

Language, Message and Spirit: Philosophical Perspectives on Spirituality as Communication through Mystagogy¹

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"No el mucho saber harta y satisface al ánima, mas el sentir y gustar de las cosas internamente."

St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Ejercicios Espirituales*, 2.

"...Venirme a deshora un sentimiento de presencia de Dios... Esto no era manera de visión; creo lo llaman mística teología."

St. Teresa of Jesus, *Libro de la Vida*, 10, 1.

"Los metafísicos y contemplativos vuelven y vuelven, y son englobados, confundidos con los místicos, ya por su parte confundidos en este aire hostil de Occidente."

María Zambrano, *Notas de un método*.

Writes José Ortega y Gasset: *"Ahora bien, la tendencia de la filosofía es de dirección opuesta. No le interesa sumergirse en lo profundo, como la mística, sino al revés, emerge de lo profundo"*

¹ Admittedly, my recent book, *Filosofía, Lenguaje, Mística: Desde las entrañas del espíritu*. (Manila: Academia Filipina de la Lengua Española-Giraffe Books, 2008), has provided me with the stimulus for this brief essay, which I wish to dedicate to the memory of an inspiring and generous friend, who helped me believe in myself, and who has unselfishly helped edit my works: Jesús González Valles, OP (†2007).

a la superficie... Now then, the tendency of philosophy is the opposite direction. It is not interested in the profound, like mysticism, but the reverse, it emerges from the depths to the surface."² The foremost Spanish thinker of the twentieth century clearly had a phenomenological concept of philosophy and a narrow concept or knowledge of Mysticism. Philosophy, for this great philosopher of our time, reveals. It does not hide. Mysticism, for Ortega in the text we have just cited, hides.

Hiding has become the most sublime art. Art, in fact, nowadays is mastery of hiddenness. It must not be overt, expressive. It must conceal its truth, its craft. This has put into crisis the modernist heritage of expressivity and openness, which has culminated in the Age of Enlightenment. After this great era, we are confronted with hiddenness and thus, a revival of the art of interpretation or hermeneutics, parting from the phenomenological character of reality, i.e., that it is open to unveiling (*offenbarung*) or revelation (*revelatio*).

Many would argue that we have seen the end of modernity or are actually living in postmodern times. Others would simply state that modernity is an unfinished project and that we are constantly rebuilding the question of the "modos" or mode or fashion in a consistent renewal process with its inevitably historical ups and downs, twists and turns.³ Modernity and postmodernity highlights the question of communication, especially within the context of rationality or of man's rational action within society.⁴ In these so-called postmodern times, can anything be worth communicating be communicated? Is there anything worth communicating? Is communicating possible? Have we not enclosed

² J. Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas VII*. Madrid: Editorial Alianza, 1987, 342.

³ Cfr. D. Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. Also: S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture. An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

⁴ Cfr. J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981. Also: Several Authors, *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas' 'The Theory of Communicative Action'*. Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1991.

ourselves in our own fragmentary natures such that fragmentation may have resulted not only in the absence of that which is to be communicated but also of the possible of communication given that fragmentation could have resulted in isolation?

The present exploratory essay, with a programmatic and yet tentative projection – or it outlines how philosophy should proceed from the backdrop of the modernist heritage and the post-modernist consciousness – though taking into consideration these debates⁵, only considers them as the backgrounders for what is truly in question here: *Is it legitimate for us to understand mystagogy as the communicative dimension of spirituality that takes a concrete form?*

For starters, mystagogy puts into crisis the bias of many, as captured by Ortega, against mysticism. Mystagogy necessarily implies openness, revelation, communication and participation.

To address this concern, it is necessary that account the key question of modernity: the question of the dominance of the self.

Spirituality and the Question of the Self

In spirituality, both as an academic discipline and as a lived experience, there are two constants: the Absolute Self (which various traditions, including the Christian-wherein the following reflections were developed-call the Personal God)⁶ and the Finite and Culpable Self, identified with man: given his rationality and his imperfection finds himself existentially writing his history as a search for meaning, which could only be attained in relation (or specifically in communion) with the Absolute Self.

⁵ For a competent overview, see: P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, New Edition, New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 1-13. Also by the same author: *Spirituality and Theology. Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*. London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1998, 6-14.

⁶ With regards to the Personal God, from the Christian tradition, from the viewpoint of spirituality and theology, I find timely this article by S. Guerra: 'El misterio trinitario como tema teológico-espiritual', in: *Revista de Espiritualidad* 60 (2001), 49-73. Also: R. Maisonneuve, *Les mystiques chrétiens et leurs visions de Dieu un et trine*. Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 2000; X. Pikaza, *Enchiridion Trinitatis*. Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2005.

The variables depend on the context which take form⁷ in schools, situations, cultures, institutions, systems, etc.

Spirituality is precisely the dynamic process, amidst the aforementioned contexts or forms, usually symbolized as a way, that takes place in history that speak of the relationability between the Absolute Self and the finite and culpable self, called to participate in the life of the former and wherein the former takes the initiative in inviting the latter to communion with it and wherein the latter responds positively, therefore carving out concrete realizations in its diverse historical forms to attain such a communion involving the metaphysical principles behind such a realization, the cosmological, anthropological-psychological realization itself in its diverse modalities, and the ethico-moral norms that govern and serve as a criteria to the same realizations.

The finite and culpable self must constantly remind itself of its status of finitude and culpability, to protect itself from the hubris of the Enlightenment, in as much as spirituality, inevitably, parts from a *cogito* with a claim to the Absolute Self. The finite and culpable self must always remind itself that it is not the foundation nor the aim. In other words, the *cogito* is not the guarantee of Spirituality but the gratuity of the Absolute Self who allows Himself to be experienced as the Supreme Reality in as much as it is Real in itself and the Real in itself as Reality in the supreme degree in the gratuity of the Spirit. The Spirit is the gratuity of experience; it is the self as it gives itself experientially and journeys accompanying the human self, the totality of the finite and culpable self, in its projection to participate in the Absolute Self. The human spirit is not the guarantee, the Supreme Self, but it is the protagonist of the adventure of Spirituality and the task of communication parts from this necessary lesson of humility.⁸

Nevertheless, to attain such a realization there exists the need for a vital recourse: communication, specifically of the experiential

⁷ Cfr. the interesting reflections of K. Waaijman on form in spirituality, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. (A. Vriend trans.) Louvain: Peeters, 2002, 11-303.

⁸ Cfr. E. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1983).

content⁹ in its cosmological (objective and ontological dimension), historical (contextual and cultural dimension) and anthropological-psychological (subjective dimension) modalities of the Absolute Self, taken as a Mystery – because of its inherent transcendence and its presence within the immanence of the finite and culpable self-in its act of mediation, in its act of allowing itself to be experienced with the finality of bringing the other (the finite and culpable self) to the fullness of sharing in this same experience. This sharing is inevitably theological, for it participates in the Absolute's experiential self-disclosure as God in revelation which is an experiential event. The Absolute, in as much as it communicates itself experientially, i.e., allows itself to be experienced, creates a communicative mediation of itself as experientiable within the immanent coordinates of the finite and culpable self, inviting a rational response (*logos*) which is labeled as theological, in terms of participation in the *logos* or the communicative word of the Absolute as God.¹⁰

By communication, the Absolute Self presents itself as Spirit and calls the finite and culpable self to be spirit. To be 'Spirit' does not mean being immaterial. Spirituality is not a way of immateriality, but of integration, of integral directedness towards that which is transcendental, the Absolute Self. St Augustine would say that one should make one's interior man live with his guest not with carnal desires, but with spiritual fruits, meaning implicating one's exteriority and interiority, within the cosmos¹¹, in the same projection towards transcendence,

⁹ On this regard, I have taken into consideration these words of the Spanish scholar F. Ruiz: 'La mistagogía presta mayor atención al contenido espiritual y a sus modalidades de comunicación', 'Funciones y dinámica de la teología espiritual', in: Several Authors, *La teología espiritual. Atti del congresso internazionale*. OCD Rome: Ed. del Teresianum, 2001, 669. Cfr. also: G. Uríbarri, 'La mistagogía y el futuro de la fe cristiana', in: *Razón y Fe* 239 (1999), 141-150.

¹⁰ The reflections of P. Coda on this regard are worth taking into consideration, cfr. 'Il ruolo della ragione nei diversi modelli teologici: verso un modello ermeneutico di teologia?', in: Several Authors, *Il sapere teologico e il suo modello. Teologia, ermeneutica e verità*. Bologna: EDB, 1993, 113-139.

¹¹ Cfr. V.J. Bourke, 'St. Augustine and the Cosmic Soul', in: *Giornale di metafisica* 9 (1954), 431-440.

which offers relationally and personally itself as Veritas or Truth.¹² Spirituality is the Absolute Self tending towards itself in love, in desire (*eros*) and is the call to the finite and culpable self to be spirit, to be directed, with a view to communion, to this Absolute Self, who offers Himself as Spirit. For the Christian tradition, the Absolute Self as Spirit is God: who is Spirit and Person, who is the Principle (Father) and is the Word made Flesh (Son) and is the Force that remains to animate the finite and culpable Self (Holy Spirit). The Trinity is the Truth of God who is Love by which man can know and participate in Him and participate and know in the cosmos, the totality of everything that is.¹³ As St Thomas Aquinas says: "*Omnia cognoscentia cognoscunt Deum implicite in quolibet cognitio: nihil est cognoscibile nisi per similitudinem primae veritatis.*"¹⁴

Spirituality, in view of this, if it is to be Christian makes use of a mystical approach, wherein this Absolute Self, who is God, Spirit and Person, is relational in Jesus Christ, whose history is the very act of revelation of the One and Triune God.¹⁵ Spirituality is a relational experience and because of this it must be understood above all as a communication. In effect, spirituality is communication; it is mystagogy. Spirit is not a term of distance or distantiation, it is closeness, intimacy, with the Absolute implying the cultivation or care of the self in relation to this Absolute, who allows Himself to be experienced mediatively in a loving communicative way which is initiation into the dynamics

¹² St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, 39, 72. Cfr. the study of L.F. Ladaria, 'Persona y relación en el 'De Trinitate' de San Agustín', in: *Miscelánea Comillas* 30 (1972), 246-291.

¹³ Cfr. G. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott: eine Trinitarische Theologie*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2001; L.F. Ladaria, *El Dios vivo y verdadero*. Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1998; C. LaCugna, *God For Us. The Trinity and Christian Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991; X. Pikaza, *Dios como espíritu y persona*. Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 1988; W.J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982.

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, XII, art. 2 ad 1um.

¹⁵ Cfr. X. Pikaza, 'Experiencia religiosa, historia de Jesús y revelación trinitaria', in: *Estudios Trinitarios* 13 (1979), 19-93.

of the Absolute and communication of its very integral life in life: mystagogy, at the same time underscoring that the Absolute transcends us, transcends our "scheme of things." This Absolute comes. Admittedly, here we are echoing Heidegger's dictum of "*Das Kommen des Anfangs...* The Coming of the Principle."¹⁶ At this point, it is worth the while to take into consideration the following paragraphs from Karl Rahner:

The mystical approach of which we are speaking must impart the correct 'image of God', based upon the accepted experience of man's basic orientation to God, the experience that the basis of man's existence is the abyss: that God is essentially the inconceivable; that his inconceivability grows, and yet does not derogate from the fact that the more rightly God is understood the more nearly does his self-bestowing love touch us; the experience that in mapping the course of one's life one can never confine God to specific points in it without being brought up against the fact that when one does so the sum fails to come out right; the experience that he only becomes our 'happiness' when we pray to him and love him unconditionally; but also the fact that he cannot be defined as a dialectical negation of the affirmative 'thrown up' by our *experiences*, for instance that he is not simply the one who is remote as opposed to one who is near, nor to be thought of as the diametrical antithesis to the world, but rather that he transcends such oppositions. Our basic orientation to him is more primary, then, and prior to all such dialectical opposites, and this has the effect that he wills to be and is 'our' God in an act of absolute self-bestowal and grace as he who is 'so and not otherwise', without becoming involved in the complexities of our dialectic.

The mystical approach of which we have been speaking must teach us in the concrete to maintain a constant closeness to *this* God; to say 'thou' to him, to commit ourselves to his silence and darkness, not to be anxious lest we may lose him by the very fact of calling him by a name, as though he cannot, if he wills (as in fact he has willed also enter into our eternal duality precisely because he does not constitute one

¹⁶ Cfr. M. Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens (1910-1976). Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 13. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976ss.

element among others in our scheme of things. It must teach us that he does not belong to any specific place in our scheme of things... Such an essentially *Christian* approach to mysticism must, of course, also take cognisance of the place which Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen one, must occupy in it.¹⁷

In line with Ancient Greek philosophy, spirituality was care of the self. Recently, Michel Foucault echoed this dictum (*souci de soi*).¹⁸ The cultivation of the self as spirit, in relation to the Absolute, is, in effect, care for the self. The self is the subject of the good life. It is geared towards the fulfillment of itself: the good life, which is the goal of spirituality. The self, as protagonist of an adventure or journey of the good life towards the good in itself (*agathon*), was an artisan who had to cultivate certain skills or crafts or customs or backgrounds (culture) in order to discipline himself (*ascesis*). The self, thus, constructed by means of culture, the art of the good life, which consists in communion with the Absolute (*koinonia*).

Spirituality, in effect, is the art of the good life. The self is the basic truth in search of the Absolute Truth. Spirituality charts this path animated by the love of this Truth, which is liveable and attainable. This liveable and attainable Truth, in as much as it is possessed or participated in with regards to the Absolute in communion, is lived out and not just an abstract entity. Thus, it becomes *sophia* or wisdom. Wisdom is the Truth, shared and participated, as lived out by the self, in the context of the good life, in the context of the care and cultivation of the self as 'spirit'.¹⁹

¹⁷ K. Rahner, 'Christian Living Formerly and Today', in: *Theological Investigations. Vol. VII: Further Theology of the Spiritual Life 1*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1971, 15-16.

¹⁸ M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College of France 1981-1982* (G. Burchell trans.) New York: Picador, 2005, 17.

¹⁹ Admittedly, in some points, I have benefitted from the reflections of P. Ricœur, *Onself as Another*, (K. Blamey trans.) Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1992, 1-25.

Philosophical Perspective for Mystagogy: The Communication of the Truth²⁰

Philosophy commences as an epistemological quest.²¹ It is a quest for knowledge or the truth in its manifestation and use.²² As Ortega y Gasset would put it, philosophy is a 'curiosa aventura... or curious adventure'.²³ Why is it curious? Because 'it seeks out the universe. And the universe is something we do not know radically or what we absolutely ignore in its positive content.'²⁴ It means going out into the unknown. Philosophy begins with curiosity. It denotes taking risks. It is tasked with "*capturar el universo, cazar el unicornio...* to capture the universe, to hunt for the unicorn."²⁵

In philosophy, we are always students, we are always beginners. Beginners or neophytes are always in search: they hunt, they capture eventually they are the ones captured. To be a philosopher is to be a perpetual neophyte. In philosophy, we are always beginners. We are called to become teachers, communicators, mentors because we will always become students of life. Thus,

²⁰ I wish to begin these preliminary reflections with a word on philosophy, especially as the perspective for my approach in this essay. It is not just that I am advocating the primacy of philosophy among the disciplines. As a matter of fact, I advocate an interdisciplinary approach to maintain the relevance of philosophy in this postphilosophical age. Philosophy, together with the other disciplines, must always be subservient to the truth, to the communication of the truth. Philosophy, in relation to the other disciplines in the service of the truth, plays a fundamental role, i.e., it lays down the foundations on which the other disciplines stand in their specialized discourses. Because of this, philosophy is somewhat privileged. As the foundation stone, it has the primordial role of communicating such a foundation. In doing so, it lays down the foundation for the appreciation of the truth in its specialized forms.

²¹ I have taken into consideration some fundamental considerations from my article: 'Charity, Modernity and Anthropological Centrality in Saint Thomas of Villanova', in: *Philippiniana Sacra* 41 (2006), 609-632.

²² Cfr. J. Ortega y Gasset, *¿Qué es conocimiento?* Madrid: Alianza Ed., 1987.

²³ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas*. VII Madrid: Alianza Ed., 1987, 300.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

philosophy is a mystagogy, an initiation, a leading of the neophyte into the mystery.²⁶

Perennial beginners need an endless and consistent initiation in order to initiate others. Philosophy is always a beginning. It is a consistent initiation, not to master or dominate (which Heidegger and those who follow him call "thought" or *denken* as the perfection or overcoming of philosophy), but to contemplate (*theoria, contemplatio*): to participate in the Reality contemplated, thus always begins anew, though it begins at dusk, after the owl of Minerva has returned to its master in order to begin a new dawn. Thought aims to reduce the Absolute to the finite and culpable categories of the human spirit, whereas Contemplation seeks to participate in the Absolute in all its fullness, in its transcendence, parting from the spirit's own finitude and culpability.

Spirituality is the call of philosophy to perfect itself. Spirituality can be understood in two levels: a) that of *thought* or purely academic spirituality and b) that of *contemplation* or that of lived spirituality. Philosophy, given it is love of wisdom, is the most sublime activity of the spirit in its calling to be spirit in its fullness, in the vocation to possess the Truth. In the same vein, there are two alternatives: that of reducing the truth to one's cognitive categories (thought) or participating in its fullness (contemplation).

Spirituality is the process of consistent initiation. This consistency is what we label as "asceticism" in as much as it becomes concrete in acts, exercises, processes, options. This consistency needs to be always concrete in the experiential narrative called history which is the nucleus of what we call "life."

By what means? By means of communication. Communication has the finality of making the other correspond to the message so as to attain its dynamic and existential effect or finality. It is attunement to the message of the messenger. As Heidegger writes: '*Philosophia* is the

²⁶ Cfr. my study: 'Possible Relationship between Mystagogy and Philosophy and its Bearing on Theology and Spirituality', in: *Philippiniana Sacra* 34 (1999), 219-246; Idem., 'Distinguir para unir: Algunos presupuestos fundamentales para comprender la relación filosofía-mística', in: *Revista de Espiritualidad* 62 (2003), 439-468.

expressly accomplished correspondence (*Entsprechen*) which speaks in so far as it considers the appeal of the Being of being (*Sein des seiendens*). The correspondence listens to the voice of the appeal. What appeals to us as the voice of Being (*Stimme des Seins*) evokes our correspondence. 'Correspondence' then means: being determined, *être disposé* by that which comes from the Being of being.²⁷

In Spirituality, correspondence is always understood in terms of the communion between the Absolute Self and the finite and culpable self. In this sense, communion necessarily implies a pedagogy wherein there is a conversion of the information about the Mystery into a concrete modality of living and personal assimilation, which in turn is translated into the practical level by means of a gradual process and continuous growth on the part of the finite and culpable self, as spirit, in its quest for communion with the Absolute Spirit to take part (participate = *methexis* or *participatio*).²⁸

Communication presupposes the existence of the self who communicates. It is also the self who initiates, who leads another self. The self has been the great conquest, the great unicorn, the great universe of modernity.

The self of the mystagogue or the initiator, by means of communication, is the self of the mystic or the self as subject of the mystical experience. The mystic, or he (the finite and culpable spirit) who is called to fully participate in the Mystery in the fullness of its transcendence as Absolute Spirit is the subject of a mediation of the Absolute in its transcendence within the same subject's immanence. But this self is not isolated. He belongs to a community which from an epistemological viewpoint is a *community of learners*, from a religious standpoint is a *community of believers* (or worshippers) and from a methodological perspective is a *community of readers*.

The mystic is a person immersed in the Mystery. He does not live in isolation, but in a community. He is a self living with other selves in whose shared universe he lives. This shared universe is what

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (W. Kluback & J.T. Wilde trans.) New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958, 75-77.

²⁸ F. Ruiz, *Caminos del Espiritu*, 5th ed., Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1998, 10.

we commonly call 'world.' It is the venue for communication to build up the essence of community (*communio* or *koinonia*). Mysticism is communion characterized by full participation, wherein the whole human person, in its historical immanence, enjoys in participating in the Person of the Absolute, in its transcendence. This participation involves the wholeness being of both man and the Absolute or God, going beyond the totality dictated by ontology and entering into the beyondness of metaphysics, wherein the Mystery remains ineffable and whose Name cannot be pronounced and yet is the very language of man as he partakes of it.²⁹

Participation makes the Absolute and man 'Spirit'. Spirit is wholeness called to participate, to be in communion, to feel in the wholeness the loving self-giving of each other. Spirit is not just an object of experience, but is the modality of the experience.³⁰

This world is a world of language or the self as a communicative center that becomes concretes in relational structures immersed in the contextual structure called culture. These structures are exclusive and are only meant to those who share the experiential patterns delineated by said structures such that there is a necessity for initiation, for pedagogy (*mystes* = mystery; *agoge* = teaching or leading).

From a mystical and mystagogical viewpoint this initiation brings about understanding (as the intellectual status of being initiated) and comprehension (as the criteriological verification of the same intellectual status) into the Mystery.

The last paragraphs of A. de Saint-Exupéry's famous fable *The Little Prince* drive home this point: 'Here, then, is a great mystery (*un bien grand mystère*). For you who also love the little prince, and for me, nothing in the universe can be the same if somewhere, we do not know where, a sheep that we never saw has –yes or no? – eaten a rose... Look up at the sky. Ask yourselves: is it yes or no? Has the sheep eaten the flower? And you will see how everything changes (*tout change*)...

²⁹ Cfr. J. Kellenberg, 'The Ineffabilities of Mysticism', in: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973), 201-211; C. Appleby, 'Mysticism and Ineffability', in: *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 2 (1990), 143-166.

³⁰ X. Pikaza, *Experiencia religiosa y cristianismo. Introducción al misterio de Dios*. Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1981, 448.

And no grown-up will ever understand that this is a matter of so much importance (*et aucune grande personne ne comprendra jamais que ça a tellement d'importance*)!³¹ In other words, only the initiated would understand! Especially the changes in the self, the growth of the self into the Absolute, which empirical yardsticks and material axiologies cannot measure. Thus it is important to always have a transcendental viewpoint which Saint-Exupéry captures with the words: *Regardez le ciel...* Look up at the sky (or look at the sky).³²

The communication on the part of the subject of a mystical experience, the subject of a mediation of the Absolute in its transcendence within the self's immanence transcends the conventional structures governing language, expression and even experiencing. The most eloquent manifestation of such a communication is silence! Silence is not refusal to talk. Silence is returning from the long path to talking and allowing the word to have its plenitude in just mediating beyond conceptualizations.

And this notion of silence is signified by the sky with the solitary star which Saint-Exupéry, reflecting the nostalgia for the Absolute given its absence, its disappearance back into the sky like the Little Prince, is the "*plus beau et le plus triste paysage du monde...* the most beautiful and saddest landscape in the world."

Ortega y Gasset did not mince words in his criticism of the mystics because of their silence before the mystery and yet acknowledged that they were the greatest writers in Spanish literature.³³ Mysticism is the most eloquent testimony of the struggle to make the experience speak in its transcendence. It is ineffable because of the mediation of the transcendental in the immanence of human experience and language.

This brings about the task of mystagogy: to bear witness by teaching (by communicating) the power of the Word of the Mystery over the limitations expressed in silence without the

³¹ A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (K. Woods trans.) London: Mammoth, 2001, 89.

³² One is reminded of the Augustinian attitude in contemplation, cfr. F. Cayré, *La contemplation augustinienne*. Paris: A. Blot, 1927.

³³ See his famous essay: 'Defensa del teólogo frente al místico', in: *Obras Completas* V Madrid: Alianza, 1987.

intention of annihilating this silence, but to make it speak in its depths even going against or beyond linguistic convention. Mystagogy expresses the power of the self not simply as a subject of the experience, but as a sharer of the experience.

The perfection of the experience or mediation of the Absolute in its transcendence within the immanence of human finitude and culpability does not consist in the establishment of the self as subject of the experience, but in the establishment of the self as the sharer of the experience. Sharing is what makes mysticism latent in all of us.³⁴

Plato's classic allegory of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic* captures the mystagogical nature of philosophy. The philosopher who escapes from the hold of the deceitful images, struggles with the comfort of the darkness and enters into his own 'dark night', the bright light of the fullness of truth, which for Plato is the *agathon* or good. This dark night establishes him as a subject of the experience.

Yet the philosopher returns to the darkness. He must go back to the darkness. There is no other alternative! He returns to the darkness to share his illumination though his fellow human beings do not wish to listen to him even to the extent of opting to assassinate the liberator. The darkness is the world or the shared universe. The brightness was the universe to be conquered. It was too bright, thus it was too dark at first for the philosopher. No words were enough to speak of the brightness, but there was a communicative act, starting with the return to the darkness.

If the philosopher were able to lead his fellow men to the light, he would not have only expanded their world into the unknown, but would have also made his fellow men transcend their finitude and culpability and become subjects of the experience themselves. This transcending or metaphysical movement, going beyond the conditionality of finitude and culpability which

³⁴ H. Bergson speaks of a mystical element latent in all of us, 'Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion, in: *Oeuvres*. Paris: Ed. du centenaire, 1959, 1059-1060.

establishes the human subject vis-à-vis the Absolute, is the movement of spirituality. Adopting Levinas's terms with caution in this context, it entails going beyond the totality of ontology and entering into first philosophy (or metaphysics) in the Infinite.³⁵

In the mystagogical vocation, within the context of the development of philosophy as a spirituality, we find the purpose of philosophy within this postmetaphysical or even postphilosophical era, wherein all foundations have disappeared. Philosophy must rediscover its ancient vocation to lay the foundations for our comprehension of reality. Comprehension, especially in the light of the Absolute made present as Mystery, always takes place in a linguistic activity.³⁶ But this reality has to be experienced in its transcendence within our immanence, especially in the Ultimate or Absolute degree.

Doubtless, this implies a return to what is hidden. It is a return to the darkness. It is hidden from the superficial viewpoint of our finite and culpable condition. It is hidden but it is present. This presence establishes the Absolute as Mystery. Its hiddenness is its dimension of transcendence from the viewpoint of our finitude and culpability, which is the inevitable starting point that must be overcome.

To overcome this obstacle, which is the inevitable point of departure, we (the philosopher) must transcend, make a metaphysical move within ourselves, by discovering within ourselves our metaphysical vocation as philosophers, as men of the Spirit.

This is where spirituality comes in. In the wake of the so-called postmodern downfall of systematic philosophy, which is the crowning glory of the Hegelian Enlightenment with the Cartesian vision of the self asserting its existence passing through the Kantian refinement of the self in the level of action from transcendental deduction, it is possible to do philosophy, to affirm the truth, not as something to be conquered but as a Mystery

³⁵ Cfr. E. Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Exteriorité*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961.

³⁶ Cfr. G.L. Hallet, 'Mistica e filosofia linguistica', in: Several Authors, *Mistica e misticismo oggi*, Rome, 1979.

ever present in its transcendence within our immanence, which Spinoza claims is contingent: "The essence of man does not involve necessary existence; that is, from the order of Nature it is equally possible that a certain man exists or does not exist."³⁷ In this presence, it is a Mystery not just to be experienced (or to be converted into a mere object of experience), but it is Mystery in which and by which we experience, in which we are mediated to be realities possessing the quality of being real.

Far from digging the grave of philosophy, we announce its immortality in mystagogy: in the vocation of leading others to the truth, to communicate the truth as Mystery and not reducible to empirical or idealist or abstract standards. The Mystery goes beyond the Husserlian guarantee of the certainty of the existence of God parallel to the same guarantee of subjectivity in the existence of the Cartesian *cogito*.³⁸

Mysticism, in its rootedness in the Mystery, and in its dynamism as Spirituality, is the announcement of the new life of philosophy. It is a new life in the sense that it announces a new transparency, that is above all experiential (experience as mediation of the Real as Reality and of Reality as the Real) in a semantic, reflective and existential level. This means that philosophy has a new *semantics* as a way of the spirit. Philosophy is *reflective* since it calls upon the self as the protagonist of such a way in which the self grows and sees itself consciously and in a relational manner with itself and the Absolute and this takes place in the *existential* or lived level and not just in speculative projections or utopias. This existential level seeks to transform being there (*dasein* or existence) into being there for and with someone and with a purpose, and not just being thrown into the ontological arena. in view of the Absolute who is experienced and given as God, who is Truth in his Absoluteness and Love in His Givenness and Giving, which for Christians is the Trinity of Persons.

In view of this, there is no superficial transparency and openness, as in the traditional phenomenological notion or going

³⁷ B. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. S. Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982, 64.

³⁸ Cfr. E. Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*. Paris: Armand Collin, 1931.

up the surface like an iceberg (as expounded, for example by Ortega), but a deeper initiation into the Mystery, which in effect ceases from being a mode of knowledge or a mode of being, but the mode of experiencing for being real and reality participating in the Supreme Real and Reality.

Spirituality is not simply understanding the Mystery, which is impossible but exposure to it, immersing into it in order to participate in its transcendence. This participation is the effectiveness of the experiential communication of the Mystery which in turn must be communicated as a concrete, contextualized way which we come to know as a specific spirituality (depending on the context, school, style, period, etc.), within a specific community, where experiencing always takes place, where mediation mediates itself, by which we come to define spirituality in general.

Philosophy as phenomenology advocated the attainment of truth (knowledge) from the depths to the surface. Philosophy, rooted in the Mystery, speaks of not just an attainment of truth (knowledge), but communion with the Truth in itself, in its source by means of initiation. This initiation is attained through communication. The Truth is the very transcendence of the Mystery in its accessibility in the mediation of experience into the context of human immanence in its finite and culpable historicity.

The truth, as proclaimed by *philosophia* (love of wisdom) as Mystery is living, vibrant and dynamic. It is mediation in itself. It is experience in itself that mediates the distance between transcendence in itself and human immanence in its finite and culpable historicity. This truth in its sublimity experientially contextualizes itself and makes itself concrete in the matrix which we call concrete or the human cultivation of truth within a specific context. Thus, in its mediating self (in its opening to man's finite and culpable historicity), the truth opens up a way of experience, which is circumstantial in presentation and which is realized, concretely lived out as spirituality (wisdom of love), creating a new situation of growth, which is spirituality, the way of the spirit. It is a way that does not only settle in the way in itself (*erfahrung*), but in the communion with the Absolute in itself from the experiential vantage point of a finite and culpable historicity.

Mystagogy is the communication of this way, with a view to initiate into this way. And the fullness of this initiation is not absolute knowledge, but participation (taking part of the Absolute which freely and lovingly shares itself, mediates itself, allows itself to be experienced) in communion (union with a common denominator: love).

Philosophy, in this light, has to rediscover its real focus of study: the presence of the Absolute in its transcendence in the experientially contextual immanence of the human self in its finite and culpable historicity. This presence or meeting point is what we term as Mystery. Mystagogy is speaking, communicating about this Mystery with a view to initiation into it. The true love of wisdom consists in grasping this Truth, the Truth of the Mystery, the Truth of the presence of the Absolute in the experience of man, making this very presence experience in itself.

Language and Modernity: Communication as Medium³⁹

The question of the self is necessarily a question of communication. The self is a personal history, an incarnate experiential narrative called to communicate (modality of mystagogy) this same narrative in order to initiate (immediate finality of mystagogy) other subjects, within the same community (which may expand as worlds expand or are conquered from the universe), towards Communion with the Absolute (ultimate finality of mystagogy).

The self is an incarnate will⁴⁰ to communicate, to say: not just to express itself but to make others participate in the experience, in the mediation behind the communication. In doing so, the self makes use of fabulation or creation of images, tech-

³⁹ Cfr. G. Cosée de Maulde, 'Analyse linguistique et langage religieux', in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 91 (1969), 168-202; J. Ladrière, 'Langage des spirituels', in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, IX, 204-217; G. Pattaro, 'Il linguaggio mistico', in: Several Authors, *La mistica: fenomenologia e riflessione teologica*, Vol. II. Rome: Città Nuova, 1984, 483-506; M. de Certeau, *La fable mystique, XVIe-XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1982.

⁴⁰ Cfr. G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

niques, analogies, comparisons, etc. This reveals the openness of the self towards the community of learners, believers and readers, which has its roots in his openness as subject of the Communion with the Absolute.

Openness, in these two paths, show the originary attitude of man towards Reality: his own reality, his surrounding reality and towards the Absolute Reality first understood axiologically or as values.

The path is metaphysical since it goes towards the Absolute. However, the origin in itself of this openness is metaphysical, it is a transcendental vocation, a spiritual calling: incarnated in the self as incarnate spirit in search of the Absolute creating a path for this search, which we all call spirituality. This incarnation has taken place in different contexts and milieus. Incarnation necessarily means pluralism. The experience of the Absolute inevitably is incarnated in pluralism.⁴¹

Communication takes on an ontological component in its exercise with the finality not of self-expression (which is the ontological frustration of ending up with the Being of beings assuming that beings cannot express their 'being' and thus the need to articulate), but in making others take part (*participare*) in the same experienced Mystery (the perfection of ontology in metaphysics or the perfection of the division of aesthetics and mysticism in the unitary vision of spirituality).

In the above-mentioned ontological component, there is a variety involved made concrete in the variety of resources, schools, methods, images (which history has registered as the differences between movements, schools and systems of spirituality).

Communication and Groundedness in the Mystery: Spirituality and Metaphysicity

However, the very root of the mystagogical vocation, in its spiritual and mystical context and realization, is creativity.

⁴¹ Cfr. the interesting reflections of D. Tracy & J. Cobb, *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983.

Spirituality, through or as communication, makes others participate in this originary creativity by a creative act of initiation with language as the tool.

Language is not only the tool of the self, but is the very constitution of the self in terms of experienciability. It attains its purpose only in communication.

In the light of the foregoing, communication is only a means never the end in itself. Spirituality is the very process of communication. It is the dynamicity of the act of the self as subject of the experience or mediation of the Absolute in its transcendence within his immanence. Spirituality is the weaving of the experiential narrative having recourse to communication, thus transferring the experience to the text: to the status of the experience in its authentication.

Authentication is only a criteriological moment with the aim of making explicit the purposefulness of the status of the self as subject of the experience. The growth of the self into what Hegel would call 'absolute knowledge' or what we may term in our study of spirituality as 'communion with the self' is not solipsistic. Solipsism or the absolutization of the constitution of the self as subject of the experience would mean the destruction of the self.

To correct this, another means or medium is needed: communication. Communication does not aim at absolute knowledge, but communion. Absolute knowledge is the reduction of experience as a mere path. Communication highlights experience as mediation, sharing, participation of the finite in the Infinite through the loving generosity of the latter.

Communication makes experience the event in itself and not just a process or journey (*erfahrung*) to Absolute knowledge. Communication is growth from solipsism into communion (*koinonia*). Communication is the very process or journey. Communication is the very growth. It is an experiential growth, process or journey.

Experience is not just a journey (*erfahrung*). It is above all communion (*koinonia*). In communion, there is joy, profound feeling or experience (which the Spanish mystics called 'sentir') and not just knowledge of something or someone, as if it were

a data or something accumulative, as it came to be in the long history of philosophy, wherein some, since the times of the Greeks, have notably reduced experience to sense data (*empereia*).

Further Projections: *Spiritualitas* and the Constant Call to Reinterpret it as Communications

Spiritualitas concerns itself with matters of the spirit, which is a self, the finite and culpable self in its quest for transformation and ultimately communion with the Absolute Self. It is the science (*wissenschaft*) of the spirit par excellence!

Moreover, *Spiritualitas* concerns itself with matters of the spirit. It denotes the dynamicity of the spirit, primarily of the Absolute Self, in its complete transcendence, i.e., its metaphysic-ality, in its invitation to the finite and culpable self. Consequently, it also refers to the dynamicity of the finite and culpable self in its response to such an invitation. The response to such an invitation constitutes the finite and culpable self as spirit, geared towards communion with the Spirit in itself, in terms of loving participation.

The invitation and response necessarily make an experiential projection, which is necessarily metaphysical because it aims towards communion with the transcendental. This projection reveals both selves to be spirits and consequently, an avenue of realization is opened. This realization is rooted in the nature (essence) of the protagonists: the selves mutually opening up as spirits. Thus the realization is spiritual. In other words, its perfection is spiritual in nature.

Communication, in the light of the discussion above, is spiritual in nature (because of its essence) and metaphysical in projection (therefore, philosophical).⁴² Spirituality finds its fulfillment in communication, in mystagogy.

⁴² We may even add that because it has a metaphysical (or philosophical) projection, communication is metaphysical in its roots, in its basis, in its starting point, in its vocation which grows as a response or projection towards the transcendent.

Communication is the opening up of spirituality in terms of initiation, in terms of mystagogy. It is initiation into the meta-physical transcendence and the immanence of mystery, brought together in the *life of the spirit (spiritualitas)* which is the life of the *love of wisdom (philosophia)* which necessarily has to be communicated by means of initiation (*mystagogia*). Only then can the *spirit of life* be shared and that the *wisdom of love* be realized.

Communication thus becomes the primary epistemological category to live spirituality (lived spirituality) and to define it in academe (studied spirituality). Communication is a process. It is an interpreting process, a process of doing hermeneutics on the relationship between the finite and culpable self with the Absolute Self in a process of mutual self-opening and self-giving which is initiation and communication in mutual sharing. □