

Truth between Science and Mysticism Spiritual experience of Teresa in the light of contemporary Epistemology

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Introduction

Epistemology is one of the important points of discussion in the contemporary philosophy. In the 20th century we see certain epistemological tendencies that brake away from the classical paradigm of truth. The scientists question the validity of narrative statements and conclude that they are never subject to argumentation and proof. They classify them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated¹. So what we see is the power and domination of a particular group. As a result of this we see various attempts to formulate the criterion of truth which are not in conformity with the traditional parameters of scientific truth. Since we are discussing the contemporary epistemological questions in the background of Teresian spirituality and her mystical experiences, we would like to consider the argument in the background of postmodern claim that «the difference between the modern and the postmodern attitude toward the sublime and incommensurable is only one of emphasis or tone. While the modern emphasizes the failure of representation, the postmodern stresses on the complementary experience of that failure – the realization that an unrepresentable exists»². Therefore as Lyotard claims the modern philosophy has to make the structure of effective plurality visible. It brings this heterogeneity to light and teaches us to understand that a final unity cannot be achieved without repressive and totalitarian means. In this war we see two different positions of truth, one affirming the absoluteness of scientific rationality and the other affirming the impossibility of scientific rationality to

¹ Cf. J. F. LYOTARD, *Postmodern Condition*, Trans. G. Bennigton and B. Massumi, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 27.

² H. BERTENS, *International postmodernism: Theory and literary practice*, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 81.

answer for every branch of knowledge. Knowledge in fact has other parameters apart from reason. Presenting the different concepts of truth, hence the diversity in the understanding of it, we try to argue for the possibility of a religious doxastic practice.

1. Scientific theory of truth and objectivity

Science considers itself to be objective. With the publication of *The New Organon* of Francis Bacon there was a boom of scientific investigations based on his principles in the 18th century with encouraging results. This gave a positive image to science, as the only way possible to acquire truth. This positive image was based on certain results which were considered to be sure and immutable. In fact science starts, not from large assumptions, but from particular facts discovered by observation or experiment. From a certain number of such facts a general rule is arrived at, of which, if it is true, the facts in question are instances. This is the reason why Russell said that, «in any scientific theories and laws we find the formation of hypothesis based on observed instances and the verification of the same with new instances. If it is correct, certain up to now unobserved phenomena will take place in certain circumstances. If it is found that they do take place, that so far confirms the hypothesis, if they do not, the hypothesis must be discarded and a new one must be invented»³. What Russell proposes here is nothing but a theory of verification based on the external facts.

Verification thesis is one of the basic columns of Vienna Circle too. Speaking about the coherence theory of truth, Carnap says that «confrontation is understood to consist in finding out as to whether the fact such as is described in the statement, or, to express it differently, as to whether the statement is true to fact»⁴. This rigid theory of truth which depends on the strict correspondence between the statement and the state of affair was made moderate by Carnap himself with his “Principle of Tolerance” according to which we are free to choose whatever language system we like. The expression “free to choose” indicates the subjective element involved. So speaking about the determinism issue he writes:

The objection may perhaps be raised at this point that the form of physical laws depends upon experimental results of physical investigation, and that it is not determined by a merely theoretical syntactical con-

³ B. RUSSELL, *Religion and Science*, Oxford, 1997, p. 14.

⁴ R. CARNAP, «Truth and confirmation», in: *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, H. FEIGL, W. SELLARS (ed.), New York, 1949, p. 125.

sideration. This assertion is quite right, but we must bear in mind the fact that the empirical results at which physicists arrive by way of their laboratory experiments by no means dictate their choice between the deterministic and the statistical form of laws. The form in which a law is to be stated has to be decided by an act of volition. This decision, it is true, depends upon the empirical results, but not logically, only practically. The results of the experiments show merely that one mode of formation would be more suitable than another⁵.

Karl Popper comes with his criticism of science saying «I do not claim that science can give a certain and definite knowledge»⁶. He described the demarcation problem as the key to most of the fundamental problems in the philosophy of science. He refuted verifiability as a criterion for a scientific theory or hypothesis to be scientific, rather than pseudoscientific or metaphysical. The criterion of falsifiability is a solution to this problem of demarcation, for it says that «statements or systems of statements, in order to be ranked as scientific, must be capable of confliction with possible, or conceivable, observations»⁷. The very criterion of a theory being scientific is its falsifiability, confutability, or controllability⁸. When the theory of falsifiability is accepted, all the theories become mere conjectures. Therefore he proposes the concept of verisimilitude, which means the nearness or approximation to truth. We judge a theory's verisimilitude by its degree of corroboration. What is questioned here is the problem of truth in its realistic sense. It is very important to observe that here we are again in the very beginning of clarifying between objective and subjective truth. What we believe to be true can be falsified. In the history of science what we see is nothing but the destruction of scientific dogmas. Thus the history of science is the cemetery of dead scientific theories and science is standing on the mud.

2. Element of subjectivity

The part played by new observations and experiments in the process of discovery in science is usually over-estimated. Very often science is considered to be the last word about the objectivity of knowledge. The belief that a scientist patiently collects observations, unprejudiced

⁵ R. CARNAP, *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, Trans. R. A. George, California, 2003, p. 455.

⁶ K. POPPER, *The Logic of Scientific discovery*, London, 2004, p. 59.

⁷ K. POPPER, *Conjectures and refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge*, London, 2004, p. 51.

⁸ K. POPPER, *The Logic of Scientific discovery*, p. 60.

by any theory until he finally succeeds in establishing a great new generalization, is quite false. In fact the propositions embodied in natural sciences are not derived by any definite rule from the data of experience. They are first arrived at by a form of guessing based on premises which are by no means inescapable and cannot even be clearly defined; after which they are verified by process of observational hardening which always leaves play to the scientist's personal judgment⁹. If we put this in the language of Thomas Kuhn the scientist is guided by the paradigm which consists of a strong network of commitment – conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and metaphysical. Therefore a paradigm includes, some implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief that permits selection, evaluation and criticism¹⁰. If this is the case, with Polanyi we have to agree that science begin from passion. Passions charge objects with emotion, making them repulsive or attractive; positive passions affirm that something is precious. The excitement of the scientist making a discovery is an intellectual passion, telling that something is intellectually precious and, more particularly, that it is precious to science. «Our vision of the general nature of things is our guide for the interpretation of all future experience. Such guidance is indispensable, theories of the scientific method which try to explain the establishment of scientific truth by any purely objective formal procedure are doomed to failure. This is because any process of enquiry unguided by intellectual passions would inevitably spread out into a desert of trivialities»¹¹. Therefore, we cannot ultimately specify the grounds (either metaphysical or logical or empirical) upon which we hold that our knowledge is true. Being committed to such grounds, dwelling in them, we are projecting ourselves *to* what we believe to be true *from* or *through* these grounds. We cannot therefore see what they are. We cannot look *at* them since we are looking *with* them, they therefore must remain indeterminate¹².

One can make these issues somewhat more concrete by taking up the current controversy among philosophers about the “rationality of science”. After the publication of Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, philosophers have been debating whether science is rational. The relativism proposed by Popper becomes consolidated by the theory of paradigm shift proposed by Thomas Kuhn. By the discovery and establishment of a new theory, the old scientific law in which ever growing anomalies were discovered, is being replaced by the new one. Thus in the history of science we do not

⁹ M. POLANYI, *Science, Faith and Society*, Chicago, 1984, p. 28.

¹⁰ T. KUHN, *Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Chicago, 1970, p. 16.

¹¹ M. POLANYI, *Personal knowledge: towards a post-critical philosophy*, London, 2005, p. 143.

¹² M. POLANYI, H. PROCH, *Meaning*, Chicago, 1977, p. 61.

verify a continuation of scientific theories which guarantees scientific growth. But we encounter anomalies we never expected, and become aware that we are not standing on a solid ground. Consequently science defines truth relative to paradigm and not absolutely. Therefore truth is only a story. The blow to scientific truth becomes mortal when Richard Rorty says that «we need a redefinition of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be “poetized” rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be “rationalized or scientized”». This means that everyone will replace passion or fantasy with reason»¹³. What needed is a shift from the era of enlightenment to the era of liberal society with Ironists. Once the contingency of language, I and liberal society is demonstrated, we can speak about ironists. «Ironists realize that their present vocabulary is not final, it cannot solve the problems, it is not closer to reality than the vocabulary of others. For the Ironist the “final vocabulary” does not mean the “one which puts all doubts to rest” or the one which satisfies our criteria of ultimacy, or adequacy, or optimality»¹⁴. Truth is only contingent. Hence no theory or system of thought can claim absolute truth.

3. Justification of our believes

When we speak about the justification of our believes, we have to consider the elements that make them justified, that is the J-Factors. The J-Factor can be either internal or external. Usually evidence is associated with internal justification and reliability with external justification. Thus we have internalism and externalism. Internalism asserts that justification is internally determined, whether by evidence possessed, or by coherence among beliefs, or by some other internal conditions. Externalism about justification is readily understood as the denial that internal factors are sufficient. Something external has an independent role in justifying beliefs¹⁵. Now let us consider the internal j-factors.

In order to raise the classical problem of skepticism with respect to the external world in the modern way following the fiction proposed by Hilary Putnam in his article *Brains in a vat* let us distinguish between Tim and Tim*: one and the same person whom we imagine in two altogether different situations. Tim's situation is normal, like yours or mine. Tim*, however, is a brain in a vat. Suppose a mad sci-

¹³ R. RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 53.

¹⁴ R. RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p.75.

¹⁵ E. CONEE, «Externalism, Internalism, and skepticism», *Epistemology: Philosophical Issues*, vol. 14, E. SOSA, E. VILLANUEVA (ed.), Boston MA & Oxford, 2004, p. 78.

entist abducted and “envatted” Tim* by removing his brain from his skull and putting it in a vat in which his brain is kept alive. Next, the mad scientist connects the nerve endings of Tim*’s brain with wires to a machine that, controlled by a powerful computer, starts stimulating Tim*’s brain in such a way that Tim* does not notice what actually happened to him. He is going to have perfectly ordinary experiences, just like Tim. Indeed, let’s assume that the mental states of Tim and the mental states of Tim* are alike. But, since Tim* is a brain in a vat, he is, unlike Tim, radically deceived about his actual situation¹⁶. For example, when Tim believes he has hands, he is right. When Tim* believes he has hands, he is mistaken. (His hands were discarded, along with the rest of his limbs and torso.) Now suppose Tim* asks himself whether he is justified in believing that he has hands. Since Tim* is just like Tim, Tim* will say that his belief is justified, just as Tim would if he were to ask himself whether he is justified in believing that he has hands. Evidentialism implies that Tim*’s answer is correct. For even though he is deceived about his external situation, he is not deceived about his evidence: the way things appear to him in his experiences¹⁷. This illustrates the internality of evidentialist justification. Reliabilism, on the other hand, suggests that Tim*’s answer is incorrect. Tim*’s belief that he has hands originates in cognitive processes – “seeing” and “feeling” his (nonexisting) hands – that now yield virtually no true beliefs. To the extent that this implies their unreliability, the resulting beliefs are unjustified. Consequently, he is deceived not only about his external situation (his not having hands), but also about the justificational status of his belief that he has hands. This illustrates the externality of reliabilist justification.

4. Teresa and her experience

Let us try to evaluate the epistemological implications of the spiritual experiences. St. Teresa speaks about spiritual perceptions like locutions and visions. She even divides them into corporeal (*L.* 28. 4), imaginary (*L.* 7, 6; 31, 10), intellectual (*L.* 27, 2; *IC.* 6, 5, 8), and mixture of imaginary and intellectual (*L.* 28, 8). She also discusses the possible source of these experiences dividing them into three: God, our own imagination and devil. We can know about the real source

¹⁶ H. PUTNAM, *Reason, Truth, and History*, London, 1981, p. 15.

¹⁷ Conee and Feldman were the first to use the term mentalism. According to them «if any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are alike justificationaly, eg. The same beliefs are justified for them to the same extent», cf. C. EARL, F. RICHARD, «Internalism defended», *Kornblith* (2001) 231-260. (Also in H. KORNBLITH (ed.), *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 231-260).

of the experience from the result it produces, or the confessor understands it if he is experienced, and has himself been granted such visions or he has the gift of discernment of the spirit (*IC.* 6, 9, 11). Teresa even gives some criteria to discern the divine origin of these spiritual experiences. She discusses in detail about different types of visions and the ways to categorize them in the 8th and 9th chapters of the 6th mansion of *Interior Castle*.

We are concerned more about the epistemological implications of the same. A reading of the spiritual experience of Teresa and other mystics reveals that these experiences lead to knowledge. Teresa herself testifies it in these words:

When the Lord so wills, it may happen that the soul will be at prayer, and in possession of all its senses, and that then there will suddenly come to it a suspension in which the Lord communicates most secret things to it, which it seems to see within God Himself... in which is revealed to the soul how all things are seen in God, and how within Himself He contains them all. Such a vision is highly profitable because, although it passes in a moment, it remains engraven upon the soul (*IC.* 6, 10, 2).

The object of the mystical vision can be everything that exists. The objects of Teresa's vision can be grouped as: Divine – mystery of the Holy Trinity, Holy Spirit; Christological – the humanity and divinity of Christ; heavenly - Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, Saints, angels; Soul - its structure, grace and sin; demons; hell; purgatory; and others¹⁸. These visions bestowed her with knowledge in different fields of Christian doctrine. Teresa herself narrates them in her writings. She got knowledge about the mystery of the Trinity (*L.* 27, 9; *IC.* 7, 1, 6); about the humanity and divinity of Christ (*L.* 27, 2, *IC.* 6, 8); about the soul and its value (*IC.* 7, 1, 3; *L.* 40, 5) etc.

Through these detailed accounts about the spiritual experiences and the knowledge obtained through them, it is clear beyond doubt that Teresa is claiming along with other mystics the doxastic value of the spiritual experiences. But there are many philosophers who believe they can bring forward equally sound arguments for doubting the cognitive value of the mystical experience or religious experience in general. According to Russel we cannot accept the mental state of a mystic and his knowledge claims because of the lack of consensus. Therefore he says that «the whole argument from our own mental states to something outside us, is a very tricky affair, even where we all admit its validity, we only feel justified in doing so, I think because of

¹⁸ Cf. M. MARTIN, «Visiones», in: *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, THOMAS ALVAREZ (dir.), Burgos, 2001, p. 1426.

the consensus of mankind»¹⁹. A. J. Ayer denies the validity of the mystical knowledge on the grounds of ineffability and testability. According to him «the fact that the mystic cannot reveal what he knows or even himself devise an empirical test to validate his knowledge, shows that his state of mystical intuition is not genuinely cognitive state»²⁰.

In this context about perception of something we can say that a direct perception of a thing happens when the subject S perceives the object X, that is X is the phenomenon that shows itself to S. Perception of X can take place in another way. That is, we can perceive X while undergoing experience E. That is, X figures in a certain way in the causal chain leading up to E and/or E leads to beliefs, or tendencies to beliefs about X²¹. In the former we have the external justification and the latter we have the internal justification. Hence in considering whether it is possible for Teresa of Avila to be genuinely perceiving God in her various experiences enumerated and described in her works, taking the experience reported in *Life* 27 as a paradigm we can ask the following questions. Is it possible that God should be what is appearing to her in that experience? Is it possible that God should figure in the causation of that experience in such a way as to count as what is perceived?

5. An attempt for justification

St. Thomas Aquinas while discussing whether the essence of God is seen by created intellect through an image, reaches a positive conclusion saying that «to say that God is seen by some similitude, is to say that the divine essence is not seen at all, which is false»²², but at the same time he adds that «the essence of God however cannot be seen by any created similitude representing the divine essence itself as it really is»²³. This is because seeing God face to face is reserved for the blessed in heaven and is not for us in this life. While speaking about mystical state in general and later while describing about different kinds of visions Garrigou-Lagrange observes that «we cannot admit that the mystical contemplation can be an immediate perception of God in Himself»²⁴. This is because even the great intellectual visions,

¹⁹ B. RUSSELL, F. COPLESTON, «A Debate on the Existence of God», in: *The Existence of God*, JOHN HICK (ed.), New York, 1964, p. 179.

²⁰ A. J. AYER, *Language, Truth and Logic*, New York, 1946, p.119.

²¹ W. P. ALSTON, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, London, 1993, p. 60.

²² T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 12, a. 2.

²³ T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 12, a.2.

²⁴ Cf. G. LAGRANGE, *Perfezione Cristiana e contemplazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino e S. Giovanni della Croce*, Roma, 1933, p. 267.

since they are inferior to beatific vision cannot grasp the essence of God as it really is, but only in a certain mode of representation²⁵. This does not mean that he denies the possibility of infused knowledge.

Now let us consider St. Teresa's vision of Jesus mentioned in the *Life* 27. She says that she did not see him. But at the same time she is sure about the presence of Jesus. Is Teresa in the same situation as of Tim* or can her belief be justified? Before rejecting this experience due to lack of external evidence, let us consider the j-factors and the probable danger that can be in the external reliabilist justification.

Now we have to consider the j-factors of the reliabilist justification. There are cases of Justified True Beliefs [JTB], that do not qualify as cases of knowledge. JTB, therefore, is not *sufficient* for knowledge. Cases like that – known as *Gettier-cases*²⁶ – arise because neither the possession of evidence nor origination in reliable faculties is sufficient for ensuring that a belief is true. It can become true merely because of luck. Consider the well-known case of barn-facades: Henry drives through a rural area in which what appear to be barns are, with the exception of just one, mere barn facades. From the road Henry is driving on, these facades look exactly like real barns. Henry happens to be looking at the one and only real barn in the area and believes that there's a barn over there. Henry's belief is justified, according to Traditional Knowledge, because Henry's visual experience justifies his belief. According to Non Traditional Knowledge, his belief is justified because Henry's belief originates in a reliable cognitive process: vision. Yet Henry's belief is plausibly viewed as being true merely because of luck. Had Henry noticed one of the barn-facades instead, he would also have believed that there's a barn over there. There is, therefore, broad agreement among epistemologists that Henry's belief does not qualify as knowledge. We can refute externalism due to circularity and high degree of probability²⁷.

Now coming back to the experience of St. Teresa we can ask whether a mystical perceptual doxastic practice is genuine in the light of the epistemological and scientific theories we have discussed so far. We know that she has no doubt about the existence of her experiences. She consulted the spiritual masters only to confirm whether they were from God. She even gives criteria of discernment of the Spirit. Our question is the doxastic credibility of the same. So we ask whether her experience was just a belief or a certainty based on evidence. In

²⁵ Cf. G. LAGRANGE, *Perfezione Cristiana e contemplazione*, p. 495.

²⁶ Cf. E. GETTIER, «Is Justified True Believes Knowledge?», *Analysis* 23 (1963) 121-123.

²⁷ Cf. A. GOLDMAN, «Discrimination and Perceptual knowledge», *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976) 771-791.

Life chapter 27 she begins to narrate her experience saying, «I saw Christ at my side» then immediately she corrects saying, «it is better to say I was conscious of him»; then again she says «he was close to me and I saw that it was He who, as I thought was speaking to me» (L. 27, 2). She even discusses the possibility of a blind man knowing the presence of a person by his movements and sounds. In her case Teresa directly «feels» the presence of the other, she «felt very clearly» that Jesus was at her right side and was witnessing everything she was doing (L. 27, 2). From this narration we get an impression that though Peter of Alcantra called it an intellectual vision, the ground of her conviction is a kind of perception akin to a definite sensation that may be the reason why she is reluctant to abandon the verbs *see*, *conscious of*, and the position like *beside me*, *near to me* etc²⁸.

What we see here is the subjective nature of the religious experience coupled with ineffability and non-testability. If we consider her doxastic claim in the light of the theories of truth presented above which includes subjectivity, generalization, verisimilitude, approximation to truth, corroboration etc., we can accept the epistemological claim of Teresa on the basis of testability in the concrete life situation and the verisimilitude and approximation between what she claims and her life. This is because the experience of God greatly enlivens one's religious life, it makes an enormous difference to the quality and intensity of one's devotional life, it greatly stimulates one's aspirations to virtue and holiness, and most important, it makes possible the loving communion with God for which one is created. This is very clear in the words of Teresa when she says:

This (Vision) brings a special knowledge of God, and from this constant companionship is born a most tender love toward His Majesty, and yearnings, even deeper than those already described, to give oneself wholly up to His service, and a great purity of conscience; for the Presence Which the soul has at its side makes it sensitive to everything. For though we know quite well that God is present in all that we do, our nature is such that it makes us lose sight of the fact; but when this favour is granted it can no longer do so, for the Lord, Who is near at hand, awakens it. And even the favours aforementioned occur much more commonly, as the soul experiences a vivid and almost constant love for Him Whom it sees or knows to be at its side" (IC. 6, 8, 4).

But when the experience is not authentic it has its own negative results in the life. So Teresa says: «I do not think they can possibly last so long or do the soul such a great deal of good, or bring it such

²⁸ N. PIKE, *Mystic Union: an Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism*, London, 1994, p. 132.

inward peace. It is not usual for one who is so evil to do so much good; he could not, in fact, even if he would. The soul would soon become clouded over by the mist of self-esteem and would begin to think itself better than others» (IC. 6,8,7). This means that the claim is being falsified by negative effects. Hence the possibility of truth in the real case.

Conclusion

In spite of these various attempts we are not able to bring forward a convincing argument because there are equally convincing arguments against its possibility. At the same time as mentioned above with Rorty we may think that «final vocabulary does not mean the one which puts all doubts to rest or the one which satisfies our criteria of ultimacy, or adequacy, or optimality»²⁹. In the attempt to explain a profound religious experience, what we see is the inexplicability of the same. Wittgenstein, in the 7th proposition of *Tractatus* says, «whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent»³⁰. Wittgenstein is not denying the doxastic value of religious experience but just states about its inexplicability. This is confirmed by the formidable verificationist Carnap «unquestionably, there are phenomena of faith, religious and other wise and of intuition, they play an important role, not only for practical life, but also for cognition»³¹. So they are affirming the possibility of knowledge apart from science.

Edith Stein, one who was in passionate search for truth, sought truth everywhere. For years she looked for truth philosophically as a scholar. It was the “truth of things”, the “things themselves”, the objects. But she found in the life of St. Teresa the “truth of love”. This truth of love is not knowledge, but relationship. Teresa lived a mystical friendship with God and with him whom God has sent, Jesus Christ. It is this truth of love attracted Edith Stein and forced her to say “this is the truth” after reading the *Life* of St. Teresa. Later after studying the lives of St. Augustine and St. John of the Cross she reaffirms this belief. This is because according to her «nobody has penetrated into the profundity of the soul more than those who sought a journey into that world with an ardent heart and were helped by God to overcome all the barriers and were introduced by Him to their own interior world of intimacy»³².

²⁹ R. RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 75.

³⁰ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, New York, 2009, p. 108.

³¹ R. CARNAP, *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, p. 293.

³² E. STEIN, «Die Seelenburg», *Welt und Person: Beitrag zum christlichen Wahrheitsstreben*. Edith Stein Werke VI, Freiburg, 1992, p. 66.

If we bring the issue to the epistemological practice of phenomenology the epistemological value of religious experience becomes clearer. The theory of inner perception which Husserl calls principle of all principles affirms that «every originally presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition... it is to be accepted simply as what it is presented there»³³. Apart from this we can very well speak about the nature of the *noesis* and *noema* in the spiritual experience of Teresa. In the case of the *noesis*, the process knowing she says: “I felt very clearly” that Jesus was at my right side and was witnessing everything I was doing. In the case of the *noema*, that is the object of knowledge Teresa did not see something ambiguous but she is sure that it was Jesus. This epistemic content, the *noesis* and *noema*, becomes a part of her current of consciousness as *cogito* and *cogitatum*. Now its foundationalist and coherentist justification is done by her spiritual masters based on doctrine, faith and other experiences. The best verification was the continued presence of Christ she experienced and the life of love emerged from it. The phenomenologists say that we have to allow the being to manifest itself, because only through the process of *aletheia* – unveiling, the essence of truth manifests itself. In fact as Edith Stein says «truth is not constructed but encountered and in this world the fullness of it is only a dream».

Abstract. – This article analyses the epistemological status of religious experience by taking the mystical experiences of St. Teresa of Avila as a paradigm, in the light of the contemporary epistemology. While the traditional scientific theory of truth affirms the absoluteness of scientific rationality, and rejects the validity of narrative statements; the postmodern theorists point out the subjectivity in contrast to pure objectivity, verisimilitude in contrast to certainty, and the replacement of the present scientific theories with better ones. They also affirm the impossibility of scientific rationality to answer for every branch of knowledge. Possibility of knowledge in the religious experience cannot be proved with scientific theories. But at the same time we cannot deny the possibility of such knowledge. It is a personal encounter with God who is truth itself. It is a truth lived in relation with God. The best verification is the life of love emerges from the experience.

Key words: Contemporary epistemology - Spiritual experience - Religious doxastic practice - Criterion of truth - Love lived in relation.

³³ E. HUSSERL, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Book 1, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson, London, 1962, p. 41.