

MYSTICISM, THE DEPTH-DIMENSION OF SPIRITUALITY

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1. Introduction

The word mysticism is derived from the Greek verb *muein*, which means to hide, to conceal, or to close the eyes. The word mystery too comes from the same verb. Mysticism is, therefore, basically sensitivity to the mystery of being. A mystic is gripped by an intense awareness of the mystery of the noumenon behind the phenomenon. The search takes the seeker from the visible to the invisible, from form to the formless, from multiplicity to unity, from diversity to the One (to *hon, ekam*). Ultimately, it is a search for the Beyond, for the Absolute, for the unifying power: for the *Ṛta*, for the Tao, for the Brahman, for the *Dhamma*, for the Divine. The unfathomability and incomprehensibility of the Divine is the horizon of any authentic mystical experience. Hence, the mystic draws life from contemplative silence before the abysmal depth of God.¹

Since the Divine is beyond human understanding, there is an element of mysticism in every authentic spiritual experience. Any symbolic perception of the Transcendent is limited by time and space and, hence, there should be an abiding mystical critique that takes the human mind beyond all names and forms. A genuine spiritual seeker has to go beyond God to the God-beyond-God. Devoid of the critique of the mystic, religion runs the risk of idolisation and ritualization.² Mystical experience unfolds the depth dimension of spirituality and, hence, offers a corrective to any religious perception.

This is not a process that takes place merely outside the person, but deep within. In every human person there are two faculties of perception:

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¹Raimundo Panikkar, *The Silence of God*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, 164-176.

²Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Chicago: Harper and Row, 1963, 3:98-106.

the extrovert mind (*manah*) and the introspective intellect (*buddhi*). Mind is the organ of reasoning while *buddhi* is the faculty of intuition. Mystical experience unfolds in and through the *buddhi*.

“Beyond the senses there is the mind (*manah*)

Beyond the mind there is the intuitive organ (*buddhi*)

Beyond the *buddhi* is the inner self (*ātman*)” (Katha Up. 3,10).

2. The Mind (*manah*) as the Organ of Reflection

It is the mind that takes a person to the world outside. One encounters the *thou* or an *it*, persons or things. Within the mind there is a twofold activity: to know and to will. Hence, the mind is full of thoughts and feelings. Mind can understand something only in as much as the latter is objectified. Mind operates in a subject-object structure. Even if one is trying to understand oneself, one has to objectify oneself: I have to look at myself, reflect on myself, and take myself in the hand. Mind objectifies everything including God. In this extrovert process of the mind a sense of I-and-mine feeling (*ahamkāra*) evolves. This sense of the ego (*aham*) is something constitutive of the human mind. Everyone needs a healthy sense of the ego to accept oneself and to affirm oneself in relation to persons and things. It is through the ego that one articulates one’s subjectivity. *I* encounter the *thou* and return to myself enriched by the *thou*. Through the *thou* I become truly *I*. The analytical, imaginative, and reasoning operations happen in the mind. All socio-cultural-religious activities take place at this upper level of mental perception.

The conscious mind has also a sub-conscious realm (*chittaḥ*). Inner-psyche factors constantly control the activities of the mind. This inner *womb* of the psyche is shaped by one’s own biography and also through the evolutionary process of humanity. Several unexpressed emotions and unarticulated thoughts are preserved within this inner recess. Memories of the past – personal as well as collective – are stored up in this inner warehouse. Some of these elements surface in dreams. Several factors of the collective unconscious find expression in myths and legends. In them we recognise the collective archetypes emerging from the deeper realms of our psyche. Introspection into the psyche will make us realize that we are not just isolated individuals, but deeply related to one another: we are parts of an evolving totality. We are not just a few years old as the mind tells us, but heirs of the entire evolutionary process of humanity. This is the basic

insight contained in the conviction on rebirth, prevalent in the tribal and Indian religions.

3. The Intellect (*buddhi*) as the Faculty of Mystical Perception

When one dives into the levels below the mind one is brought to a deeper level of consciousness, which may be called transcendental perception or mystical consciousness.³ Some like to call it meta-consciousness or super-consciousness. It is at this level that one encounters the mystery of being, one experiences one's true self in union with the absolute Self. Here one realises one's true identity in harmony with the totality of reality. One is brought to the boundary of individual consciousness and experiences the infinite horizons unto which one is existentially open. This is entry to the inner cave of the heart. The spiritual faculty by which this introspection takes place may be called the *intellect*, in the original sense of the term: *intus legere*, to read into. This is what the Indian sages called the *buddhi*, the intuitive faculty of perception. Mystics and sages of all times and religions speak of this inner spiritual organ. Christian mystics describe it as *sensus mysticus*, *scintilla animae*, *apex mentis*, *the inner eye* (Augustine), *the third eye* (Richard von St. Victor), or *Seelenfünklein* (Meister Eckhart). Jesus spoke of it as the *inner eye*, the *light within* (Lk. 11:34-36). In Indian traditions the symbols for *buddhi* are *inner eye* (*Gītā*), *inner light* (*Upaniṣads*), and *lotus of the heart* (Vedas). *Buddhi* is like the flame that enlightens the inner realms of the person, the eye that enables the *insight* into the divine reality. The light of the *buddhi* shone through the consciousness of Siddhārtha and, thus, he became the Buddha, the enlightened one.

"*Buddhi* as the highest evolute of nature and, therefore, the nearest to the immortal self is single, simple, one, because its true function is contemplation of the Eternal. As man's highest faculty it is directed towards God."⁴ "The inner light of the *buddhi* unifies perception."⁵ "*Buddhi* is the point at which the human mind is open to the divine light. It is also the point of unification of the personality. It is at this point that we become fully human. If the *buddhi* turns towards the light, it is illumined by the divine light and transmits the light to the *manaḥ* and the senses. But

³S. Painadath, *The Spiritual Journey*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2005, 7-15.

⁴Zaehner, *Bhagavad Gita*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1969, 142-3

⁵Sankara, *Gitaḥashya*, 4.3.7, Madras: Samata, 1979.

if the *buddhi* is turned away from the light then the mind is darkened and the personality is divided.”⁶ “The so called contradictions are such only at the mental level, but are in reality complementary aspects of the Overmind (intuition: truth is hidden beyond words and concepts).”⁷

4. Mind and *Buddhi*

There is, therefore, a definite distinction between the two types of perception, the mind at the upper level of understanding and that of the *buddhi* at the deeper level of intuition:

- Mind (*mens*) operates within the subject-object polarity: I encounter the thou/it. *Buddhi* (*intellectus*) transcends this polarity: I and thou/it merge into a unity of transcendental consciousness.
- Mind objectifies everything and analyses reality in its individuality and diversity. *Buddhi* enters into the depth of reality (*intus ire*, intuition) by uniting it with the perceiving subject.
- Through the mind one is driven to the fascinating diversity of things while the *buddhi* delves into the mystery of the unity of reality.
- Mind looks at the structures and qualities of the world, while *buddhi* contemplates the axis of the world.
- Mind pursues the logic of reality; *buddhi* explores the mystique of reality. “How can *He* be known, by whom all this is made known?” This is the constant search of the *buddhi* (Brh. Up. 4.5.15).
- Mind speculates on the horizontal level and acquires a conceptual knowledge (*vijñāna*) of persons and things, while *buddhi* contemplates reality in its abysmal depth dimension and attains the intuitive wisdom (*jñāna*).
- Through the mind (*ratio*) one reaches objective understanding and communicates it by way of information; in the *buddhi* (*intuitio*), however, one is graced with intuitive perception that leads to transformation.
- Mind operates on the principle of duality and classifies everything according to structures and qualities; *buddhi* unfolds on the principle of unity and contemplates everything in terms of universal inter-relatedness (*dharmalplan* of God).

⁶Bede Griffiths, *Marriage of East and West*, London: Collins, 1982, 71.3.

⁷Jules Monchanin, “The Christian Approach to Hinduism,” *Indian Missiological Bulletin*, June 1952.

- Mental understanding is conditioned by one's standpoint and, hence, it is always fragmentary; through the intuitive entry into the depth of reality, however, a new consciousness arises in which one perceives reality holistically.
- Mind deals with the objects conveyed through the external or internal senses. *Buddhi* takes one's consciousness to the *sacred space* within.

“Revealed and yet dwelling hidden in the cave,
is that which is called the great Ātman.

Whatever moves and breathes and blinks

is fixed therein. Know this as being

and also non-being, the passion of all hearts,

Transcending all knowledge.

Yet that is to be known – know that” (Muṇḍ. Up. 2.2.1).

5. The Inner Divine Space

When the inner light shines forth in the *buddhi*, when the inner eye is opened, one looks into the inner recess of reality. What does one see there? Nothing (*sūnya*)! Yet this is fullness (*pūrṇa*). This is an ineffable experience of entry into the sacred space within. Mystics and sages of all religions struggle to describe this space by using diverse spatial symbols: *cave of the heart* (Muṇḍ. Up. 2.2.1), *space of the heart* (Brh. Up. 4.4.22), *city of the Divine* (Chāṇḍ. Up. 8.1.1), *inner garden* of the soul (Sufis), *interior castle* (Theresa of Avila), *inner space of the spirit* (Meister Eckhart), etc. Jesus spoke of it as the *inner room* in which one truly experiences the Divine: “When you pray, go into your inner room (*tamieion*), shut yourself in and pray to your Father who is in the secret place” (Mt. 6:6). When he taught his disciples to invoke God as *Our Father in the heavens* (*en tois ouranois*), did he not mean the infinite divine space within?

The mystical experience is made at the level of the *buddhi*, but the expression of that through symbols takes place at the level of the mind. *Buddhi* is instospective, but the mind is extrovert. Hence, there is a constant struggle to express the ineffable experience through the symbols and concepts which evolve in the mental realm. This is the struggle that every mystic goes through. In fact, this is a struggle that is at the core of any authentic spiritual experience. The inner dialectics of this struggle

have to be kept alive as a safeguard against the idolisation of the Divine and consequent instrumentalisation of religion.

Christian mystics constantly point to the limitation of symbols and language in attaining and expressing the experience of the Beyond. "If you know God, it is not God!"⁸ In the entry of Moses into the darkness of the mountain Gregory of Nyssa finds the entry of the human into the "divine darkness."⁹ Dionysius the Areopagite demands that the praying person has to "enter into the mysterious darkness of a holy ignorance."¹⁰ John Chrysostom invites Christians to "invoke the Divine as the inexpressible, incomprehensible, invisible, and unknown reality."¹¹ For John Damascene too the Divine is primarily "infinite and incomprehensible."¹² Evagrius of Pontus says about prayer: "When you pray let your intelligence take on the impression of no form; go immaterially to the Immaterial, and then you will understand what it is."¹³ "One has to become *Godless* in order to experience God."¹⁴ In *The Cloud of Unknowing*¹⁵ there is a constant insistence on the need of putting the reason into the cloud, so that the divine Light from Beyond enlightens the intellect. For John of the Cross, an experience of the "dark night of the soul" is an inevitable moment in the soul's ascent to God. Without sensitivity to the apophatic dimension there can be no affirmation of the kataphatic forms.

In the Indian spiritual heritage one makes consistently a distinction between the experience of the formless Divine (*nirguna*) and the expression through concrete forms of God (*saguna*). The Upaniṣadic masters relentlessly emphasise that the Divine is beyond all comprehension. "There the eye does not reach, nor speech, nor mind: we

⁸ Augustine, in Minge, *Patrologia Latina*, 8.663.

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 376c-377a trans. A. J. Malherbe, New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

¹⁰ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, 1,3, New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Incomprehensibility of God*, in Minge, *Patrologia Graeca*, 3,166.

¹² John Damascene, in Minge, *Patrologia Graeca*, 94,800b.

¹³ Evagrius of Pontus, *Chapters on Prayer*, 117, in Ruhback ed., *Christliche Mystik*, Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989.

¹⁴ Meister Eckhart, *Beati paupers* in D. Mieth ed., *Meister Eckhart, Gotteserfahrung und Weg in die Welt*, Freiburg: Walter, 151.

¹⁵ Unknown English Author, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh, New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

do not know it nor do we know how to teach it. Indeed, it is other than the known, and also beyond the unknown. Thus, have we heard from the ancient sages who have spoken about it" (Kena Up. 1.3-4; 2.1.3; Tait Up. 2.4; Muṇḍ Up. 2.2.1). This being the case, the only way to reach out to the divine mystery is the way of negation: *neti... neti...* (not this, not this) (Brh. Up. 4.5.15). The Upaniṣadic sages constantly strive to transcend the mind, to go beyond the realm of words and symbols. "That which is not thought by the mind, but by which the mind thinks, that is Brahman; not what people worship here. That which is not expressed through speech, but by which speech is expressed, that is Brahman; not what people worship here" (Kena Up. 1.5-6). The inner reality of the Divine is, therefore, an incomprehensible mystery for the human mind. It is "ungraspable, unperceivable, indescribable" (Muṇḍ. Up. 1.1.6), "formless eternal silence" (Chāṇḍ. Up. 3.15), "subtler than the subtlest" (Swet. Up. 4.14). If asked what is its form, one should answer: "Its form is formlessness" (Swet. Up. 4.19)

Within the inner divine space how does one experience the relationship between the human and the Divine? Mystics of all spiritual traditions basically point to three dimensions of the experience of the relationship between the human self (and the cosmos) and the divine Self: (1) the human is different from the Divine (*dwaita/creatureliness*), (2) the human is a particle of the Divine (*viśiṣṭādvaita/participation*), and (3) the human is ultimately one with the Divine (*advaita/mystical union*).

Basically, one should be open to all these three aspects of experience, for one cannot pre-programme how the Divine directly deals with the human. These are, however, the three basic types of mysticism found in the traditions of world religions. All these three can be found, more or less, in all religious traditions. However, an insistence on the creatureliness of the human is seen in the Islamic heritage, an emphasis on the participation of the human in divine life is found in Christian faith, and the oneness of the human with the Divine is upheld in Vedānta Hinduism. If analysed at the mental level one may locate a lot of dissonance among these three streams of religious heritage; but if one tries to perceive the basic concern in the light of the *buddhi* one would discover harmony among these three streams. The three dimensions of mystical experience are, in fact, complementary and, hence, these three religious *types* could also be taken as complementary. Through an open and creative dialogue of religions one

or the other dimension of mystical experience is alerted in the religious seeker. The inner divine space is the actual meeting point of religions.

An integrated spiritual process demands both an inter-personal encounter with the divine Lord at the mind level and a transpersonal experience of the divine Spirit in the *buddhi* realm. Out of the inter-personal encounter evolves the response of devotional self-surrender (*bhakti*) and out of the experience of oneness comes unitive contemplation (*jñāna*). Through the integration of both, one gets engaged in "works (*karma*) for the welfare of the world." The basic dynamics of a liberative spirituality is described in the Christian axiom, *be a contemplative in action*¹⁶ and in the Indian aphorism, *being united with the Divine get involved in your works* (*Gītā*, 2:48). Thus, genuine mystical experience becomes an inner force to get engaged in social transformation. Solitude leads to solidarity, contemplation motivates action, mystical introspection enlightens prophetic commitment to justice, and *yoga* integrates *karma*. Mystical experience is not escapism from the world but a radical insertion into the world. The Divine that one intuits in the inner space is the Divine that one perceives in every bit of reality outside. For the mystic the world is the temple of God (1Cor. 6:19), the earth is the body of the Lord (*Gītā*, 13:2), and every human person is a manifestation of the Lord (*Bhāgavatam*, 11:5). The mystic sees God in all things and all things in God (*Gītā*, 6:30).

6. Mysticism and Religion

In order to locate the place of mysticism in the evolution of religion it may be helpful to make a distinction between spirituality and religion.

Spirituality, as the term indicates, is the experience of the Spirit. It is the experience of being gripped by the dimension of the ultimate concern, of being grasped by the Divine, of being moved by God. However, the ultimate reality may not always and necessarily be experienced in the form of a personal God. Spirituality is basically the awareness of the mystery of life, the sense of the ultimate meaning and final goal in life. "We attain to the inward depths whenever we enter into our heart. God who probes the heart awaits us there. There we discern our proper destiny beneath the eyes of God" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 14). Mystical experience is the

¹⁶Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, §230, in Luis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises*, Bombay: St. Paul, 1965.

depth dimension of spirituality. Mysticism awakens one to the *one* divine Light that enlightens the minds of all, to the *one* divine Spirit that guides the steps of all in life. The ultimate reality is, in fact, One (*ekam, unum, to hon*). Perceptions may vary, but the reality is one. "There is only one Truth/Reality, those who perceive it speak of in different ways. *Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti* (Rg Veda 1.164.46). The presence of the one divine Spirit is brought to awareness in diverse ways. Spirituality with its mystical dimension has, therefore, a universal as well as a unitive significance.

Religion is the articulation of spirituality. The universal experience of spirituality finds expression in particular religions. The unitive consciousness of the divine Spirit unfolds itself in and through the diversity of religions. The underlying sense of the mystery is made manifest through concrete forms of religions. Religion is the articulation of faith which is a concrete entry to spirituality. The dynamic relationship between divine revelation and human faith is mediated through symbols. The content of religion evolves from within the faith experience, but the format of religion comes from the cultural matrix because symbols are products of a culture. Hence, religion has a bipolar mode of existence. It mediates between the sacred and the secular aspects of life. Through religion one has access to the divine dimension of life which permeates the entire secular realm. Religion enables the believer to discover the transforming presence of the divine Spirit at the heart of the secular reality. "Religious traditions are expressions of the presence of God's Word and of the universal action of the divine Spirit."¹⁷ In as much as symbols are ambivalent media of divine revelation, religion evolves within the factors of the ambiguities of culture. Religion can, therefore, guide a believer towards God; it may also block the way to the Divine.

In the process of the evolution of spirituality into a religion four areas emerge, in which the spiritual experience finds symbolic articulation: creed, cult, code, and community.¹⁸ These are like the channels through which spirituality evolves into religion. Or, to use another imagery, these form the four corner pillars of the religious structure built on the hidden foundation of spirituality. A believing community needs these symbolic

¹⁷FABC, *Theological Consultation*, 1993, § 43, in G. Rosales, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia*, FABC Statements, Manila: Claretian, 1997, 344.

¹⁸S. Painadath, *We are Co-pilgrims*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2005, 25-37.

elements to articulate its faith, just as one needs a language in order to develop and communicate one's thoughts. Every language has its structural limitations, so too every religion. No creativity is possible without language, however limited it may be; no spirituality can unfold itself creatively without religion (or quasi-religion), however fragmentary it may be.

With these elements religion inevitably takes the format of a social reality. Religion, thus, unfolds the spiritual dimension of the social fabric and cultural process of human life. Hence, it is necessary that these four areas of symbolic expression be authentically preserved and effectively communicated in a way that is meaningful to contemporary situation. For this, the believing community officially appoints persons who have the mission to preserve the symbols of faith, interpret them properly, and make the pristine spiritual experience available to the believers.

- Theologians are commissioned to interpret the contents of the credal system in a creative encounter between the primary experience and the contemporary situation.
- Priests are ordained to help the community members experience the transforming presence of the Divine through their participation in cultic performances and rituals.
- Teachers of law have the responsibility to explain ethical norms based on the pristine encounter and in response to the challenges of the times.
- Leaders of the community have the authority to guide the believers and to keep them together in harmony and collaboration.

These four groups of *office bearers* are needed in any organised religion for keeping the believers authentically rooted in the original spiritual experience, and for making them respond to the demands of contemporary society and culture. Through these four functions the spiritual community gets integrated into the social fabric of life. As spirituality expresses itself through a concrete religion, believers get incorporated to certain social structures and attuned to definite cultural expressions.

- The language of theology formulates concrete definitions which tend to be normative in articulating the faith experience.
- In the realm of rituals particular forms evolve and fix the symbolic expressions into pre-programmed rubrics.
- The interpretation of ethical norms gives rise to laws and regulations.

- Coherence in the religious community is guaranteed by certain structures of governance.

This is an inevitable sociological evolution: inevitable because religion is spirituality's articulation within the socio-cultural modes of life's self-creation. In this process of cultural articulation extrinsic elements infiltrate into the formation of religion. Political powers manipulate religious feelings in order to defend their power and privilege. Commercial agencies misuse religious expressions with a motive of profit. Cultural elite domesticate religious symbols to safeguard their vested interests. Religion, thus, tends to lose its rootedness in spirituality. Believers fail to keep alive the alertness to the Spirit that "blows where it wills." What are the consequences?

- Theological reflection loses its alertness and gets stagnated in a sort of dogmatism without being able to communicate an authentic God experience in the light of the pristine encounter; theology gets estranged from spirituality.
- Cultic expressions are devoid of the healing power of the symbols as they end up in sterile ritualism; cult does not draw life from contemplation.
- Interpretation of ethical norms fails to promote responsible freedom but adheres blindly to legalism, which, in turn, blocks the freedom of the spirit; law kills when there is no alertness to the Spirit.
- Social structures of community life get so much politicised that they succumb to a structuralism, which is insensitive to the "Spirit that speaks to the community" in ever new ways; a community is liberative only where there is communion with the Spirit.

With these negative developments religion, which has to be the authentic expression of spirituality, gets uprooted from spirituality. Symbols, which are actually meant to communicate the pristine experience of encounter with the Divine, lose their transparency and become more or less *idols*. Symbols open infinite horizons for growth in the Spirit; idols block this process by subjugating the Spirit to the ego, personal or collective. The constant tension between the transparency of religious symbols and the opaqueness of idols can be found in all the four areas of religious expression, theological, cultic, ethical, and social. This tension is, in fact, one of the basic dynamics of the historical evolution of all

religions. Elitist Brahminism, imperial Christianity, royal Judaism, expansionist Islam, militant Sikhism, and politicised Buddhism are phenomena in which a widespread idolisation of religion has taken place. Its impact can be found in various fundamentalist movements within those religions. However, in spite of the upsurge of fundamentalism, the grace of the primary experience of encounter is never totally lost! The Spirit of God does not disappear from the evolutionary paths of history. The Spirit, ever active in history, breaks down the walls and fences which human beings put up in order to divide the one world. The presence of the Spirit in history is an explosive presence: it explodes religious structures from within in order to transform them; it activates the integrative power of symbols in spite of the tendency towards idolisation. This breakthrough of the divine Spirit takes place in two directions: vertical and horizontal; it finds expression through two charisms: through mystics and prophets.

7. Critique of the Mystic

A mystic is a person gripped with an intense awareness of the mystery of the Divine. The unfathomability and incomprehensibility of the divine reality are the underlying dimensions of the mystic's experience. Mystics are critical of all symbols of the Divine, not denying their validity, but upholding their transparency and depth dimension. Consequently, they challenge all religious functionaries to move constantly towards the ever Beyond: *Deus semper major*.

- Theological search has to go beyond concepts and definitions, and explore the "the breadth and length and height and depth" (Eph. 3:18) of the transforming presence of God manifest in the original encounter; it evolves through a constant alertness to God's ongoing dialogue with humanity in all realms of life, in all religions of the world.
- Rituals can communicate the experience of the grace of God only if they are nourished by contemplative silence; it is in silence that the depth dimension of the symbols gets unfolded.
- Ethical directives are meant ultimately to make room for the *sacred space* in which the divine Spirit enters the lives of individuals; law is an aid to discern this Spirit within and around oneself.
- Community structures in a mystical perspective are meant to create a home for the believers to experience growth in the Spirit: they may

feel accepted and supported in a community that constantly listens to "what Spirit is saying to the community;" exploration with the Spirit is the dynamics of the community.

The mystic's critique restores in all these four areas of religious life the original meaning and function of symbols. His or her sensitivity to the absolute transcendence of the divine mystery together with an awareness of the radical immanence of divine grace is the channel through which the divine Spirit transforms the world of religious symbolism. A religion that has lost the mystical dimension is no more *religio*, for it cannot any more unite human life with the divine Ground of being.

8. Protest of the Prophet

Prophet is a person who feels the inner call to articulate God's Word in a concrete situation. The prophet is in a sense the mouthpiece of God and the spokesperson of the community as well (*nabi* = the one called; *prophetes* = the one who speaks before others). Prophets speak out of an intense experience of the demands of the Spirit "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). With this radical sensitivity to the transforming presence of God they proclaim the divine demand of justice in all realms of life. For prophets a religious symbol has meaning only insofar as it expresses the divine depth of human relations, the divine call for human solidarity, the divine concern for the poor. Hence, they criticize all forms of religious expression in relation to their primary motive: promotion of justice. They challenge all functionaries of religion to make integral human liberation their main concern.

- Theological reflection should always explore the ever-widening horizons of the work of the Spirit revealed in the primary encounter: theology works out the liberative potential of spirituality.
- Rituals have to alert the believers on the concrete demands of justice and inspire them to share their life with one another: the heart-beat of cult compassion.
- Laws are meant to help the believers respond to the demands of God's justice developing solidarity with one another and harmony with creation; to the God who manifests himself in the other is the prophetic motivation of law.

- Leaders of the community have a responsibility to discern and nourish charisms of believers in the process of participating creatively in the promotion of justice, the universal salvific work of the Spirit; concern for the poor is the hallmark of a spiritual community.

The prophetic critique restores in all these four areas of religious life the original meaning and function of symbols. The alertness to articulate the absolute transcendence of the divine plan and the sensitivity to the radical immanence of divine justice are channels through which the divine Spirit transforms the world of religious symbolism. A religion that has lost the prophetic dimension cannot any more be *religio*, for it does not integrate human creativity with God's transforming work.

9. Contemplation and Compassion

Every genuine mystic is a prophet, and every authentic prophet is a mystic. These are, in fact, two basic dimensions of a liberative spirituality. The mystic emerges with an inner enlightenment and teaches the seekers; the prophet comes out with an inner vocation and exhorts the believers. The mystic is enthused by the divine Light; the prophet is energized by the divine Word. The mystic is a seer; the prophet is a listener. The mystic speaks in a poetic language; the prophet preaches in a narrative style. The mystic inspires the seekers; the prophet exhorts the community. The mystic appears from a unitive awareness of the divine immanence in the silence of the heart; the prophet comes out of an encounter with the divine Lord in the struggles of history. The mystic admonishes out of contemplation; the prophet advocates compassion.

9. Conclusion

An unconditional alertness to the divine Spirit is the dynamic dimension of both mystics and prophets. Hence, the spiritual liberative undercurrents of spirituality are manifest in and through them. Religion devoid of the wellsprings of mystical experience is sterile; religion without prophetic dynamism is irrelevant. The critique of mystics and prophets is disturbing for theologians, priests, teachers of law, and leaders of the community. It makes them feel threatened for fear of losing the basis on which they build up their security structures of thought and action. The officials of an established religious community have the anxiety that the mystics and prophets would explode the edifices of their power and authority. The

mystic's demand to relativize the traditional categories in terms of the unfathomable mystery of the Divine disturbs them. The prophet's challenge to relativize the religious forms in view of promotion of divine justice too upsets them. Consequently, mystics are silenced and prophets are persecuted. This tension has been a constant phenomenon in the history of all religions. It is also a tension that is being felt in the personal religious life any true seeker. An acquaintance with mystics and prophets will convert this tension to a creative struggle, which is actually the struggle of the divine Spirit within the ambiguities of religion. Openness to mystical experience and alertness to prophetic critique found in other religions invite a deeply genuine inter-religious dialogue. In fact, religions meet at the level of mysticism and prophecy.