

[unrevised machine translation]

FATIMA IN THE DRAMAS OF HISTORY

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The mariophanies have been observed with a certain amount of contempt by academic theology, and in fact the treatises on Mariology barely take them into account. This attitude seems to relegate the life of the Church as a theological place and the *sensus fidei fidelium*. Therefore, a claim is required, without this meaning expecting from them what they cannot give: an extension of the revelation; they are a sign, an epiphany, a historical imperative addressed to the Church (and through her to the world) at a certain moment in its history. Theology must allow itself to be visited by these deeply human and ecclesial experiences. And at the same time popular devotions must be visited by theology.

The interpretation of a phenomenon as singular as the mariophanías is extremely difficult and delicate. There is an intrinsic and insurmountable limit: the student and the observer can never arrive at the naked and brute fact; it will never be able to cross the threshold that only the recipients have crossed (with their vision and hearing). The scholar and the observer always stay on the side here, so they can only access them through the testimony of others.

In the mariophanías something escapes the explanation by natural causes. They live from a logos that has its roots in the Trinitarian economy, as an expression of a living God who does not leave the world abandoned, but rather continues to accompany it in the light of the Risen One; His Mother participates in his glory, exercising her maternal attitude towards the brothers of her Son, members of a pilgrim Church in the midst of the dramas of history. This logic is perceived in a paradigmatic way in the event-Fatima.

1.- The peculiarity of a singular event

The indicated difficulty is evident in the (commonly called) apparitions of Fatima, which only acquire full meaning within the Fatima event: this includes the participation of numerous protagonists based on the words that the Virgin (anticipated by the Angel) addressed to three little shepherds between May and October 1917. The work of theology consists in identifying the reading key that shows its logic and deep meaning.

It is convenient to underline the uniqueness of the event to capture the originality of the Message. The abandonment and fragility of the initial and founding moment is impressive: the three visionaries disappeared from the scene very soon: Francisco and Jacinta died shortly after and Lucía moved away forever from Cova de Iría. Then the event made its way: in that (apparent) emptiness other protagonists gradually joined. First of all the pilgrims. But also the curious. And even the adversaries, the critics, those who tried to destroy the traces and the memory.

Gradually it unfolded as an event at the ecclesiastical, national and world level. The Church felt involved with a degree of surprising intensity in the case of a "private revelation" (due to the extent of popular devotion and the repeated visits of the popes). He gradually identified himself with the national spirit, revitalizing the Church in Portugal. International public opinion integrated it into the tensions of the "cold war". The existence of "secrets" contributed to this, with apocalyptic implications, which aroused particular interest and which has continued to the present, with implications even for ecclesiastical politics. The sometimes overloaded language of "secrets" must be interpreted to reveal the Secret of a mystical and prophetic testimony.

The event contains an intrinsic vocation to remain always current. This is shown by the fact that it has been valued as the fundamental religious fact of the 20th century, "an overflowing explosion of the supernatural in this world imprisoned by matter" (P. Claudel). It was not the Church that imposed Fatima, but Fatima imposed itself on the Church (Mgr. Cerejeira, Patriarch of Lisbon). In the same Shrine of Fatima, John Paul II said on 5.13.1982 that "the Message, in its fundamental content, is the truth and the call of the Gospel itself", which continues to resound in the midst of the dramatic events of human history.

The complexity and the difficulties of understanding the event are evident. The texts are scarce and published years after the events (especially Lucía's Memoirs). The interrogations of the three little shepherds are sober and concise because -as is logical- they did not seek theological insights. Contemporary observers speak mostly from a distance, from outside: the reactions aroused were motivated by assumptions of an ideological or political nature. Many interpretations sought curiosity or sensationalism, at the risk of focusing attention in an unbalanced way on accidental aspects. The critical study of the texts and the sources identifies differences between the first data (in the interrogations of 1917) and the later developments, which leads to unavoidable questions: to what extent did Lucía's writings influence her imagination or her spirituality? ? Does it offer memories in the strict sense or does it introduce novelties that were not in the genuine core of the message?

Approaching a phenomenon so complex and so difficult to interpret is an adventure, but also a challenge to facilitate this reciprocal "visit" of theology and popular devotion.

2.- The reading key: mercy, light of Easter in the drama of history

As a key to the fundamental reading of the Message, we seem to propose God's mercy: the triumph of love in the dramas of history. This allows us to delve into the most radical logic of the revelation of the Triune God: God's love manifests itself as mercy to overcome the dramas of human history from within. The little shepherds are the witnesses (and in their own way protagonists) of the designs of mercy that are announced to them through the Lady who comes from heaven, of paschal glory. This perspective has not been sufficiently highlighted in studies on Fatima, but it enriches the best known interpretations.

This event of mercy arises with force because it is rooted in the sore flesh of the world, with so many individual and collective dramas: the wars and violence that broke out with such force in the 20th century, the consequence of inhuman and dehumanizing dynamisms (in 1917 Portugal was involved in World War I); the conflicts, confrontations and uncertainties that go through the historical evolution of the country; the disappointments and crossroads of national culture, as expressed in the best-known artists and writers of the time; the resistance and misunderstanding that the three children must face when they make their experience known; the opposition of rationalist prejudices to an alleged divine intervention... The Message goes out to meet those who suffer from the drama in any of its manifestations, to prevent it from becoming a tragedy by opening the horizon of hope.

In this context, this mystical and prophetic testimony bursts forth: from a profoundly theological experience, of an Easter and Trinitarian character, a prophetic discernment arises that denounces and unmasks the infernal powers that seek to dominate the world; Faced with this danger and its dehumanizing consequences, from the glory of the Risen One and from the Love of the Trinity, mercy follows the path and the itinerary to go beyond evil; the visionaries are constituted as witnesses capable of "carrying" the consequences of sin, to offer comfort and blessing in the midst of the blood of the victims and the cruelty of the criminals... Human history will not end in an irreversible tragedy thanks to the blessing that comes from the splendor of the

Love of the Trinity that radiated in a special way at a certain moment in Cova de Iría, symbolized in the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin.

The event-Fatima, like every authentically Christian experience, has a Paschal and Trinitarian character. This dimension has often been obscured by the focus (often morbid) on apocalyptic symbology (which invites us to describe catastrophic events of the future) and by the one-sidedness with which sober, penitential, and sacrificial spirituality has sometimes been interpreted. Fatima clearly shows Christian singularity when the event (and its Message) is contemplated from the glory of Trinitarian Love and from the presence of the Risen One who makes himself present in Mary.

3.- The theological dimension: Paschal and Trinitarian event

Light, beauty and joy are images and experiences that emerge from the beginning of the testimony of the little shepherds and that reveal a mystical experience rooted in Easter and in the Trinity.

The splendor of Easter

The mariophanía is described by the seers as such an intense glow and such dazzling clarity that "it hurt my eyes: I couldn't see well" (DCF I, 92), "I could see little because of the light" (DCF I .93). The Lady herself was seen "dressed all in white, brighter than the sun, radiating a clearer and more intense light than a crystal glass, filled with crystal clear water, pierced by the rays of the most ardent sun" (IV, 172). . Light shows here all the resonances of mystical images: light is the environment in which it is seen, but it is also light that (that is, the Lady) that makes itself seen by awakening the vision capacity of the little shepherds, which produces the involvement of the seers in the vision: "We were so close that we stayed within the light that surrounded it or that it radiated" (IV,172). An exact description is beyond human capabilities, because astonishment and surprise dominate at the inconceivable and inexpressible:

The lightning bolts weren't really lightning either, but the reflection of an approaching light. Seeing this light is why we sometimes said that we saw Our Lady coming; but we only distinguished Our Lady in that light when she was already on the holm oak. Not knowing how to explain or wanting to avoid questions was what led us to sometimes say that we saw it coming, other times that we didn't. When we said yes, that we saw her coming, we meant that we saw that light approaching, which in the end was her. And when we said that we did not see her coming, we meant that we only really saw Our Lady when she was already on the holm oak" (IV, 174; our emphasis).

We must underline the development of the description: they see a light, someone in the light, the Virgin radiates light, even more, she herself was the light "that penetrated us to the most intimate of the soul" (IV, 145). They even recognize that the Virgin herself points beyond herself: "God was that light" (IV, 173), even more so, the Holy Trinity (IV, 145), and they saw themselves in that light that was God himself (IV,173; M 37). The "opening of heaven" (IV, 174) seems to imply entering heaven itself.

The splendor and glory make visible an indescribable beauty. The beauty of the Virgin, young, is a constant in the testimony of the little shepherds: the Lady was very pretty (I, 44), "more beautiful than any other person I have ever seen" (DCF I, 47), dazzled by his beauty (M 30).

Likewise, joy dominates, so characteristic of the encounter of the Risen One with his disciples, and the dynamism of evangelization, of communication, of the salvific experience itself. Lucía admits from the first moment that she was very happy that the Virgin had appeared to her (DCF I, 60), and many years later she will remember that "I felt such an intimate joy that I was filled with trust and love" (M 30). Just as the apostles "refused to believe because of joy and astonishment" (Lk 24, 41), the shepherd boys "drunk with surprise" (I, 44) felt such immense joy that they could not remain silent, in secret. and for this reason Jacinta could not contain her experience and it was translated into a confession: I have seen the Lady; That indiscretion (which broke the commitment of silence) generated the dynamics of the Fatima event. It is essential to underline that peculiar dialectic between surprise and astonishment, between the intimate nature of the incommunicable and the need to communicate it:

The apparition of Our Lady came to focus us once more on the supernatural, but in a softer way. Instead of that annihilation in the divine presence that even physically prostrated us (they refer to the angelophanies of the previous year), he left us a great peace and expansive joy, which did not prevent us from talking about what had happened (IV, 140; our underlining).

I don't know why the apparitions of Our Lady produced very different effects on us. The same interior joy, the same peace and happiness, but instead of this physical dejection, a certain expansive agility, an exultation of joy, instead of this difficulty in speaking, a certain communicative enthusiasm" (IV, 171; our emphasis). .

The Trinitarian Love Experience: The King's Daughter's Secret

The paschal dimension hides a strictly theo-centric content: theological and theological. Theological, because God is recognized at the origin, a personal God who escapes all temptation of fusion or undifferentiated unity; rather it displays a communication of love (IV, 170). The angel's previous appearances produce the irruption of the supernatural, the experience of the sacred, to the point that "we were almost unaware of our own existence", that even "the next day we still felt our souls wrapped in that atmosphere (M IV, 169)". But the Mariophany establishes a strictly interpersonal relationship. It is a strictly theological experience, because it invites a deep prayer, in an attitude of deep adoration, from which faith, hope and charity flow:

My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you. I ask your forgiveness for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you (IV, 169).

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, I adore you deeply and I offer you the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ (IV, 170).

This experience contains the real Secret (below the secrets). Lucia herself will link this intimate experience to the Song of Songs 8,6-7: it is the secret of the king's daughter, reserved for the intimacy of the spouses and therefore must be kept from all prying eyes or contamination interested. The attitude of reserve and silence was recommended to them very early on: a priest asked them "to keep the secret of your souls for God and for yourselves" (I, 35).). The (mystical) depth of that Secret cannot be trivialized by the symbology that accompanies the visions. Lucía points out her true level when she says that she will always keep it as a "hymn of eternal gratitude and praise to your love", "for the praise of his glory (M 13)".

In fact, by virtue of the indicated dialectic, they will be pushed to communicate: "I will have to speak something about the secret" (III, 120), because thanks to this "others will sing with me the greatness of your mercy" (II, 66). . That love that they have experienced reflects what is

most intimate with God, his gaze on humanity, and therefore cannot be kept selfishly. The pathos of God moves the witness, and he must offer it as a "fountain of crystal clear water, a spring of grace, of light power", which -in the midst of the dramatic condition of history- manifests itself as mercy (M 11 -12).

The charisma that becomes a biography

Each of the three little shepherds modulates in a different way the experience of God, lived as a communication of love. Jacinta feels moved above all by the suffering of Jesus and for this reason "she likes" to express her love to him (I, 55), she loves the Lord and the Lady so much "that I never tire of telling them that I love them" (I, 55), and for this reason she seeks the solitude of prayer to "be alone for a long time, talking with hidden Jesus" (I, 54).

The taste for God and joy in Him are manifested with great clarity in Francis (IV, 51, 167). In her most passive attitude, in her difficulties to understand what is happening, she strongly expresses her joy: she greatly enjoyed the vision of the Angel, "but I liked Our Lady even more. What I enjoyed the most was seeing Our Lord, in that light that Our Lady introduced into our chests. I enjoy God so much! (M IV, 141)". This experience even manifests itself as a singular theopathy: he is so sorry to see God sad (because of sins), that he ardently wants to console him (IV, 145), to the point that he values death as the step to meeting with God "to console Our Lord and Our Lady" (IV, 155-156).

In her subsequent deepening, Lucia will display in a more explicit way "that mystery of love of the Three for me" (M 144), which allows one to participate in the life of Trinitarian love thanks to a "greater intimacy with God" (A 98). ; thus reaching "the fullness of divine joy" (A 126), his life becomes a "hymn of eternal gratitude and praise" (M 11), in "praise of his glory" (M 13). The very manifestation of Mary is contemplated in the dynamism of Trinitarian relations:

This mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the basis, the beginning and the end of all our prayer, of all our being and of all our life (M 38-39).

The dialectic of the negative unfolds love as mercy

This love that comes from the Trinity will manifest itself as mercy in the confrontation with the evil that dominates the world. This confrontation is expressed with terminology and images typical of the apocalyptic, to give full importance to evil and its effects in the world. What is peculiar about the Message, however, is that all of this is enveloped by the mercy that proceeds from the Trinity. This is how Lucía expressed it in the well-known vision in Tuy on June 13, 1929, which reveals the same constant: in evil and beyond evil, grace and mercy are found:

Suddenly the entire chapel was illuminated with a supernatural light and a cross of light appeared on the altar, reaching to the ceiling. In a clearer light there was seen, at the top of the cross, a man's face with the body up to the waist; on the chest a dove also of light and, nailed to the cross, the body of another man. A little below the waist, suspended in the air, was a Chalice and a large Host on which a few drops of blood fell, running along the face of the Crucified One and from a wound in the chest. Dripping through the Host, these drops fell into the Chalice. Under the right arm of the cross was Our Lady: ("it was Our Lady of Fatima, with her Immaculate Heart...in her left hand..., without sword or roses, but with a crown of thorns and flames..."). Under the left arm, some large letters, as if they

were made of crystal clear water, which ran towards the altar, formed these words: Grace and Mercy.

I understood that the mystery of the Holy Trinity was shown to me and I received insights into this mystery that I am not allowed to reveal.

4.- Mysticism becomes a prophecy within real history

The experience of God and his love cannot hide the hardness of reality, the force of the negative and the opposition to grace: as the Angel's message made you see: there are many who do not adore or believe or hope or love. This causes strong pain in the one who loves. God's relations with humanity are altered by evil and sin, by guilt and opposition, to limits that can become monstrous. Without facing the seriousness of the negative, as Hegel said, the language about God would fall into the abstract and the unconscious. God offers himself as love, as good and beauty, but he can be ignored, rejected and even persecuted. It is a permanent component of the drama of the story.

That is why the mystical experience is translated into interpellation and prophetic language, as the great prophets of the Old Testament also show. This is what happened in Fatima, which casts its gaze on terrible events in history. John Paul II came "as a witness to the almost apocalyptic threats that weigh on nations and on humanity." Benedict XVI described Fatima as "the most prophetic" of the apparitions" and C. Boff as "the most political" of them (C. Boff), as a prophecy in the making. After the Scriptures, wrote A. Marto bishop of Leiría-Fátima, it is perhaps the strongest and most impressive denunciation of sin in the world. This prophetic dimension has contributed enormously to giving Fatima and its Message a worldwide relevance. But, precisely for this reason, it must be evaluated from the basic theological criteria.

The negative is shown in the opposition reactions to that unique event and its protagonists. The secular and anti-Christian forces felt questioned and challenged, with a reaction that led them to become fundamental protagonists of the event. By a strange paradox, it was this reaction that contributed to the greatest extent to the disclosure of the events of Fatima, especially if we take into account that initially the representatives of the Church acted with great caution and reserve. That sudden irruption of the "super-natural", the theological testimony of little shepherds, arose like an intolerable sting in the scientific and positivist assumptions on which the new society and the new type of human being advocated for Portugal by influential people had to rise. political and ideological forces. The ridicule and criticism of that strange phenomenon was in fact a factor that destabilized many prejudices, apparently so safe but deep down incapable of confronting their opposite, with what questions them from their roots.

Evil lives in powers that seem superhuman, and that act from the concrete, from human freedoms, from social institutions and from economic powers. There are, Lucía will say, "gaps in love", because "God created us free, and that is why each one goes where the path he has freely chosen leads him" (M 16). The concretions of evil surround and threaten the little shepherds from different angles and at different levels. Evil was present with many faces: the incomprehension of Lucía's mother, poverty and economic hardship, the discomfort of the curious, the cries of the sick, the pressure from the authorities, the threats that put their lives at risk. , pain and death, accusations of hypocrisy, concern for the young people who had to fight at the front...

Behind these pages of the children's little story were powers that tried to take over the world through violence and manipulation: the commercial and political confrontations that led to the first great European war that reached the entire world and showed the most evil side. of

modernity, the political tensions of the country with its successive chain of disappointments, the ideological affirmation of rationalism and naturalism that condemned at its root any residue of transcendence, the emergence of a paganism that condemned the manifestations of all historical and positive religion...

And to proclaim it effectively and sensitively they resort to visions and personifications of great effect and repercussion. In this framework, between the symbol and reality, there is talk of Russia that "will spread its errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecutions" in the event that conversion does not take place (IV, 177). In this logic the vision of hell is related:

Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire that seemed to be under the earth. Immersed in that fire, the demons and the souls, as if they were transparent and black or tanned embers, with a human form that fluctuated in the fire, carried by the flames that issued from themselves, together with clouds of smoke that fell towards all the sides, similar to falling from the embers in great fires, without balance or weight, between cries of pain and groans of despair that horrified and made you shudder with fear. The demons were distinguished by their horrible and disgusting forms of terrifying and unknown animals, but transparent and black.

Above all, "the third part of the secret", the most debated and controversial, which has given rise to various theories, describes the horror that can be unleashed in history and that can manifest itself in violence against the Church:

An angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it emitted flames that seemed to set the world on fire; but they faded in contact with the splendor that Our Lady radiated with her right hand directed towards him; the Angel, pointing to the earth with his right hand, said with a loud voice: Penance, Penance, Penance! And we saw in an immense light what God is: "something similar to how people see themselves in a mirror when they pass before it" to a bishop dressed in white "we had the feeling that it was the Holy Father." Also other bishops, priests, men and women religious climb a steep mountain, at the top of which was a large cross made of rough timbers as if they were cork oak with the bark; The Holy Father, before reaching it, crossed a great city half in ruins and half trembling with an unsteady step, weighed down with pain and grief, praying for the souls of the corpses he met along the way; Arriving at the edge of the mountain, prostrate on his knees at the foot of the great Cross, he was killed by a group of soldiers who shot him several times with firearms and arrows; and in the same way died one after the other the bishops, priests, men and women religious and various lay persons, men and women of various classes and positions. Under the two arms of the Cross there were two angels, each one of them with a crystal jug in his hand, in which they collected the blood of the martyrs and watered with it the souls that approached God.

Faced with the power of evil, the Message of Fatima resonates as an urgent invitation to conversion, because there are guilty liberties that refuse to acknowledge their responsibility. It is the always uncomfortable task that corresponded to the biblical prophets and that must be continued by the prophets who place themselves before God and before the victims: Before God because he is affected and offended by human behavior. This is one of the characteristic themes of Fatima, which invites penance and conversion because it offends God's love (as seen in the vision mentioned above): the drops of blood that fall on the chalice represent the "outrages, sacrilege and indifference" with which he is "offended" (III, 79); the hands of the Virgin carry "a

heart surrounded by thorns that seemed to stick into it" (IV, 175); the very heart of the Virgin is "covered with thorns that men continually pierce" (IV, 92). Before the victims because the evil unleashed on the world generates suffering and pain, and people are required to show solidarity with the weakest and also with the culprits themselves (through reparation, prayer and waiting). The little shepherds take up this question as the mission of their lives.

5.- The scoop of the Message: here I am in favor of the others

The three little shepherds discover themselves at the center of the drama of human history and of every freedom created: between the love experienced by them and the hell that creates the void of that love, between Love and those who risk finding themselves outside. The immediate and spontaneous reaction cannot be other than one's own conversion and the invitation to the conversion of others. But they are aware (within their childish sensitivity) that this is insufficient when hell and sin continue to exist and dominate men. Love and others claim something more. They feel challenged and therefore must give an answer that pushes love to go further, to sacrifice and reparation. The Christian will never be able to say, like Sartre, that hell is the others; rather, on the contrary, in that "hell" he wishes to introduce the force of the greatest love, because there is nothing more worthy of God than the salvation of man (Tertullian).

That is why the vocation and charisma of the little shepherds are concentrated in the dedication of their own lives to that goal. This provision will be considered by Lucia as "the first fruits" of the Message (M 36). This mission awareness is directly linked to mercy and to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In his account of the event, it is even situated at the opening of his mystical experience: from the beginning the Angel tells them that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary "have plans of mercy for you", for which he asks them: "Constantly offer prayers and sacrifices. On May 13, the great interpellation is addressed to them more directly:

- Do you want to offer yourselves to God to endure all the sufferings that He wants to send you, in an act of reparation for the sins with which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners?

-Yes, we do.

"You will therefore have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your strength" (IV, 173).

Lucía will later remember: "I answered on behalf of the three of us 'yes we want'; "spontaneously and unconsciously", but I never regretted it, but I renew it every day". This means carrying the suffering. It cannot be otherwise, because "sin brings with it the weight of the cross" (A 132-133). This radical attitude is situated by Lucía in the logic of the mission of Jesus and Mary. Jesus also answered here I am when making his entrance into this world (Hbr 10,7). And Mary proclaimed "behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1,38) when welcoming the Son who was going to begin his hard journey among men (M 36).

In favor of others they are willing to make sacrifices and resignations, as Jacinta shows so clearly. The Memoirs repeat it frequently: "Jacinta took the sacrifice for the conversion of sinners so to heart that she did not miss any opportunity" (I, 46), "Jacinta seemed insatiable making sacrifices" (I, 47). Love for Jesus and sacrifice for sinners always go together: "Oh, my Jesus, it is for your love and for the conversion of sinners" (I, 51). The vision of hell accentuates his availability, seeing the suffering of the damned: "Poor things! We have to pray and make many sacrifices for them" (I, 46).

The exercise of love, when it acquires the figure of mercy, is not a "cheap grace". The little shepherds are aware of this, expressing it from their childlike sensibility. These attitudes may seem excessive from our current mentality. Those children were indebted to the spirituality of their time. But within that conditioning, the important thing is to value the breath that pushes them: they feel involved in God's pain and in the guilt of men. Here the seriousness and credibility of worshiping God and concern for others is at stake: to what extent are the others important? Are the others deserving of their own solidarity to the point of reaching sacrifice and reparation? From these questions, the Message of Fatima acquires all the greatness of authentic generosity: the pain of realizing that sinners are outside the heaven they have glimpsed in the mariophanies is unbearable for them.

That attitude is a criterion of authentically Christian holiness. The saint is the one who most intensely experiences sadness due to the absence of those who cannot share his joy. Both in this world and in ultimate glory. As Saint John of the Cross briefly said: to the blessed "it seemed little to go to heaven alone." It is the same conviction that Lucía will express: precisely because God is love, and because only love can make us one with God, this love is not content with being happy; he wants to lead his neighbor to share the same happiness with him (M 32).

Jacinta had expressed it in a more childish and naive way: she knew she was going to go to heaven, but this did not leave her fully satisfied, because "I would like all those people to go there too" (III, 124). The fate of others cannot be contemplated from a distance, but rather as a matter that affects the most intimate part of one's own mystical experience, becoming a criterion of credibility.

This attitude is a reflection of the logic that drives the history of revelation and God's relationship with humanity. God needs collaborators, people who also respond "here I am" like Abraham (Gn 22,1.11) or Moses (Ex 3, 4), in favor of others, with the aim of achieving liberation or definitive salvation. The believer is one who does not hide from the gaze of God (cf. Gn 3,9) or from the destiny of his brother (cf. Gn 4,8). The Christian cannot abandon the other in the impotence of his sin or in the pride of his rebellion, since he has to be with him and before him as a witness of a love always ready to welcome the sinner and even to sacrifice himself for him.

6.- A penitential and Eucharistic spirituality

This is the fertile soil from which the spirituality of reparation springs, of a sacrificial reparation. The idea of "making sacrifices" for sinners may seem excessive at times (I, 45.47). But the sacrificial attitude contains a deep anthropological content that is materialized in various gestures: giving one's own food to the poor (I, 47) or sharing the grapes with other children (I, 57) are childish signs that show that justice, Harmony or balance can only be achieved by giving up one's own in favor of others. The illusion of innocence without guilt or freedom without responsibility is often linked to the myth of human coexistence without sacrifice. Reconciliation –as in the case of Jesus- costs a price: giving up one's own right, assuming hatred and violence without resentment and without the desire for revenge so that evil does not prolong itself, to overcome evil.

This profoundly theological spirituality has a strongly Eucharistic dimension and is sustained by constant prayer. From the beginning, the words and images contain allusions to the Eucharist, since in the Jesus who gives up his life in favor of all they perceive the bloody consequences of the dramas of history: in Jesus they perceive the victim of sins, a situation that is not it ended with his death because – as Lucía recalls – what is missing from the passion of Christ is still being fulfilled (M 22). This understanding of the Eucharist is accompanied by a deep Eucharistic devotion, which manifests itself in Francis up to the moment of his death. Being with

Jesus in the Eucharist was his goal and interest. Especially when he realizes that he is going to die and go to heaven. That is why he tells Lucía: "Now you go to school. I stay here in the church, next to hidden Jesus. It is not worth learning to read, because soon I am going to Heaven". Later, from his sickbed, he asks: "Go to church and say hello to the hidden Jesus for me. What I am most sorry for is not being able to go and spend some time with hidden Jesus" (IV, 155). In his last days of life he continues to yearn to receive his first communion. That is why he urges Lucía: "Did you ask the hidden Lord for the priest to give me Holy Communion?" She was "radiant with joy" when the priest promised to bring her communion the next day. And when this was finally accomplished, he said to his sister Jacinta: "Today I am happier than you, because I have hidden Jesus inside my chest" (IV, 163). It is therefore logical that the Eucharist occupies such a prominent place in the sanctuary of Fatima.

Prayer is the safeguard and expression of the theological experience and the proclamation of the theocentric dimension of the event-Fatima. From the beginning, the Angel introduces them to the dynamism of prayer, fundamentally as adoration and praise. The recommendation "pray, pray" is insistent in all apparitions. In that prayer the others are necessarily present, God's concern for sinners and the simple. Without open and trusting prayer, it will not be possible to discover or fulfill the proper mission of each one (A 101) which is carried out in the communion of saints and in tune with the needs of others (A 103-105).

From the oldest testimonies of the little shepherds, the rosary occupied a special position, because it is the prayer of the simple and because it places before those who pray all the mysteries of salvation. But always, beyond the specific way of praying, what is decisive is the personal reference to God, who keeps alive the contemplative attitude of the Christian life, as is also expressed in the behavior of Francis, who knows how to identify the radical, that from which he lives. everything else. When asked "what do you like more: consoling Our Lord or converting sinners so that no more souls go to hell?", he answered decisively: "I like to console Our Lord much more... I want to console our Lord and then convert sinners." For this reason, he sometimes objects to the two girls accompanying him. because "I prefer to pray alone, so that I can think and console Our Lord who is very sad" (A 155).

7.- Mercy: the triumph of love becomes visible in the Immaculate Heart

Love for God – necessarily linked to love for others, for those who suffer and for sinners – pushed the little shepherds to assume a "special mission" (M 36): in the drama of human selfishness and injustice they had to offer their own lives in a sacrificial and repairing attitude to overcome the arrogant force of evil. That is the expression of mercy: love in the most surprising of its figures and manifestations. That is what the designs of mercy referred to those who responded with their here I am.

What is peculiar about the Message of Fatima is that this love-mercy that springs from the Trinity is directly linked to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is in the Immaculate Heart of Mary where the Trinitarian Love that becomes mercy is manifested in the most tangible and singular way. From this point of view, it can be affirmed that devotion to the Immaculate Heart constitutes the center of the Message of Fatima, which assumes a long tradition of Christian spirituality, although modulating it from a specific historical circumstance. Discovering the true theological roots of ritual or spiritual practice is the best way to rescue it from devotionism or sentimentality that have so weakened devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary.

The little shepherds had learned the usual ejaculations, showing special preference for "Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation!" (I,55; III,126). It was close and understandable to them that the Angel announced that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary had designs of mercy for them (IV,

168). The Immaculate Heart of Mary appears linked to the more properly theological content of the Message of Fatima. The three little shepherds saw from the beginning the Immaculate Heart of Mary linked to the theocentric nucleus of the apparitions and therefore to the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. Alluding to the mariophanía of June 13, Lucía observes that “she extended her hands making the reflections that came out of them penetrate our chests”; at that moment “he mainly instilled in us a knowledge and a special love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary, just as in the other two times, it seems to me, he had it in relation to God and the mystery of the Holy Trinity” (III, 125).

Above all, Jacinta feels linked to the Heart of Mary: “I love her Heart so much! It's so good!”, “I like the Immaculate Heart of Mary so much! It is the Heart of our little Mother from heaven!” (III, 126). And he assumes as his own responsibility that it translates into a corresponding devotion:

I'm almost there to go to Heaven. You stay here to say that God wants to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the world. When it's time, don't hide. Tell all the people that God grants us graces through the Immaculate Heart of Mary; that they ask her; that the Heart of Jesus wants the Immaculate Heart of Mary to be venerated at his side; that they ask for peace from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which God gave to her. If only I could put into the heart of the whole world the fire that I have inside my chest, burning me and making me love so much the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary! (III, 131).

But all of this leads one to wonder about deeper reasons, of greater theological scope, which closely unite the Trinity, mercy and the Immaculate Heart. We have already found a clear example in the vision of 1929: under the right arm of the cross was Our Lady of Fatima with her Immaculate Heart and under the left arm it was possible to read: Grace and Mercy. Mercy appears as a fundamental word in the midst of -and despite- the pains that afflict humanity. In our opinion, the most appropriate perspective is found in a prior and fundamental moment, in the vision of hell in July 1917: the “secret” communicated at that time, and which includes the establishment of devotion to the Immaculate Heart (III, 121), consists in the fact that this is the guarantee that beyond hell, despite the hells, there is a guarantee for hope. Against the background of the negative, of the perversity of evil, hope is proclaimed:

Finally my Immaculate Heart will triumph (IV, 177).

As Lucía will briefly recall: “After...the horrible vision of hell, he once again shows us devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as the path to salvation” (A 144, our emphasis). It is the experience of a Kindness more original than all sin and all hell: the terrible vision of demons and the damned had been produced in the “reflection” that came from the hands of the Virgin and penetrated the earth (IV , 176); or, as he will say later, “he wanted to show us hell in the Light of the immense Being of God” (M 49 our emphasis). And for this reason, in his heart is condensed the love that cannot be destroyed by any sin, not even by hell. Lucia understands that this Immaculate Heart will forever be “my refuge and the path that would lead me to God” (III, 125) through (but beyond) the hells that constantly arise in history.

The same interpretation criteria must be applied to the third part of the secret that we already presented. Lucia herself confessed that she had been given the vision, but not its interpretation, which is the responsibility of the Church. And indeed this interpretation was produced especially through the mouths of Cardinals Sodano and Ratzinger: picking up on the

seriousness of the prophecy, they warned that his Message was not, along the lines of what we have been saying, resignation in the face of a fateful tragedy but rather the invitation to participate in the drama of history with hope.

On May 13, 2000, at the end of the Eucharist presided over by John Paul II in Fatima, Cardinal A. Sodano, Secretary of State, read a communiqué in which he repeated that it was a prophetic vision comparable to that of the Holy Writing, which therefore does not describe the details of future events with a photographic sense, but condenses on the same stage events that continue in time in a succession and with an unspecified duration. Therefore, the reading key must be of a symbolic nature: it has to do with the struggle of the atheistic systems against the Church and the Christians, and shows the immense suffering of the witnesses of the faith of the last century as an endless *via crucis* directed by the popes of the 20th century. It is an unclosed process. The events of 1989 led to the fall of the communist regime both in the Soviet Union and in other countries. Yet in other parts of the world the attacks against the Church and Christians, with the burden of suffering they entail, have not ceased. Therefore, the Virgin's call to conversion does not belong to the past, but continues to retain a stimulating relevance. It is, we said, a prophecy in becoming.

Cardinal Ratzinger's theological commentary stresses that the purpose of the apparitions is to make people grow in faith, hope and charity. In this case, anguish is overcome by hope, and it is a stimulus to mobilize human forces towards good. It points out the dangers and the paths to salvation. It is not a film about the future, but it offers an always current meaning.

The angel with the flaming sword recalls the threat of judgment that hovers over the world. That the world can be reduced to ashes is not pure fantasy, since man himself has created that sword of fire with his technology. The mountain and the city symbolize the scenario of human history, as a costly ascent upwards, which can create development but also destruction and death. The Church is advancing along this itinerary, which continues to be a community of martyrs, as the 20th century has confirmed. In these pains of the Church, the various popes have charged with persecution and even attacks. All of this does not belong to the past but continues to be current and a real experience (it is a prophecy in the making). And today he continues to offer comfort and hope:

It is a consoling vision, since it proclaims that the future is not predetermined, that God himself has a human heart to direct the freedom of man towards the good. The Immaculate Heart of Mary will triumph because the heart open to God, purified by the contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and any type of weapon.

Mercy must recover all its value as the first word of anthropology and theology, in tune with the heart symbol, which is also -in Rahner's expression- a protoword that condenses the most genuine, authentic and profound aspects of the human being. It can continue to fulfill a prophetic function within human civilization, both in antiquity and in the present.

Mercy has been revalued by recent popes, sometimes even in direct reference to the Message of Fatima (with this they highlighted the permanent validity of Fatima as an event). John XXIII already wrote in his Diary that mercy was the most beautiful name of God. Above all, John Paul II, influenced by the visions of Faustina Kowalska, devoted profound reflections to mercy in the encyclical he dedicated to this topic: *Dives in misericordia*. Precisely in contact with evil, "the throbbing image of God's love" manifests itself as mercy; it is "a special power of love that prevails over sin and infidelity", therefore "an indispensable dimension of love". From there comes the strength to resist against evil, against the totalitarian powers that seek to dominate

the world. Mary is a privileged icon and mirror, underlines John Paul II: "She is the creature who, like no other, experienced mercy and made possible, with the sacrifice of her heart, her participation in the revelation of divine mercy." And that is what he perceives in Fatima, as he said in the same sanctuary: not only did he personally experience it in the attack he suffered, but in a general way it makes "the infinite power of merciful Love" perceptible and experienceable.

Benedict XVI said in Fatima that "faith in God opens to man the horizon of a certain hope that does not disappoint; it indicates a solid foundation on which to support, without fear, one's life, it calls for abandonment, full of confidence, in the hands of the Love that sustains the world"; He invoked her as "Mother of Mercy" in the act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and asked those present that they too pronounce their here I am to become apostles of divine mercy in their contribution to saving the city of men.

Pope Francis, who has placed mercy at the center of his ministry, has defined it as "God's attitude in contact with human misery" and has expressly linked it to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; even within sin and weakness it resonates like a song of triumph and victory; In light of Jesus' resurrection, "God's mercy always wins."

Currently, mercy continues to act as a prophecy when a society or a civilization rejects it or marginalizes it in subtle ways. In the ancient world, Christianity made present the surprise of a merciful God; In a world dominated by tragedy, the human being saw himself lost and annihilated by merciless anonymous powers. When great philosophy made its way, it underestimated mercy as a weak attitude (Plato) or considered it incompatible with a God who could not be thought more than himself (Aristotle). Also in our cultural context, mercy has been exiled: because it is typical of servile spirits (according to Nietzsche), because social functioning is organized as a mechanism dominated by merciless competitiveness, or because production and consumption are established as ideals, success and pleasure, before which whoever claims mercy is an obstacle or a hindrance. In our collective setting, the Message of Fatima is no less necessary than it was in 1917.

Lucía also captures the meaning of the heart as a symbol of love and pain, forgiveness and mercy (M 45). For this reason, it is logical that he highlighted the meaning of the references to the heart of Mary in the Gospel of Luke (2,29.35): it is the place where the sword of misunderstanding and suffering penetrates, but it is at the same time the sanctuary in which who experiences the mercies of the Lord (I, 35). It is the heart that embraces the hells of the world and that makes present the same Trinity, from where the designs of mercy on the world start.

His mission is conceived as a service to what that heart means: to be "poor instruments" (III, 135), who continually divest themselves of other interests or concerns, in order to reveal the greatness of God's mercy (M IV, 190) that they have experienced. Lucía will understand her presence in the world as a humble and simple reminder of the mercies of the Lord. The devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is nothing more than the concretion of that radical mystery of the revelation of Trinitarian love.

8.- In the end, the blessing as a guarantee of hope

The spirituality of Fatima lives on a hope that is confirmed by the conclusion of the Mariophanies of 1917. It is the "excess of meaning" of the Message of Fatima that must continue to spread over the world and that can only be understood in the light of Easter and of the Lady who makes herself present from the Glory of the risen Son. In September the Virgin says: "In October Our Lord will also come, Our Lady of Sorrows and Mount Carmel and St. Joseph with

the Child Jesus to bless the world" (IV, 180), an idea already present in the first interrogations. Covered with the images that came from childhood experience, the promise is made in October:

With Our Lady disappeared in the immense distance of the firmament, we saw St. Joseph with the Child and Our Lady dressed in white, with a blue mantle, next to the sun. S, José with the Child seemed to bless the world, with gestures that they made with their hands in the shape of a cross. Shortly after this apparition vanished, we saw Our Lord and Our Lady, who gave me the idea of being our Lady of Sorrows. Our Lord seemed to bless the world in the same way as Saint Joseph (IV, 180-181).

All the characters mentioned come together in the blessing. Those who are present in an attitude of blessing are already in the Glory of God, in the Glory of the new creation.

Conclusion

The Message of Fatima is not closed because the dramatic history of humanity is still open: the suffering and fragility of the Church continues, the threats against the faith remain, the perverse powers continue in their attempts... But, in light of the event- Fatima, remember Benedict XVI that the strength of the Mother will also continue to communicate the strength of God to weak human hearts; On the world stage it continues to act "as a window of hope that God opens when man closes the door." This is the true secret that must be preserved as a treasure for the Church and for the world, avoiding disputes over undisclosed enigmas, as Lucía herself warned: "If they know, let them say it! I don't know any more... There are people who are never happy. It is ignored." The fundamental thing has already been said: in the midst of the dramas of history, love becomes mercy to put a stop to evil and to communicate hope to the world, as symbolized in the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This is not a late discovery or later in the event-Fatima. It was the core of the Secret from the beginning: as a counterpoint to hell or to the sufferings that the Holy Father (and, therefore, the Church) will have to suffer, the same victory song is proclaimed: "Finally my Immaculate Heart will triumph" (M III ,122). The love and purity that are manifested in it will not be destroyed or defeated, because they come from the most intimate being of God. The Immaculate Conception can be recognized as the mystery of God's power against evil, and from her come indications for the titanic battle between good and evil. And from this angle, the message of Fatima, the testimony that it proclaims, is that love is at the beginning of creation, according to the conclusion of J. Ratzinger's Theological Commentary: "God himself has a human heart and in this way he has directed the freedom of man towards good..., freedom towards evil no longer has the last word"; In the light of Jn 16,33 ("I have overcome the world") it must be concluded that "the message of Fatima invites us to trust in this promise" (T. Bertone).

The sanctuary of Fatima, architecturally embraced by the Trinity and by the Virgin, retains its permanent value because it prolongs (and gives to the world) the joy that comes from the blessing of the Risen One and that is why it introduces the new logic of the Gospel.

