

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Organized by the Order of Discalced Carmelites

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD TODAY AND CARMELITE MYSTICISM

Mystagogy and Inter-Religious and Cultural Dialog

Zidine (Bosnia and Herzegovina), September 16th – 22nd, 2007

September 17th: Mystical Experience

- 8:45-8:55 *Introduction to the Theme of the Seminar*
9:00-9:25 Mystical Experience and Mystical Theology (L. Borriello)
9:30-9:55 Mystical Experience as *Locus Theologicus* (J. Mamic)
Break
10:30-10:55 Mystical Experience: A Need for All Times (B. McGinn)
11:00-11:25 Everyday Mysticism (Del Genio)
- 4:00-4:25 Mystical Experience: Life in the Spirit (A. Guerra)
4:30-5:30 *Discussion*
Break
5:45-7:00 *Discussion*

September 18th: Mystagogy

- 8:45-8:55 *Introduction to the Theme of the Day*
9:00-9:25 Sacred Scripture in the Mystagogy of the Carmelite Mystics (B. Moriconi)
9:30-9:55 Experience in the Mystagogy of Teresa of Avila (S. Ros)
Break
10:30-10:55 Experience in the Mystagogy of John of the Cross (J. A. Marcos)
11:00-11:25 Experience in the Mystagogy of Therese of Child Jesus (D. Sorrentino)
- 4:00-4:25 Prayer: the Way of Experience (R. Checa)
4:30-4:55 The reality of the Christian: Carmelite and Religious Experience (C. García)
Break
5:30-6:30 *Discussion*
Break
6:45-7:30 *Discussion*

September 19th: Inter-Religious Dialogue

- 8:45-8:55 *Introduction to the Theme of the Day*
9:00-9:25 Carmelite Mysticism and Eastern Mysticism (K. Barron)
9:30-9:55 The Relationship Between Jewish and Christian Mysticism (J. Domaš)
Break
10:30-10:55 The Relationship Between Islamic and Christian Mysticism (I. Bušatlić)
11:00-11:25 The Relationship Between Orthodox and Catholic Mysticism (J. Porfilije)
- 4:00-4:25 Protestant Theology and Catholic Mysticism (L. Matošević)
4:30-4:55 The Influence of Other Religions in Carmelite Mysticism (P. P. Chakiath)
Break
5:30-6:30 *Discussion*
Break
6:45-7:30 *Discussion*

September 20th: Cultural Outing

September 21st: Mysticism and Culture

- 8:45-8:55 *Introduction to the Theme of the Day*
9:00-9:25 The Cultural Influence of Carmelite Mystical Experience (A. G. Cannistrà)
9:30-9:55 Modern Philosophical Thought and Carmelite Mysticism (I. Raguž)
Break
10:30-10:55 The New and Next Age and Carmelite Mysticism (R. Berzosa Martinez)
11:00-11:25 The Revival of Mysticism in Popular Piety (C. Maccise)
- 4:00-4:25 The Mystical Dimension of Contemporary Art (S. Carillo)
4:30-5:30 *Discussion*
Break
5:45-7:00 *Discussion*

September 22nd: Mysticism and Health

- 8:45-8:55 *Introduction to the Theme of the Day*
9:00-9:25 Christian Mysticism and Health (M. Szentmártoni)
9:30-9:55 Carmelite Mysticism: the Way of Human Development (L. J. Gonzalez)
Break
10:30-10:55 Teresa of Avila in Dialogue with Modern Psychology (H. Blommestijn)
11:00-11:25 John of the Cross and Healing in the North American Context (D. Chowning)
- 4:00-5:00 *Discussion*
Break
5:45-7:00 *Discussion and Synthesis of the Seminar* (C. Pellegrino)

Cf. <http://zidine.karmel.hr/>

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

This Seminar on **"THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD TODAY AND CARMELITE MYSTICISM: Mystagogy and Inter-religious and Cultural Dialog"** is in keeping with the Order of Discalced Carmelite's ongoing pastoral and theological reflection on its own Spirituality. In order to both avoid repeating what has been studied in antecedence and in an attempt to provide basic orientation to seminar participants the following essential notes, consisting of two reflections, is being provided.

1) What has been done so far

"From the 3rd to the 10th of September, 2003 an International Congress on Mysticism was held by the Order of Discalced Carmelites near Würzburg. Although ten of the twenty-five speakers belonged to the Carmelite family, only one third of the papers, addressed to more than two hundred people, were directly concerned with the Carmelite mystical tradition. While the location greatly contributed to the Congress' success it was, above all, the spiritual and liturgical ambient of the hosting community, consisting of the nearly one hundred monks of the abbey of Münsterschwarzach, which set its tone. The positive experience of the congress helped to firmly establish the relevance of the theme of mysticism and consequently the importance of attempting to define the mystical life as well as highlighting the universality of the Christian call to the same mystical life.

The relevance and revival of mysticism and its related themes

Investigations into and casual ponderings over the themes of mysticism, whether understood correctly or not, are popularly circulated and, one might say, almost in fashion. Fr. Ciro García notes an awareness of this phenomenon and offers, in his lecture on the Principal Mystical Schools of Thought (*Principali scuole mistiche*), possible contributing factors to it including; "fascination with the East, reaction against the materialism and consumerism of western civilization, accompanied by a glance to the oriental world, so permeated by the values of the interiority and religious experience" all of which constitute the very heart of the New Age movement.

The Benedictine, Fr. Anselm Grün, in considering the influence of Jung, Roberto Assagioli and Abraham Maslow, has also noted a renewed interest in mysticism by certain psychological disciplines which are no longer considering it in terms of alienation but rather as a possible means of transformation-healing of the structures of the conscience.

Due largely to the intervention of the evangelical Pastor, Gerhard Wehr, Protestantism is overcoming its refusal of mysticism and even discovering its existence from within its own tradition. In Catholicism, the return of mysticism is verifiable especially in the field of publishing (sufficient evidence of this reality is found in the critical works of the great mystics by the Vatican Publishers, The Dictionary of Mysticism (*Dizionario di Mistica*), the series Experience and mystical phenomenology (*Esperienza e fenomenologia mistica*) as well as others editions dedicated to the great mystical texts (*Testi mistici*)); essential elements to the progress of mystical theology are also emerging as historical and theoretical obstacles are beginning to disappear. The work of Fr. Eulogio Pacho, OCD and Fr. Otger Steggink O, Carm have underlined how the influence of the *Alumbrados*, the Reform and the Quietist Movement has brought about a reaction "against the subjective experience of the Protestants and the 'spiritual' ", consequently resulting in the relegation and confinement of the spiritual life to the arid space of *aceticism*.

The well known Jesuit scholar, Josef Sudbrack, has reported that the increasing "aridity" of the faith has unfortunately resulted in both an increased rationalization of it as well as a divorce between theological reflection, above all dogmatic, and the life of faith. This has been confirmed by the reflections of Fr. Steggink: "While in the thought of the great scholastic theologians (Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure) theology and mysticism constitute a vital unity, around the end of the 16th century these two realities began to distinguish themselves and a "divorce" between mysticism, as an experience of faith, and theology, as the science of faith" began to emerge; it is sufficient to recall the distinction/separation between, *speculative mystical theology* and *practical mystical theology* in the works of the Grand Chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean de Gerson.

Later, "St. Teresa of Jesus, woman and mystic, would teach theologians, with whom she enjoyed relationships of her own initiative, that theology has its roots in the experience of faith", but also emphasize that religious and mystical experience without reference to dogma and theology is reduced to nothing more than vulgar sentimentalism. His Excellency Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop of Würzburg, also asserts that dogma and mysticism must be considered as a whole since they are both gifts of God, even if on different levels, that they are rooted in His *mysterium* and oriented to Him as a final end. Professor Fr. Luigi Borriello, OCD (organizer of the congress along with Fr. Ulrich Dobhan, OCD) has highlighted the passage from *mysterion* to mysticism in the works of St. Paul who had knowledge of the initiation practices of pagan mystery and roots that mystery within the "sacred mysteries (in particular in the salvific action of Christ, culminating in the paschal mystery)"

It is necessary to admit the inevitable tension that exists between theology and mysticism. This is certainly due, at least in part, to their respective languages (the rational language of theology and the symbolic language of mysticism, as noted by Fr. G. Castro). Such tension is obviously not resolved by simply imposing to the first a narrative language opposed its proper rational-speculative one, but rather by orienting the work of theology to mystogogy or introduction to mystical experience; which in the end depends upon the life of faith of the same theology. This uneasy equilibrium between theology and mysticism was also recognized

by Prof. Hanna Barbara Gerl-Falkowitz in the work of Edith Stein who, for her part, skillfully put her philosophical and theological background at the service of mystical doctrine.

The Definition of Mysticism

Neither the learned works of Johannes Maier or Giuseppe Laras, Chief Rabbi of the synagogue of Milan, on Jewish Mysticism, or those of Prof. Eric Geoffroy on the transcendent unity of religions according to Sufism, or even those of Fr. Gregory D'Souza and Barthélemy Adoukonou on the mysticisms of India and Africa, respectively, have offered an exhaustive definition of mysticism. Even Juan Martín Velasco in his expansive and systematic consideration of the theme is limited to speaking of the interior, immediate and fruitive experience of God's Mystery, cultivated in "how the transcendent reality in its imminence, always in the act of self-revelation and self-giving, makes it possible to establish with human beings a relationship of an inter-personal nature." Even in a more specifically Christian consideration this issue continues to be somewhat nebulous; as though there is some deep seated reluctance to impose a definition of mysticism that might be too rigid or strict. There is no hesitation in speaking of faith or a more intense life of grace, that is accompanied by sense experience or from the experience of the presence (or absence) of God. The Pauline concept of vital participation in the mystery of God and of Christ has already been noted.

Discussion on the specificity and complementary nature of the experience of mysticism by the sexes must also be considered in greater depth: put forth by the Carmelite Sr. Cristina Kaufmann and refuted by the American Susan Muto, it suggests a greater openness on the part of women to the mystical (in Spain there are 911 monasteries of women as compared to 38 monasteries of men).

Bruno Secondin, who was entrusted with the delicate task of summarizing the conference, recapitulated its findings with the assertion that "the mystical adventure appears as somewhat of an illusive, mobile target in a panorama of movement. We've felt a bit lost, unable to bring home some clear and precise idea. But perhaps this crumbling of certainty, this bursting of the indecipherable and imperviable, is the true sense of mysticism? [...] Mysticism is not a theorem, or a standard formula of approach to the divine, but it is eternal truth making itself creative anew in both encounter and absence, in the kiss and in the night, in the painful purification and in being born again."

Prodigious are the works on the theme of Carmelite mysticism: from the work of Fr. Maximilliano Herráiz, OCD to the famous and numerous works of Fr. Eulogio Pacho, OCD which have clearly demonstrated the influence of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross on both modern spirituality and the lives of many great saints; however unfortunately limited to their Spanish influence without highlighting their relevance for St. Therese of the Child Jesus, new doctor of the Church. We should also note the interesting work of Lopez-Baralt on the relationship between the symbology of Sufism and that of the great masters of the Carmelite mystical tradition.

A reflection worthy of special reflection is that of Sr. Kaufmann who, after a brief presentation of the spirituality of St. Teresa of Jesus, offered a "proposal/protest expressed in a very calm manner" (B. Secondin) but certainly controversial, regarding Teresa's monastic charism. Fr. Steggink highlighted the "conscious option for contemplative life" of his founder but Sr. Kaufmann insisted upon the "impossibility for women to dedicate themselves to any form of apostolic activity in the Church of St. Teresa's time", on the uniqueness of the Carmelite Charism for friars, sisters and nuns, and on the solicitation and cries of help coming from society. This vision risks clouding the distinctions between contemplative and active life and confers an excessive merit and obligation in this area.

It may be helpful at this point to cite the Jesuit Fr. Harvey D. Egan on *The Christocentric Mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin*, who was fond of the story narrated by R.H. Benson of a visionary who came upon a monk in prayer and who saw the expanse of the universe spanning the chapel and all the cosmological elements organizing themselves around the monk, who for

his part became an energetic center which accelerated the process of evolution of the universe: "All of a sudden, he saw the whole world rise, move and organize itself around and in harmony with the intensity and inflection of the desires of this little praying figure".

Returning to Carmelite Mysticism, essentially spousal and interpersonal in nature, as well as a referential paradigm of Christian Mysticism itself, as suggested by Fr. Pacho, raises once again the problem, very easily pushed aside, of its compatibility with the journey, its being very attuned to the "negative way" as also found in; the empty mind of Buddhism, New Age, the thought of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and above all the greatly cited Eckhart. We know in fact of St. Teresa of Jesus' opposition to induced suspension of thought and the rarity with which the contemplation of the Sacred Humanity of Christ was practiced, all things which according to her lead to insanity, little humility, deception, and a "journey in the air"

In conclusion, it is necessary to go beyond the strictly phenomenological prospective (even on the inter-religious level) and address the problem of the truth of a mystical way in relation to another.

Universal Call to Mystical Life

The word "mysticism" has been freed of the popular notion of favors and extraordinary phenomena, and brought back to its original ideal, thanks to the teaching of the Church, as real and unexplainable contact with God produced in the soul and offered to all. "Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called "mystical" because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments – "the holy mysteries" – and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2014) This reinterpretation of the Christian faith as universal call to the mystical life carries with it the advantage of reuniting the mystical life with and in the context of the normal development of the life of grace. As if to flee, in a rather unilateral way, any sense of the extraordinary, the Congress insisted on a very Teilhardian and Rahnerian concept of mysticism of/in daily life (a concept that pervades the Little Way of St. Therese of the Child Jesus); a concept suggests Fr. Secondin, not too removed from

"that which Paul VI says of popular religiosity in as much as it is a manifestation of a thirst for God in the simple and the poor in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 48". More ample but in continuity with this line of thinking are the assertions of the always problematic yet fascinating Teilhard de Chardin: "No one can ever understand the great mystics without understanding the fullness and profundity of the truth according to which Jesus must be loved as a world". This analogical affirmation as explained by Fr. Tomáš Špidlík, SJ touches upon the "science of beings" and the more symbolic vision that constitutes reality in Oriental Mysticism.

In each and every way, these affirmations on the daily and cosmic dimensions of mysticism are in complete agreement and keeping with Christian duty, and therefore, also with the historic-dynamic dimension highlighted by Fr. García: "Mysticism of the twenty-first century will tend to become a Trinitarian Mysticism, which resonates in the daily reality of life and the dynamic of history". Fr. Camilo Maccise, OCD has more specifically emphasized the continuity between the mystical life and our duty in the world, above all on the socio-political level: "The mystical experience contributes to reminding us that *the world as it is does not respond to the plan of God* and the He, through Christ, has come to communicate His Reign or plan for humanity: a plan of freedom, fraternity and solidarity". The testimony of Frei Betto OP, who paid for his convictions with a four year prison sentence in Brazil, is certainly a profound example of this truth.

We are convinced of the relevance and urgency of these discussions on the mysticism of/in daily life, the love of Christ as "world" and on the continuity of mysticism with socio-political obligation; but at the same time are also convinced of the urgency of ulterior investigation in such a way as to remove the mystical life, so easily discounted, from the risk of being banalized and thereby reduced by an activism which is more or less ideologized.

However, the return of mysticism, made all the more concrete by the Congress, constitutes an undeniable sign of the times as well as being one of the most beautiful and mature fruits of Second Vatican Council.

(Article by **François-Marie Dermine OP**, printed in the L'Osservatore Romano under the title "Il ritorno di una grande assente" ["The Return of a Great Absence"])

2) What we intend to do

The Present International Seminar intends to move ahead from where the above Congress left off. It proposes a consideration of mystical experience in the Carmelite Tradition – which has an intrinsic mystagogical function – in dialogue with modern theological and cultural discussion on mysticism, in order to respond to the challenge brought about by diverse cultural and religious interests and hopefully put forward proposals for future reflection. It seeks to ask the question: What does the Teresian-Carmelite mystical tradition have to say in reference to the variety of mystical-religious-Christian experiences within the context of their historical-cultural panorama? In continuity with its mystical tradition and "reinterpreted" by theologians both Carmelite and non-Carmelite, how does this tradition situate such experience within the theological and cultural frameworks? Is this tradition entrenched in its past or is it open, sufficient and relevant enough to cope with the new, attempting to interpret and offer an adequate response to contemporary expressions and phenomena?