

Guest Editor's Preface

Mystique: between Ethics and Politics()*

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What is the reason for dedicating an issue of *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* to mystique? How does mystique fit in with ethics and politics? If we are able to answer the second question we are clearly in a better position to answer also the first, and therefore justify the editorial choice of this on-line journal. In order to do so, however, we should avoid accepting the most immediate and simple answers.

In this age of “return to religion”, a return interpreted and evaluated in different ways, the connection between mystique and politics would seem obvious, to the extent in which mystique is described –as one of the authors here does– as a specific mode of religiosity, a singular “emphasis” present in all religions. To the extent, moreover, in which today religions have again, for better or for worse, a somewhat ‘political’ function (which has always characterized them in their institutional aspects), we should not be surprised that it is possible to identify a number of consequences and precise influences on the public realm also for the mystical experience. And this happens against the intentions of the ‘mystics’ themselves, who wish to detach themselves from the world, “depart” from it.

This is why, for instance, it is possible to study Islam focusing on the Sufi tradition, rather than on its fundamentalist off-springs, as Giuseppe Scattolin does in this issue. It can thus be maintained that, in order to support a “fraternal and pacific life with other religious communities in the human village”, one should favour what might be called an “open” Sufism, which is certainly rooted in its own tradition but, at the same time, is self-critical and critical of its own history”. This is why Simone Weil, as it is shown also by Marco Vannini in his essay, is able to experience the “real and not only alleged Catholicism” which urges inside any religious tradition. Weil does this by emphasizing in each of these traditions, starting with Christian universalism, a specific mystical feature. This is exactly why Claude Geffre’, as it is clearly shown by Alessandro Cortesi, identifies in a “mystique of what is genuinely human”, experienced in Christianity, the path “that can show how in the contemporary cultural context there is a threshold spirituality, which perhaps does not dare call God by name, but tries to find his traces sometimes paradoxically”.

Mystic experience emerges thus as a reference point that we should live and practice if we want to start a real inter-religious dialogue, able to overcome the

current conflicts and to promote a prospective peace. And this is not all. For in the contemporary situation it is possible to identify the ever stronger emergence of clear spiritual necessities, although they cannot be traced to a specific religion; the reference to the sphere of mystique could become a common ground capable of promoting a dialogue that can elicit what is authentically human in us. This would be the “political” function of the mystical approach -if we take the term “political” in a broad sense.

Obviously, we do not fancy that all the problems of the complex situation in which we are living can be solved following this approach: an approach that, if it is followed seriously, is only for few. In fact mystical experience cannot be considered a simple behaviour, nor can it be transformed into a costume or a habit. Simply put: it cannot be turned into a morality, nor can it be conceived as such. The pursuit of spirituality and its eventual ending in an encounter with what is diverse are, in fact, an exception. When they are the norm, we are facing a fraud.

It is perhaps for their radical character that the mystics of all religions are everywhere held in suspicion. To be sure: sometimes the charge of mysticism -as it is shown by Elmar Salmann in his essay devoted to Schleiermacher and Sailer-serves to preemptively discredit those we want to attack. One reason for this is that mystique is the place where all the mythical, imaginative, figurative aspects of a religion emerge and flourish: they are functional to an authentic experience of the divine and to an ever provisional expression of it. This is shown, for instance, by Maurizio Mottolose in his essay on mythical and mystic discourse in the Jewish monotheism. It is in this way that the mystical approach becomes an alternative to the *logos* of the Greek tradition and to the mostly apophantic ways in which it expresses itself. Mystique is thus arbitrarily confined into the dimension of “irrationality”.

The not obvious consequence of all this is that mystical experience, although it can contribute to identify ways towards dialogue and common beliefs between different religions, is often contrasted with ethics as well as with western logic. And when the solutions suggested by these disciplines appear to be inadequate, there seems to be new room for different forms of religiosity. Mystique, in the contemporary situation of intercultural and inter-religious conflict, discloses an alternative path to that of *logos*, or maybe can help broadening the boundaries of *logos* itself. This is perhaps the reason of the suspicion in which mystique is held. This is also the reason why, in all times and in all religious traditions, those who are perceived as mystics are persecuted.

In mystique, however, lies an additional, decisive, extreme possibility, to say the least, of realizing what is typically human. In it there is the possibility to live in diverse and often radically new ways what we are accustomed to describe as

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“feeling”, “language”, “experience”, “truth”. Politics can obviously take advantage of all this. And this is also the direction which this issue of “Ethics and Politics” heads to.

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