

REFLECTIONS AROUND THE RELIGION HOW TO KNOW  
OF SALVATION FROM THE THOUGHT OF MARÍA ZAMBRANO

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Reflexiones sobre la religión como saber  
de salvación desde el pensamiento de María Zambrano

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Abstract

This article issues from a doctoral thesis on Maria Zambrano's religious thought. Although it arises from that research, it doesn't try to show thoroughly the lines of work or the conclusions developed in it.

It is about presenting the central thematic nucleus of religious thought of Zambrano. Enriching with texts of her writings the convictions exposed. The methodology followed consists of the presentation of the key concepts of the religious thought of María Zambrano. It starts from the criticism to rationalism, to advance exposing the philosophical proposal of Zambrano, the poetic reason. A thinking that has to deal with life, a knowledge of experience that initiates the opening of the person and leads to the sacred. Below is the central aspect of Zambrano's religious thought, the original feeling. From the origin of feeling and thinking the person receives the revelation of himself. Discovering two central aspects of the human being: the vocation to unification, interiority and the call to the relationship with the Other and with others, otherness. Lastly, it turns to life to transform it and to manifest the new person capable of piety, fraternity and mercy. In the conclusions the author's contribution to the criticism of rationalism is valued and the methodological proposal of the philosopher is advanced, for every human being, religion how to know salvation.

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Keywords

Knowledge of experience, poetic reason, native feel, Piety, Mercy, Forgiveness, Fraternity.

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### Resumen

Este artículo surge a raíz de una tesis doctoral sobre el pensamiento religioso de María Zambrano. Aunque brota de dicha investigación, no pretende exponer de manera exhaustiva las líneas de trabajo y las conclusiones desarrolladas en ella. Se trata de presentar los núcleos temáticos centrales del pensamiento religioso de Zambrano, enriqueciendo con textos de la autora, las convicciones expuestas. La metodología seguida consiste en la exposición de los conceptos claves del pensamiento religioso de María Zambrano. Se parte de la crítica al racionalismo, para proponer, la razón poética. Una razón que tiene que ver con la vida, un saber de experiencia que inicia la apertura de la persona y la conduce hacia lo sagrado. A continuación se expone el aspecto central del pensamiento religioso zambrano, el sentir originario. Un sentir y pensar en el que la persona recibe la revelación de sí misma, descubriendo dos aspectos centrales del ser humano: la vocación a la unificación, interioridad; y la llamada a la relación con el Otro y con los otros, alteridad. Por último se torna a la vida para transformarla y manifestar que la persona nueva es capaz de piedad, fraternidad, misericordia y perdón. En las conclusiones se valora la aportación de la autora con la crítica al racionalismo y su propuesta de la religión como saber de salvación para todo ser humano.

### Palabras claves

Saber de experiencia, razón poética, sentir originario, piedad, misericordia, fraternidad.

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## Introduction

In *Delirio y destino* María Zambrano writes: “My life is not my dream [...] God dreams us and then we must make his dream as transparent as possible” (1998, p. 24). In this way the author wants to show us what is the task that concerns us, to move away the shadows and to express with a life, transparent and lucid, the dream of God. Because for the philosopher the person is not only a historical and static being but is a being destined to the progressive creation of itself.

The metaphor of birth, so suggestive in Zambranian philosophy, expresses the idea of “being continually in a trance of birth” (Zambrano, 1988, p. 123). This entails, for the author, a promise that cannot be abolished. “The promise of being conceived and at the same time, to conceive entirely, although the end is not seen, nor the goal” (Zambrano, 1990, p. 24). In this way human existence is understood as being constantly born, oscillating between what the person is being and what he wants to be. “And it seems that it is a condition of human life to have to be reborn, to die and resuscitate without leaving this world” (Zambrano, 2005, p. 18).

Thus, from its Ortegian root, life for her appears as an unrenounceable task. A task that assumes responsibility and demands its own involvement. From this key, the person has to go unraveling or building itself continuously. In this consists the full existence. María Zambrano in his writings assigns this committed task to the human being, places him with a strong responsibility in front of his own life.

The strength of her contribution lies in this peculiar way of evoking and summoning existence, as wisdom that knows how to account for life and, at the same time, overcomes it. This is how the author describes it:

There are truths, those of science, that do not start life. The truths of life are those that, entering into it, make it orderly move; those that turn it on and take it out of it, making it transcend and putting it in tension (Zambrano, 2005, p. 90).

Zambrano first lived it, traveled a personal path, wanted to turn it into a method and propose it as such; she tried to describe it as she went through it. *IEL hombre y lo divino* she expresses it in this way:

Transform the simple living, the life that has been given to us and that we carry in an inert manner, in what has been called experience. Experience that forms that first layer, the most humble, of the knowledge “of the things of life” and without which no ancient would have dared to call himself a philosopher (Zambrano, 2011a, p. 225).

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The central aspect of her philosophy is an invitation to transform life; it is a knowledge of salvation, a religious knowledge. Zambrano provokes us to enter ourselves, where we find our own indigence and in this way we are revealed the need to get out of ourselves in search of salvation. For the philosopher of Malaga this task is developed by the person throughout his life, therefore her writings are offered as light to those who read it, because for her writing is to make known what has been discovered and offer it to others. In the literature of María Zambrano, the person who seeks transcendence will be the central axis; she also develops, with her writing, other themes that help the human being in this important task that is his responsibility. These topics are political, ethical, religious and educational<sup>1</sup> activities. This article starts from the poetic reason and describes the religious aspect.

People who know her philosophy consider that from the religious point of view, they could understand all her thoughts, it is consider as the central axis around which all her work revolves. She herself sensed it that way, which is why in the prologue to the second edition of *The man and the divine*, she commented: “It is not in this thought to make *The man and the divine* the general title of the books given to me by the editors, nor of those who are on their way. But I do not think there is another one that better suits them” (Zambrano, 2011a, p. 99).

The present article starts from the conception of the human being as being in construction to demonstrate that María Zambrano conceives

the person as an essentially religious being. This objective will be realized describing some central thematic nuclei of her thought, fundamentally through her writings. There are many texts, especially from the centenary of her birth, year 2004, which interpret her thinking and her philosophy, including the religious aspect; but this contribution tries to base the statements exposed based directly on her writings, although the literature on the author is kept in mind.

The methodology consists in the exposition of the key concepts of María Zambrano's religious thought, enriching the convictions exposed with texts of her writings.

As for the content, we start from the criticism of rational idealism, to describe a knowledge of experience that initiates the opening of the person and leads to the sacred. A reason that has to do with life, poetic reason. Next, the central aspect of the Zambranian religious thought, the original feeling, is exposed, since the person receives the revelation of himself. In this way, you will discover two central aspects of the human being: the vocation to unification, the interiority and the call to the relationship with the Other and with the others, the otherness. In this way she turns to life to transform it, manifesting that the new person is capable of piety, fraternity, mercy and forgiveness. In the conclusions, the contribution of the author proposed by religion as knowledge of salvation for every human being is valued.

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## Knowledge of experience

Initiated by her teacher, Ortega and Gasset, in the concept of vital reason<sup>2</sup>, Zambrano will advance and follow the course of a felt reason, in tune with the writings of Unamuno and Machado that she knows well and incorporates into her thinking. In this way, Zambrano collaborated in the profound renovation of the dominant rationalist philosophy of her time.

Previously authors like Husserl, Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, etc. had announced the crisis of modern reason; binding she proposes another type of reason.

Her thinking is also in tune with a group of contemporary authors such as Rosa Luxemburg, Edith Stein, Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir and Simone Weil; "They have helped to change, with their words and their testimony, the intellectual expression of the last century" (Villora Sánchez, 2015b, p. 102).

The Malaguenian philosopher criticizes Cartesian rationalism, which reifies God and distances us from his presence, places the conscience in the place of God. Modern reason places consciousness without references, closed in on itself. It is a reason that does not count on feelings, dreams, faith, hope; In short, reason that does not take into account life. The thought of María Zambrano moves away from rationalism, a closed discourse on its own reasons, and seeks a philosophy that goes through a reason that also counts on life. Because from rationalism life becomes sterile and “loses its ability to transcend, to always go further; The point at which the ‘rationalist walk’ has led us would find its alternative in emotional life. The world of feeling, understood between the intellect and the sensation” (Revilla, 2013, p. 158).

From this critique of idealistic reason she “illuminated a new way of philosophizing from the very heart of life, exposing what rationalism had hidden or repressed, the other reasons of the heart” (Cerezo Galán, 2004, paragraph 5).

Zambrano in analyzing the consequences of idealism that moved away from reality is suggesting a more modest metaphysics, “proposes a thought tailored to man. It is not a matter of the philosophy of dominating the world, but of something that is prior, of knowing it, of letting oneself be possessed and caressed by its harmony and its beauty” (Ortega Muñoz, 2010, p. 202). Leaving the utilitarian philosophy that sees reality from the needs or desires proposes a Copernican turn to capture the essence of human knowledge that develops in three phases: “a sensitive intuition that give us the senses, an intellectual intuition, which manifests a series of principles and truths that make us possible to think and a discursive capacity that by virtue of these principles judges and reasons” (2010, p. 203).

With rationalism, the human being has lost the ability to deal with the mystery. The consequence of this uprooting is loneliness and she expresses it thusly: And thus we have come to be alone; alone and unskilled to deal with ‘the other’. But, if we gather the different kinds of ‘the other’, we see that it is nothing less than reality, the reality that surrounds us and in which we are embedded (Zambrano, 1989a, p. 19).

How to get out of the crisis of rationality? The way out of the crisis of modern reason lies in the recovery of intimate feeling, from the heart of God. This, for Zambrano, goes beyond a simple thought of the divine, it is discovering the Christian God of love, “that cordial God who awakens us universal brotherhood, co-belonging to the world” (Zambrano, 2003, p. 25).



## Poetic reason: like a drop of oil

The thought of María Zambrano originates, where the sun or the light rises, “because living humanly must be to bring to light the feeling, the dark and confusing principle, to bring feeling to intelligence” (Zambrano, 1998, pp. 100-101).

The fact that her philosophy is based on knowledge of experience, does not make her renounce reason. She will have a reason that is not immobilized in analysis and deductions; it acquires its balance, following the rhythm of the heartbeat. Complement the reason with the transcendent movement of life:

It will be the continuous and humble action of a reason that has not started by naming itself, by establishing itself; of a reason or way of knowledge that has been humbly extended by beings and things, without delimiting itself before itself; that has acted without defining or separating, mixing; inclusive, with reason to use, with its enemy and dominating rationalist reason. But it is that one of the characteristics of such a kind of reason would be not to retaliate against what dominates it, not to retaliate more than in the terrain of creation, exceeding, surpassing - never refuting or disputing. Reason essentially anti-polemic, humble, dispersed, merciful (Zambrano, 1986, pp. 125-126).

This is the Reason, a mediator that seeks to delve into the “roots of the human”, which aims to open a clearing in the middle of the forest: “Open, open Reason, uniting reason and piety, reason and original feeling, philosophy and poetry” (Zambrano, 2002, p 195).

In Seneca, Zambrano finds a mediating reason like the one she seeks. She describes it this way: “because the thought that comes from it is not coercive; and it has something musical. They are chords that silence, adorn and soften” (Zambrano, 1992, p. 16). And this is the philosophy that the author embraces for the good it provides. “It is philosophy, the compassionate reason for the helpless condition of man. It is, in a certain way, the entrance of mercy and piety into ancient reason” (1992, p. 19).

A philosophy of inner vision, a philosophy of light, of the dawn. It is reason assisted by the heart so that the person is present in its integrity.

Her philosophy is to bring life to language, to give voice to what asks to be taken out of silence, to the levels of reality that hardly find the way to access the word. It is María Zambrano’s own way of thinking, oblivious to abstractions, to avoid the risk of suffocating human life, the main object of her reflections. At first she will call it a mediating reason, but in the depth of her writing she will arrive at the “poetic Reason”, un-



derstood as a relation of thought and experience, which makes it possible to unify consciousness and life.

María Zambrano, in a letter to Rafael Dieste, describes the poetic reason:

Years ago, during the war I felt that they were not “new principles or Reform of Reason”, as Ortega had postulated in his last courses, what has to save us, but something that is right, but wider, something that also slide through the interior, like a drop of oil that soothes and softens, a drop of happiness. Poetic reason... is what I’ve been looking for. And she is not like the other, she has, she has to have many forms, she will be the same in different genres (Zambrano, 1991, p. 102).

The metaphor of the drop of oil will be the image that, for the writer, better conveys what she wants to convey. Thus, in *The Agony of Europe*, she affirms: “one had to feel the drop of oil full of wisdom that avoids, given in time the closing of the heart, their petrification. And man, being of interiority, cannot remain closed or empty for a long time” (Zambrano, 2004, p 115).

The poetic reason implies going to the hidden part of the person’s life and bringing it to the possibility of lucid reason through the word. Entering the center of the person is the fundamental task of poetic reason, as a method of knowledge to get to decipher what it feels. In short, the poetic reason is a thought that wants to make public and intelligible the interiority of the human being.

Metaphysics based on the experience of Zambran’s poetic reason, is a way of doing philosophy similar to that of Augustine of Hippo in the *Confessions*, which seeks the conversion of life, rather than the knowledge of scholarly truth. Conversion of the existence that means for Zambrano to channel one’s life towards a truth capable of transforming it. To this fullness the human being aspires “truth transforms life” (Zambrano, 1988, p. 13).

For the student of Zambran thought, A. Bundgård, the transformation is made from love, which shows us God: “The poetic reason is a logos that is inscribed in the Christian tradition because it does not try to conceptualize the mystery of God, but unveil through an act of love something of what God is. In this sense, poetic reason is a theological and spiritual reason” (Bundgård, 2000, p. 75).

The poetic reason is full of mercy, love and relationship with others... feelings that lead to the fullness of human life and transcendence. “The poetic reason is, in short, a thought that wants to make public and intelligible the interiority of the human being” (Villora Sánchez, 2015a, p. 78).



## The original feeling

With the proposal of this reason María Zambrano seeks clarity of human experiences to facilitate their understanding. The poetic reason invades the person, as a drop of oil that slowly expands through the heart sweetening them and leads to discover the original feeling. It is a knowledge that we feel, that comes from the origin and makes it possible to know the deepest part of our life, our interiority. The philosopher describes it thus: “we seek the original experience in the deepest, in the highest, everywhere, to see if we find it” (1987a, p. 70).

This knowledge is metaphysical one because it seeks an original experience. Try to guide about human life, knowing that it has an origin, that there is a center that gives strength and harmony. Ultimately, a knowledge that is not based on simple understanding, a knowledge of revelation. And this happens when we give ourselves completely, when we transcend our individualistic desire and understand ourselves as creatures. Feeling creature prevents pride and makes us humble and merciful. This religious experience is, then, a condition of the possibility of poetic reason. That is why the philosophy proposed by María Zambrano is religious thought; it is knowledge of salvation that puts the person in communication with reality.

A creature that feels reality and at the same time feels itself heterogeneous [sic] to it. Consciousness of loneliness as well as awareness of participation, of treatment. Whereas the rationalist, apart from believing that reality is given to him in an idea or thought, also believes that only reducing reality to thought can be understood with it (Zambrano, 1989a, p. 20).

The phenomenology of the divine, Zambrano, is about an inquiry that points to the unveiling of what appears. It is a Heideggerian and Ortegaian concept; it is an essential search, therefore, a search for the sacred essence, for the profoundly human that is shown in multiple ways.

Agustín Andreu (2007), a good connoisseur and confidante of María Zambrano, describes the original feeling:

The presupposition is that the ‘conatus’ of man’s being as we know it has a trinitarian characterized internal circulation, that is, just as it has to sleep, breathe and digest, the life of man has, with normal character, steps and transfers from the original feeling to the expression and from it to the spiritual situation in its various stages and states (Andreu, 2007, p. 170).

We can still ask ourselves: what happens to the being if it is not situated at the center of itself? The author replies that it lives in exile, located outside as an external person who does not inhabit his own being. To express it, she uses the image of the shipwreck: “everything implies that only ‘in extremis’ man thinks and that he is shipwrecked because he has desperately resisted doing it” (Zambrano, 1989b, p. 20).

The possible exit is in the person, if he admits a transcendental knowledge, knowledge of revelation. That is why part of the confession, which is to enter one’s own consciousness to know not only the exteriority but the interiority where we find our own indigence.

The confession, more than any literary genre, shows what life has on the way, of transit between the one we find ourselves being and the other we are going to. [...] Confession by revealing the path between one and another, between the dark self and the one that has reached its unity in its transparency, makes possible the realization (Zambrano, 2004, p. 109).

The awakening of being to oneself and to reality occurs in the “original feeling”, in the affectivity and not in the concept. Being is not detached from feeling. In the person these two acts occur simultaneously, the act of being, how to exist, and the act of feeling by being. The philosopher in her writings expresses it this way.

Everything that can be the object of knowledge, what can be thought or submitted to experience, everything that can be wanted, or calculated, is previously felt in some way; even the same being who, if only understood or perceived, would cease to be referred to his own center, to the person (Zambrano, 1989a, p. 11).

This original feeling is a feeling that shows two areas in the person. One is the space of the opening to the world through reality, how the person lives and suffers it, It is the ambit of “otherness”. And the other, is the interior space, where the attachment of the person to itself that we will call its “interiority” occurs. The original feeling becomes, for Zambrano, something that keeps us bound to our interior and, at the same time, invites us to go out, to transcend.

## Open conscience to the other: Piety, fraternity, mercy and forgiveness

As it has been verified, entering into one’s own heart leads to the original feeling that seeks unity and the relationship with the other. Thus, the uni-



tive interiority and the relational alterity lead to an “open consciousness to the other” (Zambrano, 2011a, p 260).

Although you can live life from the simple exterior, as with other living beings, the person from its interiority is called to use the faculties available, “self-conscious and interrogative intelligence, self-determinant and free affective sensitivity. Thanks to these faculties, he can internally process the meaning of everything that interrogates him from the outside” (Carrón de la Torre, 2012, p. 178).

It supposes placing oneself in the interiority of the human being for the search of the divine that inhabits it. It is not a going out of oneself, but rather the person takes care of himself and looks inside for the truth. Feel and know that being united with God is the best way to remain in ourselves. This new man is the Augustinian inner being to whom so many times the author:

Do not want to spill out; enter within yourself, because in the inner man lies the truth; and if you find that your nature is changeable, transcend yourself, but do not forget that, when you climb over the tops of your being, you rise above your soul, endowed with reason. Route, then, your steps where the light of reason is lit (Saint Agustin, 1976, p. 72).

It is a living that has to communicate because it involves an involvement with every human being with whom we are part of a system, the human race “Living together means feeling and knowing that our life, even in your personal life, is open to that of others, it does not matter whether they are close to us or not; it means to know how to live in a medium where each event has its repercussion” (Zambrano, 1988, p. 16).

In the phenomenology of religion that Zambrano draws in her work, *Man and the Divine*, she points out the importance of piety, “which supposes the creative moment of thought and human behavior” (Sánchez-Gey, 2009, p. 79).

Piety is shown as the best way to know how to deal with what is hidden from dogmatic reason. It is located beyond an exclusive manifestation of forgiveness. It is an attitude that leads to knowing how to recognize the uniqueness of being and its manifestations in the plurality of its forms and in its contradictions. Piety is a reciprocal relationship in which life and the living being are influencing each other. Piety is to know how to deal with the heterogeneous, with what is different from the person, is knowing how to deal with the other. It consists of a feeling of communion without losing the individuality of being. It is not reducible to compassion for animals or plants from an ecological conscience. Nor



to the tolerance that maintains a respectful distance with those who one does not know how to treat. “Communion in difference, treatment that does not entail a reduction of plurality to a single homogeneous plane of reality, but respects and seeks the relationship with the wide chromatic range that reality presents” (Gómez Blesa, 2008, p. 193). Therefore, ample communion opens up to the heterogeneity of being.

We can deduce that, if piety assumes the right treatment with reality, and reality always constitutes that mysterious background that eludes reason, we can come to define piety as “knowing how to deal with the mystery” (Zambrano, 1989a, p. 22).

On the one hand we find a reality external to the subject, something that surrounds it; on the other hand, an inner reality, which manifests itself in the heart. For this Zambrano affirms: “The mystery is not outside; it is inside and in each one of us, as it surrounds and envelops us. In him we live, and move. The guide to not get lost in it, is piety” (Zambrano, 1989a, p. 23).

The philosopher proposes the recovery of piety, the empowerment within the person of pious feeling.

To understand the concept of piety in the philosophy of the author, we have the assistance of some characters that she analyzes in detail in her writings. It is the case of Antigone, a woman devoured by piety. Zambrano’s recreation of the mythical character is “poiesis” of the new person. Antigone as a self-made person, sacrificed for love generates a new way of relationships, fraternity.

Several writings María Zambrano dedicates to the figure of this Greek tragedy. The first in the work *Antigone’s delirium*, published in 1948, embodies a young girl who acts driven “by love and piety.” Through the narrative it shows that the laws of the heart are stronger than those of reason. She moves away from the idea of tragedy as a literary writing to approach a concept that involves a religious significance.

In the second writing on the theme, *Antigone’s tomb*, from the year 1967, referring to Greek philosophy and the classical Greco-Roman world, she made a new interpretation of the character. This recreation allows her to make an allegorical reflection on the struggle between good and evil, the oppression of the powerful and their injustices; the fratricidal wars; the family union before the problems and sweetness as a dynamic element in human relations. In this way for María Zambrano, Antigone acquires a universal nuance, she is the archetype of humanity.

*Antigone’s Tomb* is the only play written by Zambrano. For the author the theater is that space where the mystery that sustains human

life can be invoked, the place where it is possible to make sacred every moment. The work takes place in the tomb, there Antigone is visited by fictional and real characters. The place becomes a space for encounters, which allow her, through relationship and communication, to overcome the identity consciousness, closed in on itself, and to become the prototype of a new person.

The symbolic structure of the work offers the author the possibility of making a confession of her own experience, in the Augustinian style. The imaginary world present in *Antigone's Tomb* becomes a biography or history of the personal and collective soul with which Zambrano is identified. She shows her own path of personal detachment, the detachment of herself that leads to open a horizon of piety, the birth of human consciousness and transcendence.

In order to reach that fullness and depth in her reflections, María Zambrano had to suffer many setbacks in her life: exile, lack of resources, abandonment and death of people close to her, etc. Everything assumed from the reason of the heart, acquiring that vital experience that led her to be able to affirm when she returns to Spain that there is no longer any resentment "For grudges are born of what one does not achieve, always working, being listened to". (Zambrano, 2005, p 69).

Zambrano leads Antigone to undo the knot of the family labyrinth, in this way the difference between the law of the people and that of the gods is established, and the true law appears, that of forgiveness and mercy, which in the opinion of the author. Surpasses the previous two. She begins the human journey of free individual life, closing the tragic process through the sacrifice that frees her from the burden of guilt of her inherited and generic lineage. The young woman is guilty from the cradle and her sacrifice responds to a desire to break with the predestination marked by the gods. Hence, the author from Malaga says, Antigone opens a Christian horizon.

The task of Antigone is fraternity, in the Zambran tragedy, the brothers come to the grave together. There a dialogue is established between the three to discover the links of brotherhood. Both claim an exclusive brotherhood but she declaims with force: "And I, yes, I am your sister, of the two as I have tried" (Zambrano, 2011b, p. 1152). The mission that Zambrano attributes to the young protagonist of the tragedy is that of brotherhood, of equating, of mediating between the brothers and beyond the family circle between life and death; for this "Antigone did not come 'to live her life'. If Antigone had lived 'her life', how could she have untied the terrible knot, verify the reconciliation?" (Zambrano, 1995, p. 70).



This fraternity is the condition that makes justice possible and encourages the aspiration to equality of all human beings, charity. In Zambrano, fraternity and love have a resonance of Christian scope.

Mercy, for the author, is a category that emerges from within the person; it is a knowledge that has to abandon the pride of reason, the pride of life:

Nothing more infertile than rebelliousness, the one that keeps man loose, self-absorbed, without depth; confined in the misery of isolation, which some insist on calling freedom or independence; that some others go so far as to call power, but that it is only arrogance (...). In short, this new knowledge will have to be knowledge of reconciliation, of involvement (Zambrano, 1987b, pp. 110-111).

Therefore, it can be affirmed that mercy, for her, is something more than a charitable institution, it consists of a way of being, leaving the simple appearance, it is placed inside the person. This mercy is based on a humble reason, a reason that does not retaliate against rationalism, surpassing it, overcoming it, but without disputes. A reason that acts without defining itself or separating, mixing, therefore renouncing abstraction so as not to detach itself from the human heart.

Zambran's thought about mercy is included in the commentaries and writings on Benito Pérez Galdós. This is what he discovers and finds:

Humble, scattered, merciful more than any other is the work of Galdós; it makes visible like no other the most decisive questions of our history, the most transcendent events of our yesterday and the living fire of the present. There it is as an immense gift to satisfy our need for knowledge, our extreme poverty in knowing what matters most to us (Zambrano, 1986, p. 126).

Frequently, the author from Málaga, exposes her thought by drawing circles with her writing around some figures, which she analyzes in detail; they are characters present in different works, coming back to them again and again, as we have seen. This is the case of Nina, central character of the work *Mercy* by Benito Pérez Galdós (2003). The novel quoted is present in many of his works, in Spain, dream and truth, introduces the character; returning on him in *The intellectuals in the drama of Spain*, where extensively she deals with the novel by Pérez Galdós of the same title. Also, in *The Spain of Galdós*. It can be affirmed that about a dozen times the work of this author appears in Zambran's reflection and writing.

Following the Royal Spanish Academy we collect the central ideas of the Galdosian novel: Mercy is an emblematic novel about social mar-



ginalization; a timeless criticism of society and the values on which coexistence is based. In it, Pérez Galdós reflects the life of the humblest classes in Madrid at the end of the 19th century. It tells the story of Benigna, also, called Nina, a woman of great humanity who serves in a house of the Madrid bourgeoisie, ruined and decadent, and is forced to beg to economically help her lords. The pride and importance of keeping the appearances that characterize these masters, contrast with the kindness of Benigna, condemned to survive in a hostile environment, without losing their dignity. For the masters, the future is not possible without her forgiveness and without her mercy.

¿Cómo trata el tema María Zambrano? Se acerca a cada uno de los personajes de la novela, intentando aprehender sus movimientos trascendentes, sus proyectos o los sueños de existencia que tienen. Benigna de Casia es el personaje que encarna estos sentimientos, ella la describe así: “Atrae como ninguna otra la figura de Benigna en Misericordia; por lo que es en sí misma –agua pura y viva brotando entre escombros– y porque es ella la clave de todo este mundo complicado. Agua y roca a la vez” (Zambrano, 1986, p. 138).

In the world of Benigna it is discovered that people can still stand because untiring hands, courageous backs sustain them: the hands and the indefatigable heart of Nina, advocate of impossibles. Benigna begs for them and for them: “She is at the door of the church of San Sebastian like a beggar, runs through the streets and climbs endless stairs, on a daily basis she overcomes the impossible and performs a continuous miracle, continuous as the bread of each day” (Zambrano, 1986, 138).

The author’s interpretation continues like this: “Benigna, which as the story progresses becomes the true axis of the world, the protagonist of the tragedy, victim and liberator who pays for all and saves everyone, despite being her who wins” (Zambrano, 1986, p. 144). The great strength of Nina resides, first of all, in the understanding, *faculty of understanding*, she will say, absorption of everything that surrounds her and, at the same time, elimination of everything that could poison her or stop her; survive saving all difficulties with naturalness. “It is the inexhaustible force of life transforming everything into life” (Zambrano, 1986, p. 144). The heart of Nina, full of love and mercy will not be carried away by ingratitude or disappointment, overcomes and escapes bitterness and resentment.

For Nina it is important, and the author suggests it for each person, doing what her conscience tolds her and letting those “fight for a bone like dogs; the others for a toy like the children, or those for bossing around, like the elderly, and not quarreling with anyone” (Zambrano,

1986, p. 145). This is because she lives in the light and with her effort creates freedom. “Dismounted and attached to a time to things, free of reality and her slave at the same time; invulnerable and within reach, owner of everything and servant of each one, Nina, in truth, is Mercy” (Zambrano, 1986, p. 145).

It is the path that the philosopher shows to achieve the transcendence of the person. His attitude is that of the mystic, that of the person who discovers the mysteries. “According to St. Thomas, mysticism is not experiential knowledge of God? For in that we want or not want” (Zambrano, 2002, p. 80). Because for Zambrano “the Christian person, [...], has no limit, neither for his forces, nor for his life, nor for his death” (Zambrano, 2004, p. 123). It is the infinite perspective, which she places at the bottom of the person, in the interiority.

In this key of open consciousness to the other there is another attitude that Zambrano proposes for the transformation of life and the crucial importance in the religious sphere, forgiveness.

Of special relevance are the manuscripts: *Of forgiveness*, M-97, written in February of the year 1965 and the *Place of forgiveness*, M-103, of March of the same year<sup>3</sup>. Both bring light to the theme of the specific actions we propose, from which the person transcends.

In the work titled *of Forgiveness*, the philosopher draws attention to the importance and beauty of this word, which must be like a jewel stripped of adhesions and revitalized in its content. The manuscript has an introductory character to the subject, frames it and gives the key: “There are words worn by their continuous use until they fall like leaves without sap in a land where their meaning is lost in the ‘humus’ of the usual language that many forms of thought devours” (Zambrano, 2015a, p. 505).

The word forgiveness is an image, a resource frequently used in Zambrano’s literature. And To capture the light, strength and specific weight of forgiveness “is there with its pure presence full of meaning, rescued word, overwhelming in all its integrity” (Zambrano, 2015a, p. 505), the author resorts to the comparison of the concept of forgiveness with a precious stone to help understand its importance.

But the word forgiveness has been emptied of content and, then, it’s submerged, says the author, in a hammering and ephemeral use from which must be rescued, because simple forgiveness is not a currency of exchange against a favor or a request. For this, she continues affirming:

And whoever writes this would cost great fatigue to explain to the educated in a non-Christian religion as Christians we have come to use in this way the word figure and key of all that Our Lord will give us. Or

is it not the same in other religions? And the sacred words will have [sic] done in their corresponding civilizations, daily, formulaic, opaque (Zambrano, 2015a, p. 505).

She proposes, thusly, to recover the force of language in the concept of forgiveness, because “words govern us. At least I would have to rediscover the meaning and value of some of them. The word ‘forgiveness’ deserves to be the first of all among us. What we will try less than modestly to do” (Zambrano, 2015a, p. 506).

The second Manuscript *The place of forgiveness*, the author specifies that “the place where such an event happens is the soul and even before the heart” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513). She indicates that it is an action that is elaborated in the heart and, like a drop of oil; it expands and invades the thought and the whole person to even the most recondite of the mind.

The philosopher from Malaga continues, looking for places of forgiveness: “There are doors called forgiveness, there are walls, there are temples and even the sacred mountain among all, the Calvary to impede forgiveness and to give it” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513). A forgiveness that unites human beings and “that forgiveness is one, indivisible, if it is received, must be given at the same time, and if it is given in some way, however invisible, it is received” (p. 513).

As has been affirmed, forgiveness begins in the heart, therefore, for the philosopher, her place is the center of the person, within himself, an intimate, secret space that facilitates and realizes the alchemy of forgiveness. For this, Zambrano resorts to Agustín de Hipona: “When life has not become confused and dispersed” (Zambrano, 2001, p. 73). And to live together it is “necessary to know oneself, to stop being a stranger to oneself, not to have come to have intimacy with oneself or to have lost it; to go alienated, a strange guest in one’s own home” (Villora Sánchez, 2015a, p. 184).

Thus, the place of forgiveness is the interior that flows like water, floods and transmutes thought. And such is the radicality that Zambrano’s philosophy presents, at this point, which goes so far as to affirm: “When forgiveness has real importance, it shows itself against judgment” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513). The reasonable and the judicious reasons remain outside of forgiveness, for the author. Judgment is, for her in principle, the most indissoluble of thought. It resorts, once again to the metaphors to establish the relation between the judgment and the pardon. “If forgiveness is water, judgement is a diamond or metal that is fiery and flaming, diamond if it is a judgment in which a whole thought has crystallized” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513).

The author considers one more step: the social dimension of forgiveness. “There are times when forgiveness can be confused with lack of dignity or laziness or with a calculation in view of purposes that have nothing to do with the supreme morality of forgiveness” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513). Undoubtedly here lies the substance of the question of forgiving others. How to get to forgiveness in this horizon of thought? María Zambrano again shows her method and suggests entering into herself:

Then forgiveness comes alone, because it seems to be the place where it is born is the knowledge of ourselves, not of the self and the you, but of the we, of that ‘we’ that make up all of humanity, including the most beautiful and splendor and those with the deepest motives that offer us to be ashamed of our condition (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 515).

In the interior of oneself turns out to be just and “not generous to forgive; for by virtue of this unity of the human race we share in the glory of beauty, and we collect fruits of all kinds from those who were and those who are better than us” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 513). The echo of the person’s participation in everything human resounds, a universal co-participation that humanizes, that is a source of fraternity and does not allow disconnecting from the other.

Sentiment is the last place where the author places forgiveness. “If each human being occupies the right place within our soul and within society as well, forgiveness would be easily done” (Zambrano, 2015b, p. 515). Thus, prepare that total forgiveness that comes by grace, but not without personal effort, affirming that the person is responsible for seeking unconditional forgiveness. “I will not have an enemy”, as he says in his article *Adsum* (Zambrano, 1998, p. 29).

Living from the depth entering into itself, acquiring in the experiences and events, a knowledge of experience makes it possible to cling to forgiveness, and its ability to transform life. Piety, brotherhood and mercy, just before generous actions, lead us towards others. Thus, entering into a knowledge of experience, a knowledge of salvation, is key to understanding the transformation of life to which María Zambrano invites us.

## Conclusion: The religion of salvation knowledge

The thought of María Zambrano suggests the exit from the crisis of modernity, the recovery of feeling, of the intimate feeling of God. It is not enough to think about the divine, because God cannot be transformed into an entelechy of reason, but we must make the effort to recover that



Christian God of love, that cordial God who awakens to mercy, piety, to universal fraternity, to belong and participate in the world.

María Zambrano walked a personal path, which she wanted to convert into a method, is the poetic reason. This reason is fed by observation, intuition, attentive listening to the inner world, the circumstance and the environment that surrounds it. This is poetic reason that as a drop of oil runs through the entrails of the person to germinate a new being.

A reason laden with mercy, love and piety; are feelings that are oriented to the fullness of the person in their relationship with others, and with the Other.

Upon entering the interior of oneself, the person finds the “original feeling”, which is the sacred, and approaches reality. Philosophical knowledge that counts on the interiority of the person, with its own experience and experience, with piety, with the divine...

Religiosity is not numbness of the person. When the religious is lived in a personal and awake manner, it tends to be self-affirming and a horizon that is projected in living and in living together giving meaning to the whole existence.

The mercy of the revealed God leads us to free ourselves from their false images; to overcome the struggle with the unknown God, and to remove the masks in which the human being hides. The Zambranian proposal is a religious expansion that looks forward, with a future where unlimited hope reigns, because the person feels transformed, with new knowledge, knowledge of salvation.

## Notes

- 1 The person, who seeks transcendence, which for her will be the axis of political, ethical, religious and educational activity (Sánchez-Gey, 2009, p. 190). These four aspects are not developed in these pages, some of which have already been addressed in other articles: Villora Sánchez, C. (2014). Regarding the aspect of citizen construction, see Villora Sánchez, C. (2017).
- 2 On the vital reason of Ortega y Gasset we suggest a metaphor referring to the forest that it gathers in the *Meditations of the Quijote* (1984): “This beneficial forest that anoints my health body, has provided my spirit with a great teaching. It is a masterful forest, old as teachers should be, serene and multiple. He also practices the pedagogy of allusion, the only delicate and profound pedagogy. Who wants to teach us a truth that does not tell us: simply to allude to it with a brief gesture, a gesture that begins in the air an ideal trajectory, sliding through which we reach ourselves to the feet of the new truth. Once the truths are known, they acquire a utilitarian crust; they no longer interest us as truths, but as useful recipes” (pp. 108-109). Therefore a reason that leads to the search from the own circumstance; in the description of the

- poetic reason of the present article one can appreciate the leap that Zambrano will give, reason that counts on the feeling.
- 3 On the publication of these manuscripts there is evidence that *The place of forgiveness*, M-103, was published in the Puerto Rican magazine *Semana*, in the year 1965, currently, of difficult access. The manuscript, according to the researches carried out and consulted by the María Zambrano Foundation, can be said to be unpublished: *Del Perdón*, M-97. These texts have been published in Zambrano, M. (2015b).

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