

# Spirituality and Mysticism

## Preliminary Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Exploration of their Epistemological Relationships

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– A Jesús Encinas, O.S.A. (1933-2008),  
*in piam et gratam memoriam.*

On the eve of his famous Asian Journey during which he unexpectedly met his death, the acclaimed Cistercian spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, said: “But the thing that really makes me wonder a bit about the progressive Christians is their staunch repudiation of the mystical element in religion and their firm approbation of the nineteenth century, which is what they’re trying to catch up with right now.”<sup>1</sup> For Merton, the nineteenth century stood for positivism. Mysticism,<sup>2</sup> viewed especially from this

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<sup>1</sup> W. Capps (ed.), *Thomas Merton: Preview of the Asian Journey*, New York: Crossroad 1989, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. J. de Guibert, ‘Mystique’, in: *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 7 (1926), 3f; Several Authors, *Encyclopédie des Mystiques*, Paris: R. Laffont, 1972; C. Tresmontant, *La mystique chrétienne et l’avenir de l’homme*, Paris: Seuil 1977; Several Authors, *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione teologica*, Vols. I-II, Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1984; Several Authors, *Vita critisana ed esperienza mistica*, Rome: Teresianum, 1982; L. Bouyer, *Mysterion. Du mystère à la mystique*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986; Several Authors, *Mistica e misticismo oggi. Settimana di studio di Lucca 8-13 settembre 1978*, Rome: Passionisti-Cipi 1979; P. Dinzelbacher (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la mystique*, Turnhout, Brepols 1993; M.-M. Davy, *Encyclopédie des mystiques*, Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages, 1996, 4 vol.; L. Borriello, E. Caruana et al., (eds.), *Dizionario di mistica*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice

positivistic prism of the heuristic demands of empirical and logical contemporary thought, has been frequently studied from the perspective of its cognitive value. It is, from the empirical and logical criteriology brought about by the onset of modernity (Merton's nineteenth century), reduced to its mystical phenomena<sup>3</sup> such as levitations, revelations, visions and the like.

Any discipline, from this positivistic criteriology, should be consequently open to interdisciplinary scrutiny, falling under or outside the specifically confessional realm of religion (while retaining its broad religious roots as the search for meaning in terms of the Absolute)<sup>4</sup>, like psychology, anthropology and sociology and taken to be a phenomena, a happening, an event with aesthetic or perceptive value and therefore with manifest visibility, classified as beyond the ordinary or natural and taken to be a way of knowing reality.

Simultaneously, mysticism inevitably highlights religion (or at least what we may term as 'the religious' given the postmodern aversion for institutions), tracing its origins to the radical drive of man towards his transcendental roots, given that religion, viewed aconfessionally primarily from phenomenology and philosophy of religion, is the condensation of mystical phenomena.<sup>5</sup> At the out-

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Vaticana, 1998; G. Berti, *Dizionario dei mistici. I grandi maestri dello Spirito di ogni tempo e religione*, Milan: A. Vallardi, 1999; J. Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico. Estudio comparativo*, Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1999 Several Authors, *Sentieri illuminati dallo spirito. Atti del congresso internazionale di mistica. Abazia di Münterschawarzach*, Rome: Edizioni OCD, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent introductory presentation, J. Martín Velasco, 'El fenómeno místico', in C. García (ed.), *Mística en diálogo*, Burgos; Editorial Monte Carmelo 2004, 19-28. From the perspective of catholic theology, see the fine essay of K. Rahner, 'Mystical Experience and Mystical Theology', in: Idem., *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 17, New York: Crossroad 1981, 94f.

<sup>4</sup> W. Ralph Inge, *Mysticism in Religion*, Westport: Greenwood Press 1976; R. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, London: Macmillan 1909; Fr. Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends*, 2nd ed., London: M. Dent 1923; G. Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 1976; J. Martín Velasco, 'Mística y religión', in: *XX Siglos* 5 (1991), 25-35.

<sup>5</sup> This is the thesis of H. Bergson, 'Les deux sources de la morale et la religion', in: Idem., *Oeuvres*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1959.

set, mystical phenomena should not be reduced to extraordinary experiences, but must include and begin from everyday contacts with the Absolute, such as prayer, inner inspiration, moral actions, and the like. However, all this necessarily implies a way of living out the religious root, which has acquired the quite acceptable name of spirituality.

In view of the fundamental question regarding the reality of what is deemed to be transcendental (especially in its ultimate instance: that of the Absolute itself), there is a more biting and perhaps relevant line of inquiry: that of the possibility of 'spiritual' experience.

In light of this, the so-called mystical phenomena are the presented proofs of the reality not of the transcendent, but of the experience itself which is the very affirmation of the validity of what is generally called spirituality, which is human relationality with the Absolute wherein the latter becomes effectively present in the non-absoluteness of man, in its characteristic of being finite and culpable. The effectivity of such a presence brings about not only a participation (or elevation) in the Absolute by man, but in the participation (or condescendence) towards man or the non-absolute on the part of the Absolute.

In this light, the so-called mystical phenomena can be taken to be the proofs or scientific (empirical or verificative) data, not of the Absolute but of the very possibility of spirituality (the possibility of the relationality between Absolute and non-Absolute, which is the very possibility of 'spiritual' experience) itself.

#### **STATUS QUAESTIONIS: THE ABSOLUTE FROM SPIRITUALITY AND MYSTICISM**

The so-called aim or object of mysticism, the Absolute, because it is transcendental in nature, is notoriously difficult to pin down. More so, that mysticism consists of the aim of man to have union or communion with this Absolute. Consequently, it can also be said that the very concept of mysticism is practically impossible to pin down. Wittgenstein, in drawing the limits of the factual or empirical world, famously elevates the mystical

into the realm of silence, where logical and atomic language fails.<sup>6</sup> The true mystics on this regard would speak of a certain musicality of silence, wherein the divine harmony could be perceived.<sup>7</sup> But it exists and it manifests itself to be a specific state, within a religious context. Phenomenologist of Religion N. Smart concludes that a mystical experience is 'reported by a class of persons generally referred to as 'mystics'.<sup>8</sup> And these mystics are historical persons, historical subjects of an experience that manifests itself as an experience characterized mainly by *Ineffability*, *Noetic Quality*, *Transcendency* and *Passivity*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, 7. I am citing this work, according to this version: trans. by C.K. Ogden & F.P. Ramsey, London: Kegan Paul, 1922. See the following studies: E. Zemach, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy of the Mystical', in: Several Authors, *Essays on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Bristol: Thoemmes Press 1993, 377-392; A. Tornos, 'La filosofía del cristianismo y de la religión en L. Wittgenstein', in: *Pensamiento* 46 (1990), 23-47.

<sup>7</sup> For example, consider the following words of Elizabeth of the Trinity: 'Une louange de gloire, c'est un âme de silence qui se tient comme une lyre sous la touche mystérieuse de l'Esprit saint, afin qu'il en fasse sortir des harmonies divines', in: *Écrits spirituels*, Paris: Philppon 1958, 203.

<sup>8</sup> N. Smart, *Reasons and Faiths: An Investigation of Religious Discourse, Christian and Non-Christian*, London: Routledge & Keagan Paul 1958, 55.

<sup>9</sup> These four characteristics have their origin in William James. This author lists them as the fundamental traits which identify a psychological state of consciousness as something mystical, see: W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*, New York: Modern Library 1936, 371-372. See also for their own lists of the basic characteristics of mystical consciousness, for example: E. Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, New York: Meridian Books 1955; W. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London: Macmillan 1960, 131-133; Idem., *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York: Mentor Books 1960, 196-198; F.C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, rev. ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970; A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Westminster: Celtic Cross Books 1978, 54-99; P. Agesse & M. Sales, 'Mystique', in: Several Authors, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Vol. 10, 1189-1984; L. Dupré, 'Mysticism', in: Several Authors, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. X, New York: Macmillan 1987, 245-261; S. Guerra, 'Mística', in: Several Authors, *El Dios Cristiano. Diccionario teológico*, Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 897-916; J. Martín Velasco, *Espiritualidad y Mística*, Madrid: Ediciones S&M 1994; J. Wiseman 'Mysticism', in: Several Authors, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1993, 681-692; R. Faesen, 'What is a Mystical Experience? History and Interpretation', in: *Louvain Studies* 23 (1998) 221-245.

With these basic or fundamental characteristics mysticism reveals the Mystery, its very root: the very transcendent Absolute made present in a hidden or occult way in the immanence of human existence, in its finitude and culpability. In other words, mysticism reveals, opens up a world of sacramentality, of effective, relational and transformative presence, in all its metaphysical stability<sup>10</sup>, beyond all rational comprehension, for living out and for study.<sup>11</sup> Especially from a positivistic viewpoint, the primary significance of mystical perception is not spiritual, but epistemological.<sup>12</sup>

Mysticism, thus, opens up a new world by providing a model of comprehending reality in relation to the Absolute, in its non-transferrable transcendence, sacramentality present in man's experiential coordinates as Mystery.<sup>13</sup> Thus, truly affecting man's existence. Without exhausting itself, this Mystery is open, in its metaphysical stability, to the comprehension of man, 'elevated' in his non-transferrable historical immanence in the world characterized as finite and culpable to participate in this transcendence, as a rational being, as a lover of wisdom (philosopher).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In the background, I have taken into account the attack of J. Derrida to this stable presence in terms of rational comprehension, cfr. *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil 1967; Idem., *Grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. E. Poulat, *L'université devant la mystique*, Paris: Editions Salvator 1999.

<sup>12</sup> W. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1991, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. S. King, 'Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism', in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1988), 257-279; D. MackKinnon, 'Some Epistemological Reflections on Mystical Experience', in: S. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, London: SCM 1978, 132-140; P. Moore, 'Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique', in: Idem., 101-131; A. Moore, 'Mystical and Philosophy', in: *The Monist* 59 (1976), 493-506; J. Shear, 'Mystical Experience. Hermeneutics and Rationality', in: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1990), 391-401; N. Kretzmann, 'Mystical Perception: St. Teresa, William Alston, and the Broadminded Atheist', in: Several Authors, *Reason and the Christian Religion. Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, 65-90.

<sup>14</sup> See my exploratory study: 'Distinguir para unir: Algunos presupuestos fundamentales para comprender la relación filosofía-mística', in: *Revista de Espiritualidad* 249 (2003), 439-468. Likewise: D.Z. Philips, 'Mysticism and epistemology.

The relationship of mysticism with spirituality<sup>15</sup> is not that all clear or not that firmly and definitely established by scholars and experts. Mysticism is usually understood, vis-à-vis spirituality, as the culmination, the summit of the latter. Mysticism is termed as the crowning glory of spirituality, understood or reduced as a way towards union or communion with the Absolute (or mysticism).

There is a tendency to reduce spirituality as that process which precedes mysticism or that which mysticism presupposes. Thus, spirituality has been rashly reduced to ascetism or ascetical practices that have the aim of reaching mystical union or communion. This reduction is by no means acceptable<sup>16</sup> and though it may have proposed interesting historico-hermeneutical keys in

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One devil of a problem', in: *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995), 167-188; S. Breton, *Philosophie et mystique. Existence et surexistence*, Grenoble: Edit. J. Million 1996; M. Vannini, *Mistica e filosofia*, Cacciari: PIEMME 1996; Several Authors, *Filosofia e mistica: Itinerari di un progetto di ricerca*, Rome: P.I. San Anselmo, 1997; Several Authors, *Philosophie, Poésie, Mystique*, Paris: Beauchesne 1999.

<sup>15</sup> See: E. Ancilli (ed.), *Dizionario enciclopedico di spiritualità*, Rome: Studium 1975, 2 Vols.; M. Downey (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario di spiritualità*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2003; A.G. Matanic, *La spiritualità come scienza. Introduzione metodologica allo studio della vita spirituale cristiana*. Cinisello Balsamo: Ed. Paoline, 1990; Several Authors, *La teologia spirituale. Atti del Congresso Internazionale OCD, Roma 24-29 Aprile 2000*, Rome: Teresianum, 2001; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Les trois âges de la vie intérieure, prélude de celle du ciel*, 2. Vols., Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1938; Idem., *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, Rockford: Tan Books 2003; A. Royo Marín, *Teología de la perfección cristiana*, 5th ed., Madrid: BAC, 1968; C. García, *Teología espiritual contemporánea. Corrientes y perspectivas*, Burgos: Ed. Monte Carmelo, 2002; K. Waaijman, *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> This tendency can be seen in classical works of spirituality such as: F. Naval y Averde, *Curso de teología ascética y mística*, Madrid: E. Mestres, 1914; A. Farges, *The Ordinary Ways of the Spiritual Life. A Treatise on Ascetic Theology According to the Principles of St. Teresa declared by the Carmelite Congress of Madrid* (March, 1923), London: Burnjs Oates & Washbourne, 1927; A. Tanquerey, *Compendio di teologia ascetica e mistica*, Rome: Desclee Et C., 1927; G. de Sta. Maria Maddalena, *Manuale di teologia spirituale secondo la dottrina di Santa Teresa di Gesù e di San Giovanni della Croce e della scuola mistica teresiana*, 3 vols., Rome: Facoltà teologica del Collegio di S. Teresa, 1936; C. de Jesús Sacramento, *Compendio de ascética y mística*, 3rd ed., Madrid-Avila: Editorial de Espiritualidad-S. Díaz, 1949.

rediscovering the original meaning of praxis<sup>17</sup>, there still exists the anthropologico-hermeneutical keys<sup>18</sup> of dividing the subject of the spiritual and mystical experience, which is the very core of spiritual and mystical anthropology, and sacrificing the unity of the spiritual and mystical experience.<sup>19</sup>

Spirituality is a broad concept involving a process, an intense and committed way of life. Without attempting to propose a definition of the term, it is a committed life, that takes shape as a relationality, rooted in the Absolute, which in its transcendence, is made present, in the realm of the immanent, as mystery.<sup>20</sup> Thus, mysticism, from 'myos' or closing of one's eyes in order to initiate oneself to way of life, is rootedness in this very same mystery.

Mystery is presence, but it is a vocational presence, it calls out within immanence and its context to the one who is conscious of his difference as non-absolute vis-à-vis the Absolute because of his consciousness of his experiential structure of finitude and culpability, i.e., as profane as compared to the holiness (or the Absolute's inherent metaphysical quality)<sup>21</sup> of the Absolute in its

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<sup>17</sup> See the interesting study of praxis in relation to philosophy, though somehow reducing philosophy or theoria to ascesis or spiritual exercise, P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (ed. A.I. Davidson), Malden-Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. L. Borriello, 'Mística come pienezza dell'uomo', in: Several Authors, *Esperienza mistica e pensiero filosofico. Atti del Colloquio 'Filosofia e Mística'*. Roma, 6-7 dicembre 2001, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2003, 109-143.

<sup>19</sup> On this question, the contribution of the Dominican J. González Arinterio cannot be forgotten, *La evolución mística*, Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1989; Idem., *La verdadera mística tradicional*, Salamanca: San Esteban-Editorial Fides 1926. In relation to this, see: M. Belda-J. Sesé, *La 'cuestión mística': Estudio histórico-teológico de una controversia*, Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra 1998. Also the classical article of G. Moiola, 'L'acquisizione del tema dell'esperienza da parte della teologia e la teologia della spiritualità cristiana, in: *Teologia Brescia* 6 (1981) 141-153.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. M. Ofilada Mina, 'De la escuela mística carmelitana a la cuestión mística: Tres modelos evaluados desde la hermenéutica y la antropología', in: *Archivum Bibliographicum Carmeli Teresiani* 42 (2003), 615-657. Also: T. Alvarez, 'Estado actual de los estudios místicos', in: Several Authors, *Contemplación. Primer Congreso Nacional de vida contemplativa*, Madrid: Claune 1963, 95-108.

<sup>21</sup> Clearly, my notion of holiness is different from the classical phenomenological study of R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, New York: Oxford University Press 1958.

presence which creates an ambiance of relationality to it, which is termed as the 'sacred'. The sacred, as opposed to the profane<sup>22</sup>, is the meeting ground between Absolute and non-absolute. In this meeting ground, the non-absolute becomes holy or possesses holiness, understood as 'mystical' participation in the inherent metaphysical quality of the Absolute.

In the light of what has been stated, the sacred is in effect the soil of the relational way of life that implies the integrity of both Absolute and non-absolute, which we term as 'spirituality' and through which this same relationality is cultured and cultivated in its concrete forms, always presupposing its rootedness in this same mystery.

Mysticism is profound contact in terms of rootedness with the mystery and thus seeks to reveal this presence of the Absolute in a concrete way of life which is Spirituality. Therefore, Spirituality is the *phenomenological expansion* (manifestation as historical development and narrative) of mysticism and taken in its phenomena or experiential episodes<sup>23</sup>, mysticism is the *hermeneutical development* (interpretation in terms of concrete events that presuppose a way of life, cfr. the traits enumerated by authors like James, Underhill, etc.) of spirituality.

Conversely, mysticism is the criteriological guarantee that the way of life, called spirituality, has profound contact with the mystery. Because of this, mysticism, in all actuality, is the *phenomenological criteria* (manifestation as certitude and validity) of spirituality, given that the cultivation of spirituality necessarily implicates the integral manifestation of the relationality in concrete moments in life (visible as phenomena even in its most discrete forms). At the same time, mysticism is the *hermeneutical possibility* (openness to interpretation) of spirituality, of the way of life.

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<sup>22</sup> I have greatly modified the classical presentation of R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism sacred and profane. An inquiry into some varieties of praeternatural experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>23</sup> Or religious or spiritual experiences (in the plural), see: Several Authors, *Experiencia religiosa hoy: Preocupaciones y posibilidades*, Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad 1978; A. Léonard, 'Experience spirituelle', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Vol 4, 2005-2026; A.M. García-Ordas, *La persona divina en la espiritualidad de santa Teresa*, Rome: Teresianum 1967; T. Alvarez, 'Experiencia cristiana y teología espiritual', in: *Seminarium* 26 (1974), 94-100.



We are, at the outset of this introductory essay, confronted with a interplaying relationality between spirituality and mysticism in terms of phenomenology<sup>24</sup> and hermeneutics<sup>25</sup>. These pages, bereft of any pretense to be exhaustive, will explore this conceptual interplaying from the angle of epistemology.

## EXPERIENCE AS FACTICITY: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

As stated earlier, the object of questioning is the very possibility of spiritual experience: that of the relationality between the Absolute and the non-Absolute, in its finitude and culpability. The only proofs of such a relationality are the so-called mystical phenomena or experiences, which are experiences that are textualized in what we now call Scriptures or Sacred Texts or Mystical or Spiritual Texts. The textual process eventually establishes the fleeting experience in the permanence of human historical consciousness. The same textual process also establishes the relationality as a practice or as praxis, such that the experience itself has been lived by certain historical individuals. Here we see the link between spirituality as a lived experience and as something historically established and thus studied or capable of being studied.<sup>26</sup>

This establishment – which is historical in nature –, culminating in the textual process, brings about foundational certainty. In other words, it makes possible for the treatment of spirituality

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<sup>24</sup> Cfr. M. Faurer, *The Aims of Phenomenology: The Motives, Methods and Impact of Husserl's Thought*, New York: Harper Torchbooks 1966; J. Kocklemans (eds.), *Phenomenology*, New York: Doubleday 1967; Q. Lauer, *Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Project*, Paris: Librairie Gallimard 1945; H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. R. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1969; P. Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1974; Idem., *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Ed. and trans. by H.B. Thompson, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press 1988; H.G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. D.E. Linge, Berkeley: University of California Press 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, I have taken these two basic levels of spirituality as being lived and as study from K. Waaijman, *Spirituality*, op. cit.

as certain knowledge, i.e., as a science. Epistemology is the philosophical foundation of certain knowledge or scientific (certain) knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Experience is the mediation of the transcendental in the immanent. It is the mediation by which that which is beyond becomes real and reality in the realm of what is human, given the cognitive-experimental faculties of man.

Applied to the Absolute (or understood at least within the epistemological domain of spirituality), experience is the mediation by which the Absolute becomes immanent or real and reality in and according to the experiential categories of the non-Absolute. This mediation becomes concrete in what is taken to be mystical experiences, visible as phenomena. This is the metaphysical understanding of experience.

From this notion of mystical phenomena (which are experiential episodes of the metaphysical mediation), we can derive the first directionality in understanding the relationship between spirituality and mysticism.

The mystical phenomena are the 'raw' data for spirituality which are assimilated as texts: testimonies, teachings, narratives, hagiographies, etc. These raw data both make manifest, while configuring itself as a specific approach or form (phenomenology) of the relationality between Absolute and non-absolute. At the same time, it interprets or provides meaning (hermeneutics) to this same relationality, in order to make it comprehensible, in terms of the dynamics of experiencing, that takes place in history and conserved as a textual narrative.

Conversely, it would also be feasible to propose the following 'directionality': the aforementioned relationality or spirituality is the descriptive development of the specific approach or form as perceived in history (phenomenology) of the rootedness in the mystery that takes place as phenomena or experiences. In the

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<sup>27</sup> Cfr. K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972; Several Authors, *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, London: Routledge 1990; A. Rosenberg, *The Philosophy of Science*, London: Routledge 2000; S. Okasha, *Philosophy of Science. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 2002.

same vein, the relationality expounds (hermeneutics) the rootedness in the mystery in its characteristic features or finer points thus establishing this rootedness as a specific kind of language, a language that struggles with the ineffable and touching on the Absolute parting from the metaphysical distance to this same Absolute of the non-absolute.

In view of what has already been stated, phenomenology, as descriptive (in terms of configuration of specific approaches or forms or development of the specific approaches or forms in history), provides a historical testimony, establishing that the Absolute is real and a reality in the experiential realm or lived and liveable world of the non-absolute (which Husserlian phenomenology calls 'lebenswelt').<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, and in relation to phenomenology, hermeneutics, as interpretative (in terms of the elucidation with a view to comprehension and as the expansion-exposition towards a specific language), develops a magisterium or a collection of teachings which draws out the lived experience as a liveable one with a plan, itinerary and goal. This eventually takes its more developed form as a mystagogy, i.e., initiation<sup>29</sup> into the same experiential dynamic, presupposing the relationality between Absolute and non-Absolute in its historical dynamics and institutionalized narrative, by means of the effective communication of the same dynamic.

### THE FACTICITY OF THE EXPERIENCE: CONVERGENCE OF THE 'DIRECTIONALITIES' AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FUNDAMENTAL THESES

Both 'directionalities', which we have just enumerated and only briefly expounded, constitute the basic epistemological possi-

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<sup>28</sup> Cfr. E. Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, New York: Collier Books 1967; Idem., *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1964; Idem., *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and the Crisis of European Man*, New York: Harper Torchbooks 1965; P. Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1967.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. P. Rodríguez Panizo, 'El carácter iniciático de la experiencia mística', in: *Miscelánea Comillas* 53 (1995), 93-113.

bilities in the comprehension of the relation between spirituality and mysticism. Their range do not only encompass strictly spiritual and mystical terms (such as God and belief) but imply totality, which we call world, the cosmos. This is because of the question of experience, which is how the non-absolute relates to the totality, in which the Absolute is revealed and found as God. This revelation becomes the mystical nucleus of what we call 'the religious' institutionalized as religion.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, it is worth quoting the following paragraph from W. Stace: 'If a mystic speaks of the experience of 'an undifferentiated distinctionless unity,' this mere report or description [or phenomenology in our terms] using only classificatory words may be regarded as a low-level interpretation [or hermeneutics in our words]. But this is being more fussily precise than is usually necessary, since for all intents and purposes it is just a description. If a mystic says that he experiences a 'mystical union with the Creator of the universe,' this is a high-level interpretation since it includes far more intellectual addition than a mere descriptive report. It includes an assumption about the origin of the world and belief in the existence of a personal God.'<sup>31</sup>

Both 'directionalities' point out to the same root or have the same basic presupposition: the facticity of the experience. And this facticity takes place in the world.

The facticity of the experience is our starting point. In this preliminary exploration, it is our aim to analyze this methodological starting point in terms of some preliminary 'categories' which we have already mentioned and which serve as the viewpoint from which we 'condense' the directionalities, which we have expanded as possible points for development, as the episte-

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<sup>30</sup> Cfr. B. McGinn, *The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism, Vol. I: The Foundations of Mysticism*, London: SCM Press 1992, 23-61.

<sup>31</sup> W. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 37. Obviously, this author favors hermeneutics or interpretation over mere description or phenomenology which he reduces to a 'mere descriptive report'. For a more profound study of the God of the Mystics, see; Ch. A. Bernard, *Le Dieu des mystiques*, Vols. I-III, Paris: Ed. du Cerf 1994-2000; R. Maisonneuve, *Dieu inconnu, Dieu Trinité. Anthologie. Comment les mystiques chrétiens 'voient' Dieu un et trine*, Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 2002; X. Pikaza, *Enchiridion Trinitatis*, Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2005.

mological relationship between Spirituality and Mysticism is not to be resolved in an exploratory essay such as this one, but is most likely a life-long project.

In the following reflections, we will re-state these categories in thesis form:

A. *Thesis One: Spirituality as Phenomenological Expansion of Mysticism and Mysticism as the Hermeneutical Development of Spirituality*

Epistemology or established certain knowledge is only possible when there are things themselves in their plurality and diversity, taking place or giving themselves as data in this shared lived-world (*lebenswelt*). Thus, epistemology parts from facticity, which allows us to 'see' and do and distinguish what is certain from what is false.

What is certain is what is true. And the true is derived from the 'raw' data of phenomena or experiences. What is true is what is revealed, open, unveiled. It becomes the vehicle for language. The phenomenal expansion of mysticism in spirituality consists precisely in giving 'language' to the rootedness of the mystery. This, in turn, establishes the mystery noetically, i.e., as something perceptible to the mind, for it is the data, the noematic data of reality that has direct access to the knowing faculty giving this same knowing faculty access to the thing or things in itself, the very mystery, in its expansion as experiences or phenomena (which are the experiences in as much as they are noematically intentional or directed to the knowing faculty).

This linguistic 'event', given it gives the 'logos' or language to the rootedness in the mystery, qualifies this same rootedness into its historical specificity as a form, as a school, as a movement, i.e., with identity within history. As a linguistic event it is availability as language for textualization. Such textualization signifies the possibility of being seen. Spirituality makes mysticism visible by giving it language or reason or intellectual perspective. Spirituality makes mysticism visible by making it intelligible.

In this directionality, spirituality is the relational current between the Absolute and the non-Absolute. As the relational

current, spirituality is the movement of Experience such that there is a perceptible, or rationally viewed, effect in the finite and culpable level. Such perception<sup>32</sup> takes 'form' in the language of mysticism, taken as concreteness of the Experience or of the mediation in mystical phenomena, which then serve as 'raw' data. Given the 'raw' data, spirituality is developed as the texts for spirituality as the relational current narrated as history.

History, the history of the relation between Absolute and non-absolute, takes the form, as earlier observed, in testimonies, teachings, hagiographies which make manifest the rootedness in the Mystery, given the relationality between Absolute and non-absolute. This history, in its texts, constitute spirituality, which expands the rootedness in the Mystery.

In this sense, spirituality does not merely indicate an object of investigation, but the limits of what is manifested and what should be the data of the investigation that is still to be undertaken and developed with the phenomenological and hermeneutical considerations (or coordinates) provided or charted by mysticism.

In relation to this, it should be pointed out that spirituality, as the phenomenological expansion of mysticism, establishes the phenomena as data and indicates them to be encompassed by spirituality, the relational current in as much as it is narrated as history.

Spirituality makes the experiential episodes the object of an investigation, the first step of certain knowledge, the first step of epistemology. Spirituality provides the raw data an area for certitude, expanding itself as a relationship (that between Absolute and non-absolute) and thus as a discipline that sets specific areas or limits. Thus, there are two levels at play here, spirituality as lived and spirituality as study or to be studied.

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<sup>32</sup> Cfr. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Paris: Gallimard 1965; Idem., *La Structure du comportement*, Paris: Press Universitaires France 1963.

This history necessarily takes the form of a description. Phenomenology is description. Thus, the expression 'descriptive phenomenology' is tautological. Description is the giving of language to the mystical phenomena. Description consists in giving them the 'logos', which delineates and determines them as within the camp of spirituality, as within the camp of the relational current between Absolute and non-Absolute which brings about a transformation that leads to communion between the two.

Spirituality as phenomenological expansion or description unveils the spiritual essence and meaning, without imposing any restrictive ontology (the husserlian regional ontology which defines the essence of phenomena in a specific area or lived world or 'lebenswelt'), of the mystical phenomena.

Mysticism, at the same time, given that it provides the data develops spirituality, which is the narrative with the phenomena taken as experiential episodes for such an experiential narrativity, for such a history. In this sense, mysticism establishes itself as the hermeneutical development of spirituality, i.e., it is the interpretation of the relationality between Absolute and non-absolute. In history, hermeneutical development can only take place as experiential episodes, as phenomena, observable to reason, because it is language or 'logos'. Mysticism is taken here, at first glance, primarily in the *empirical* and *experimental* level that is in that which is lived out spontaneously and that is lived out consciously.

Mysticism, however, is not taken here exclusively in the reductive manner of mystical phenomena, despite the dominance of its role of providing the raw data. It is also, and above all, the profound *experiential*<sup>33</sup> sense of being rooted in the Mystery, which implies the whole person, integrated in love and in fullness of the will.

The experiential episodes establish that the relationality between Absolute and non-absolute, which is spirituality, is hermeneutical, is capable of being interpreted and thus developed as such in the light of history.

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<sup>33</sup> These three classes or levels of experience, empirical, experimental and experiential are taken from J. Mouroux, *Expérience chrétienne*, 24.

*B. Thesis Two: Mysticism as the Phenomenological Criteria of Spirituality and Spirituality is the Way of Life which is made Hermeneutically Possible by Mysticism*

What has been expanded above complements what we are to reflect in the following paragraphs. Thesis one could only be understood in relation to thesis two and vice-versa. Our interest here is to show points of convergence which are necessarily inter-playing moments of the same organic experience as characterized by the way of life brought about by the Presence of the Absolute in the realm of the non-absolute.

Spirituality, previously, has been taken as relationality, which then brings about transformation towards communion. This means that spirituality is a way of life to be lived and to be studied. Here is its first epistemological expression.

As a way of life, it has to be provided with a phenomenological criteria: the basis or guarantee that manifests its epistemological certitude and validity. A spirituality without experiential episodes or just being a metaphysical mediation in the purely theoretical level is not a spirituality, but only a movement established in history.

Spirituality is a living and dynamic concept. It is a relationality that has to be manifested in language. Thus, mysticism provides this phenomenological criteria. Mysticism is the cultivation of spirituality. This does not mean that there is the necessity for extraordinary phenomena so that there would be spirituality.

Mysticism is the cultivation of spirituality, it is the living out of the relationality from the criteria of rootedness in the mystery which guarantees the experiential and existential projection towards the transcendental in communion.

Mysticism as the cultivation of spirituality is the form of reaching or attaining the ideal of communion, which is the fullness of the mediation. Spirituality is only possible only as mysticism. The way of the spirit is integrative. Asceticism and Mysticism are not two different realms. They are not natural and supernatural, but the very same natural life with a supernatural vocation and realization.



Organically, the spiritual life is one. The perfection of asceticism or the exercise of the virtues takes the form of the fullness of love, which is communion, which is not loving the Absolute but allowing oneself to be loved by the Absolute, for the latter was the first one to love from all Infinity, such that any response of love from the non-absolute only takes part or *participates* in this Infinite love. 'The spiritual life (*spiritualitas*) is attained through charity (*per caritatem est*).'<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, in the perfection of the virtues, the perfection of asceticism in its ordinary development of the fullness of communion (thus asceticism and mysticism are not two different zones but two moments in the same experiential current) does spirituality become possible in its dynamicity and not just a fossilized object of study. Even as an area of study, spirituality must be taken historically in the fullest sense, as something living and dynamic, as something lived and transforming and not static or purely institutionalized. It must historically lived and liveable (*erlebnis*) and not just a static historical form which reduces history to a museum. For history is above all experiential narrative.

All this opens up, spirituality as a doctrine, as a teaching. A way of life in its dynamicity remains not in history (or history as static) but as history (as experiential narrative) as a teaching, a doctrine. As such, it is the starting point of mysticism. It gives mysticism 'epistemologically experiential' stability to remain as history, in order to continue being a way of life to be lived (hence, liveable) and to be studied, presupposing the reality of the Absolute, to which the non-Absolute aspires by allowing his integrity (spirit) to be transformed towards communion in the current of mediation (experience as a metaphysical principle) taking place as episodes (experiential episodes or phenomena whether extraordinary or ordinary).<sup>35</sup> The aforementioned 'epistemologically experiential' stability

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<sup>34</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* III, d. 38, q.1, a. 4, sol. Also: *Quaestiones Quodlibet* VII, a.17, ad.5; *Summa Theologiae* I-II, a.65, a.2, sed contra; Ibid., III a.59, a.3, arg. 2. I have used the edition of Turin published by Marietti.

<sup>35</sup> For these two basic levels of spirituality, in terms of reality and in terms of doctrine, I am indebted to W.H. Principe, 'Toward Defining spirituality', in: *Sciences Religieuses* 12 (1983) 127-141; Idem., 'Spirituality, Christian', in: Several

is attained by teaching, or the presentation of doctrine as model, as paradigm<sup>36</sup>, which dynamically remains as history in and as mystagogy.

Mystagogy presupposes a descriptive act. It presupposes a phenomenology which deals with the pluralism of the experiential mediation in experiential episodes. These episodes establish spirituality, the way of life, in its difference, in its specialty, in its specificity whose interpretation or hermeneutics culminates in the configuration of a teaching or doctrine.

In other words, as a teaching or doctrine contextualized specifically or in its forms, or in its schools, as history would capture them in its dynamic experiential narrative process. Mystagogy as converging point for both phenomenology and hermeneutics unveils and interprets 'the hidden (*verborgen*) presence of the incomprehensible God (*Gott*) and the working of his Spirit (*Geist*), as transcendent origin and ground, and as horizon and goal of the individual's life history'.<sup>37</sup>

Mysticism, as stated, gives spirituality its phenomenological certitude and validity as history also opens spirituality to hermeneutics, to openness by initiating the hermeneutical process of dealing with plurality, with various data. This culminates in the hermeneutical capturing of form, in its interpretation within the dynamics of history as schools.

Thus, spirituality defines mysticism hermeneutically into categories comprehensible by history (forms, schools, movements) by underlying contextual specificities, which in spirituality are labeled 'charisms', which become phenomenological manifest as experiential episodes or phenomena (whether ordinary or extraordinary).

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Authors, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1993, 931-938.

<sup>36</sup> I have taken especially in account, H. Kung & D. Tracy (eds.), *Paradigm Change in Theology. A Symposium for the Future*, trans. M. Kohl, Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1989.

<sup>37</sup> W. Simon, 'Mystagogie', in: Several Authors, *Lexikon für theologie un kirche*, Freiburg: Herder 1998, 570.

Spirituality establishes mysticism in terms of 'charism' in terms of gifts of the Absolute Spirit to contextualize the integration of the non-absolute as spirit within the limits of his finitude and culpability, within the transformative process of spirituality, rooted in the Mystery (sacramentological presence) towards the fullness of participation, i.e., the transcendence of communion. And 'charism' is only comprehensible (interpretable or hermeneutically open) by means of experiential phenomena which are the everydayness of spirituality in the life of the non-absolute and which are later on categorized as ordinary and extraordinary exercise of virtues (ascesis) made perfect in the fullness of love, which is being loved by the Absolute in its Infinity. This in turn presupposes the perfection of love in the act of passivity.<sup>38</sup>

Hermeneutical openness, presupposing the act of description, establishes that experience is truly mediation. And as mediation it is factible or possesses facticity. It takes place here in the realm of experience, transforming it in life, in a specific way of life called spirituality. The Absolute allows itself to be experienced as Spiritu in its integrity, implying existentially the life of the non-absolute within a specific context, which is a specific way of life.

This meditation is nothing more than the 'powerful'<sup>39</sup> (in the sense of dynamic and transformative) establishment of the presence of the Transcendental in the immanent: the Mystery and the way of life, established in terms of 'charism' is nothing more than the rootedness in the same Mystery towards the fullness of participation, i.e., communion. Hermeneutics gives meaning to

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<sup>38</sup> Passivity is giving the Absolute 'absolute protagonism'. In theological terms it can be condensed as the act of letting oneself be loved by God, be guided by God. Writes J.A. Estrada, 'Podríamos definir la espiritualidad como la vida según el espíritu, es decir, la forma de vida que se deja guiar por el Espíritu de Cristo. Según el cristianismo, el Espíritu es Dios mismo que se revela al hombre. Con lo cual la espiritualidad sería la que trata de la vida cristiana en cuanto guiada por Dios mismo.', *La espiritualidad de los laicos en una eclesiología de comunión*, Madrid: Paulinas 1992, 14. Also: A. Queralt, 'La 'espiritualidad' como disciplina teológica', in: *Gregorianum* 60 (1979), 321-376; A. Guerra, 'Proceso histórico en la formación de la teología espiritual', in: *Teresianum* 52 (2001), 39-42.

<sup>39</sup> M. Buber speaks eloquently of the presence of Power of the Absolute Thou, *I and Thou*, New York: Collier Books 1958, 110-111.

this mediation in terms of rootedness, giving sense to the notion of 'charism' in the process of living out the process of integration in the here and now.

Hermeneutics establishes the meaning, the sense of what is described, of what is phenomenologically revealed, opening up the horizon of meaning, i.e., that of the way of life (spirituality) made comprehensible by experience and its episodes as rootedness in the mystery (mysticism) in its dynamic process of transformation (spirituality) towards the fullness of transcendence or participation in the transcendental Absolute made present or mystery (mysticism).

This hermeneutical establishment, always presupposing the act of descriptive phenomenology, also makes possible the study of all these aforementioned interplays of meaning, which always begin with data, especially in its most ordinary or discrete forms as phenomena, and with the establishment of principles of certitude (epistemological foundations), in all dynamicity as something to be lived out and to be studied,<sup>40</sup> and in relation to the Absolute reality and with the stability of being an established doctrine in history through context made concrete in forms, schools, movements, etc.<sup>41</sup>

Hermeneutical establishment, always presupposing descriptive phenomenology and united to it, is no less than the determination of horizons, both for experiencing (level of being lived and in relation to reality) and meaning (level of being studied and contextual concretization).

There is no pretension of the fullness of the grasping of the essence, especially with regards to the Absolute, but there is the opening of a horizon, wherein we could, from our finitude and culp-

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<sup>40</sup> Again, these levels are taken from K. Waaijman.

<sup>41</sup> This is my modification of two meanings of spirituality by W.H. Principe. This author also speaks of spirituality as taught or scientific knowledge. We prefer to speak of scientific knowledge in terms of certainty. Certainty is the basis of teaching. In the case of spirituality, such a teaching could only take place as mystagogy. See my study: 'Possible Relationship between Mystagogy and Philosophy and its bearing on theology and spirituality,' in: *Philippiniana Sacra* 34 (1999), 219-246.

ability, point our finger at the Absolute for we have experienced Him, we have a way of life in relation to Him (spirituality) and rooted in His presence, called Mystery (mysticism) and conversely, we produce a teaching based on our relationship with Him (spirituality) made concrete in moments of our life or in experiential episodes (mysticism). And this point out to the Absolute, this feeble attempt at tautology is nothing more than a tautology of love, of reaching out to participate in the transcendence of the Absolute in our finitude and culpability.

The key here is *cultivation*: the cultivation of spirituality as mysticism or of the way of life in concrete experiential moments (thesis one) and the cultivation of mysticism in spirituality or the rootedness in mystery in its contextualized specificity (forms, schools, movements), as seen in thesis two. Such a cultivation would demand permanence. Mystagogy is this permanence, the permanence of the way of life by means of initiation and communication.<sup>42</sup>

Admittedly, each thesis emphasizes a specific understanding of the key words spirituality and mysticism. These specific understandings are only levels which find their complement in the other thesis. The levels are complimentary and not exclusive.

However, the cultivation presupposes the 'charism' which is the invitation of the Absolute to the non-absolute interpreted in terms of grace. Spirituality and mysticism necessarily part from grace which become present sacramentologically (in mystery) as 'charism'. Spirituality and mysticism are the finite and culpable response of the non-absolute, conscious of its facticity, to grace given as 'charism'.

Cultivation, aided by 'charism', makes possible the living out and study, of the relationship with the Absolute reality and the teaching or mystagogy, is a continuous epistemological act of opening and limiting horizons and sailing beyond fixed points or fields of vision and developing criteriological principles of possibility of expansion and elaboration.

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<sup>42</sup> With this affirmation, I am somehow reversing my ideas expressed in an earlier essay: 'La mistagogía como teología de la liturgia y su permanencia en la espiritualidad', in: *Studium* 43 (2003), 291-323.

## FINAL REFLECTION: THE TRUTH AS FACTICITY OF EXPERIENCE AND THE GROUNDEDNESS IN LOVE

To reflect on the relationship between Spirituality and Mysticism is to reflect on the truth of the Absolute, which makes itself experientiable, in the mediation of experience, to the non-absolute in its immanence. This creates a history, which becomes contextualized in spiritual schools, forms and movements underlying the rootedness of the finite and culpable non-absolute in its rootedness in the experiential (mediational) presence of the Absolute in Immanence or mystery.

The Absolute becomes factual in its presence, in mystery. Thus, it becomes 'true' not only in itself but also in relation to the non-absolute in terms of grace, with the effect of the out-pouring of its integral self ('charism') to build up the non-absolute in its process of building of integral self (spirituality) towards the fullness of participation in the Absolute (mysticism) with various everyday phenomena both ordinary and extraordinary (mysticism) underlying a teaching or doctrine contextualized in forms, schools and the like (spirituality).

Truth is facticity. This facticity is established by the mediation of experience and not just by discourses on truth.<sup>43</sup> Facticity opens up vistas, horizons. Its very act of opening is descriptive of itself, with no pretenses of static and fully-defined essences but tautological paths in terms of love and which at the same time make meaning and comprehension possible. In this facticity, the experiential episodes confirm, from the viewpoint of the finite and culpable, that the opening up has found its completion in the participation of the non-absolute in the Absolute which has mediated itself experientially, i.e., allowed itself to be experienced. As St. Teresa would say, 'I base this on experience (*tengo por experiencia*)'<sup>44</sup>, thus indicating the effectivity of the mediation of the experience on the part of the Absolute.

Existence is facticity. Truth springs from this and yet manifests itself (*aletheia*) in the configuration of a way of life, contextualized and specified, characterized by experiential episodes with

<sup>43</sup> M. de Certeau, *L'absent de l'histoire*, Paris: Mame 1973, 52.

<sup>44</sup> St. Teresa of Jesus, *Libro de la Vida* 4, 2; 13, 7. I am using this edition: Santa Teresa de Jesús, *Obras*, 12th ed. by T. Alvarez, Burgos: Monte Carmelo 2002.

an organic development in the exercise of virtues, made perfect in the perfection of Love, which is allowing oneself to be loved. This is the fullness of participation in the Absolute. This is communion. This is the 'originary' truth: the origin of the invitation of love which becomes the goal at the summit of the way, at the perfection of the same way, the very integral process of becoming oneself in spirit, participating in the life of the Absolute Spirit.

Existence is just being there. This is the basic truth. But spirituality and mysticism make this being there 'being there for someone' in terms of love. And this someone is the Absolute which became facticity, in its presence in order to be there, for someone, who is the non-absolute. This is the very truth of the relationality between the Absolute and non-absolute. The truth is characterized by transformation, which is the descriptive development of the relation and the interpretational sense of the dynamicity of such the same relation.

Truth is relational. It has to be dynamic. It is living and thus liveable and open to study. It is formulated as a way of life, a teaching, a model, a paradigm and thus becomes its own communication and initiation, its own mystagogy. The dynamicity of this relationality could be termed as 'proximity', the Absolute becomes near and intimately united with the non-Absolute in the Spirit, as God. This is obvious especially in the language, both phenomenological and hermeneutical, of the greatest masters of spirituality, the mystics.<sup>45</sup>

Spirituality and Mysticism, and the full comprehension of their relationships which we have only commenced to study here in a somewhat clumsy and reiterative manner (characteristic of a pioneering approach which only aims to open doors and to point out to convergences instead of differences), affirms the facticity of the Absolute.

Spirituality and mysticism are the approaches, both lived and studied, in relation to the reality and as a doctrine (paradigm or model) of the non-absolute towards the Absolute who took the initiative to approach the non-absolute in terms of love and as a constant invitation of love to the fullness of love.

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<sup>45</sup> J. Martín Velasco, 'El fenómeno místico en la historia y en la actualidad', in: Several Authors, *La experiencia mística: Estudio interdisciplinar*, Madrid: Editorial Trotta 2004, 18.

Love alone, in its metaphysical significance as the will of Reality to be to desire itself and satisfy itself in sharing with the whole of the universe, specifically man, becomes the fullest criterion from which Spirituality and Mysticism sprung and to which they will converge in all the senses that we have enumerated. Love alone is the defining force that defines the condition of possibility of Spirituality and Mysticism, because it is participatory in the sense that it makes possible the participation of the non-absolute in terms of a way of life which is in effect a way of perfection rooted in the very presence of the Absolute, which is the personalized supreme degree of the force of Communion and beyond the positivistic limits of language, as Proclus would put it (*tw arrhtw to arrhton*).<sup>46</sup>

In love, the Absolute, which becomes factible, in the silence in which we immerse ourselves (*per hoc quod ea silemus*),<sup>47</sup> has its historicity. Spirituality and Mysticism (taken together), through description (phenomenology) and interpretation (hermeneutics), makes the non-absolute appropriate for himself this very historicity.

## SUMMARY

This exploratory essay is a reflective attempt to establish the complementary differences and convergences between Spirituality and Mysticism in the course of epistemologically delineating and determining their fields of competences as areas of life and areas of study. The study parting from two fundamental theses tackles these questions from the perspectives offered by phenomenology and hermeneutics of the relationship between the Absolute and the non-Absolute in as much as the Absolute mediates itself as experience and the experience becomes concrete (and empirically or positively accountable) in the phenomena or episodes, both ordinary and extraordinary, within the current of a way of life, which is a doctrine or taken as paradigm or model, necessarily implying the notion of mystagogy. The result is an opening of a broader vista of an already explored question, as seen in the cited works, with new advances in terms of truth, facticity and historicity. □

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<sup>46</sup> 'Through the unsayable, the unsayable', *Théologie platonicienne*, I, 3rd ed., Paris: Saffrey-Westerink 1968, 15.

<sup>47</sup> This is an expression of St. Thomas Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, Turin: Marietti 1950, number 14.