Giovanni Ballini ocd

Explore

- Lumen Fidei 36 -

The ascent of Mount of St. John of the Cross

- exploratory mysticism in the new millenium -

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CONVENTO SAN TORPÈ
CARMELITANI SCALZI - PISA

- Pisa 2013 -

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EXPLORE
THE ASCENT OF MOUNT
OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

- exploratory mysticism in the new millenium -
SUMMARY

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT
OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, BRIEF PORTRAIT

- EXPLORE -

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- WORK BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS -

S Ascent of Mount Carmel - CB The Spiritual Canticle
N Dark Night of the soul - FB The Living Flame
People who met and knew St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) said that “the general expression of his features, his appearance and his gestures give to his face a sweet pleasantness”. In his face there was something that “makes him pleasant, a spiritual light, an inner and lovely sweetness which emanates from his features transfiguring them”. That is the feeling of those who met him. According to a witness in the Saint Father John “it was clearly visible something divine, which attracted the attention compelling to look and listen to him; it seemed as he had a dignity superior to that of any other man on the Earth”.

About the Prince of Mystics as a “bridge” towards non-Christian religions and in the context of the interreligious dialogue – in particular between the Christian and Indian spirituality – the words of the Hindu scholar of Carmelite mysticism Svami Siddheshwarananda (1897-1957) speak for themselves. He, a Prince of the Cochin Family (Kerala, India), when he read the Works of the Prince of Mystics, maintained: “When I read St. John of the Cross, I am often enthralled by the light of his personality, I am attracted by the blessing that I feel emanating from a so saint company”.

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1 Siddheswarananda, Pensiero indiano e mistica carmelitana, Rome 1982, 63.
The priestly life of Father John carries the Easter sign of the Cross. Anyway, Father John Evangelist, who lived with him about nine years, witnesses that: “he tolerated the suffering with a heroic patience”, and he adds that “he was very cautious, gentle and good-hearted, very mortified, and with a nice appearance”.

St. John of the Cross travelled a lot. These were very long and difficult travels, where the fraternal dialogue with his fellow alternates with long silences, with breaks to pray in the woods or along the banks. Usually they travelled on foot or by mules.

In his books the Mystic Doctor leaves a lot of allusions to the well-disposed explorer, to the exploratory mysticism, to the search for God along the mystic path, particularly in the Ascent of Mount Carmel and in the Dark Night. He was a simple and disinterested man - Ruiz writes - and he never required a regard for his person, he was the last between his Brothers. But his simplicity and clearness emanated a superior light.  

He died as a "swan" (FB 1,30) when he was only 49 years old, after a brief illness. In the end, before his flight of swan, he asked that his Brothers would read him the Song of Songs, preferring to the prayers for the dying - to which he certainly listened - the mystic enchantment of the biblical love.

His Works light all the path of the call towards the summit of the union with God-trinity. They can be divided into Main Works: Ascent of Mount Carmel, Dark Night, Spiritual Canticle, The Living Flame of Love; Brief Works: poems, warnings, letters, sayings of light and love.

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In January 25th 1675 he was beatified by Clement X. In December 27th he was canonized by Benedict XIII, and he was declared Doctor of the Church the 24th of August 1926 by Pius XI.

- Paul VI places him between the saints of the Christian joy.³
- John Paul II declared him Master in the Faith.⁴
- Benedict XVI notices that the Doctor Mysticus describes a sure path towards the holiness.⁵
- Cardinal Atanasio OCD recalls that St. John found in the mystery of the Cross the spring of every peace and serenity.⁶
- Father Saverio, Praepositus OCD, shows St. John of the Cross as an expert of the mankind who, walking in the dark night of the faith, finds again his freedom thanks to the relationship of Love with the God-Trinity.⁷

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³ PAOLO VI, Gaudete in Domino, Esortazione Apostolica, 9 Maggio 1975. n. IV.
⁴ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Maestro della Fede, Lettera Apostolica, 14 Dicembre 1990.
⁵ BENEDETTO XVI, Udienza Generale, 16 Febbraio 2011.
⁶ ANASTASIO card. BALLESTRERO, La Montagna, in AA.VV., Simboli e Mistero in San Giovanni della Croce, Roma 1991, 18ss.
⁷ SAVERIO CANNISTRÁ, "Influsso culturale dell'esperienza mistica carmelitana", in Teresianum, Rivista della Pontificia Facoltà Teologica del Teresianum, Roma LX-1-2009, 8ss.
"Since faith is a light, it draws us into itself, inviting us to *explore* ever more fully the horizon which it illumines"

- Lumen Fidei 36 -
I. METHODOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN PRAYER

- the christian prayer

The Christian prayer belongs to the “Deposit of Faith”\(^8\) of the Church which, since the beginnings, persevered in this prayer thanks to the Apostles and the disciples together with Mary (At 2,14.42). Thanks to the prayer, conversation with God, the Christian answers to God Who calls him in Christ to the communion with Him, although, to answer, the believer needs the Holy Spirit.

According to our Faith, in fact, the human cannot not only develop, but neither begin the prayer if the divine initiative doesn’t turn him towards this direction, since we pray always thanks to the divine infusion and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and freely moved by its grace. So, the Christian prayer is theologically based on the Christian mystery.

- definition

From a theological point of view the contemplative prayer is defined by the three Carmelite Doctors in these ways:
- “relationship of friendship” (St. Therese of Avila)
- “conversation with God” (St. John of the Cross)
- “a transport of the heart, a shout of gratitude and love” (St. Therese of Child Jesus).

\(^8\) JOHN PAUL II, Aposolic Constitution “Fidei Depositum” for the publication of the Cathechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) draft after the Vatican Council 2nd, 11th October 1992, n. 3.
1. Methodology

The term "method" in general, suggests the idea of a mean which can help us to reach an aim. It indicates an effective way to reach an purpose. In spiritual theology the term "method", specifically, refers to the exercise of meditation, throughout which the Christian, moved by the grace of the Spirit, reaches the contemplative prayer, the “conversation with “God”.

1.1. The nature: “a method is nothing else than a guide”

There are two concepts we have always to keep in mind when speaking about a method of prayer.

- First, that the prayer aims to lead us to the “loving knowledge of our Lord Jesus, to the union with Him” (CCC 2708) which is realized throughout the contemplative prayer, which is the conversation with God.
- Second, that the way is the exercise of the mental prayer, through which we reach the contemplative prayer, the conversation with God, a superior “form” of mental prayer.

1.2. The need of a method

All the spiritual authors agree that we need to use a method as an introduction to the mental prayer, but they also agree that we have to leave it when the soul, progressing towards the contemplative or theological prayer, spontaneously converses with God: “The use of a method decreases according to the simplification of the prayer, until the silent glance begins to be the deep attitude and also an essential need of the one who is praying. The method has to encourage the contemplative prayer, the theological prayer, and it has to lead to this last goal which is also its overcoming and its end” (E. Ancilli).
Necessary as an introduction, the method has to be abandoned when advancing into the prayer the soul spontaneously, with simplicity and with a loving breath, creates a relationship with God, converses with God.

1.3. Some elements for the elaboration of a method of prayer

A good method is based on almost four points in harmony the one with the others: environmental conditions, subjective conditions, theme, part of the discourse.

- environmental conditions

- **time:** like Jesus: vespers, night, dawn, third, sixth, ninth, vespers.
- **place:** solitary space, desert, caverns like Elijah, closed rooms as Jesus recommended us.
- **frame:** “the great book of the creation” (CCC 2705): sun on the horizon, full moon which rises from the mountains, clear starry nights, glance towards the “Pleiades and Orion” (Am 5,8), charm of far isles, enchanting effect of colours, twilight, dawn light, northern lights, mountains, woods, forests, dark woods, clefts, fountains and resounding rivers, flight and sweet melody of birds, whistles, green meadow full of colours, the whole created by the “hand of the beloved God” Who “loves walking in His garden at the breeze of the day”.

- subjective conditions

**Goodwill:** “the meditation puts the thought, the imagination, the emotional nature and the desire into action. We need this mobilization to deepen the beliefs of the Faith, … , and to reinforce the will of following Christ” (CCC 2708).
**Body position:** any, provided that it is humble and respectful: standing, sitting, kneeling down, bowing on earth, and, if suffering, laying in bed. Sitting on the heel is the position “of the carmelites” and it is the position used by St. Therese of Avila for her prayer.

- **theme**

**Well prepared:** “preferably about the mystery of Christ” (CCC 2708).

- **parts of the method**

Among the different points that succeed, there are three standards:

- **Preparation:** far, near, immediate.
- **Concentration:** dialogue with God which is for the soul a “recreating and enchanting dinner” (CB strophe 15).
- **Execution of his own intentions.**

**2. THE CARMELITE METHOD**

“There are as many methods as many spiritual masters”

(CCC 2708)

**2.1. Origin**

The carmelite method\(^9\), in part based on the Granada’s method\(^10\), adds to a

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\(^10\) LUIS DE GRANADA, *Libro de la oratiòn y meditatiòn*, Salamanca 1554. The book by Granada is among the “buenos libros” recommended by St. Teresa of Avila in her Constitutions: “since they are in part a good food as necessary for the soul as the material food is for the body”. For the biography and Works of fray Luis de Granada cf. A. HUERGA, Luigi di Granada, in Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità (II), 1196-1198, Rome 1990. To the method by Granada is recollected that of St. Peter of Alcantara.
lot of methods of prayer that, from the 16th century, makes the Christian life of the Catholic Europe full of Saints.

We can find this method inside the *Instruction of Novices* by Father John of Jesus Mary\textsuperscript{11}, approved by the Consulta of the Teresian Reform, in which Father John of the Cross took part as third council member. Composed by the General Vicar and five council members, the Consulta was the main authority of government of the rising Teresian Reform. In the historical documents of the Reformed Carmel we find that the Consulta approved the Instruction of Novices and so, the method of prayer involved in it, in January 11th 1591\textsuperscript{12}.

The *Instruction of Novices* is a pedagogical-monastic work about the education of the novices of the Reformed Carmel. There are two versions, the Spanish one (1591) and the Italian one (1605). We will follow the Spanish one, for two reasons:

- There is the influence of St. John of the Cross in the division into seven parts of the method of prayer
- It was examined and approved by the Saint

The method of prayer of the Instruction of Novices is “simple and agile in its structure, open-minded in its freedom, profoundly characterized in its physiognomy: a loving conversation which aims to an always higher union with the Lord” (G. Lercaro).


\textsuperscript{12} cf. *MONUMENTA HISTORICA CARMELI THERESIANI, Documenta Primigenia*, vol. IV (1590-1600), Teresianum-Rome 1985, n. 537, 431-432.
2.2. The parts of the carmelite method

The difference between the Carmelite method and the Granada’s method is that the first one adds the loving conversation (contemplation), while the second one doesn’t consider it.


Moreover, according to the witness of the first historian of the Teresian Reform, Father Quiroga (1564-1628), John of the Cross taught the central core of the carmelite method, the second part, dividing it into three moments:

- Representative moment of the mysteries of the Humanity of Christ
- Considering moment of the same mysteries
- Simple loving attentiveness – conversation with God – about the same mysteries

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<th>Carmelite method</th>
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Focusing on the **PART II**, defined as **ATTRACTING phase**, we can further distinguish:
- According to the meditative level:

- Representative moment → role of the imagination
- Considering moment → role of the intellect

- According to the contemplative level:

- Affective moment → role of the loving glance, the conversation with God which will develop according to its degrees, in:
  - Loving attention
  - Loving news
  - Two beautiful eyes outlined in the heart

2.3. Not the void, but the Humanity of Christ

"we imagine Christ crucified, or bound to the column, or at another of the stations"
(St. John of the Cross, 2S 12,3)

The end of a Christian method of prayer is not the mental void, but the contemplative prayer, that is to say, the “relationship” of friendship or spiritual relationship, the conversation with God, the loving glance towards God Who loves "conversing" with His sons (Dei Verbum 2) "in different ways, restoring them” (CB 11,3).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that some people consider the prayer as “an effort of concentration to obtain the mental void” (CCC 2726). This, as we can read, is a “wrong view” of the prayer which has to be seen in its dialogic nature. “Therefore we have to understand correctly the doctrine of those masters that recommend us to make the spirit empty from any sensible representation and from any concept, keeping a loving attention towards God” (Oratioins Formas 19).
Against the masters of her own times, who taught to think about nothing during the mental prayer (IV M 3,4), Theresa wrote: “Don’t stop working with the intellect, since otherwise you’ll remain cold and stunned [bobos]” (V 12,5).

Regarding the intellective suspension Theresa maintains:

- First, that it is an action from God: “In the state of the mystic theology the intellect stops working because God suspends its functions” (V 12,5)

- Second, that it is not a human action: “To presume of suspending the activity by ourselves, it is a thing it is better to avoid” (Ib.)

Then, according to St. Theresa, we have to avoid “to suspend the activity and stop thinking, because it is a good thing to remember of being always in front of God and who this God is” (IV M 3,7).

And so John of the Cross:

- “the aim of meditation on the things of God is to reach of some knowledge and love of God” (2S 14,2)
- "as long as he finds sweetness in meditation, he should not abandon this" (2S 13,2)
- "it is no less needful for him not to lay aside the imaginative meditation before the proper time lest he should turn backward" (2S 13,1)
- "and this comes when God brings the soul into a more spiritual communion, which is contemplation (2S 17,7)

“Each method of prayer, recalled John Paul II in Avila, is effective as soon as it takes its inspiration from Christ and leads to Christ, the way, the truth and the life” (AAS 75).
The Christ at the column that Teresa of Avila got painted in a hermitage of the Monastery of St. Joseph in Avila. The nuns called it "Christ with his beautiful eyes"
II. CONVERSATION WITH GOD

The Catechism of the Catholic Church recalls that the prayer is a Christian prayer when “it is a communion with Christ and it widens within the Church, which is His body” (CCC 2565). During the celebration of the divine mystery of the divine liturgy, as well as during the ordinary life, everything contributes to the fulfilment of the communion with Christ, to the “conversation” with Christ, the contemplative attitude of the Teresian Carmel which widens within the Church of the third millennium.

The “conversation” is the typical relationship with Christ that the Doctors of the Teresian Carmel lived and taught within the Universal Church; it is the way by which St. John of the Cross suggests, “with a whole faith” (3S 42,6) the secret and mysterious fascination of the Christian prayer, “conversation with God in the spirit” (2S 17,5).

The main character of the “conversation” that we are going to outline is a Christian “well-disposed towards God” (CB 1,22), because he is “converted” (1N 1,2) to the service of Him, searching Him in the “contemplative life, humiliating himself in the mortifications and in the humble exercises” (CB 3,4).

There are three ways of “conversation” of the contemplative attitude that aim at the communion with Christ within the Church. St. John of the Cross outlines them, with amotum obliquum, in the “path of dark contemplation” (2S 7,13):

- Conversation with God as a “loving attentiveness” (1.)
- Conversation with God as “loving knowledge” (2.)
- Conversation “of God” thanks to two beautiful eyes (3.)
1. "Loving attentiveness"

As contemplative attitude we mean that disposition of a "searcher of God" (Benedict XVI) who has within himself some spontaneous attitudes, some moods in order to easily “converse” with God with "more courtesy" (1N 12,3) and with a “loving attentiveness” (2S 13,4). These are two attitudes that are difficult to separate one from the other, that are easy to love and that we can easily feel during our Christian path, seen by St. John of the Cross as that evangelical “path” (1S 13,10) which leads to the eternal life.

This “conversation” with God Who made Himself visible in Jesus Christ, was always in the heart of the Doctor of the nada, who desired nothing else than this, as these words show: “we imagine Christ crucified, or bound to the column, or at another of the stations" (2S 12,3).

Thanks to these first notes we can naturally realize that with the contemplative attitude in the form of “loving attentiveness” we have already entered that inner and secret space called “Eden”, a simple and natural space of a searcher of God, a delicious space for the divine Beloved, because He finds His delight in living with the sons of the humans. (Pr. 8,31)

The loving attentiveness towards God is a “confused, loving, passive and tranquil” (2S 14,2) knowledge of God, where the searcher of God "drinks wisdom and love and delight" (2S 14,2). It is called contemplative prayer because it is between the mental prayer and the infused contemplation. It is the same mental prayer in a theological form: “conversation with God” (2S 17,5) because the theological acts of pure love towards God, that the searcher is used to repeat during his mental prayer, became usual for him and they are a mood to receive the loving knowledge that God is presenting along the “path of dark contemplation” (2S 7,13).


2. "Loving knowledge"

God, finding His delight in the conversation with the human, is "The One Who moves and instils Love" (FB 3,50), "making the human to feel His presence in a lot of ways, bringing delight and joy" (CB 11,3), as St. John of the Cross maintains, performing "a work which is quiet and delicate, solitary, productive of peace and satisfaction" (1N 9,7). This divine pedagogy, spiritual and gentle, produces with “order and sweetness” (2S 17,2) the “secret, peaceful and loving” (1N 10,6) infusion of contemplation which, as St. John of the Cross teaches, “if allowed, enkindles the soul with the spirit of Love" (1N 10,6).

Here are some quotations about this gradual infusion: "touch of knowledge and delight" (2S 26,5), "peaceful and secret infusion from God" (1N 10,6), "inflow of God" (2N 5,1; 2N 14,1), "infused and loving knowledge of God" (2N 18,5). So, touch-infusion-loving knowledge are equivalent.

From these quotations we can deduce that the secret infusion is an intervention of God, a touch (toque) which, thanks to the grace and the theological love, realizes a new dynamism of communion within the life of the searcher of God, summarized by the Mystic Doctor by two simple words, “loving knowledge” or contemplation, according to two main degrees:

Incipient, that is vague perception of God, relates to the state of the proficients “which is that of the contemplatives” (1N 1,1)
Deep, without interruptions, relates to the state of the perfects, “which is the divine union” (1N 1,1)

The loving knowledge is an enchanting truth\(^\text{13}\) which God communicates throughout a touch (2S 17,5) which penetrates the “substance of the soul"

\(^{13}\) JUAN DE JESUS MARIA, Le amarà tanto como es amada. Estudio positivo sobre "la ingualidad de amor" del alma con Dios, en las obras de San Juan de la Cruz, in Ephemerides Carmeliticae 6 (1955).
(2S 26,5,6): "touch of knowledge and delight" (2S 26,5), "delectable touch" (2S 26,7), "divine touch" (2S 26,8).
This communication produces in the searcher of God the passive act of knowledge and love of that loving knowledge. This whole mystery is defined by the Master of Faith "pure contemplation" (2S 23,3) and it is "part of the union" (2S 26,10).

3. Two beautiful eyes

wonders alternate with horrors (2S 6,6)

In a life "according to the faith" (CB prologue 2) "as it were by night in darkness" (1S 1,1) those who "well disposed" (CB 1,22) are looking for God, discover, to their amazement, two beautiful eyes outlined in their hearts (CB 12,5): order and sweetness, self-denial and purity.
With "order and sweetness" (2S 17,2), they climb the stairs from the "musica callada" (CB 15) of the famous "nada" (1S 13,11 13), and start to explore new dimensions of the way of contemplation, "so solitary and secret" (2N 25,2).
With "self denial and purity" (2S 7,5), they have a look at the "first precept" (2N 11,4) and in their continuous "conversation with God", they go into the "soledadsonora" (CB 15) made up of transcendental echoes, even though of arcane sounds of the "todo y nada" (1S 13,11-13).

- 'Wonders': the whistle

to hear the "whistle" with the hearing of the soul is to see it with the eye of the passive intellect (CB 14,15)

Veiled by the secret infusion of the contemplation and led by the two beautiful eyes along the "path of dark contemplation" (2S 7,13),
sometimes it seems to the searcher of God to live in an spell, he wonders on what he sees and hears if "he is under a spell" (2N 9,5). All this is caused by a lot of beneficial effects that the infused contemplation exerts at the beginning over our explorer; in fact, as we can often read in the Works of the Doctor Mysticus:

- it communicates a sublime, secret, soft feeling to him
- it hides him in a pleasant, secret, loving solitude
- it leads him towards the perfections of the union with God
- it stops all the faculties and the senses and it makes them dumb
- it leads him to a very deep and vast solitude
- it introduces him into the veins of the science of Love, into the divine wisdom
- it gradually makes him exit and ascent towards God, "along the path of solitude, without a true understanding of the way" (2N 25,4).

Led by the conversation with God, the infused contemplation, the searcher of God will walk with wonder along the mystic path, and will go over the off-key echo of the earthly "nasty tongues" (CB 3,7), hidden and protected from the "contradiction of tongues" (2N 16,13).

- 'Horrors': in the grave (Psalm 87,8; Dn 6,17)

to enter the "grave" is the time of the spiritual passing of God, of His angel, in order to exceed the limits of human's nature (CB 14,18)

Anyway, along this wonderful mystic path, the searcher of God meets - and so cannot avoid - a lot of distress and horrors (2N 5,4.7; 9,11); furthermore, the path shows him a lot of obscure faces that will cause him pain and suffering in the spirit (2N 17,7).

These are the horrors of many anguishes, through which the explorer well
disposed towards God maintains of walking safe (2N 16,1), since he is sustained and led by two beautiful eyes outlined in his heart. The Prince of Mystics explains that the communication of God is "horrible" (1S 1,3) for two reasons:

- because of the height of the divine wisdom that exceeds the capacity of the soul (2N 5,2-3)
- because of the baseness and impurity of the soul (2N 5,2)

The horrible experiences of his descent into the hell and his damnation - descensus ad inferos - that "here means purgatory" (2N 6,6) opens to the searcher of God:

- "anguishes and hardships" (N prologue)
- "death throughout a true mortification" (N declaration 1)
- "purgative contemplation, which causes passively in the soul the renunciation of itself and everything" (N declaration 1)
- "violent and severe purgation" (2N 3,2)
- "the soul feels very keenly the shadow of death and the lamentations of death and the pains of hell, which consist in its feeling itself of being without God. All this is felt by the soul in this condition for it believes that it is so with it forever" (2N 6,2)
- "the soul itself should be annihilated and destroyed, since these passions and imperfections became natural to it" (2N 6,5)
- "The afflictions and constraints of the will are now very great likewise, and of such a kind that they sometimes pierce the soul" (2N 7,1).

These are the horrors of the many anguishes, the specific subject of the Dark Night, "severe word and doctrine" (1N 13,3), "substantial foods" (1N 1,2), "bread with crust" (1N 12,1), "the food of robust person" (1N 12,1) for the sons of the Church: "the inward food is the beginning of a
contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses" (1N 6,9) as the Doctor of the Mystics maintains.

- **A cult in the spirit** -

The "conversation with God" of St. John of the Cross that we briefly outlined not only shows an *emotional* communion with Christ (1.), but also reveals an *effective* communion with Christ (2.) in an Easter act, "secret wisdom" (2N 17,2) *of the Cross*, that **St. John** widened within the Church in a mystic exploratory form (3.).

Then, the contemplative attitude outlined by St. John of the Cross is "in communion with Christ and it widens itself within the Church, which is His body" (CCC 2565).
III. DIVINE PEDAGOGY

"It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms" (Hosea 11)

- The theological dynamical project

1. God, in His pedagogy, brings gradually our explorer to perfection: "God brings the human to perfection according to the way of human's own nature, working from what is lowest and most exterior up to what is most interior and highest" (2S 17,4). Our searcher of God, in his continuous "conversation with God", by degrees, actually "becomes ever more detached and emptied of the ways of sense" (2S 17,5).

We have already said that our explorer is a searcher of God who uses a path by stages in the spirit tested since the first centuries of the Christian era. This path is seen in a theological-dynamical perspective.

This expression means that we will develop the plan of the mystic path starting from the mystery of the One and Triune God Who reveals Himself and who is present within the history of salvation and within each believer, using the skilled experience of the Prince of Mystics, who is not only a subject of meditation, but also one of the sources of the spiritual theology.

2. As a theologian, St. John of the Cross witnesses a systematic approach to the history of salvation and of the process for holiness.

In fact, the teaching of the Mystic Doctor proposes this theological dynamism: "the human arrives in the bosom of the Trinity [glorification], because from the Trinity he is born [predestination]"\(^{14}\). [1]

In fact, according to our Saint, in the human, who is predestined by God to the divine union, all the big stages of the salvation which appear in the biblical Revelation are fulfilled, in an active-passive way. Big stages which succeed each other and which are: creation, redemption, purification, transformation, divinization.

The searcher of God, our explorer well-disposed towards God, during his walk of spiritual exercise which aims at the communion with God, lives again the inner experience of these saving facts which God realized within the history of salvation.

3. The presence of the One and Triune God, "the axis of the spiritual life"\(^{15}\) [2], coordinates the ascetic-spiritual path of the Christian. According to the Mystic Doctor, the presence of the One and Triune God accompanies all the stages of the historical-saving development of the Christian who, from his birth (creation), throughout the rebirth-purification (baptism), the mystic transformation and the divinization (Easter Christology), stretches himself forward towards the glorification. This theological path of St. John of the Cross takes his strength from the only objective path constituted by the wonders of God within the history of salvation, that the Christian lives again in a subjective way in the mystic exploratory pattern of the theological todo-nada, the diptych Ascent/Dark Night; and in the mystic unifying aspect described in the Spiritual Canticle and in the Living Flame of Love.

So, we can identify the plan of the path towards perfection at whom our explorer constantly looks, within the mystic dynamics, that is to say, within the project of salvation that St. John of the Cross has about the human life stretching towards the "high and sublime union with God" (N, prologue).

- The divine pedagogy

1. We cannot wonder if we speak about a divine pedagogy, about His divine initiative and about His way of acting towards the human. According to St. John of the Cross in the spiritual life God is the main character, He is the "main Lover" (CB 31,2), He is the one "who moves and infuses Love" (FB 3,50).

\(^{15}\) GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Maestro della Fede*, n. 9.
About this divine way of acting the Saint notices some qualities that underline the care, the attention and the harmlessness of God towards our well-disposed explorer: "The peace of God, being spiritual and delicate, performs a work which is quiet and delicate, solitary, productive of peace and satisfaction" (1N 9,7). This way of acting engenders in the soul - step by step - the "secret, peaceful and loving" infusion of the contemplation which "if allowed, excites the soul with the spirit of love" (1N 10,6).

2. Now, as God deals with the soul according to His own nature, that is "when individuals love and do good to other, they love and do good according to their own nature" (FB 3,6), the searcher of God is urged to have with God a "kind and respectful" conversation (1N 12,3).

God, "infinite beauty" (1S 4,4), or better "abyss of infinite beauty" (FB 3,22), moves the human within his own anthropological nature, made up of two interdependent dimensions: the sensitive or lower one (2S 3,2), thanks to whom we communicate with the World, and the spiritual one or "the higher part of the soul and the part which is in relation with God and receives His communications" (3S 26,4).

"God - the Saint writes - is to move the soul and to raise it up from the extreme depth of its lowliness to the extreme height of the Divine union with Him, He must do it with order and sweetness and according to the nature of the soul itself" (2S 17,3). So, our Saint stresses with "an ordinary method" (2S 17,4), the way of the divine proceeding throughout which God gives shape, moves and raises the soul towards the summit of the union: the trinitarian communion.

3. We can summarize this divine way of acting, of "giving shape" in the three principles that St. John of the Cross suggests as points of reference of the divine pedagogy:

- "The works that are done are ordained by God" (2S 17,2)
- "The wisdom of God, orders all things with sweetness" (2S 17,2)
- "God moves all things according to their nature" (2S 17,2)
Throughout these principles, therefore, God takes by hand the human, shapes him with a divine touch, gives him a shape with order and sweetness and conforming to the human nature: "God continues to lead the soul step by step till it reaches that which is the most interior of all" (1S 17,4).

It is a thing of great wonder that, when God begins giving a shape, "moving" the soul from the more exterior up to the more interior, because of the impurities and imperfections which are in the soul, that the Saint calls appetites, it feels this well-ordered and sweet action of God very contrary and heavy: "A thing of great wonder and pity is it that the soul’s weakness and impurity should now be so great that, though the hand of God is of itself so light and gentle, the soul should now feel it to be so heavy and so contrary" (2N 5,7).

"From what has been said it will be seen how much greater is the work of God in the cleansing and the purging of a soul from these contrarieties than in the creating of that soul from nothing" (1S 6,4).
JESUS CHRIST
THE ONLY REDEEMER

History of Salvation

predestination

creation

path of transformation ⇄ mystic path

beginners

proficients

perfects

purification

enlightenment

union

BEGINNING

MIDDLE

END

Ascent - Night - Canticle - Flame

YESTERDAY

TODAY

ALWAYS

path towards the perfection “conversation with God in the spirit”

(2S 17,5; cf 2N 4,2)

to become again what we were

The movement of union

The soul “in the divine union recovers the state of innocence which was Adam’s”

(2N 24,2; cf CB 26,14)

expectation of what we will be

“he embraces within his redemptive power the whole past history of the human race, beginning with the first Adam”

“Christ, like a divine leaven, always and ever more fully penetrates the life of humanity”

“the future belongs to Him”

- TMA 56 -

- TMA 56 -

- TMA - Tertio Millennio Adveniente

elaboration

Giovanni Ballini

« THE OTHER DAY »

(CB 38,6)
IV. PREPARATION FOR THE MOUNT

- A high and totalizing measure -

1. In the draft, "which is the figure" “ (1S 13,10) of the Mount of perfection (Mp), drawn by St. John of the Cross, it is essential the high and totalizing measure of the path of the “nada” which, becoming more and more narrow and steep, climbs towards the totalizing summit of the union with God, the “todo”.

St. John of the Cross combined a poetic intuition and a verbal invention with a late-scholastic taste for the schemes and a meticulous analytic distinction. So, he added to the poem *Dark Night* a famous sketch of the Mount of perfection and the path which leads to its summit. Reading the book by John Ballini, we get the feeling that he is following this second inspiration of the Saint.\(^\text{16}\)

The Mystic Doctor himself maintains that this "figure is at the beginning " (1S 13,10) of the book “Ascent of Mount Carmel”. As he was an artistic mind, he decided to draw a sketch, a picture with the main lines of his mystic *todo y nada*.

2. Also the draft of the mystic path we elaborated, following and pursuing that of St. John of the Cross, climbs up in the nature of the “Ascent of Mount Carmel” (Mp)

This draft, showing the mystic path, actually is a preparation, a frame of mind towards the doctrine (S, prologue 9), summarized by the lines of our Saint Father John, which are under the Mount he has drawn for those who

have received from God the grace of having being posed “en la senda di este monte” (S, prologue 9).

- The vertical line of the layout

1. We can notice, in fact, that the doctrine of the *todo-nada* is at the summit of our mystic path, while in the drawing of the “Mount of perfection” (1S 7,3) it is at the base. This is the reason why we are allowed to speak about the mystic path as a preparation; in fact, this path leads to the diptych Ascent/Dark Night and is connected with it. The theological/dynamic nature which is at the basis of our draft, with the helicoidal movement of the mystic path, is explained in the following way.

2. Starting from the first theological knot, relating to the *theological, intuitive, mysticism*, thanks to the three terms – night, infusion, contemplation – connected with this mysticism, the searcher of God goes forward, “in a dark night” (N poem), towards the second theological knot, relating to the *dynamic, orientative, mysticism*, that is composed by other three interrelated terms: divine pedagogy, theological crossing, progress/searcher of God.

Moving in a dynamic relation on this existential knot – dramatic and wonderful, wherewonder and horrors alternate – the searcher of God proceeds again towards the same direction of the starting point, to find himself into new dimension in a theological act – *mysticism in evolution, exploratory mysticism*, thanks to the experience of transcendentnal echoes hidden within three points: todo/nada, precise spirituality, theological attitude towards the nada; actualization of the mystic theology related to the starting point of the knot.

As we can notice, the passage and the link from a knot to another one always occurs on the same helicoidal positioning and in a gradual way, at the soul pace, step by step” (CB 23,6), as the Mystic Doctor maintains.
Let’s remember that on this subject we find the oblique movement in Clemens of Alexandria, who compares the spiritual ascent towards God with that "turning movement that goes, in a true ascent, towards the One who is" (*Stromati*, V, 14). And also in Dionysius the Aeropagite (*De Divinis Nominibus*, IV) and Thomas of Aquin (*Summa Teologiae*, II-II, q. 180).

There are three areas - or theological knots - of the Christian mystery that, with "motum obliquum"\(^{17}\) compose the structure of the mystic path and the mystery of the theological science that is contained in it:

[A] Mystic Theology, *intuitive*

- "salir en la noche a buscar" (2N 24,4)  [N]
- "pasar por la oscura noche" (S arg)  [S]

Doctrinal basis: the nature of the mystic path in the three terms of the search: "noche" (a); "infusión" (b); "contemplación" (a’).

[B] Mystic dynamics, *indicative*

- "senda del alto Monte" (2S 7,3)  [S]
- "subir y bajar" (2N 18,3)  [N]

Existential development: the mystic dynamics of the mystic path in the three elements that outline the way: *pedagogy of God* (a); *"senda”* (b); *searcher of God* (a’).

[A’] Mysticism in evolution, *exploratory*

- "nuevos caminos" (2N 16,8)  [N]
- "no tiene modo" (2S4,5)  [S]

in a theological act: the cult in the spirit which is in progress, by degrees, as new dimensions, through three exploratory criteria in relation the one

with the other: "todo y nada" (a); "coordinated spirituality" (b); "theological attitude towards the nada" (a’).

As it can be noticed, this structure of the mystic path as a rotatory-helicoidal progression that winds the 'Mount Carmel' of St. John of the Cross leads - as a high and clear vertical line - to the "musica callada" of the famous "nada" that are "doctrine" (1S 13,10-13), totalizing fullness on God's initiative for the sons of the Church, who received from God the grace of having been placed "en la senda de este monte" (S, prologue 9).

3. This is the exploratory Mysticism in evolution, a "linear and teaching mystic, charged with meaning and detailed" (Card. Giovan Battista Re, Letter), a Mystic of doctrinal research, that "climbs the Mount" (Father Saverio Canistrà, Review), a "dynamic-evolutionary" mystic of the experience (Father Roberto Fornara, Review); a mystic "a modo de la fe" (CB prologue 2), traced in a catechetical and mystagogical form:

- In a **catechetical** form because it helps stay with Jesus Christ: "it introduces into the comprehension of the reasons of our faith"\(^\text{18}\)

- In a **mystagogical** form because it assimilates us to the life of Christ: "it introduces us into the totality of the mystery of the salvation"\(^\text{19}\)

*The mystic path* is thus a first approach to the "caelestis sapientia" of St. John of the Cross, the "Master in the Faith"\(^\text{20}\).

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\(^{19}\) BENEDICT XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter, n. 10.

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- preparation for the Mount -
the grafic of the mystic path

“Since faith is a light, it draws us into itself, inviting us to explore”
- Lumen Fidei 36 -
- Conclusion of the discourse about our "figure"

Everything-nothing, focused spirituality, attitude towards the nada, as a point of connection between the mystic path and "the path to the mount of perfection" (1S 7,3).

In particular, the connection of the mystic path which we have drawn with the path that leads to the Mount drawn by St. John of the Cross may be seen in the theological attitude towards the nada; here we find the contact with the famous stairs of silent music, the "musica callada" (CB strophe 15) of the seven "nada" of the draft, "which is the figure" (1S 13,10). In this meeting point our explorer is already well-disposed: "pure spirit well-disposed towards God" (CB 1,22), but here we are already into the mystic "dark night" (N poems), no more in the "figure" (1S 13,10).

After what has been referred by the draft, we can naturally see the mystic path traced in these pages as a preparation, a disposition, a preliminary introduction to the wonderful diptych Ascent of the Mount Carmel/Dark Night, "grave words and instructions" (1N 13,3) of the Doctor Mysticus, "high measure" (John Paul II) and a "totalizing" (Benedict XVI) one for the son of the Church of the third millennium.
As a reflection on a sheet of water, this work, changing the perspective, pays attention not only to the 'noche oscura' that leads along the 'senda oscura' towards the "alta unión con Dios (N, prologue)", but also, with a greater intensity, to the 'senda oscura' that leads - en una noche oscura - towards new dimensions of the life of the spirit, "por nuevos caminos no sabidos ni experimentados" (2N 16,8) by those who are looking for God: the "unión con Dios" (N, prologue).

That is to say: in front of the spring, the sheet of water, the "cristallina fuente" of the objective contents of the faith, that is, posed in front of the intelligence of the faith involved in the 'Noche Oscura', the dyptich Ascent/Dark Night, the theological reflection catches a glimpse of those "silvery appearances" of that faith along the 'Senda Oscura', the Mystic Path.

The perspective is certainly different: 'senda' instead of 'noche'. The end is the same: "unión con Dios"; the evangelical way of Christ is exactly the same: 'senda' as the 'noche' is the dark but safe and totalizing guide, towards that hope that Pope Benedict XVI calls the true "Hope", "The eternity in which the totality embraces us and in which we embrace the totality" (Spe salvi, n.12).
"A mysticism for the third millennium", that's the expression that connects the two key elements of this work: on one hand, the doctrine of St. John of the Cross; on the other, the need to start from the doctrine of the Mystic Doctor in order to show to contemporary mankind new ways for the Spirit.

The aim of the text is to explain the crucial principles of the spirituality of St. John of the Cross to those Christians who are well-disposed towards new adventures of the spirit, in order to reach the "union with God".

The word "spirituality" expresses the research of an absolute value. Indian spirituality is here understood as a research of a spiritual path, a research of the Absolute, that has its origin in the Yoga (योग), the way of the ancestors, the ancient path of self-fulfilment for the Indian humans.

The purpose of the author is to provide introductory directions of the Indian spirituality in order to identify the common spiritual basis in the ancient religions of India and the Christian Faith.