

MYSTICS OF CARMEL

The mystic is an "expert" in divine matters. Carmel is the school of "divine compassion" par excellence. From Teresa to John of the Cross and in each of the saints of Carmel, we find the incarnation of this divine quality as a special manifestation of God experience. We could say, undoubtedly, that prophetism of Carmel is directly linked to the encounter that each of our mystics had with God who is infinitely merciful and compassionate. From them and as heirs of this charism, we feel called to speak and embody in every gesture the ethics of compassion as fruit of our encounter with the divine mystery. The mystic feels constrained to express with words and deeds the encounter with God who has changed his life and seeks, first of all, that others may *grow fond* of God.

With the God experience a mystic becomes audacious, fearless, courageous and enthusiastic and with such a mysterious strength that can only come from a *soul in love*. By "taking time frequently" with the Lord (Life 8, 5), the prayer stimulates the soul from within so that its "deeds" are for Him, for love. For this reason, Teresa of Jesus and the mystics of Carmel are always on the go and on the way. This is a way of interiorization towards the dwelling place where they know that God lives through them, and the way of evangelization for the tortuous paths of life.

Teresa of Jesus is the prototype of Carmel. The wandering nun, called to the great interior silence, paradoxically, is the most anxious woman of the Spanish XVIth century. Nothing was strange for her, no face was unknown to her, nor was she a stranger for any path, or for any face. Teresa of Jesus is the teacher of the ways: of those who never give up until the last foundation, managing to reach to all the ends of the world and of those who help spiritually to attain the highest union with God, up to the depth of the soul. Teresa succeeded to penetrate into the tangled ways of the souls of those who journeyed with her in her way. Even after 500 years she goes on doing it: keeps on penetrating the deepest ways of the human heart.

It is enough to see the list of her foundations, to verify the extraordinary activity of this woman burning with God's love, who traversed Spain from north to south, in a tented cart that is driven by mules. Her heart crossed the seas and settled in America as a species of incarnation, to transmit with her madness, with her excessive love for God and to tell us that she carries God not only in her heart but also in the dust of her sandals and in the ardour of her words. Her God was in wagon and dreams, in crib and farmhouse, in poverty and excess, God in simple writing, in graceful expressions, in touching words, God ... always God ... in an endless embrace ...

But also each of our mystics help us to "win the love of" of God starting from their own experience that led them then to make a radical commitment with this world.

In today's culture, that is marked deeply by the religious indifference, Teresa presents God as a friend, intimate, Lover, companion, good neighbour, a God who is captivated by us ... Before the image of an absent and strange God, John of the Cross presents us a close, affectionate God, who by speaking politely and touching delicately wins the love and becomes present in the whole creation; before the image of God who abandons himself to

his creatures, St. Therese of Child Jesus presents a God who is a affectionate father - mother who cares for us constantly, who shows the arms of God as a place where we can rest and be safe; before the image of God who ignores human suffering, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross presents a God who in his son Jesus opens the arms on the cross to receive us with love and to assume our pain and suffering; before the image of an egoistic God who only lives for himself and looks for his glory, Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity presents a God who goes out of himself and becomes to us as Father, Brother and Love in whom we can immerse our life by feeling deeply loved; before the image of a merciless and cruel Church, Francisco Palau presents us a Mother Church with entrails of compassion; before the image of a God who does not know to love, St. Teresa de los Andes of Chile, presents a God who is madly in love with us ... Before the figure of an Almighty, Omnipotent God, punisher, cruel and hard Judge, Carmel presents us to a God whom we do not know, a God whom we can meet only by loving and letting ourselves be loved freely ... a God who is all bounty, mercy and beauty.

1. The mystical language

The poetical language is usually the way the mystics use to communicate their visions, and if it is a seer, besides belonging to the angelic lineage, enjoys the predilection of the muses, and then emerge the noble words that can be said in the ambience of mortality. The poetic word, due to its major significant plasticity, the aura of evocations and suggestions that wake up and the emotional tones that cause, it lends with docility to the symbolization of the unspeakable. But, the mystic sees beyond the images and concepts, and surely it darkens when it is articulated in the moulds of a human voice.

The word of the mystic, despite its apparent fragility with which it appears, is the most powerful word when it is accepted from its functional possibilities. Listened and accepted by the people, it can change radically the life of the humanity. But the functional capacity of the mystical word differs radically from the functional capacity of the scientific and the poetical word.

When the word of the mystic resounds, the divine becomes concrete and existentially accessible to the human heart. The humanity inclines constantly to launch on towards an imminent future, and experiences by virtue of the mystical word, a direct openness towards transcendence. H. Bergson says, speaking about the Christian mystics that, once they listen to God's voice and are illumined by His presence, descend to the earth, with such an overabundance of divine energy that, in case if they are listened to, the destiny of the humanity would change in a radical way. The word of the mystic, turned into action, acts wonderfully in the substance of this world and struggles to raise our animal nature to the divine.

1.1. Characteristics of the mystical language

The mystic always speaks about the need of "new words" to express some of his experiences. Nevertheless, the mystic makes use of the ordinary language in order to express "extraordinary" things.

The first characteristic feature of the mystical language consists in being the language of experience: " *I will not say anything that is not known by experience*", Teresa of Jesus recounts us. The mystic does not speak simply about God as the theologian does, but about a God who has become experience for him, who has invaded and has transformed the person. Hence its concreteness is opposite to the abstraction of other theories because religious language is different from one of theology. [Well, Teresa suggests that a theologian should not write about God if he has not experienced God].

Another characteristic feature of the mystical language is its great psychological and affective impregnation and it is natural, because here we are trying to make an experience perceptible of the mystery that inhabits in the depth of the human being and it affects the whole person, even to the very breath. We can say, then, that what is typical of the mystical language is not to introduce new objects or new truths but adhere to the only possible truth that reveals to the people its real identity and its most genuine beauty.

One of the most striking attributes of the experience of the one who uses and creates the mystical language is its "transgression", as it is generally called. This consists in extending meaning to the vocabulary until the limit of its significant capacity and its symbolic use.

The clearly expressive resources of the transgression of the mystical language are undoubtedly, *the metaphor, the paradox and the antithesis*. That's why, it is not surprising that the mystics, intend to express their acquaintances, beyond all determinations, with the transcendent reality of God, and recur repeatedly to the use of antithesis and paradoxes [fact or sayings apparently opposite to the logic]. The mystic tries to tell us how had been his encounter with the divine and essentially this experience, leads him to be a "transgressor and subversive".

The rationale of such paradoxes lie in the transcendent condition of the Being with whom the person relates that surmounts the human mind and in the need that the mystic experiences to break up with the ideas received and propagated as an expression of God's nature, as the first step to speak about a transcendent reality with which one has come in contact through the contemplative experience. We can say that the paradox has something of intentional transgression as far as it is destined to break the level of thought. It is to awaken the new form of knowledge that corresponds to an ineffable reality at the conceptual level. The use of the paradox would be something like the "confession of a failure", the resignation to satisfy the spirit in order that the same dissatisfaction confuses and takes beyond the images in a personal quest for the divine.

The antitheses [opposition or contrariness of two judgments or assertions] are very common in the mystical texts. They are related to the depth of the soul, to God or his action on man and the human response to his presence. They are a new way of expressing the inability to refer the current terms in ordinary experience, the unique experience that one lives, and especially, the content of the same. Well-known are the bright antithesis present in the poems of St. John of the Cross and in the writings of St. Teresa: *Sweet cautery; delightful wound; that tenderly wounds my soul; silent music, sounding solitude; Oh night more lovely than the dawn!; You changed death to life; you woudest not, yet pain 'st indeed...*

Often the mystical language leads into silence: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." [Wittegenstein]. This silence is a condition of mystical language, "all wrapped up in silence" [John of the Cross]. The silence is the root where the words emerge and like the weather it surrounds them, "*Nothing is as powerful as silence. And if we were not born in the bosom of the Word, it could never have been broken*" [Rilke].

The mystic speaks from the existence of the Word and from his fruitful silence. This way, his voice is a piece of eternity and temporality, a Voice that does not go off [but that speaks in silence] and of his subdued voices [but they continue speaking in silence]. Every word of the mystic is a message of the eternal in time; it is the resonance of a saying that begins to be, shines for a moment and soon it goes off, lasting in the interior silence that shapes the word.

The mystic could not speak unless, Someone had not spoken in him and he hadn't spoken in and by what is spoken to him. This silent speaking of God in the mystic and this knowledge of the mystic spoken in the diction of an interior Word is what we call *a divine word*. Therefore, the Word speaks to the mystic, meanwhile the mystic becomes a "word *of* the Word". The mystic is a word spoken by the Word; then, the mystic is a word *on* the Word.

That's why the mystical language is characterized for appearing as self-concerned and witnessing language. We say a self-concerned language because the subject always speaks in first person; that's why whenever he refers to God speaks of "my God". Whatever he says then is nothing but, his own life. The language of the mystic, expression of an interior experience belongs to self-concerned languages (lenguajes autoimplicativos). In the first place, like any language of faith. That is to say, when the believer says "I believe in God" not only makes a statement about a fact like someone who affirms "God exists", but expresses one's own interior state of belief, performs an act of commitment by which the believer ratifies and adheres to what is proposed in the statement and makes an act of "conduct" by which the believer expresses his confidence in God [e.g. When the mystic says, "God is my lover" or "my beloved" ...]

Another aspect is recalling the experience, and this means not only to describe it from outside but to make it emerge from consciousness, to assume it as true, recognizing in it and promising to give account of the truth. That's why it is so frequent that the mystic suffers for not having able to say everything that has been lived, and is concerned because he was not being understood by those who listened to his description without an experience.

The mystical language is, also, witnessing. One realizes something of what the subject has lived, "what is seen and heard", and that's why one cannot remain silent [Acts 4, 20: "for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."]. He constantly fears that the one who has not lived the same experience does not grasp the meaning of what he says, but feels the need to repeat it, even if there are times when this communication will be overtaken by the ineffability of lived experience and the mystic will be reduced to silence as the only form of communication. Let's remember, for example, the end of the commentary of St. John of the Cross to the *Living Flame of love*. In these extreme cases the

silence is the last means of language that becomes witnessing. Regarding the witness that speaks of an experience whose content is not knowable by other, means this testimony is based on one's own authority. This authority rests, on one hand, in the quality of life of the person who gives this testimony, and in the quality of the relationship or experience to which it refers.

Talking, like oscillating between silence and the word, leads us towards a place where emerges *human word*. In the silence prior to the Word there is a possibility of *opening oneself*. But: what or who opens? Those who open themselves in this encounter are those 'who are not' with the 'One who is', precisely by virtue of this encounter in the open. Teresa will say it poetically this way: *Oh wondrous juncture, that dost bind two things that nature parts in twain...!* (Poem VI) The 'One who is' meets 'one who is not' to become someone who is. At this encounter those who meet perceiving to be who they are, receive different names; but all the names that were imposed on them denominate the One whom by virtue of Him is possible to name. To name by virtue of the original Word: *Oh woods and thickets planted by the hand of my Beloved ...!*

From the lineage of the divine Being springs a thought, and emerges a language in the form of words. All the power and scope of the word is lived for the Being who animates, and its mission is not different than manifestation of the richness of the Being. Essentially the word is not an expression or representation, but significance of *something*, highlighted in the horizon of the unseen, succeeds to maintain the vibration of the presence. It is, the thought and the word of the mystic as well that constitutes the *epiphany* of the divine Being. But no human thought is capable of revealing, with its significant capacity, the totality of the Being; so every human word, although essential, always, somehow, is limited and partial. Seen this way the limitation of the word to explain and to communicate divine contents, it becomes all the more necessary the silence as the last "word" to speak the unspeakable. We can refer to three kinds of silences:

One of them is the absolute silence broken for ages by the victorious presence of the Word. The existence of this silence is only a hypothesis, because if it existed at some time, it might never have been broken. That's why, always it is the Word.

Another is the silence left inexorably behind by the real presence of the human word. Breaking of this word, simultaneously projects behind a space of silence that is identified with the mere possibility. That first and original Word cannot be confused with our human word, because the word of the person is preceded by a long space of silence and of nothing. The human word lacks that "divine" vigour required for the overcoming of nothing. We are born within the word, but we are not the Word.

There is a third silence. It is the silence, new and fruitful, that exists due to the presence of the human word and from which emerge the authentic words. This silence is more vigorous than the word, because the force, depth and scope of a human word, as nurturer of destination, depends on the vigour of silence in which it is rooted and from which it sprouts. That's why we speak from the existence of the Word and from our fruitful silence.

Genesis of the mystical language

We have already noted that among the documents where the mystical language is recorded, they are of very diverse nature: *groans, exclamations, prayers, poetry, exhortations, descriptions, sermons, and psychological, philosophical or theological interpretations*. All these documents, to the extent that they are samples of a mystical language, are involved to a greater or lesser extent point out the characteristics of this language. All of them refer to the mystical experience as their origin. Without the presence of some kind of language it would not be a human experience and would be lost in the realm of the non-conscious.

The mystical experience, like all human experiences, demands, to exist as it is, to emerge from the consciousness. And this is what happens in the language.

That's why the language is not a piece of translation in sounds or in graphic signs of something previously lived. It is a part of the original moment of the experience. Hence, its function is not reduced to describe, by means of signs that represent it and the experience that provokes it. In the language in its most original level there occurs the unveiling of the reality in which consists the truth and knowledge and constitutes the threshold of what is human. Such unveiling causes the phenomenon of symbolization: transparency of a universal meaning in the materiality of a sign, constituent of a human language.

In the mystic originates a growing awareness of the breaking-up of human condition, perceptible in analogy [relation of similarity between different things] of some of the words of ordinary language are loaded with the new meaning. That is why, although all mystical language is by its nature "transgressive" and symbolic, their more originating levels are those that appear in the symbols, with their high concretion, immediacy, vividness where analogical rupture takes place [interpretation of the Scriptures from a literal sense changes to a spiritual sense] and that gives rise to every language.

After this first level of expressive character and perhaps "explosive", there appears descriptive, explanatory, interpretative texts in which the subject will reveal, in conceptual increasingly clearer, more "dominated" way, the light that shone so incandescent form in the original symbols. These symbols can be taken in the materiality of the significant ones, of the cosmos, its elements and the natural phenomena that is closest to the human experience: night, water, wind, light, fire; they can be based on human fundamental experiences: life, birth, and in the effects or feelings that they endure: love, death, pleasure, happiness, sadness. Almost always they have their root in the deeper awareness of oneself through the proper corporal condition as axis that determines the origin of the orientation: to enter, to climb, to go out, to go down; and, beneath all of them, as root of all the disparities, which emerges in the consciousness of being, of being this and being so that is to say, in the consciousness of the infiniteness performed under irremediable finite forms.

John of the Cross, in the prologues to his comments or statements to the poems expresses with the most possible clarity in questions that are so little susceptible to full clarity. Let's look at the commentary on the Spiritual Canticle and let's sum up his fundamental affirmations:

The stanzas, which have as their object "exchange of love between the soul and Christ, its Bridegroom", are written "with a certain burning love of God". This immense love

constitutes such an experience, that not even the souls that experience it can understand, nor express it with words. That's why these souls resort to “figures, similes and similarities” through which they “let something of their experiences overflow, and from the abundance of the spirit pour out secrets and mysteries”, as it happens in the Scriptures. It is impossible, therefore, to declare “these stanzas in all the breadth and fullness” with their figures and likenesses, with “ordinary and used terms”. This abundance of meaning cannot be explained adequately. And their attempt will not be this, “because it is better to explain the utterances of love in their broadest sense so that each one may derive profit from them according to the mode and capacity of his spirit”. Therefore, after considering that “if these similitudes are read without the simplicity of the spirit of love [...] they will seem to be absurdities rather than reasonable utterances”, it is recommended that “there is no reason to be bound to this explanation. For mystical wisdom, which comes through love [...] need not be understood distinctly in order to cause love and affection in the soul, for it is given according to the mode of faith, through which we love God without understanding Him”.

Following the reading of the texts of John of the Cross, we can formulate in a more precise way some elements of the genesis of the mystical language. In the beginning, there would be an experience lived under the form of love, indescribable of what is love and above all what it has of immense love, as coming from the infinite and mysterious God. But we know that there is no human experience, if it does not glisten in the conscience. Well, the symbol is the radical, original language of this experience emerging from that fundamental experience in which, due to the symbol, the mystic becomes aware of the originating Presence that inhabits as the dimension of its ultimate depth. The symbol would be, then, the essential word of the mystical experience in which the relationship is revealed and realized with the Being that constitutes to the being of the person who expresses himself, according to the traditions, as abyss without name, as absolute, as person, as love, as a friend, as a beloved, as a companion, as a good neighbour ...

The experience of the real that pursues the mystic is expressed by the symbol; this experience which expresses itself in the language and, primarily, in the symbolic condition of the language, as the place of encounter of the material and the metaphysical, of the sound and the sense, of the meaning and the reality.

This radical nature of original words expresses itself in the response of John of the Cross to the naive question whether God was giving him those words that were both understandable and adorning: “*Daughter, a few times God was giving them to me, and other times I was looking elsewhere*”. Hence reading the words of the mystic without the “simplicity of the spirit of love and intelligence that they have, earlier look like absurdities...” [Comment to the prologue of spiritual Canticle]. The suitable interpretation will require some "affinity" of the interpreter, understood as the ability to share the experience that caused it.

This explains the different reactions that has caused and continues to cause the language of the mystics. Whereas the entire generations of Christians have found meaning and benefit in the writings of the mystics in their way towards contemplation; whereas the sensitive critics to the peculiarities of this language have admired its brilliance, beauty, evocative power, creativity, its renewing capacity, there have been who, measuring this language with the existing norms in the field of purely immanent experience, or judging with the simple

logic of conceptual thinking, although it is theological, have judged it as absurd, confused, arbitrary, or even have condemned it as heretical. To get rid of the above mentioned, so that its linguistic "eccentricities" were not harshly condemned as pioneering and dangerous, the mystics have had to fight a war on the limit of the words.

With everything that is mentioned above a question is placed before us: has the Carmelite Mystic anything to say to the world of today?

The Carmelite Mystic is first of all, a mystic of love. Our society seems to be experiencing the "dark night" of love. God is absent, God outside the world, hidden God, indifferent God ... The Carmelite Mystic, by her essence, has the ability to communicate personal experiences rather than moral norms. The mysticism of Carmel is a mysticism of the passion, of surrender, of service, of compassion, of abandonment, of the cross, of confidence, of generosity ... The mystics of Carmel restore the value of the free relation between God and the human beings.

The mystics of Carmel, knowing the hardness of the human heart and our apathy to engage in affectionate relations with God, accept the challenge to show with their life and in their life the wonderful madness of living with God and in God. That's why they are significant for all those who want to take up this risk: educated and uneducated, wealthy and destitute, aged and young, atheists and believers, good and bad ...

A typical feature of the Carmelite Mystic is the assertion that one can know God only with the heart and not with the reason. The Carmelite Mystic is the proof that, after the dark night, a different discourse is possible, which does not put love in danger any more, allowing God to be truly God. God as he is, God as I experience, God ... simply God ...

The mystics of Carmel tell us that life cannot be anything else but a continuous transformation, under its various aspects. They show the greatest stimulus for changing and providing the conditions for entire human progress is that, the active power of love and compassion. Thus the self-knowledge of a person becomes a 'real and divine self-knowledge'. That is the human being becomes aware of his real and divine life, and in the finally, reaches to become what one really is.

For some years it was tried for withdrawing mysticism from the convents and from the high stages of the spiritual life, and put them to walk through the streets of the daily life. Often we hear now that we are in a moment of "turning to the mysticism". There is certain awareness that indeed we have lost the mystical dimension. And we are aware that this loss affects the depths of our being and the meaning of life. This is very important. But, at the same time, we realize that we do not know what mysticism is. When the concepts are left in the air, they are misrepresented, one is exposed to multiple deceptions and mysticism can be reduced to Puritanism or to a "cheap" proliferation.

The mystic is not elitist, because its quality can be found and, in fact, is found in any human standard: " there is a lot of mysticism in the simple life of many people: peasants, workers, mothers of family, elders, sick ...

Mysticism is not a formula to approach the divine, but it is a continuous truth of the eternal becoming creative in the encounter and in the absence, in the embrace and in the night, in the painful purification and in the new birth. However, with all this, the mysticism continues to escape from our hands. We might say that the mysticism is one way of being and feeling that welcomes and assimilates experientially the God who inhabits and allows imbibing our whole existence. The religious experience affects the depth of the person and every fibre of our existence, causes us to vibrate all our strings. The first thing in this encounter is the fact to face that “divine reality” and be overwhelmed by it.

The challenge that appears before us is of answering, from our particular charism, to the question as raised many times and perhaps seldom answered on God's responsibility with regard to the distressing situations that we have to face each day, starting from an experience of faith that must be increasingly qualified. It is qualified to the sense of having a deep experience of the mystery and with the mystery. Only from these depths of the Spirit we will be able to respond to the deepest and existential questions raised by the human being.