

Ecology and mysticism

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(from the [Alphonsian Academy](#) blog)

Spiritual life has been metaphorically depicted through two images: the pilgrimage and the ascent to the mountain's summit, where the soul will be united with God.[1] Under the influence of “unhealthy dualisms” that have left “a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history” (LS 98), these metaphors have sometimes been misconstrued as an attempt to escape from the despised or unbearable world (*fuga mundi*). Dionysius the Areopagite used these words to describe the journey toward mystical vision:

“Thou, O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast away all, and become free from all”[2]

We need to develop a spirituality and a mystique that again opens our eyes, enabling us to discover the Invisible in everyday life and experience “the intimate connection between God and all beings.” (LS 234). Indeed, “there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (LS 233). Creatures help us to ascend to God and, in Him, we discover the true entity of all that exists. Additionally, all creatures accompany us “on a wonderful pilgrimage” toward God (LS 92). Therefore, “the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one” (GS 39).

Francis of Assisi, universally recognized as a model of ecology, “was a mystic and a pilgrim” (LS 10). Indeed, “a commitment to integral ecology cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an interior impulse (LS 216). If we don’t change our minds and hearts, we cannot change our world.

“What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons, and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person’s heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation.”[3]

The mystic perceives the profound union of all that exists and listens to the creatures, which are “filled with words of love” (LS 225). He lives with love “in ordinary affairs,”[4] perceives the world as a sacrament, a mirror of the invisible, and is thus moved to a reverential contemplation. For him, everything is theophanic.

A “mysticism of open Eyes”[5] enables us to hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”. This mystique is not about imitating idealized and distant models, but about growing through small gestures (GE 16), transforming our whole life into mission.[6] Indeed, “an integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation, and selfishness” (LS 230).

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[1] Cf. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Dover Pub., Mineola (NY) 2008. Cf. Carbajo-Núñez M., «Mysticism in everyday life: the faces of God», in *Verdad y Vida* 276 (2020) 11-25

[2] Dionysius the Areopagite, «The Mystical Theology», ch. 1 section 1, in ID., *Works*, 1897, 130-137.

[3] Isaac the Syrian, Homily 81

[4] Francis, «*Gaudete et Exsultate*. Exhortación apostólica» (March 19, 2018), [GE] 14.

[5] Metz J.B., *Mistica degli occhi aperti. Per una spiritualità concreta e responsabile*, Queriniana, Brescia 2013. We need to be “nourished by a mystical spirituality in the style of St. Francis of Assisi.” Amazon Synod, Final document, 17.

[6] GE 27; “No es que la vida *tenga* misión, sino que es misión. La vida, in su totalidad, no es un simple *factum*.” Zubiri X., *Naturaleza, historia, Dios*, Alianza editorial, Madrid 1999, 427. Also “the Church is mission!” Synod of Bishops, «Amazonia: new ways for the Church and for an integral ecology. Final document de special assembly for the pan-Amazonian region», [amaz], n. 21, in Internet: <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/>; cf. EG 15.