

Antonella LUMINI, *Mistica e coscienza. Vedere dentro*, Edizioni Paoline, Roma 2024, 368 p., ISBN 978-88-315-5727-6, € 22.

Antonella Lumini's latest work stands out as a remarkable contribution to both Christian spiritual practice and the fields of Spiritual Theology and Christian Psychology. This book, which builds upon the author's own commitment to a life of silent prayer, reaffirms the significance of re-engaging with the mystical dimensions of Christian faith at an experiential level, presenting a novel perspective that resonates deeply with modern readers. Lumini offers a compelling theoretical framework and practical guide for spiritual growth. Her skill in seamlessly integrating insights from a wide range of disciplines, such as Greek Philosophy and Jewish Mysticism, into a cohesive approach is impressive. Drawing on the works by Teilhard de Chardin, Marco Vannini, Federico Faggin, Giovanni Vannucci, and Simone Weil, just to mention some, the author develops a new interpretative paradigm to explore the relationship between inner work and mystical experience, intended as experiential knowledge and intimate encounter with God. Her prose, noted for its elegance and precision, is enriched by evocative quotations and metaphors that enhance the narrative and understanding of the concepts presented.

The challenge of writing about Christian mysticism is helping readers become aware of their own assumptions about the interplay between immanence and transcendence, time and eternity: «La dualità non è fra terra e cielo, materia e spirito, ma fra mondo (in senso giovanneo) e Regno, fra spirito del mondo e Spirito Santo. Il cristianesimo è per sua stessa natura mistico. O incarna questa forza di trasfigurazione che investe l'essere e la coscienza, o rischia di divenire una credenza, mero fideismo» (28-29). In a successful effort to redefine the connotations of mysticism—traditionally shaped by historical and cultural factors—Lumini introduces the compelling concept of *embodied mysticism* to articulate mysticism as a profoundly integral aspect of Christian spirituality and deeply rooted in the lived experiences of individuals. This concept emphasises that mysticism is not merely an abstract phenomenon. *Embodied mysticism* captures the idea that mysticism is an experiential and transformative process that engages the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—in a direct and intimate encounter with Divine Love. In this state of presence, we become receptive to the guiding influence of the divine and open ourselves to being conduits for Divine Grace. This process requires that we empty ourselves of worldly distractions to create space within our being for the divine to dwell;

this emptying is not about self-negation or deprivation but rather about letting go of what obscures our connection to the divine. Lumini stresses that mystical living is not about attaining a static state of enlightenment or rejecting our temporal existence to transcend earthly challenges («spiritualità disincarnata», 54); instead, it is about embracing the dynamic flow of life with openness, receptivity, and surrender to the divine presence continuously unfolding within and around us. She argues that true mysticism involves active participation and engagement in the divine work through one's inner transformation and spiritual development. We are called to fully embrace our earthly existence and embody the divine in our daily lives. By doing so, we bring a tangible expression of divine presence into the world, transforming our actions and relationships into reflections of this higher Love.

The book is structured into three well-defined sections, each addressing complex themes with remarkable depth while aiming to build a clearer picture of the issues at stake while addressing the topic of mysticism in modern religious discourse. The first section (15-109), «Mysticism», looks at the definition of the term and focuses on the mystical dimension of Christianity from its very beginning, looking at the relationship between early mysticism and various forms of Platonism, the Christian tradition in the Latin West, and another central element of Christian mysticism such as apophatic language. Notably, Lumini goes beyond a mere historical review, providing insights into how mysticism remains relevant for contemporary spirituality: mysticism is integral to the core essence of Christianity and is not the exclusive domain of a few—it is a universal call to a transformative journey of spiritual awakening. Ultimately, Lumini argues, embodied mysticism is a journey of profound inner transformation: it involves grounding ourselves in the present moment and allowing the Divine to flow through us, continually responding to the essence of God's Love. It is through us that Divine Love manifests: the divine through the human, the invisible through the visible («Il lògos, l'ordine dell'amore, è impresso in ogni cellula di vita, sigillo di appartenenza alla natura divina nel suo infinito rivelarsi», 55)

In the second section, «Consciousness» (115-217), the author sets out a new paradigm and identifies three states of consciousness within the biblical narrative. Using a mystical-psychological framework, Lumini skilfully organises, develops, and reinterprets concepts related to human nature and consciousness as symbolically portrayed in the biblical narrative and connects them to broader themes related to a holistic process of personal transformation and

self-discovery. The author's main thesis is that there is a spiritual development which parallels the evolutionary stages of human beings, similar to the progression seen in different forms of life throughout history. She illustrates these states as essential stages in the human journey («L'uomo biblico è in cammino», 28) aimed at transcending egoic tendencies, duality, and achieving human fulfilment: the *Christic consciousness*. Lumini identifies three states of consciousness within the biblical narrative: the state of original unity, the state of fall, and the state of grace (embodied by Jesus Christ, who represents the consciousness of the New Man). This journey begins with an original state of innocence and unity—though one marked by unawareness—progresses through the development of a self-centered ego and the ensuing duality and separation between creature and Creator after the Fall. The incarnation restores a renewed oneness, which is not merely a return to an original state but a conscious and deliberate alignment with God, characterised by pure awareness. It represents the fulfilment of human potential, an ideal yet attainable state of human consciousness made accessible through Jesus' experience. «Il processo di incarnazione si matura nel tempo attraverso una costante relazionalità amorosa, fino a manifestarsi pienamente nell'umanità di Gesù per espandersi verso tutti» (54).

The third section, «Seeing Within» (223-291), provides a nuanced exploration of introspection and self-awareness within the framework of Christian spirituality. Among the themes discussed by the author are creation as a never-ending process, the practice of letting go, the transcendence of egoic identity, the search for the true Self, spiritual awakening, silent prayer, and the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal. Lumini also underlines the importance of self-compassion and gentleness in the emotional healing process, arguing that by embracing our pain and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, we pave the way for true healing and transformation: «Il cristianesimo chiede di essere incarnato attraverso l'esperienza mistico-contemplativa che comporta la guarigione interiore» (54). One of the author's priorities is here again to move away from an understanding of mysticism as a collection of severe ascetic practices. We approach God not through our strength, but through our weakness; Jesus willingly assumed the role of the Wounded One, and Christians are followers of a wounded healer.

One of the many inspiring ideas discussed in this book is its characterisation of the *Kingdom of Love*—God's Kingdom—and how Christians can actively participate in making this Kingdom a tangible, meaningful reality in

their daily life. Embodied mysticism is the realisation and manifestation of this Kingdom in the present moment. The Kingdom of God becomes discernible through the lives and actions of those who embody its essence. For it is not confined to a distant afterlife but is a dynamic and living reality accessible in the here and now. When individuals tap into this inner source of Love, they contribute to the manifestation of this Kingdom on earth. It is a mystical body, the communion of Saints, those who have gone before us, and the living, who continue to work for the realization of Love in the world.

In brief, this book is both inspiring and well-argued, offering profound insights into the intersection of personal transformation and Christian mysticism. Lumini reminds us that the evangelical message calls for awakening to this inner Kingdom and living in accordance with its principles: «La vita divina non richiede il distacco dalla materia, ma di manifestarsi nella vita terrena riverberandone ogni potenziale bellezza» (55). The Kingdom of Love resides in the heart of every human being. It is a secret place within each person, waiting to be discovered and expressed. God loves all creation, but it is only those who respond to this Love who will fully experience its transformative power and be able to embody and manifest it in their lives.

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