered as such given the axiological demands of the times.

At first glance, Theodicy could be considered as tantamount to the form of apologetic discourse in the face of the contemporary challenge of affirming God's experientiability. Theodicy, however, is more than just mere apologetics. There is nothing to defend or apologize about. On the contrary, there is something to be proclaimed. Philosophy (since Theodicy is a philosophical venture and responsibility) must be a kerygmatic process of experience. Only what can be experienced can be taught and shared. Without this experientiability, it would be impossible to have a mystical experience. Neither would there be any mystagogical process. Said process consists in the construction of the discourse. Theodicy could be creatively regenerated as the justification of Spirituality, in the sense that justification be taken as discursiveness or discursive explicitation of something lived and commonly held to be private or internal and hardly expressed at all. Theodicy then becomes or could become, as a form of discourse, the ideal tool to narrate mystical experiences mystagogically. Theodicy could only prosper, within a secularized context, as a testimony of a profound spiritual experience and thus, be a mystagogical discourse! Genuine theodicy is mystagogical: it presupposes the assimilated experience previous to the springing forth of said experience into description and interpreta-

³² G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy. Essays on the Freedom of Man, the Goodness of God and the Origin of Evil*. W. Stark ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

tion towards another assimilation. It is like the Plotinian journey of the solitary to the solitary; an *exitus-reditus* scheme.

The theodiceal dimension gives the mystagogical discourse its effective power especially in overcoming the frontiers imposed, not only by cultural, geographical and sociological factors, but above all by modernity and secularization. This dimension insists not only in the transcendence of God, but in the fullness of man within said level of transcendence in participation, full freedom, full realization especially in terms of knowing, experiencing and appreciating in the sense that the reader of the mystagogical text is invited to be creative like the mystagogue in narrating the presence of the human elevating and glorifying transcendence in his very life. Said theodiceal dimension is like a trampolin, better said, a creative point of departure in the consideration of the reader or the one initiated mystagogically in the consideration, description, interpretation and projection of his very own experiences in dialogue not only with the mystagogical text but also with his own circumstances, contemporaries and particular historicity.

THEMATICAL VARIATIONS AND MYSTAGOGICAL CONSISTENCIES

There are various forms or *genera* of talking about God for today's world situation.³³ Our discourse could be narrative in character in the sense that it has to above all tell a story. Basically, all discourses are narrative in the sense that they fundamentally relate and describe. It is only later on that our discourses become dogmatic usually as an apologetical response to an adverse intellectual or otherwise situation. That being the case, it is also feasible to construct a normative discourse wherein we touch on certain norms and practices that are missing and could form solutions to the present theological-theodiceal crisis. When a normative discourse imposes, it acquires a legislative nature. This kind of discourse may be considered as the praxis of any dogmatic discourse. Likewise a sapiential discourse is possible and likewise necessary, since in these times of great questioning man is in constant search for the meaning of his existence. In the same light, said discourses must also be proverbial in character in the sense that they are tasked to build bridges over different perspectives and tempo-

³³ I have partly adopted and followed the schema of M. Maceiras Fafián, "Dios en la filosofía de Paul Ricouer" in Various, *Filosofía de la Religión*. (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1994), 691-692.

ralities in order to shed light on the present situation and its "lack" of God's presence given that previously God was "present" in the world.

The aforementioned are merely forms. Indeed there are various forms. There is an abyss between form and content. The content must be experiential in nature. But what could be the basis of the experiential content of a discourse? Through the content, the historicity, circumstantiality and accidentality of the forms are transcended and transfigured in a transcendental, immanent, intimate and personal process. Said necessary basis could only be found in the very roots or sources of the discourse. Who is the one speaking or constructing the discourse?

Nowadays, taking into account the various possible forms of discourse making, all of them must be prophetic in nature. To be a prophet does not mean to be an astrologer nor a fortune teller; it means being the spokesman of another who has a very important message to impart. To be the spokesman of another necessarily entails being a witness of the gratuitousness of the Other in one's own life. Thus, the witness becomes also a sharer in the gratuity; he becomes the subject of experience. His discourse building qualifies him as a teacher, as a sharer of the experience. Therefore, the prophet is truly a mystagogue in the fullest sense of the word.

Mystagogy makes the best theodicy because it is necessarily the translation into discourse of a theophanical experience, the root of religious phenomenon (Eliade), as something not only witnessed or viewed, but assimilated and accepted.

Theophanies are gratuitous experiences. Philosophy would only reach its grandeur upon realizing the true value of all human efforts to rationally understand and explain, by means of models, reality. Said true value is only transparent in the light of the acknowledgement that reality is gratuitous. Man may approach it. But said approach would not been possible if reality, taken as a whole and as a context, did not make the first inviting move. Man's approach hopefully will eventually end up in an intimate, profound and personal assimilation. The process towards this kind of assimilation is nothing else but Spirituality.

More than just searching for the truth (which is quite generic), the philosopher is tasked to present his fellowmen with models and schema in order to understand the reality that they are experiencing. Said models and schema could be collectively labeled as "modes of ex-

periencing." This presupposes that the philosopher has had an intense and authentic experience of reality. Truly, the philosopher is (must be) a mystagogue in every sense of the word. He should be a prophet... a spokesman for the reality of the experience. Though he may be the subject of the experience, he must always be aware of the gratuity of the experience. Thus, the experience is not exclusively his; it was given to him in order to be shared. Indeed, the philosopher must be a teacher... one who shows the experience and the way to it. But he must also be an experienced teacher. Experience, in the enriching sense of the word or as an accumulation of learning moments, is the guarantee that the teacher would "speak clearly, with love and integrity, with lesser words and always committed with these words."³⁴

Taking all this into consideration, the following are the coordinates charted and touched by the journey narrated by the mystagogical discourse:

1. The totality of reality with God, reality as HE is, as the centerpoint, source and finality.
2. The personal history of the mystagogue.
3. The human experience as a whole and as the experience addressed by the discourse.
4. The organization of the text and the dynamic and flexibility of the process in the experiential text.
5. The invitation to follow, to read, to persevere and to go on in the process.
6. The credibility of the experience in its text as a whole and in its various moments and dimensions.

TRINITAS: CONVERGING POINT OF A CHRISTIAN MYSTAGOGY AND ITS THEODICEAL NATURE

We are aware that these reflections will not convince everyone. By citing the example of the Buddhists, many could legitimately claim that mysticism is not exclusive of theism but is also the experience of atheists. For them *nirvana* is the ultimate reality. God or the ultimate reality, from an all-comprehending viewpoint, need not be a person. It

³⁴ S. Juan Bautista de la Concepción, *La llaga de amor*. II, 2. I am using this critical edition: *Obras Completas I: Escritos Espirituales*. J. Pujana & A. Llamazares (eds.) (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1995).

could be a concept, a value, a state, a non-state, etc. But being a Christian, this writer believes that only in being a person could there be experiential plenitude. Earlier in this essay, we alluded to the notion of person within a trinitarian context. Thus, a non-personal notion of mystical experience and experience in general is quite imperfect and empty from our viewpoint. The *Anatta* Doctrine of Buddhism is *Anatta*, emptiness! How could *nirvana* or bliss be non-existence or totally empty? But we do (and must) respect the way of thinking of others.

Experiences are for persons and persons are experiences in themselves. Thus, God for us, the object of mystical experience, must be a person. Indeed He is. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For a Christian, the ultimate experience should be trinitarian. The Trinity is a mystery of faith. Many would say that it is not the realm of philosophy. We beg to disagree. Philosophy is love of wisdom. In the Trinity, we see God-love Himself in Three Persons. And God is the infinite source of Wisdom and is Wisdom in Himself. We then could say, with St John of the Cross who was Mystic, Theologian, Master of Spirituality and Philosopher, that "...to philosophize is to love God, to philosophize about the divine flame of love is to experience this divine flame of love by loving it."³⁵

Genuine Christian mysticism attains its fullness in the experience of God as Trinity.³⁶ The most urgent task of Christian mysticism consists in being a more and more explicit trinitarian experience to be transmitted, taught and shared to others. "Man is mystery precisely because, though limited, he is a seeker after limitless being. He is seeking thus not just himself, or the being which makes him exist, but he is seeking someone who is other than himself, one whose essence is to be precisely limited."³⁷ The Mystery of God as Trinity provides the firmest ontological basis in order to respond to the mystery of man especially in terms of being a reality, experiencing, relating, being a person open, creative, open and loving.

³⁵ *II Dark Night* 10, 2. Cf. M. Ofilada Mina, "Philosophy and Spirituality: Reflections from St John of the Cross" in *Studies in Spirituality* 6 (1996), 145-152.

³⁶ Cfr. Various, *Trinidad y Vida Mística*. (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1982). This is the best collective volume on the relationship Trinity-Mysticism.

³⁷ F. Imoda, *Human Development. Psychology and Mystery*. (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 39.

Is the present time not the "kairós" for rediscovering the Trinity: God in Three Divine Persons loving each other eternally as the supreme model of philosophizing? What is philosophy if not love of wisdom? Is not the Trinity God, Source of all Wisdom, loving himself in three divine persons? Truth could only be personal and thus, it is experientiable and real. Shouldn't we strive to love wisdom ascending from the wisdom of this world to the wisdom of the cross where the Trinity shared man's radical finitude in Christ? This paschal event was perfected in the Resurrection wherein the Trinity glorified and divinized man in the Resurrection of the Incarnate Word. The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Death may be for some the last of all the potentialities of man, but it is the openness to the resurrection of the flesh, the triumph of the Word, Wisdom Incarnate.

In this essay, we attempted to propose a methodological innovation: the exploration of the possibility of philosophy as a mystagogy especially in one of its branches or dimensions: Theodicy. This possibility urgently needs to be further elaborated and explored. We would be happy if this essay would call the attention of better prepared scholars to said possibility.

But should there not be a Christian Theodicy wherein the discourse gushes out from a radical, intense and authentic experience of the Christian God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Or do the mentioned theodices exist mainly in the writings of Christian mystics and saints which are waiting for us to be discovered and read using the theodiceal, in as much as it is mystagogical and therefore necessarily a testimonial paradigm? If a theodiceal discourse is deeply rooted in an authentic and intense experience of God, it could be said that said discourse is a discourse of Spirituality. All discourses of Spirituality innately are pedagogical, i.e., mystagogical in nature. For Christians, the God that is spoken of or narrated in said experiential discourse is necessarily trinitarian, i.e., personal, relational and experiential. A mystagogical discourse of Christian Spirituality presupposes the experience of participation in the trinitarian life. This life is the factor that makes the Christian experience singular, unique and geared towards the insuperable fullness which is nothing else but union or salvation.³⁸

³⁸ Ch. A. Bernard, "La natura della teologia spirituale" in E. Gutiérrez de Cea, O.P. (ed.), *Compendio di teologia spirituale*, o.c., 93.

With the Trinity as focal point, center point, starting point and end the following dimensions of Christian experience are necessarily highlighted by the mystagogical discourse:

1. The Revelation of the Triune God in the Experience of God made man.
2. The Union of God and Man with the Experience of God made man.
3. The Union of Men as an assembly, community within the Experience of God made man.
4. The Experience of God made man being experienced today by sacramental, mysterious means.
5. The Experience of God made man as an existential compromise with a concrete, compromised and faithful way of life.
6. Said way of life in the Experience of God made man as harmony with all that is created whose summit is Man, the glory of God and the Man in whom God became Human as its saving and perfecting point and personality.
7. The perfection of man as Experience of God *through, with, and in* the Experience of God made man.

God became man in order that man would become like God. This is the mystical drama. This is the Trinitarian commitment with mankind. Said commitment is indeed an existential and experiential drama that passes through the following stages which are then (or must be) narrated by the Christian mystagogue:

1. *God and man in union*: This relational dimension occupies first place above all.
2. *Jesus Christ*: Necessary mediator and the fullness of God as experience of man and fullness of man as experience of God.
3. *Faith-Hope-Love*: The driving forces for the compromise.
4. *Commitment / Option*: or Asceticism —not only denial, suffering, but continuous commitment, lifeliving and lifegiving acts.
5. *Process*: The concrete path of the existential choice and commitment.
6. *Transformation*: I prefer the term "Transfiguration" because, just like the experience on Mt Tabor, there is an anticipation of future glory or perfection and fulfillment. The realization of the processual dimension of compromise and is fulfilled in the union between God

and man, between the Triune God and man, between Mystery and mystery.

But mystagogy, as such, though it relays the lived message, and in the Christian tradition said message is trinitarian, it is necessarily limited with the following ironical or better said, contrasting characteristics:

- It is *mystical*, but does not assure that the reader or listener will become automatically a mystic though it must necessarily relay the mystical notwithstanding the limitations of language;

- It is *theological* and *confessional*, though not imposing and not necessarily abounding in technical terminology and systems;

- It is *literary*, without necessarily being technical, but truly highly readable though its true beauty requires a refined and educated sensibility. This literary quality is enhanced by a critical approach to reading;³⁹

- It is *psychological*, though it does not offer a ready made, universal, generalized diagnosis but helps in understanding the person all the more especially the person's dimension and reality as a mystery;

- It is *scientific*, again without necessarily being technical, but definitely objective, justifiable and corresponding coherently to a certain criteria for confirming or even falsifying (Popper);

- It is *philosophical*, without (necessarily) being attached to a particular school or thinker, but may use their insights and this philosophical characteristic guarantees: a) critical thinking in terms of discernment and logic, b) it puts wisdom over factual knowledge, and c) it is hinged on experience and yet giving it conceptualization not only for expressing, but mainly for an assimilating experiential comprehension.

Thus, for the Christian, the experience of the Trinity is mystical, theological and confessional, literary, psychological, scientific and philosophical.

³⁹ Three works have been helpful in forming a global vision about this matter namely: T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); R. Selden, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); M. Steele, *Critical Confrontations. Literary Theories in Dialogue*. (Carolina: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1997).

Let us end this article with a question wherein Philosophy, Theology, Spirituality and Mysticism need to converge and combine forces⁴⁰: Is not the Trinity the Narrative, the Experiential History of a Loving, Personal and Relational God in Three Persons? □

⁴⁰ Cf. M. Ofilada Mina, "Dios para creer y para pensar: La Trinidad como punto de convergencia epistemológica de la teología y de la filosofía," in *Philippiniana Sacra* XXXIII, 99 (1998), 461-494.