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WHERE THE EAGLES FLY

St. Jerome Miani

Spiritual Theology and Theological Anthropology

I intend to present the spirituality of St. Jerome Miani (1486-1537), his way of thinking about God, his way of relating to Him, the transformations occurred in his personality, the causes which have led him to operate in a certain way in the society and Church, his determination to self-sacrificing for the expansion of the kingdom of God in the world.

Here, I would like to pinpoint and present his spiritual patrimony, that is, how he viewed Christian perfection, and what practical organization he gave to the common elements of the Catholic theology.

My purpose is to highlight contents without imposing pre-established schemes. I try to understand and present Miani with Miani. Therefore, though taking in due account collateral information, I lead my study on the writings of the Saint, and on the statements that a contemporary biographer attributes to him as “ipsissima verba.”

I start from what I consider the most important statement, the founding principle that contains in a nutshell his spiritual theology and theological anthropology: the way of God is love and humility with devotion.

This statement recalls a journey with a double meaning. It is the way chosen by God to enter the history of the world, and it is the way through which we go back to God. God as a beginning, God as a final goal. But who is the God whom St. Jerome believes in? Can He be met? Where? The spiritual theology gives the answer. How does the way of the return to God present itself after the breaking of the relationship because of sin? Which ones are the questions asked by the Revelation in order to, once again, please God? Is there any hope for the future? The theological anthropology gives the answer. As a background for all this there is the “devotion,” a complex and deep reality that concerns the possibility and the way of the encounter/dialogue with God, and that accompanies every stage and phase of this itinerary.

I remind the reader that St. Jerome’s spiritual theology and theological anthropology are born and develop not in academic and monastic environments, but in situations of extreme concreteness. They have as immediate reference, people – men, women, priests, lay people – associated with him in his charismatic movement aimed to reforming the Church. They become, later on, spiritual patrimony of the Company of the Servants of the Poor until the latter remained in its original form (from 1537, death of the Saint, to 1568), as well as in its following canonical transformation (1569) in the Congregation of the Clerics Regular from Somasca (Somascan Fathers), and till today.

Abstract from the work that has the same title, published by Tintoretto – Treviso, Italy.

To the eagle, king of birds, profane culture has attributed a place of excellency in every time and place. Admired because of its exceptional speed, fascinating because of its flight elegance, unparalleled because of its strength that makes it soar up high in the sky, the eagle is a symbol of a glorious nobility that only to it assigns the lordship of the celestial spaces.

In the Bible, it is a symbolic image of divine omnipotence, of God's love for the human family, and of the mysterious force of faith. The Medieval theology sees it as a symbol of Jesus who ascends triumphantly to heaven, of the baptismal re-birth of Christ's believers, and of contemplative prayer.

Such a stimulating cultural background legitimizes the title of this book "Where the Eagles Fly," dedicated to the study of the theology of St. Jerome Miani. He is a Saint, to whom the divine grace, has opened the access to mystic and charitable experiences which irresistibly conjure up his daring, fast, and high advancing in the mysterious world of God.

ETERNAL SYMPHONIES *SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY*

The way of God is love. This is the first note of the spiritual theology of St. Jerome, in perfect accord with the Bible canticle that announces: God is love, God loves, God is the love: Father Son Holy Spirit, Trinitarian mystery, eternal symphony, hidden for centuries, now revealed in the last times. For short moments, God has walked on earth. He has summoned the multitude of peoples, has invited them to enter in a new family where barriers of race, color and nationality are broken down. He called it Church, his Church. He thought it as a prelude to the entrance in his glorious kingdom, where the eternal symphonies of angels and saints get lost beautifully in joy, feast, and light that never end.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIFE
THE GOD IN WHOM JEROME BELIEVES

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

GOD THE FATHER

JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF THE FATHER
HOLY SPIRIT

The God, in whom St. Jerome believes, is the God of the Christian Revelation. He is the Trinitarian God, eternal life, source of all lives, creator of any existing reality. A God who reveals himself gradually, enters in human history, takes up its destiny, and transforms it in history of salvation. He enters it personally, through Jesus Christ, who proclaims Himself to be the Son of God and demonstrates that with his resurrection from death, announces salvation to those who will believe in Him, and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit, who makes it possible for everyone to follow him on the journey that leads to the threshold of life, eternal Life.

God the Father knows the ways of the human behavior even before of their occurring in history. He suggests and shows the most appropriate choices to be made in every field, because He has a full and total control of any created reality. Even the situations of discomfort created by human stupidity He makes part of the universal picture of his pedagogy of salvation. He has the absolute primacy upon the being and doing of every person, of the world, of the Church. His names lift the veil that hides his ineffable mystery. Names which reveal Him as a God full of attention, care, understanding and tolerance, and capable of responding to any questions, of overcoming any difficulties.

The Son of God becomes man to re-lead the lost man to God. He is the Master who teaches the way of God. Every supernatural enterprise, the life of grace up to the top of holiness, is made possible by staying with Him, by standing at His side. He has come to stay with us, so we save ourselves by staying with Him. We need to let us be transformed in spiritual creatures in order to help Him in expanding the kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of justice, love, and peace. It is a grandiose plan which finds its premises in the Church, wanted by Him as a family of faith, where we become aware of having been adopted by God, of having Him as a Father, of being invited to bring the joyful news to the whole of humanity. Jesus has opened the way by sacrificing Himself on the cross, from which baptism, supernatural adoption, and possibility of access to the eternal beatitude have sprung.

The Holy Spirit holds the place of Jesus after his ascension into the glory. He is the alter ego of Christ, who continues to bring about the redemption in anyone who docily accepts the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ. To be docile to the Spirit means to be docile to Christ. This is a gift which we attain with prayer. The approachability to the Holy Spirit is a reality that is offered to everybody. He is at the center, lives as indwelling in the personal reality of any believers. From the

Baptism on, every disciple of Christ becomes his beloved dwelling. He lives there, not idly, but in order to promote the capillary evangelization of the world. He is ardent fire, but He wants the cooperation of every disciple of Christ so that his flame and light never may be extinguished because of infidelity, inconsistency, and human fragility.

A WINDOW ON HEAVEN
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

CHRISTIANITY AND CHURCH
SAINTS AND SANCTITY
MARY OF NAZARETH

Gift of God the Father to humanity, thought by Christ as a window open on the world of Trinity, the Church of the century of St. Jerome is all moved by waves of restlessness, need of changes, unhappiness with the status quo, urgency to recover precious traditional values rejected or forgotten by the culture of humanism and renaissance. Martin Luther and the Protestant reform are the most visible signs that reveal this winding uneasiness. The Saints, many Saints, and then the Council of Trent, are the first answer of the Church, that will allow her to re-present herself to the world as Christ wanted her, a window to which all the peoples of the earth can look in, in order to discover the fascinating beauty of God, to believe, and to be saved.

Theological thinking and pastoral creativity are directed toward the reform of the Church, from her inside, through an attempt to return effectively to the sanctity of her origins.

It is not a question of using integralistic extremisms, or copying an unrepeatable historical period, but of re-discovering her roots. That implies to start from a concrete position that accepts the reality of the Church, which had developed charismatically and institutionally to the point of being structured in social schemes no more responding to her initial freshness and originality. However, the Catholic hierarchy cannot be touched: it is Church, as Church are all the others, monks and lay people, whatever is their social class. For everybody, the only door of entrance is Baptism, from which springs the new family of the children of God who recognize Christ as their Savior, “the firm rock,” sent by the Father to extend the kingdom of God into the world, which is a kingdom of peace, love and prosperity.

Church are the Blessed in the heavenly glory. Church are the disciples of Christ, faithful to his Gospel. Church are the sinners who, temporarily separated from Christ, can again re-enter vital communion with Him. Church are the souls who, at the moment of dying, have been found ready for the glory and are undergoing definite purification. Church are the peoples who have not received the announcement of the Gospel, but in the divine pre-knowledge are seen available to let themselves be enveloped in by the light of faith.

A universal vision: Catholic. It is an adequate response to the often chaotic starts of the Protestant reform, and to the following other divisions, tearing apart, extremisms which create violence and hatred. It is a response that is an invitation to prayer for a new generation of saints, in the same manner of the early Christian communities, who were happy to plant the sanctity of God everywhere.

Reform begins from oneself. It takes inspiration from the exemplary model that is Christ according to the Gospel. Christian life and evangelical life are the same reality.

Christian witness is credible when one:

- frees him/herself from attitudes and behaviors which provoke scandal
- exercises theological virtues by docily answering the inspirations of the Spirit
- lives on divine grace by nourishing his/her supernatural experience with the Eucharist and Reconciliation
- invests his/her gifts from nature and grace in deeds of mercy letting him/herself be taken by Christ's passion for the poor, the little, and the sinners
- perseveres until the end in the witnessing despite being in the middle of storms and difficulties, and has confidence exclusively in God.

It is a gigantic work, an impossible task for the sole human strengths. It is necessary a very special aid from above, a great grace. In order to have it, it is enough for one to address to the "virgo gloriosa," Mary of Nazareth, chosen by God to be "mother of all graces." She, virgin and mother, humble and glorious, is the most adequate image of the Holy Church of God.

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY *THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY*

Theological anthropology studies the origin of human kind, its situation in history, the destiny God reserves to it. The Bible reveals that man and woman, creatures preferred by God, do not keep their fidelity to the divine covenant, and fall from their status of innocence and grace. God does not abandon them, plans the history of salvation and offers, as a result, the participation in his same divine nature. The extraordinary God's project is pre-figured and finds its fulfillment in Christ risen from death and glorified. In Him, God the Father manifests what He intends to do for every human being: to redeem him/her from sin with his sanctifying grace, to make him/her able to follow Christ's example with the gift of the theological virtues, to assist him/her in every difficulty with the actual grace, and to make him/her happy for ever. However, happiness cannot be bought. It is the delightful surprise God reserves for the end. The obliged passages in order to be pre-disposed are the humility of heart and the strategies of asceticism: dynamism essential to Christian holiness, understood as the grace of being found ready for the final appointment with God. It is the long march, from here to eternity.

*ALARM-BELLS
HUMAN NATURE WOUNDED BY SIN*

*DARKNESS
FRAGILITY
BLINDNESS
CAPITAL VICIES*

Alarm-bells, sign of danger. The destiny of man and human kind is at stake. Miani realizes that the Lutheran reform changes the fundamental characteristics of the Catholic anthropology and that, answering with intellectual debates, will lead to nothing. On a public level, he offers his orthopraxis as a proving sign of his orthodoxy. To companions, friends and cooperators, he points out risks, dangers, and obstacles, which nest inside the human nature and jeopardize the attainment of the Christian ideal of evangelical perfection.

The anthropological position is very realistic, far from the naïf optimism of the renaissance scholars, as well as from the irremediable pessimism of Luther and Calvin.

Deprived of the presence of Christ, people and society find themselves immersed in the ambiguous darkness of night, where it is impossible to find a direction.

Salvation does not come from one's efforts, but from adhering with faith to the grace of Christ who passes by, as the Christ pilgrim who perennially accompanies his Church in the journey of history. However, we need to recognize Him, invite Him, welcome Him.

Let alone, man is only fragility and blindness. Immersed in a world, he is like the soil covered by rocks and thorn bushes, crisscrossed by abusive paths. The will for good continuously needs to be fortified, supported by prayer, which invokes the divine grace, so that desire may be changed in action.

This analysis pictures ordinariness and concreteness. It stops at the reality of facts, without probing the whys and hows of the outset and origins of humanity.

Man is studied as he is in history, torn in his inside, wounded in his integrity, inclined to evil.

Denouncing rending and wounds is not all. The way of God is much more interested in showing how Christian rebirth, restarting, honoring that excellent gift that is the adoption of man into the divine family, are really possible. Goal of the reform is to make the image and likeness of God imprinted at Baptism shine in oneself, the Church, and society. At every stage of the transforming process there is the awareness that nothing would be possible without the gift of divine grace, obtained by untiring prayer.

THE TREE OF LIFE
THE GIFT OF GRACE

ILLUMINATING GRACE
TRANSFORMING GRACE
GREAT GRACE

Grace is a direct intervention of God for the cure and remedy of the wounds of human nature. There are three types of grace. The first, connected strictly to faith; another, relates to the transformation of personality; the third, has to do with the mystical gifts of prayer. The first two can be obtained by addressing God in prayer. The “great grace,” on the other hand, is an excellent, unforeseen, unpredictable divine surprise, absolutely free. Grace is the new Tree of Life, which returns to blossom in the Church, God’s garden.

Grace is a divine gift, which hits the human person, making it able to live on a level of friendship and familiarity with God, and to produce virtuous actions, which, without grace, are impossible.

Grace illuminates human intelligence, which, through a process of spiritual discernment, perceives and understands God’s projects, what God expects and desires from each one, for his/her own well-being. Grace solicits to enter the plan of God, by supporting nature in fulfilling what it sees in the illumination. It is a flexible, penetrating gift, perceived in the conscience, but at the same time efficient, that is, capable of giving the energy necessary to realize every kind of virtuous exercise in every situation of life.

Grace is the effective commitment in leading a Christian life, the show/witness of evangelical life, in public and private, in the ordinariness of the daily concreteness. Since only God can give grace, every grace is asked for from God in prayer, for oneself and for others.

Either the illuminating grace or the operative one, have their roots in the first grace, the one that from the instant of Baptism, makes of a creature a child of God, with a inner transformation that is irreversible and indelible. It tends to burst in the field of the mystical gifts, drawing the soul to high levels of union with God in prayer, according to a mysterious plan predisposed by God individually for each disciple of Christ.

INVISIBLE FORCE
BELIEVING IN GOD

BEGINNING OF FAITH
AUTHENTICITY
EXPANSION
PEDAGOGY OF TRIAL

The lessons of theology that Jerome teaches at St. Rocco in Venice are a synthetic comment of two fundamental biblical texts: one from the Prologue of John's Gospel (1:12-13), the other from the letter to the Galatians (3, 26). The evangelist maintains that the Incarnate Word allows those who welcome Him to become children of God. Here, "to welcome" means to believe in Christ and in his universal saving mission. St. Paul affirms the same: "all of you are children of God because, as far as you have been baptized in Christ, of Christ have been clothed." Everything has changed in the history of fallen humanity: now there is faith, an invisible force that makes the Christian adventure possible.

Faith is a gift offered by God through the sacrament of the Christian re-birth, from which it springs the absolute novelty of children of God, who are destined to become in Christ and with Christ heirs of eternal happiness. Every baptized is a recipient of this excellent capital, which he/she has to learn to wisely administer by leading a life faithfully modeled on Christ's, that is *conditio sine qua non* for participating in his eternal inheritance in the glory.

The imitation of Christ is not an optional. On the contrary, it is the only right answer to the gift of God. On one hand, it is made possible by faith. On the other, it certifies and guarantees the authenticity of faith itself, preventing retreating in oneself, which may make one lose sight of the teachings and examples of the divine Master. It is a matter of conjugating Christian being (believing) with Christian doing. Then, God delights Himself in considering every good deed of his children as a credit, a merit acquired in sight of the final reward. In his infinite goodness, He is satisfied even when He only finds good will for commitment to work, independently from results, which may not be there because of external reasons.

As God is the initiator of faith so He is also its promoter. In his wise Providence, He directs situations and events in such a way that faith, from a mustard seed, may become a big shrub. As inside the seed there is all the power to become a tree, so inside initial faith (supernatural adoption) there is all the power to reach its full maturation (holiness). The human part consists in assuming an attitude of confident acceptance of God and his plans, even when they might look incomprehensible and absurd, or might be refused by instinctive sensitivity.

The grace of faith is always effective, without taking away, harming, and limiting human freedom. There is, therefore, the possibility of refusing faith, evading or turning

back from the commitment of Christian growth, for being afraid of risks, dangers, sufferings, and difficulties, which, necessarily, (on the example of Christ) mark the Christian adventure.

Then, here it is the pedagogy of trial, the fork-road, where one has to choose. It is the obliged passage where choosing becomes determinant as to the final result: with Christ or against Christ. There is no neutral position.

The pedagogy of trial, with which God tests the faith of his children, aims at creating the God-dependence, a relationship of intimate familiarity, friendship, even mystical spousal relationship. Difficulties, disagreements, unexpected occurrences, the hostility of the world itself, are in the hands of God instruments of purification, necessary moments to verify the authenticity and honesty of personal motivations in adhering to God.

As it happened to Christ, so it is necessary that it will happen to his disciples. The presence of the cross, presence accepted in faith, offers the definitive possibility to reach the final goal of the Christian journey, when, once the “way of the Crucified” has ended, the barriers of signs fall and the direct vision of God’s glory appears.

THE JOURNEY OF HOPE
TRUSTING IN GOD

THE SURPRISE OF HOPE
WAITING FOR GOD'S FUTURE

Faith actualizes itself in the historical present, here and “now,” but it “already” tends to project itself toward the future because it inspires the desire of experimenting the truth believed, welcomed in the darkness of human mind. In this hedging over, faith transforms itself in hope, that is, almost anticipated certainty of what it foresees that it can enjoy tomorrow. Miani knows that baptismal faith made him child of God, but now he entrusts himself to that hope which makes him foresee/foretaste what is in store for eternity. He, in fact, is together with all the baptized, legitimate heir of Christ's glory. To entrust oneself to hope is to realize that the Holy Spirit lays in everyone the fruitful seed of the certainty of rising from death and entering into glory. It is the journey of hope.

Hope is infused together with faith as a germinal state by Baptism – made grown regularly, it becomes a sure sign of its maturation and its ulterior prolongation. Faith shows the mystery of God Trinity, hope advances in order to be enveloped in It. Faith peers on the extraordinary glorious world of God, hope enjoys that, and desires to participate in. Faith reveals the advances of a God infinitely lovable and loving, hope joyfully surrenders to this love.

Therefore, hope is unmovable certainty of a present that knows it is placed in the hands of God, Lord and dominator of history. It also is waiting for a better future, that grandiose future that has already begun in the mystery of Christ, firstborn of the risen ones.

No trouble, persecution – no hostility, anguish – not even death: nothing can destroy the certainty of the faithful who already sees him/herself (in faith) be reborn and glorified in the same Christ's triumph. Fear of suffering, and physical and moral pains, fade away in the abandonment of the human will, spurred (by hope) to identify itself with the divine will.

Supreme hope is to surrender to God, with the certainty that, within the earthly experience, everything concurs to the well-being of those who love Him. However, it is not a blind and fatalistic abandonment, as if one tries to ignore the effective status of one's relationship with God. It is not an undue appropriation of the merits of the Crucified Jesus, as if one tries to acquire the sensation of being safe and of having already reached salvation. The true Christian hope leaves to divine grace the task of purification from sin. It entrusts to it the human effort, eager to reach the highest level, the grace of all graces, the final perseverance that is final encounter with God in a condition of joyful friendship.

THE HILLS OF HAPPINESS
TO LOVE GOD

LOVE AND CHARITY
CHARITY FOR GOD
LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR

St. Jerome maintains that full and mature faith becomes certainty/hope of a future, that is, the believer knows he/she is held in good hands, the hands of God. It is confidence for the present and future. From here, it is very short the step for a transformation in love. Better still: faith/hope release the explosive charge of love already present in the central core of the spirit transformed by the sanctifying grace. The hills of happiness are the parabolic symbol of the joyful state of a soul overwhelmed by the flame of love that is God Himself – a love that cannot remain hidden, but it is exposed for the benefit of all through the splendid witness of the deeds of mercy.

The returned love, the adequate response to the love received from God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, is the essential core of the Christian experience, the con-natural confluence of faith/hope brought to the highest levels of perfection.

One returns to God the Father, by following Christ His Son, with heart full of love/charity. One is certain of being welcomed when one attempts to approach Jesus' example that establishes the apex of love in the gift of life. One arrives there gradually, when one makes of love for God the primary/prevalent motivation of one's Christian being/living. One must become aware that Christian life in all its aspects (personal, social, private, public) is guided, directed, and supported by the Spirit of Christ, the One who initiated it in Baptism. It does not have the possibility of developing outside of His constant active presence.

The Spirit works in the consenting soul, and takes it up to levels of union with God/Trinity which may include:

- a state of permanent peace
- an unconditional adhesion to every divine proposal
- a growing passion for the glory of God and salvation of souls
- a desire of breaking the earthly bonds in order to get immersed in the glory of the beatifying vision.

The signs of the love for God need to be authenticated with the trial of the love for neighbor. God and neighbor are the poles through which goes through the energy of charity that makes one free from any illusion or self-suggestion. The commitment to the works of mercy gives the exact measurement of the level of maturity reached by the love for God. When this love is ardent, strong, and nourished, the commitment to service to the neighbor becomes spontaneous. Counseling, instructing, correcting, comforting, forgiving, bearing, interceding – feeding, quenching thirst, clothing, sheltering, visiting, assisting, burying, are other expressions of accomplished love, the kind of love that is

able to see and serve Christ in the poor, the little, the last, the abandoned, the sick, and dying.

Love/charity, understood and lived in this way, is the best way (“the way of God”) to reform the mystical body of Christ, the Church, and draw to Her those who are far away, distrustful, and hostile. Those who work in this way are never abandoned by God.

WHERE THE RIVER FLOWS
HUMILITY OF HEART

HUMILITY AS TRUTH ABOUT GOD
HUMILITY AS TRUTH ABOUT MAN

Humility, the value/virtue that presides the process of Christian conversion, finds its origins exclusively in the Gospel. It finds its foundation in the invitation of the divine Master: “learn from me who am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). It has its roots in the revelation of the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic writings and Psalms. Jesus valued and re-proposed it in every phase of his witness, starting from the kenosis of his passion and death. He has opened a window over the world of God, so that we can justify the affirmation that humility has a place at the center of the Trinitarian life, where the project of universal salvation has been defined in all its details. St. Jerome understood that and placed it as a pivotal foundation of God’s life, immediately after love. Humility means to make oneself little, to accept to be carried. Humility is coming down along the river of God, without asking how and why.

God comes close to man by lowering Himself, becoming humble. In Christ, He reaches his complete kenosis, He annihilates Himself. Christian humility is but re-running through this same itinerary.

At the beginning one must affirm the absolute primacy of God over every created reality. To affirm means to recognize Him, accept Him, and adjust to Him with the certainty that one is safe only when he/she leaves to God the times and ways for the realization/ development of His plan of salvation, which regards both the whole human family and every single component of it. The desire/attempt of the human thinking to penetrate the mystery of the divine thinking does not contradict humility, as well as it does not the pondering on the how and why of the Providential dispositions. In fact, it is not for criticizing, refusing, protesting, but it is for entering more deeper into the dynamics of the divine wisdom, which reaches the apex of the relationship between God and humanity in the Incarnation and Passion of the Word, the firstborn of God the Father.

The humility of the disciple of Christ is measured by the degree of identification with and imitation of the humility of the crucified Master. The concrete facts, not only the intentions, manifest this truth.

Humility is a dynamic virtue. It tends to grow, intensify, extend, and deepen. It invades all the components of personality, all the environments of the human presence in action. On one hand, it takes away the attention from oneself, creating valid premises for the soul to remain in tranquillity and peace, even though vigilance is crucial in order to prevent the dominating return of deviant instincts. On the other, it courageously faces and accepts humiliation, disappointment, and anguish in the inflexible determination of re-living the experience of Christ on the cross, under the eyes of God who knows everything, controls everything, recognizes what are the limits of everybody beyond which the burden is no longer light and the yoke no longer easy.

DIFFICULT CHOICES
STRATEGIES OF ASCESIS

PRINCIPLES AND THEOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS
GENERAL METHODOLOGY
AREAS OF INTERVENTION

Humility, as truth about God and man, takes note that Christian life, in order to be as such, must move along directives drawn by the divine plan of salvation, and keep into consideration human nature wounded by sin. Christ's invitation to deny oneself and every day take up one's cross, realistically recalls the need to put into action countermeasures appropriate to face, balance, and overcome the thrusts of deviant instincts. It is necessary a global strategy of ascesis, in which austerity of life, ascetic exercises, physical and moral mortification find full justification. The goal of all this is to become disciple of Christ, in an irreversible decision. They are difficult choices because they

- 1) must be made in opposition to natural tendencies, with clear principles and theological motivations;
- 2) suppose a general methodology which consider the whole;
- 3) must be carried out in concrete interventions which regard the human personality in every aspect.

In the way of God, suffering and pain constitute the litmus test, in which the authenticity of being disciple of Christ is confirmed or denied. To understand them in their true meaning (revealed by faith), to accept them serenely (sustained by hope), to desire them as Christ did (pushed by love), is a sign of Christian maturity.

The redemptive economy presents suffering, in all its forms, as part of a mysterious divine plan, pre-ordered before time, manifested in Christ crucified, extended to the disciples in the invitation to take up the cross daily and carry it in following Him. Pain, entered in the world because of sin, is not a value per se, but it becomes as such in the light of the Crucified, when it is welcome as it is welcome by Jesus, who suffers and dies for the others. Here, the way of God identifies itself with the way of the Crucified.

The journey opens with a one's self-offering to Christ, a free and full donation, which inserts him/her in a new level of living. The primary commitment of those who offer themselves is to open up themselves and make their own the sacrificial feelings of the Redeemer, through frequent prayer before God, made man of pain. This face to face familiarizes the praying man with the divine victim. Frequency and brevity of the entertainment, proportioned to personal availability, helps prevent distractions and tiredness. The desire to encounter each other produces a current of awareness, a continuity of presence, which fix the image of the Master on the cross in one's soul. Gradually, a spiritual communion takes shape, in such a way that the two souls are fused in one, when the disciple begins to see the absurdity of sin and feels deep dislike for it.

There is a special methodology in this field for avoiding illusion and derailment from the way of God, in excess/defect. It is necessary to make a list of all that, in a

person, inhibits the action of grace, defaces the splendor of the soul chosen by God as his dwelling. Once one has become aware of the work to do, he/she begins a courageous fight against oneself, with order and faithfulness, that is, without passing to another sector before having concluded or re-ordered the previous one. One works systematically, supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit, until he/she eliminates what is not compatible with the privileged model one takes as reference, Christ, the perfection of God.

Some forms of specific renunciation and (internal/external) self-denial are always useful, at times indispensable for obtaining a robust Christian personality, which is any longer victim of sinful instincts or uncertain in the conflict between sense and spirit, but, on the contrary, it is eager to render visibility and splendor to the image and likeness of God, received in the supernatural adoption.

HIGH-ALTITUDE ENCOUNTERS
EXPERIENCE OF GOD

DEVOTION

INTERCESSION

PETITION

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAISE

SACRAMENTAL LITURGY

In the formulae in which St. Jerome summarizes the meaning of his charismatic renewal movement, among the essential components, always we find “devotion” or its equivalent “unction”: love humility devotion, work devotion love, humility love unction. Devotion/unction represent the spiritual vision of the world, where sacred and profane, nature and super-nature, interweave harmoniously, even though in their different reality and in their precise functional location. The passage from profane to sacred, from sacred to profane is lived with freedom and spontaneity. High-altitude encounters are ways, forms, and expressions of the experience of God. On the background there is an indissoluble union between the reality of God, who comes to meet man, and the quest of man who welcomes God, dialogues with Him, and desires Him to be present in all the situations of his life.

Devotion is the joyful awareness of being able to live in the presence of God, with an intensity more or less marked, in proportion with the degree of development, reached in love and humility. Its privileged space is prayer, understood as an encounter with God the Father, the crucified Son, and the Spirit, who envelops it with peace, sweetness and tenderness. It is a devout fervor which tends to expand from prayer, as an unction, on all the areas of life, including also work, grave tasks, and toil. There is no opposition between the solitude of the encounter with God in prayer and apostolic activity, between inner silence/peace and service to the neighbor.

Devotion transforms itself naturally in intercession, that is, personal involvement into the difficulties of others, into the problems and worries of the neighbor. It becomes sign of ecclesial sensitivity, where the other is no longer a stranger, but he/she is viewed and welcome as a member of the one family of God’s children, redeemed by the blood of Christ. The altruistic service is born of the altruistic prayer. More the fate of the neighbor is a concern, more intense intercession becomes, and more effective the service grows. Even when no service is possible, the supplication to God for the others’ needs is the most authentic form of Christian love.

The prayer of petition is legitimized by Christian revelation. It is theologically correct to ask God for oneself what regards the good of one's soul (conversion, spirit of faith, perseverance in virtue) and what (even at a merely material level) is deemed necessary/useful in leading one's personal and social life.

To ask God is not a matter of moving lips, making intelligible sounds, construing verbose discourses. It is primarily a matter of faith, that is, awareness that one meets God in order to present to Him one's petitions. Faith certifies divine presence. Then, one waits, re-presents his/her petition, continues asking, without fretting with God for presumed delays, without getting tired. This is the ambience of theological hope, which trusts in God, always, and opens the space for love. In fact, the petitioner is supposed to hold a good relationship of friendship with God, wishes to establish one if he/she did not have one, or to re-build it if he/she did break it.

Another way to channel devotion and to manifest to God the joy of one's heart, and the happiness because He is, is to pray with the Psalms. The exuberance of heart, gratitude of soul, doubt of the mind, anguish of spirit, all is channeled in the psalmody with words and expressions made sacred by the divine inspiration. One comes to think and breath with the Psalms, whose sublime poetry becomes so familiar to the point of accompanying and alleviating even the toils of work. Psalms teach gratitude, but they leave to the praying one the ways to thank God for every gift received. More the love that reigns in the heart is ardent, more the gratitude, even for the small signs, gestures, interventions for the benefit of the soul and body, is spontaneous. The heart knows how to invent new ways, new words, and new titles to express its uncontainable vibrations.

The climate of great trust that is established leads to the need for looking for reserved moments and spaces, where the praying one can second the movements of the Spirit by letting him/herself be taken by hand, as a child, in the exploration of the world of God.

Te more the external commitments, the works, the intervention of solidarity are numerous, the more contemplation becomes a need that can not be derogated. The contemplative one discovers inside a mysterious source of patience, courage, and energy that allow him/her to respond in excellent ways to every operational need.

To pray is always to look for God, to meet Him. To be spiritual means to live with the Spirit of Christ, to walk together toward the heavenly fatherland. All this is fulfilled in the sacramental liturgy, where the Eucharist is beginning, center, and end. One must approach mystery with humility, devotion, and awareness of being placed at the presence of the glorious Christ with the signs of his passion.

The contact with the physical body of Christ is also the contact with his mystical body, the Church, not as two different, separate, strange bodies. The presumption to limit oneself to the physical body by taking distance from the visible members of the mystical body, makes the Eucharist hollow. It is no more liturgy, that is prayer of the One who

reconciles to the Father. The fire of the Spirit is put off, the way of God is refused, and other ways that bring to ruin are followed.

Sacramental liturgy is the natural outlet of devotion, where all the other forms of prayers, such as, personal/community, public/private, converge. Confession and Communion, together with the commitment to bring to maturation the infused virtue of love in its twofold component (God/neighbor), constitute the best passages in order to establish a preferential relationship with God, during the earthly experience.

THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGY

I hope the Saint will excuse me if I will try to give a systematic organization to his theology. I will divide it in three groups. They have the function of theological archetypes, that is, powers, which hold and draw around them the other aspects of his theological exploration. They are: the mystery of God, the mystery of man, and the mystery of mercy.

MYSTERY OF GOD

If Blaise Pascal allows me to borrow his famous slogan, I could say that the God of Jerome is everything but the God of philosophers. He is the living and tremendous God, the powerful and merciful God of the Bible. He is the God who chooses to enter the history of man. He is a God who has the goodness of making man aware of his eternal mystery, of the project invented by the divine mind to transform him. He wants to bring him from a primitive image and likeness to a perfect identifying communion with the Almighty, through the redemptive and constructive work of Christ. This kind of theology starts from living, solid, and precise faith. It is a theology that presupposes sincere adhesion to the word God pronounces in the human history, through a myriad of events, but most of all through Christ Jesus.

There are two worlds, two histories, correlating and complementary to each other. There is the world of God, which surrounds the world of man and his history. He draws, invites him to see with the eyes of faith. He sweetly solicits every person to accept Him as God, as supreme complement of his human being. St. Jerome finds himself rightly in this situation: he sees the world of God lowered and immanent into the world of man, he welcomes it, and moves in it with perfect easiness.

How did he consider God?

Certainly not as a pietistic character he would like to reserve only for his individual religious sphere. Neither as a grandiose alibi on which he could discharge contradictions, shadows, and unanswered questions, which fills human history. On the contrary, He is the main character of this history, both on a personal/social and national/worldly level.

He is a God who comes down, who gets in touch with any of his creatures, who asks and wants dialogue with each one of them. In fact, Jerome does not linger in describing the divine attributes from an abstract point of view, but he sees everything embodied in a historical and existential context.

God is unlimited wisdom: it is true.

God is the end to which all the historical process of the evolution, growth and maturation of the world are oriented: it is true.

God knows the ways and times in which the economy of his kingdom on earth will be realized: it is true.

God is the unique source of grace and good: it is true.

However, this God keeps into consideration the fragility of each one of his creatures. He is well disposed toward every person with an attitude of understanding, kindness, and forgiveness.

The God of Jerome is so present in history that He is the main character of the events of the Company of the Servants of the Poor. To Him his friends and cooperators must address in order to find inspiration and council.

From Him it starts the universal redemptive plan that will reach every individual as a personal invitation to salvation. This invitation is never withdrawn, even when it clashes with human refusal or indifference. God is faithful. He is not indifferent to the response of his creatures. If this response were to be, unfortunately, accompanied with contempt, hatred, and ill intention, He would be provoked to act through justice.

Miani too faces the difficult problem that tormented all the Saints, the innocent Saints as well as the former sinners. How to reconcile the goodness of God with his inflexible justice?

At level of reason, the contrast is unresolved. However, Jerome does not turn to reason. Here, his life experience comes into the scene. He has experienced how terrible and painful guilt is, but he has also tasted how sweet God's forgiveness is. Therefore, he finds in Christ, the Crucified Christ, the personalized and dynamic identification between justice and mercy. The anguish that pierces the repentant sinner finds relief in abandoning itself to that Lord, from whom one hopes to be kindly welcome, as he entrusts himself to Him, who is not a judge but a savior.

This God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. With Him and at His side, the Holy Spirit takes action in perfect harmony of intent and performance. The God of Jerome is the Trinity revealed by Christ. It is a Trinity of persons, who contemporarily enter the history of both humanity and single man. To be docile to the movement of the Spirit means to tune in with Christ. To stay with Christ corresponds to staying on the side of the Father.

Everything starts from God.

Everything returns to God.

Glory and honor are offered to Him through the "sweet" Jesus, in faithfulness to the suggestions of the Spirit.

The dominant idea, or better, the major reality that directs Jerome's psychic and affective energy is the divine goodness that revealed itself in Jesus. Divine goodness is the mirror in which the Saint reflects his personal experience and the prodigy of that work that is blossoming in his hands, the Company of the Servants of the Poor.

Goodness is the divine grace that makes him to be reborn from the stormy past of sin. It is the sweetness of God who with gentleness reveals Himself to him through the presence of the Blessed Virgin. It is the clement benevolence of a father who forgets wrongs and offenses.

Goodness is the love of the Lord, who assumes human likeness in order to take away every distance between creator and creature. It is the meekness of God who becomes a child at Bethlehem. It is expiating love exalted on the cross. It is the encounter of the risen one who become pilgrim along the humanity that goes away sad from Jerusalem toward Emmaus.

This goodness snatches from Jerome a stupendous response. It challenges him. It spurs him to transform his violent character in a new one, meek and peaceful, like the one of the Lamb who faces all the risks to save the brothers – and offers himself instead of them to lift them up and free them.

The Christ of Jerome is Pauline. He is the God of glory who did not consider an exclusive privilege to enjoy equality with his Father. He is the God of love who has assumed in his person the mysterious project through which everybody is called to share in the glory of it. He is the Word who has annihilated himself by passing through the destroying trial of the cross.

The nights spent in the contemplation of Christ transfigured in suffering have persuaded the Saint that Christianity without cross – and cross without the Crucified – would be reduced to mere sentimentalism or incomprehensible cruelty.

The Easter mystery, to which St. Jerome refers, does not limit itself to affective memory, devout commemoration of a historical event lost in the night of time. It is a mystery that repeats, renews itself, and lasts under various forms: personal, ecclesial, sacramental, charismatic, and mystic.

It is the experience of those who let themselves be immersed in the dynamics of the saving plan, offer themselves to Christ and remain rooted in Him with unwavering faith.

It is the experience of those who become pilgrims with the pilgrim Christ, by re-living in hope the burning purification of suffering, and waiting that the divine sonship be completely revealed.

It is the experience of those who eat the bread of Christ and let themselves be called servants of the poor of Christ, by shouldering the burdens, torments, anguish, nakedness, misery of the most disgraced and degraded part of humanity.

Faith, hope, and love get fused together as dominant elements of the new mentality of those who have dedicated their life to God. They cooperate in the spreading of his kingdom on earth, in those social environments, in that sector of humanity, in that historical period where Providence has put them, in the mystery of his infinite wisdom.

The Lord Jesus, the one sent by the Father, the Christ of the Gospel, without shying away from his promise of peace, always present in the midst of those who are gathered in his name, reserves for himself the right of freedom of action. With his interventions and challenges, He baffles and confuses every vision of things, that is merely human or naturalistic.

The choices of Christ are unpredictable. It is obvious his predilection for the poor and the little. The more one loves, the more one is demanded. The image of fire, biblical image, prevails over this theology in order to give visible substance to the difficult trial in which Christ introduces those who consecrate themselves to Him. The intention is to make Saints of them, in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his mother, whom He has demanded everything because she has given everything, to the point of staying at the foot of the cross during his atrocious agony.

In the writings of the Saint I do not find any theoretical question about divine existence, essence, and attributes. His God remains the God of faith, the God who dialogues with man, the God who loves first, and who chooses first. He is the God who reveals Himself in the dramatic genesis of his conversion, and who comes back to manifest Himself in the love ecstasy through which he enters eternity.

His lack of dissertation, speculation and discussion about the Absolute, Universal, Supreme is not due to preconceived anti-intellectualistic positions. He could have done that: he does not lack natural predisposition to reflecting. But he does not have time. The privileged place of his encounter with God remains his religious experience rooted in what I like to call, by analogy, the mystery of man.

I consider it appropriate to fathom the nature of this religious experience because it leads us directly to the core of the reality of Miani as a man, to the core of his individuality. There are motivations, reactions, tendencies, responses, and resistances, all as symbols that enlighten him about a larger response, the response of humanity to God's projects.

MYSTERY OF MAN

The Venetian experiences God who saves. It is not the experience of a God who casts a lifesaver from the highness of his aloofness or from the abyss of unreachable majesty. It is the experience of a God who personally enters his individual history with such and much light that He shows to him the way to take. The final goal is his insertion in the divine family.

Jerome assures that the light is so intense that it is not possible to make mistakes about divine intentions. Everyone finds it in the existential act of the earthly pilgrimage. It is up to everyone to become aware of it and to choose the direction the light of Christ illumines unequivocally. In evangelical terms, that means to eliminate rocks and buckthorns from the soil, so that the seed, that is Christ Word of God, may take roots, grow, and produce salvation and holiness.

It is the discourse about the fidelity to the Gospel.

It is the discourse of returning to the sanctity of the early Christian origins. Without this fidelity, even the divine project of salvation falls. It is the dramatic moment when each man faces the fork-road of history that counts: or with God or with the world.

The Saint's theological anthropology presupposes a difficult dualism between the things of God and the things of the world. It is a substantial, determinant difference between two worlds: the present one, visible, experimental – the future one, divine, transcendent. Difference does not mean separation, hostility, and conflict.

Undoubtedly, there is a clear distinction between secularized immanence and absolute transcendence. It is to the latter that man is called in the constant interest of God for him. Here, they are clearly pointed out the two dimensions that tear apart the human reality. They are the two centrifugal tendencies that make of man a mystery of misery and a mystery of greatness.

St. Jerome discovers the misery inside himself. He feels it is rooted in his flesh. He discovers it around himself, in the history of the innumerable tramps he snatches from despair – in the history of the women plucked from the streets and vice. The love for Christ presses him not to lose anybody among the least of Jesus' brothers.

Physical and moral evil are the ocean that surrounds him from everywhere: the memory of his moral collapse. The shiver of having been on the brink of despair gives him the concrete idea of what is man without the saving intervention of God.

The experience of his illness that has dragged him to the threshold of death, the physical contact with the sick and plague-stricken give him the precise view of the limits, conditioning, and constitutional frailty of the human nature. The consequences deriving from that are simple and clear: man cannot consider himself safe and stable in this world because his earthly establishment is not his final dwelling. Man, as the Emmaus' disciples the day after resurrection, is a fearful pilgrim whom the evening of life surprises too early. No pilgrim longs to stop along the way until he reaches the goal of his journey.

Right here the theology of the human greatness grafts itself in: man is invited to enter God's glory. He is the permanent object of divine predilection.

Clear are the statements of the Saint: what makes man truly great is his faithfulness to the things of God, is his perseverance in the journey toward the ultimate

and definite realities. The call to this divine greatness is a gift, free offer from God. Every man is chosen and destined to reproduce the features, likeness, and image of Christ in the kingdom of heaven. For this reason the Father has sent his Only Begotten Son to accompany, orient, and guide him toward the new Promised Land. Man become great because God makes him great in his love, when He finds in him the coherent response of living and incarnate faith, the convinced response of hope, which abandons itself trustful to divine promise.

I do not find in Jerome other ways, other indications or suggestions for overcoming limits, misery, complexes, and resistance: only faith and hope, which transform themselves in the love of trustful confidence.

Physical and moral torments, temptations, separations, adversities, failures, everything become fire for the one who believe. Fire accomplishes prodigy. Fire causes an extraordinary metamorphosis. It brings man from a merely historical, temporary, local existence to a new type of life, which has divine, eternal, infinite, and beatifying dimensions.

The privileged place where this metamorphosis takes place is the Church of Christ.

For her Miani has a great veneration, respect, fidelity, and love. Everybody knows the dramatic events of the Church of 1500: she is divided, torn apart, and bloodied. It is a Church with an unrecognizable face. A face ravaged by politics of prestige, power, wealth, and sensuality.

It is amazing to see the firmness and radicalism of a convert who prays and exhorts everybody to be faithful to the Church, which remains always the Church of Christ. He launches an appeal to Christianity so that it may return to give the witness of holiness that was characteristic of the times of the apostles. It is a breaking away from, even objection, and refusal of the triumph vision of the Church that many contemporaries cherished. It is a firm “no” to any compromise with the Gospel.

The reason of this is his personal experience of the transforming power of grace that saves. Because he has seen himself being reborn completely, St. Jerome becomes a champion of God’s project everywhere the Spirit sends him. He tries always to draw to God any sort of people: rich, poor, learnt, ignorant, friends, cooperators, close and far ones, sympathizers, indifferent ones. His luminous face is a reflex of the grace, holiness, and glory of God. It is a manifestation of the divine benevolence for human weakness, living witness of the divine lowering into the human condition to the point of reaching the levels of prodigy and extraordinariness.

It would be appropriate to consider the ways in which the saving intervention takes place inside the Church and the individual believers. How the rapport between nature and grace is established, has always been a fascinating mystery even for the most learnt theologians and saints. It would be the matter of discovering how divine, absolute, all powerful, transcendent interventions can enter the existential context of human psychology without violating the freedom of determination and choice. Miani, rather than pondering on this problem, lived it in depth. Proves of it are the consequences derived from his initial conversion, and moreover, from the conversion that takes place in constant, continual, and progressive intensity during the course of all his life. Under the action of grace – invested by the initiative of the Spirit, he did not feel to be a lesser man, or less free or less responsible. On the contrary, he has grown in all the dimensions of his

personality. I would say that it is practically impossible to find where divine activity ends and man's response begins, as they are so vitally interpenetrated.

God and Jerome, on the level of inner transformation and pastoral activity, constitute a dynamic unity. They are one, one in Christ and in the grace of the Spirit. It is a unity realized in the contest of sacramental signs left by the Redeemer to his Church.

I do not think that it would be wrong to ask ourselves if the Saint may have thought or believed that it would be possible to build an earthly city, where man, re-made according to the Gospel, would be able to give the witness of holiness to the world, as the early Christian generations have already done it.

I do not think he did it.

I do not think he did it because I see in all his motivations and commitments a decisive orientation, a perspective that clearly points to the after, to the ultimate future, the eschatology.

In other words, I have the impression that Miani considers it necessary to invest all his best energies in making the society ferment in Christian sense, without illusion of forming a new earthly paradise. He seems to think that man is capable of realizing the dimensions foreseen by God for his growth in Christ, both as an individual and as a member of the human community, only if man enters the tension that pushes him toward God, source of all good.

MYSTERY OF MERCY

The final outlet of this theology could not be but the explication of that stupendous reality that is contained in the word mercy.

In speaking to his friends, the Venetian used to shake, move, and make them foretaste what God has in store for those who love Him. The sum of the ultimate Christian realities, the final place of the recapitulation of all things, goes through this last, grandiose, and ineffable mercy. It means another world, the survival of man in God's mystery, the human insertion into the divine reality in a total and definite way.

Mercy is the term for pilgrimage in time. It is the experimentation of the immense goodness of God which in Christ walks with man in order to re-take him back to the paradise lost, through the narrow gate and the narrow evangelical path.

But until one is on the journey, there is always the temptation of power and prestige, the allurements of beauty that makes one forget the true Beauty, the provocation of the earthly realities, which are opposing the heavenly ones. Human nature is instinctively led to conquer and selfishly own this world, forgetting the call to eternity and running the risk of being excluded from the embrace of divine mercy.

Down here, writes the Saint, it is preferable to feel in the desert, as Israel did, because deprivation and hardship quicken the journey toward the final goal. There, there are no detours, deceit, and mirage. Those who travel with an attitude of the poor never lack divine help, even in extraordinary ways.

Two are the marks of this assistance: peace and sincere will for penance.

According to Miani, peace is the inalterable balance of serenity and inner relaxation enjoyed by those who abandon themselves in God. To abandon oneself means, first, to accept the providential divine plan and then, passionately cooperate to its realization. This peace is the beginning, first-fruit, and anticipation of the definite state of beatitude. There are no words to describe it, but the experience can still be made, at least in a germinal way.

Voluntary penance, the desire to perform penitential acts (of any kind of form and content), becomes like a guarantee. It is something very reassuring. The voluntary penitent, innocent or sinner, at the end of the earthly journey, will have assured for him/herself the entrance into God's glory.

It is really a mystery this divine mercy. Before a man who let himself be grabbed by the desire of reparation through effective penance, it does not take into account fault, infidelity, and human malice. It is the divine mercy itself that inspires the works of penance.

Jerome's eschatology presents itself as a dynamic process that starts from peace of heart and goes to the total peace of the beatitudes in God, from the experience of the sweetness of forgiveness on earth to the ecstatic experience of love in heaven.

The use of these two expressions (peace and mercy) indicates that Miani puts in the background the intellectual vision of God. He gives absolute priority to the most intense, experimental communion of love with God, and to the ineffable participation in the two divine attributes, which fascinate the human heart: peace and goodness.

There is even the affirmation of the possibility of anticipating this definite state of things, now, during this earthly life. This befalls through the love for God, the fidelity to his project of salvation, even when it implies bitter sufferings, and through unconditional abandon to divine will. And all this is already heaven on earth. This anticipated heaven is well far from being blessed passivity or, worse, alienation from the raw human reality. On the contrary, it solicits personal initiative so that the human effort may be marching at God's pace. The human effort, however, is not understood as natural autonomy, self-sufficient ability, but it is the result of a consent that is solicited by God, time by time, through the virtues of faith, hope, and love.

To trust, hope, love.

Faith, confidence, abandon.

To trust in Christ's promises. Integral acceptance of the Gospel. To own the word that does not pass. To root onto the immovable rock of the Church, at which uselessly the powers of hell rage.

St. Jerome places himself in antithesis against any utopia, futuristic or optimistic, invented by the human fantasy. He re-affirms the need to cooperate with Christ for the transformation of the world, from a field cluttered by rocks and thorns into a field free and fecund. In it the grace produces the fruits of renewal, preparation for eternity, and divinization.

Miani gives to human life the value, the function, the role of vigilant waiting, of attentive listening to God's voice and the signs of the times, through which God speaks to everyone personally and invites him/her to join hands with the brothers of all over the world, in order to reduce the kingdom of Satan and make room for the kingdom of God, in the name of Christ.

It is a concept of life that excludes the idea of onlooker and considers it, instead, a mission for main characters.

The act of making oneself available for God is located between the historical present and the eschatological future. The first one is premise, the other consequence. The present is considered as a true grace, a gift that needs to be asked for in prayer from God. In fact, there is always something in the human nature that tries to escape from the legitimate exigencies of God. There is always a degree of blindness that tries to interpret Christianity as alienation from a hard present.

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is born from theological principles in order to form a true itinerary toward God, the “way of God.”

The Saint never intended to write treatises of asceticism and mysticism, but he dedicated himself to asceticism and mysticism. He committed himself to the work necessary to reach Christian perfection and to the following of the movements of the Spirit who would bring him to the level of experiential knowledge of the divine realities to which God would have him introduce.

Jerome’s formulae of his program of the itinerary to God share common values, from which love emerges, with the function of orientation, mediation and end.

Love brings one get free from mediocrity, that is, from that vicious atmosphere which suffocates every initiative of the Spirit. He enumerates concrete situations with raw realism: emptiness or inner lack of wisdom. It is passive conformism; security based on the possession of material goods; carelessness of the state of Christian consecration to the point of seconding the instinct of the senses; attachment to comfort with the excuse of need and foresight; insincerity; lack of fear of God; lack of interest for those who live in error or far away; indifference for the eternal destiny of the errant brothers; refusal to aid other with the excuse of inability; permanent conflict with cooperators and superiors; heedlessness to the councils of brothers and community; pride and presumption; grossness of spirit; hypocrisy interpreted as adaptation to the situation.

The long list offers a view of all the viruses, which attack the spirit, rape it, force it to return to the things of the world, which are incompatible with the commitment and dignity of the Christian consecration.

The danger is so serious that the Saint, in order to shake those who are in these situations, recalls the possibility of the punishment that God reserves for the hypocrites and those who persevere in evil. However, he prefers to appeal to love instead of fear, that love that comes from God as an offer of salvation in Christ and as a personal invitation to holiness. This love is the logical response to the surprising fidelity of God and to his marvelous and patient waiting.

One must aim at acquiring full love, gift from God to those who work to bring faith and hope to the phases of their deepest development. Great faith, great hope constitute the breach through which the waves of the great love rush in.

The insistence on the word “great” is symptomatic. It refers to a constant work of corresponding to grace – to the persevering commitment of regularity in Christian life – to the incessant tension toward God, that characterizes a soul in love. It is not a race from a subject to another, but it is a harmonious interweaving, completing, integrating of these three essential values with which one permanently hooks up with God.

Love is the initial push, the reason of the tension that does not slow down, the cause of the final consummation. God does not delay in pouring the super-abundance of it in those who abandon themselves to Him.

In this way Christ’s love acted, and touched its apex in the consecration of the cross. In this way, it acted in Mary who let herself be treated, led, inspired by the same love to the point of identifying herself with Christ in the act of sacrificial love on Calvary.

What prevents love from becoming religious sentimentalism is its desire of identifying with the crucified Christ. For St. Jerome, to follow Christ to the Calvary means not only to accept the providential suffering, but also to take the initiative of voluntary penance.

In this suggestion, I do not find any false anthropological conception or any shadow of masochistic deformation. The acts of voluntary penance are freely programmed in order to maintain physical organism and personality in perfect self-control that allows one to face trials and hardships with success. In this context, we understand his insistence on being ready to suffer and do penance, on praying to God so that He may grant the grace of penance.

Love and sacrifice express the sacrificial mentality Miani has derived from the constant prayer before the Crucified. It is not impossible that he also might have in mind the clear will of undergoing the purification of senses, if God might will to grant him the gift of mystic union.

As strange it might look, pain and suffering remain the mysterious language of love through which God dialogue with his favorite children. They are sure signs that express the divine intention of drawing someone in a more deep, intense, and unpredictable intimacy. Therefore, the Saint recommends that, in order not to disappoint the expectation of the most benign Lord, one needs to willingly accept what Providence arranges for him/her and to persevere in it generously and consciously.

There is then the moment when God assumes the initiative of the spiritual growth. The person has the impression of being abandoned to him/herself, of not having anyone to trust anymore. He/she feels lost and uncertain. He/she sees a known, familiar, and easy direction before him/her, the way of the world. The other direction is dark, unknown, and mysterious. It is the way of pure faith, the great faith. Its function becomes more and more demanding. It leads to a high goal: the mystic communion with God, with the gift of joy, peace, serenity, security and abandon.

God’s pedagogy uses the trial of suffering only as a transitional, instrumental phase. It is used to destroy resistances and guilty feelings, shortcomings, imperfections. Only he who loves God more than oneself accepts to expose himself to the flames of pain, trusting blindly in God. God’s return travels on one hundred percent in joy, consolation and exultance.

The loving God, besides drawing humanity to Himself in a filial adoption, wants to establish with it a relationship more intimate than the one between father and son. Miani calls that, holiness. In it, love develops its tension at the maximum degree: to create of the two only one, to go from union to unity.

He openly proclaims that God wants the Christians, already his children because of water and Spirit, even more united to Him, in image and likeness that surpass any expectations. They are children on the level Christian rebirth. They are dear children on the level of holiness. A new kind of adoption, one that brings the baptismal adoption to his maximum fulfillment: fullness of love, consummative perfection, transforming union.

What surprises in Jerome's spirituality is his placing love at the top of every single operational phase of God's way.

Love has unifying, integrating, finalizing value. It is the reason, the initial push in the process of ascending, and its conclusion.

Suffering, either providential or voluntary, remains as an instrument of freedom and purification. It takes away what prevents the spirit to immerse itself in the perfect union of love with God. It is a very rich love because of its multiplicity of its components and dimensions.

It starts from God's tenderness toward man. God is supreme goodness, source of every good. God is love. The only worthy response is an equally loyal, faithful, filial, intimate love, translated and expressed in true familiarity.

When a Christian overcomes the natural resistances (using all that the saving plan of God puts at his/her disposal: sacraments, prayer, penance), he/she is ready and available to be dragged into the vortex of the transforming union. Always, if God wishes so. Miani thinks that it is legitimate to desire, ask for it humbly, without any claims. Must be done, only by remaining attentive, listening to, and waiting for the passage of God.

The love for God, open to all the hottest perspectives, never presents itself separated from love for neighbor. Here, there is the other part of its fascination and completeness.

Far from isolating one's spirit in a passive idleness, it adds to itself an unexpected dimension, the one of the mystic consanguinity with all the members of the human family. The passion and anxiety that characterize the authentic Christian as to the salvation of the others, is explained only by feeling of being members with them of the same family of children of God. Members of the same and unique body of Christ, that is a body animated by the same Spirit. Therefore, if someone goes far away from this family, if someone gets lost, it is as if something of ourselves gets lost irremediably and dies for ever. Love pushes to do everything in order to prevent that. Not only. Love suggests the use of all the best initiatives to help everybody persevere in friendship with God.

This is a love that, in order to obtain the salvation that counts, the final one, gets interested in curing and healing every aspect of the person, such as physical illnesses, psychic illnesses, misery, isolation, indifference.

All –this is the definite message of our Saint – need to be reached by the expression of God' love through our love.

