

Presentation

How was this book born?

It was the Fall of 1973. At that time I was living in the Holy Land and was teaching Philosophy at the Franciscan Theological Seminary in Jerusalem, which for the first time was opening its doors to students of other religious congregations as well as to lay people of both sexes. Among other things I was commenting on the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue on love, wherein the six guests of the banquet, of whom Socrates is the most prominent, agree that each one would deliver a discourse in praise of love (*Eros*), in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and euphoric inebriation, precursor of promising suprarational revelations.

We had read and commented on the first five discourses and were about to enter into Socrates' discourse, when, moved by an inexplicable impulse – of the kind that reveal their meaning only upon yielding their fruit – I felt to invite to the lecture on Plato the one who had been my “Diotima.” Diotima, in the platonic dialogue, is the «woman foreigner,» the «friend from far-away lands... wise in matters of love and in many other kinds of knowledge,» whom Socrates says he had met in his youth, a woman who, with her supernatural wisdom, had initiated him in the mysteries of Love to the extent that he could say: «All that I know about love I owe to her.» When it is his turn to speak, Socrates does nothing else than reproduce Diotima's inspired discourse, which is the climax of the dialogue and one of the most profound pages that have ever been written on love in the literature of all times.

I introduced the person I am referring to with these precise words: «Here is Diotima in person who will initiate us in the mysteries of Love.» The students welcomed her with astonishment and surprise and, at the same time, with an eager expectation of what might come forth from her. I began my lecture as usual, and she, all at once, as if enlightened by a sudden intuition, began to explain the text that we had not as yet even read, revealing its hidden meanings as well as discovering its limits, what Plato would have wanted to say or should have said, but did not say. It was, for all of us, an exceptional experience that was to be repeated four or five times on different days, during which time the great Plato had to take the second place. Anyhow, he himself, by presenting his teacher Socrates as the disciple of an inspired woman, was clearly recognizing the subordination of human reason to the revelation of the One-one, the first “King,” almost unnamed, at Whom all his dialogues are pointing.

Shortly afterward, and as a result of these encounters, there was born the nucleus of this booklet, as tiny as it is rich and profound; its understanding requires a true ability of “flying” with one’s mind and heart, since it is an astonishingly synthetic and intuitive thought, fruit of a lived-experience and expression of a suprarational wisdom that only with difficulty lets itself be boxed into the concepts and terms of our language. In dedicating her experience to «all lovers of “PHILOSOPHY,”» the authoress herself is indicating the immediate circumstances that inspired her to write these pages. It is not difficult to recognize in them a profound affinity with the spirit of the platonic doctrine on love, which is herein assumed, integrated and surpassed, not in an intentional or reflective manner, but spontaneously,

because of the intrinsic and objective demands of truth itself.

Who is “my Diotima”?

I had met her a year and a half earlier, in May of 1972, in a moment in my life of great intellectual and existential hunger and thirst. In my seven years of teaching Philosophy I had imbibed various currents of thought, apparently divergent, but which in my spirit, through a phenomenon of “natural selection” or assimilation, tended to converge, impelling me with lively enthusiasm toward a synthetic vision of reality and, at the same time, making me feel the need for a new, further word. From the existential point of view there began to surface in me my first post-Conciliar disillusionments, after the sudden blaze of rekindled hope that the petrified and deadening structures might receive an infusion of life. I, too, had thought, rather naively, that it would be sufficient to renew the laws in order to renew the life, and I had fought vigorously to attain this in my little world of the Custody of the Holy Land, where I succeeded in making a greater part of my convictions prevail, translating them into laws and statutes that came forth stillborn. The disillusionment was imperceptibly bringing with it a progressive and dangerous lessening of my spiritual and vital energy.

Before coming to know her personally, I had heard about her through José Barriuso, a confrere of the Franciscan Monastery in Bethlehem where I was residing; I had become deeply interested in her “doctrine” or “message” which was shining through our evermore animated philosophical-theological discussions in which various members of our fraternity were

participating and, in a very special way, Raffaele Angelisanti, my former professor of Philosophy and seminary master, and at that moment my teaching colleague. This “doctrine” – Barriuso would tell us – had not been the fruit of any studies, but the sudden irruption in her consciousness of a gushing stream of supernatural light or wisdom that had transformed her life.

Her arrival in Bethlehem, unexpected and unforeseen, coincided with a deep desire of mine, a desire scarcely formulated and as yet unexpressed to anyone. I perceived and welcomed her coming as an answer addressed personally to me from the One who scrutinizes our minds and hearts.

My first encounter with Josefina Chacín Ducharne, the “woman foreigner” who was coming from the far-off land of Venezuela, was for my spirit like the blossoming of a new springtime, the opening up of infinite horizons, an irradiation of light that manifested as an inexplicable joy, a hope of liberation, a renewed trust in life. I had found a spring of fresh and pure water in which I could quench my thirst, and the supersubstantial bread that alone can satiate the hungry soul. The fact that such a light should come from a woman gave me a strange sensation of plenitude, of concreteness, of greater authenticity. There vanished, as if by magic, the antinomies of theory and practice, reason and faith, philosophy and Gospel. Now everything seemed possible, I felt lighter, I was in love with life. Today I realize that at that precise moment I received something like an inner fecundation; there was activated or awakened in me a sprout of life which, in spite of everything, has been imperceptibly growing, impelling me from within

to take leaps that, if they are not real “flights,” are, I believe, their image, being leaps into the fathomless void that separates the old from the new “Earth.”

This sprout of life has brought me, by its own intrinsic force, to break many of the shells that were enveloping me and which had been necessary for my evolution, and it has constrained me to go beyond all human structuring of the life of the Spirit. Today, fourteen years later and after having left behind the spiritual and material security that the religious Institution to which I belonged was offering me, I find myself here, in the “far-off land” of Venezuela, in order to share, together with many others, the marvelous spiritual and existential adventure of this “woman foreigner,” trying to follow her from nearby in her vertiginous “flight” toward the depths of the soul, where one begins to glimpse that “Earth” promised of old, that «“Paradise” of eternal happiness» from which flow forth all our springs. The wisdom of a suprarational order – which unceasingly gushes forth from her ever since her first extraordinary experience of the Divine in that long-ago of 1954 – is none other than the irruption, from within, of the rivers of living water which according to an ancient promise (cf. Jn 7:38) will flow from the bosom of anyone who opens himself to this inner Spring, both immanent and transcendent, which is the true essence of every human being. The irruption in her of this «spring of water welling up to eternal life» (Jn 4:14) manifests the total openness of her human reality to the inner Spring, a total openness that involves a life of total service and surrender to the Divine Will, united to the clear consciousness of instrumentality and transparency in transmitting understandings and concepts that are not the fruit of human effort or rational

elaboration. And this is the profound meaning of the expression *la esclava del Señor* (the slave of the Lord) with which, here as well as elsewhere, her writings are signed.

What is the message of this book?

This book is the description, both conceptual and graphic, of the great awakening of man from the dark “night” of the unconsciousness in which he is submerged to the luminous promise of the “third day,” when, breaking the shell of his “self,” he soars in lofty “flight” toward the encounter and consummated union with his complementary Divine Reality. The complementarity between the Divine and the human in man is the way we live in time the eternal polarity of Love and Beloved which is the heartbeat of Subsistent Love, the Being who “IS,” the Unique One. It is the One and Only Being who “moves away” or “distances” Himself from Himself in order to encounter and identify Himself with Himself. In this eternal movement or process of manifestation-and-return, man is the “interval” between the Being and the Being, between the Being and Himself. Just like the platonic *Eros* – child of *Penía* (Poverty) and of *Poros* (Plenty) from whom he inherits the opposite characteristics – man, conceived in the Nothingness of the Manifestation-Liberty for the presence and self-annihilation of the Being who vivifies His image, is half-way between the Being and the Nothingness, and therefore he is a live nothingness, living image of the Being who “IS.”

Since man is the living image of Subsistent Love, he also, in his intimate essence, is love, in its two faces of *Eros* and *Agape*. *Eros*: desire for happiness, for eternity,

hunger to “be”; and *Agape*: impulse to give and to give oneself without reserve to the point of the total denial-of-self. Plato, in his penetrating analysis of the essence of love, takes into consideration only the aspect of *Eros*. He believes that man can reach the Being by climbing step by step the ladder of Beauty – «the only goddess that has not abandoned the earth» – impelled by *Eros*, the unrelenting conqueror always plotting in order to track down what is beautiful and good, «bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter, always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom, fertile in resources; a philosopher at all times, terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist» (*Symposium* 203 d5-e). In Plato, man indeed detaches himself from each step in order to be able to pass on to the subsequent one, but it is always the same “self” that pursues a more ample, more immaterial, more real beauty, to the point of presuming to “see” Beauty in itself. But Absolute Beauty cannot be attained without passing through the nothingness of all the beautiful things, without passing through the nothingness of the entity and, hence, the nothingness of the “self.” It is only at this extreme price that there occurs the encounter with the Absolute Reality, which, according to Plato himself, is “super-essential” (*The Republic*, VI, 509 b). The platonic man climbs, he does not “fly.”

In the book that I am presenting, love, as *Eros*, though maintaining all its value as the dynamic principle of man’s evolution in the unconsciousness of his Being, is reduced to the rank of “shadow” of the true love, and receives the name of «positive ascendant egoism» in its three-fold «individual, collective, and universal» aspect, corresponding to the platonic ladder of Beauty. Only at the end of man’s human evolution

does there begin to awaken in him the capacity of true love, which is the denial-of-self. It is the moment in which man – shaken up, as it were, by the socratic torpedo – «knows that he does not know and finds himself in the void of his nothingness.» It is the moment in which all that is human, in man, turns into a question, and, from the depths of his being, «Someone» replies inviting him to “fly.”

“To fly” has always been man’s dream, stuck, as he is, to the crust of the planet earth with an invisible glue that enslaves and humiliates him, impeding him from reaching the infinite heaven toward which his heart gravitates. “To fly” is an impulse that springs from the innermost center of our being; it is that irrepressible yearning to go beyond our present form for having “seen” the butterfly that eternally lives in the depths of our “caterpillar” heart, primordial remembrance as well as infinite promise of what we are. It is the same impulse that impels the chick from within to come out of its shell, the newly-formed bird to leap out of its nest, the mature fruit to detach itself from the tree, the fecundated ovum to grow and multiply with vertiginous rapidity in order to become independent and come forth free from the maternal womb. The “flight” is the supreme realization of the primal impulse, more or less conscious, of every manifestation of life.

The life that impels is the very one that attracts to itself. “To fly” is to be moved by love, and love moves by attracting. “To fly” is therefore for us to feel attracted by a center more powerful than our tiny, provisional center (the “self”), more powerful for being more real. What attracts – both lover and beloved – is that fathomless Center which is the Divine Reality present in

man and, through man, in the entire Universe, which is man's image. The desire to "fly" is "philosophy" in its etymological meaning of "love for wisdom," the longing for encounter, for ecstatic union after and beyond the separative intellectual knowledge, the yearning for compenetration and identification with the complementary beatific Reality.

The full, transforming compenetration with this Divine Reality is the "New Earth" that the authoress of the book tells us she has glimpsed and toward which she invites us to "fly."

The message of the book is, therefore, a message of love. It is a delicate, concrete and urgent proposal addressed to all those who already have "wings," so that they might join the one who is already "flying," and it is also an invitation card for a new banquet, the "Wedding Banquet" of which the Apocalypse of John speaks (19:9), because the Bride is ready and the "third day" is already dawning...

GIUSEPPE NAPOLI

May 4, 1986

«I was astonished at her words, and said: “Is this really true, O thou wise Diotima?” And she answered with all the authority of an accomplished master of wisdom: “Of that, Socrates, you may be assured... He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty... a beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things.

He who from these beauties, ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other Beauty, using these as steps only... until he arrives at the insight of Beauty in itself, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.

This, my dear Socrates, is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of Beauty absolute... Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities..., bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may...”»

Plato, Symposium
(from the cover flap)

I dedicate my experience
to all the lovers of “PHILOSOPHY.”

What is “PHILOSOPHY”?
the Knowledge of Life.

What is Life?
the Knowledge of Love.

What is LOVE?
the BEING who “IS.”

la esclava del Señor

Bethlehem, Milk Grotto, December 7, 1973

The “flights” to the “New Earth”

These “flights” are states of Consciousness. A “state of Consciousness” is not a knowing, it is an “interiorization”: *to be* oneself in each act, “to be” being in the doing and not the “self” doing without being.

They are four “flights” and a single “Flight”:

The first “flight” is when the human being knows his egos and finds himself in the void of his nothingness.

The second “flight” is when the human being knows his nothingness and, going forth from the “world” of the ego-self, orients himself to the denial of himself for the sake of others.

The third “flight” is when the human being decides to die to himself once he discovers the Divine in himself or in another.

The fourth “flight” is when the human being comes to the consciousness of the Liberty in the Unity of her Being, the Will, and he denies himself, orienting himself irreversibly to the Divine.

The “New Earth” is glimpsed in the second “flight.”

Each one can become aware of the state of consciousness in which he is to be found to the extent that he meditates on and verifies in his life – in himself, in his reactions to other people as well as to the diverse life-situations, and in his everyday tasks – what is said in these pages.

It is necessary to be very sincere with oneself in order not to fall into the illusion of thinking that one can undertake the fourth “flight” while still being *attached* to the shell, the ego-self.

To leave the “shell” before the necessary time, as well as to remain in it after the necessary time, would mean to become rotten.

To detach oneself from the “shell,” the “self,” are the states of Consciousness, the “flights.”

To drop the “shell” is not our concern, it is a consequence that comes about after the fourth “flight.”

In what follows I transmit a lived “experience.” After having “glimpsed” the “Promised Land,” the “New Earth,” that “Paradise” of eternal happiness that cannot be compared with anything in this world, I cannot help but offer an invitation to each and every one of those who have the capacity of “flying,” since these “flights” depend on our liberty:

Do you want to? You can!

Me? I am decided

You? Decide!

We?

We are flying!

If you have decided – *with your life!*
you are flying with “US”