

Studies in Spirituality 22/2012

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A Drop of Water in the Sea – Reflections on Michel de Certeau's 'Christian' Everyday Life Spirituality

Does spirituality replace the bygone divine foundation of life and reality? Does it provide sense in a world where sense has lost its self-evidence? This is a very broad definition of spirituality and it applies to many of its manifestations. Yet, what if it is just the other way round? What if spirituality is not an attempt to found a new kind of sense in our modern, inherently senseless world, but is, on the contrary, an acknowledgment of that loss of sense, as well as a way to lose oneself in the world become senseless? What if this is the real meaning of what a long Christian tradition defines as becoming 'a drop of water in the ocean'? And what if Christianity as such, in order to be faithful to its own mission, has to disappear 'as a drop of water in the sea'?

This is the basic question underlying Michel de Certeau reflection on Christianity. It is as if Christianity, to remain faithful to its 'spirituality', has to disappear into a kind of 'everyday life spirituality', in which the references to its Christian origin are imperceptible. This article examines in detail one of Certeau's important texts on Christianity and concludes that the question remains unresolved. To save the 'drop of water' from disappearing in the 'sea', to prevent the 'sea' from becoming a devouring monster, a reference to the Christian inheritance will be indispensable for any of our modern forms of spirituality. Thus the thesis defended in this essay. That thesis has important repercussions on how to define the nature of modern 'spirituality'.

Joke Schakenraad

The End of Paradox – Apophasis and Paradox in the Works of Johannes Scottus Eriugena and Ludwig Wittgenstein

Attempts to describe the limits of thought and what lies beyond inevitably lead to paradox. In this article I address this apophatic paradox as it arises in the main work of Eriugena, Periphyseon, and Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Both philosophers face the paradox of speaking about the ineffable and aim to know what lies beyond knowledge. The temporary solutions they have found show remarkable resemblances. In the end, when the paradox emerges again in their works, their readers have acquired knowledge of nature, logic or language, and at the same time they have ascended to the contemplation of God, the 'mystical', or a higher view of the world.

Macario Ofilada Mina

Between Semiotics and Semantics – An Epistemological Exploration of Spanish Mysticism and Literature and its Contribution to Spirituality in the Academy

This exploratory essay parts from the distinction between semiotics (system of signs) and semantics (system of meaning in discourses) to distinguish between the mystical experience and the mystagogical text. Applying this distinction to the case of the Spanish and mystical texts, culminating in the sixteenth century, an era of imperial conquests and reforms, the study does not only present principal trends in interpreting Spanish spirituality from a historical viewpoint, but also underscores its unique contribution of viewing spirituality as a conquest for the transcendent God, viewed as His Majesty. The essay, citing some key figures and events in the history of the Spanish School, then proceeds to affirm the validity of this unique perspective as the distinct contribution of the Spanish School to the universal Christian spiritual tradition. Likewise it is an invitation to a detailed textual sampling and study of the elements which could only be presented from a global perspective in this study.

Jan van der Watt

Aspects of Johannine Spirituality as it is Reflected in 1 John

The focus of this article is on spirituality as it is expressed in 1 John. Since 1 John was written as a reaction to a schism, the identity of the remaining group rests on their experience of being the people of the truth as it is expressed in their tradition and is evidenced in the presence of the Spirit among them. The opponents have abandoned both the tradition and Spirit and does not display true spirituality. It is argued that through proper discernment believers remain in God by remaining in his word through the guidance of the Spirit. In this way the author envisages the transcendental reality becoming part of the human reality thus leading to true spirituality.

David T. Bradford

Evagrius Ponticus and the Psychology of ‘Natural Contemplation’

Evagrius was the first ascetical theologian of the Christian tradition and one of its most influential. His mystical theology has been widely discussed with the exception of his writings on ‘natural contemplation’ (*theoria physike*). Traditional spiritual writings regularly mention natural contemplation but provide relatively few details and little practical exposition. This study has nine sections. The first is concerned with textual sources. The second situates natural contemplation in Evagrius’s outline of the stages of the ascetic life. The third shows that the two forms of natural contemplation are aspects of a single cognitive process. The fourth is focused on psychological insights mediated through natural contemplation. The types of contemplative objects are reviewed in the fifth section, and the mystic’s identification with the objects is discussed in the sixth. The seventh section highlights contemplation’s effect of inhibiting sensory perception. The eighth is concerned with extraordinary spatial perceptions intrinsic to contemplation. The temporal duration of the two forms of natural contemplation is considered in the final section. This is the first psychological analysis of natural contemplation.

Thomas Quartier

Monastische Thanatologie – Lebens- und Todessymbolik in der Regula und Vita Benedicti und ihre Bedeutung für den modernen Kontext

In this article, thanatological insights are combined with monastic spirituality, especially the roots of Benedictine tradition. This relationship is often underestimated, as Saint Benedict does not seem to be very explicit about thanatological practices. A deeper analysis of the Regula Benedicti and the Vita Benedicti shows, however, that mortality leads to a concrete way of living and dying in early Benedictine abbeys. By using insights from symbolic theory, we try to show that life there is always directed towards death, and death – vice versa – towards life (after death). In this respect, monastic thanatology is essentially Christian. In modern culture, it can form a challenging counterpart to views on life that are self-referential. Death is then denied by images of continuity, experienced individually and interpreted immanently. Monastic practices as symbolic acts offer a perspective to combine continuity and discontinuity, individuality and collectivity and immanence and transcendence.

Krijn Pansters

Franciscan Obedience – Fraternity and Virtue in Thirteenth-Century Literature and Instruction

This article provides an in-depth and systematic analysis of the essential virtue of obedience according to the works of three major Franciscan authors: Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan order; Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the order’s foremost theologian and religious writer from the thirteenth century, as well as its most prominent minister general; and David of Augsburg, a novice master and author of one of the most influential religious instruction manuals within the Franciscan order. The article offers a historical and source-based treatment of early Franciscan virtue discourse, by answering the following questions: How do the authors define, describe, and prescribe this virtue necessary for the life in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? How is the virtue acquired, kept, or lost? And how do the practice, development,

and application of obedience shape ‘perfect’ individuals as well as the ‘good’ of the community?

Patrick Meadows

Sacred and Profane Remotivated – Baudelaire’s Autotelic Centralization of the Self

While considering the relevance of certain modern and traditional perspectives on the psyche as backdrops for a reading of the nineteenth-century canonical French author, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), the analysis concerns the opposition, emphasized in sacred scripture, between man and Satan, which is transposed by Baudelaire onto the level of his own dichotomous psyche, the artistic expression of which is shown, by reference to metaphysical doctrine, to be an allegory of the ‘desire’ inherent in manifestation to detach itself from the Principle and to remain in an illusion of self-contained autonomy. Thus the essay argues that, despite his latent mystical tendency, Baudelaire’s writings involve a spiritual retrogression toward a quasi-Manichaeistic perspective which is paradoxically counterbalanced by the elaboration of an idiosyncratic artistic ‘unity’ which installs the individual self in the place of the divine Self.

Domenico Pezzini

The Rhetoric of Silence – Or How to Say God Today in the Poetry of R.S. Thomas

A God, whose name cannot be said, inhabits silence as his homeland. Even the Incarnation does not solve the problem of the ineffability of the Christian God, since his Son begins his human life as *Verbum infans*, the ‘Word without a word’, and ends it in the cosmic silence of the Cross. This fact gave rise to a branch of theology called apophatic, or ‘negative way’, based on the principle that we can talk about God only by saying what he is not. R.S. Thomas, ‘a colossus as influential as T.S. Eliot’ (Rowan Williams), strove all his life to renew religious language, for which he found ‘silence’ as the most effective way to protect God from superficial babbling or the tedious repetition of stock-phrases. The essay outlines Thomas’s poetic itinerary from silence experienced as frustration to the discovery of its potential force to purify our vocabulary and to provide spaces of attention where to catch epiphanies of the deity; silence thus becomes a ‘choice’, both in life and in language. This understanding leads to the elaboration of a ‘theology of silence’, in which the same progress from negative to positive is followed, so that the intrinsic weakness of language is turned into the practice of the resulting *via negativa* as a way to protect language, and faith, from the risk of idolatry. The ‘practical’ end of this itinerary is prayer, a space where, from ‘silence as a question’, a kneeling man comes to ‘question silence’ itself, and learns that life consists in waiting (another word for silence) patiently for an answer leading to find ‘fissures of mercy and trust’, while remaining conscious at the same time that ‘the eternal silence is the repose of God’, and possibly one of the ways for men to find peace in him and in themselves.

Meins G.S. Coetsier

Etty Hillesum and the Integral Spirituality of Dialogue – Explorations with Martin Buber

Etty Hillesum’s diaries and letters and Martin Buber’s masterpiece *Ich und Du* (‘I and Thou’) have in recent times been acclaimed as standard works for dialogical spirituality. Many prominent writers have acknowledged their influence on the contemporary religious debate and on the developments in theology, philosophy, and psychology. Scholars of intellectual history regard their works as spiritual landmarks. Some would even consider Hillesum and Buber as modern-day prophets. The need for a fresh exploration of their works has been felt for many years. The old 1981 publication of Hillesum’s writings, *Het verstoorde leven* (‘An Interrupted Life’), was marred by many inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and the subsequent portrayal of Hillesum as a Christian martyr was seriously misleading. Now the Dutch edition of all available texts of Hillesum has been published, an analysis of her writings in relation to Buber may clarify some of the obscurities, and bring the reader closer to her original grounding experience. Buber’s I and Thou philosophy opens up innovative perspectives on Hillesum’s thought and spiritual journey. Moreover, this article seeks to provide a new basis for further discussions of Hillesum’s integral spirituality of dialogue.

Janet K. Ruffing**A Path to God Today Mediated through Visionary Experience**

Reports of visions continue to be a problematic form of spiritual life today even in the context of spiritual direction. Yet Karl Rahner and William Johnston, both Jesuits, sought to understand such phenomenon and support its importance in the contemporary church. The history of this issue is traced from biblical times and discussed in relationship to the flowering of visionary mysticism in the Middle Ages. Finally, a sample of visionary material from qualitative research interviews demonstrates that such experience is not at all uncommon today and deserves to be received with respect and nuanced understanding.

Jojan Jonker**Exploring the ‘Mystical Experiences’ of a New Spirituality – A Case Study of Reiki**

At this moment there are many new movements or groups in the Netherlands when it comes to new religions, religiosity, spirituality and healing modalities, as for instance Reiki; an (energetic) healing technique performed by the laying on of hands. Participants and practitioners of Reiki sometimes have experiences that they consider to be (very) special and often label these experiences spiritual or mystical. This paper presents a closer look into 70 self-defined mystical experiences provided by 17 Reiki practitioners. The analysis makes use of Waaijman’s model, holding ten characteristics that may appear in a mystical experience. Based upon this model, all together a total of 260 occurrences of characteristics were found. The characteristics ‘Presence [of transcendence]’ and ‘Shift of the act-center’ together provide more than half of all the spotted characteristics, closely followed by ‘Ongoing impact’. Of the 70 stories that were shared only one can be recognized as Buddhist, five as Christian, and 64 as New Age mysticism. The results further support the idea that a classification of Reiki as ‘holistic spirituality’ seems more appropriate than a classification as ‘New Age spirituality’.

William Yang, Ton Staps, & Ellen Hijmans**Going through a Dark Night – Existential Crisis in Cancer Patients: Effective Coping as a Psycho-spiritual Process embedded in the Vulnerability of the Body**

An existential crisis may occur in cancer patients when they realize that their death may be imminent. In the first research cycle we uncovered the characteristics of an existential crisis and the phases in the process of effectively coping with it. We now report the second research cycle in which we reanalyzed the data to demonstrate that coping with an existential crisis is essentially a psycho-spiritual process. For oncological patients the body plays a vital role in the unfolding of this psycho-spiritual process, adding a strong physical dimension to the sometimes ephemeral concept of spirituality. This physico-psycho-spiritual process has its own inner dynamism, which at the same time turns out to be a process of individuation. Coping with their existential crisis, cancer patients are going through a process that can be considered as a present day form of ‘lived spirituality’. This perspective opens up a new approach for health care workers’ support of cancer patients struggling with their existential crisis.

Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, & Sarita Cargas**The Perceiving Process and Mystical Orientation – An Empirical Study in Psychological Type Theory among Participants at the Parliament of the World’s Religions**

A sample of 580 participants attending the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona 2004 completed the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale together with a measure of psychological type (the Francis Psychological Type Scales) in order to test the thesis based on Christopher Ross’ work that intuitive types would record significantly higher scores of mystical orientation in comparison with sensing types. The data supported Ross’ theory, and also added to the growing body of evidence supporting the relevance of psychological type theory for shaping testable hypotheses within the empirical psychology of religion.