



Invitation to the international conference:

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN CULTURE AND SCIENCE



Place and date of the Conference:

Wrocław, December 7-9, 2022

Organizer:

University of Wrocław

Faculty of Letters

Institute of Romance Studies

Wrocław is the hometown of the Angelus Silesius (1624-1677), and the region of Lower Silesia is a place of work of outstanding philosophers and mystics, among whom Jacob Boehme (1675-1624) seems to be the most important. The city of Wrocław dedicated the year 2022 to Edyta Stein (1891-1942), one of the most prominent students at the University of Wrocław, who, as a phenomenologist, strove for the depth of the experience of the "inner man", which she expressed in her writing activity. For this reason, we would like to invite you to participate in the international conference dedicated to the broadly understood mystical experience in culture and science, as well as to the commemoration of Edith Stein.

Mysticism, a philosophical and religious current occurring in various cultures and religions, recognizes the existence of mystical experience seen as an act and / or state of direct communication and union of a human being (or each individual conscious being) with ultimate reality. Most often, this reality is defined as an impersonal absolute or a perfect personal being on which the essence of any other being is founded. This transcendence in the general religious context performs the function of *sacrum*. William James (1842-1910), who included mystical

experience as Religious Experiences (1902), indicated the distinguishing features such as: ineffability, noeticism (the accompanying enlightenment revealing and covering at the same time), transitory (relative transience) and passivity (of the experiencing subject).

Empirical experience, the seemingly infallible link between the individual and reality, has no justification of its own, it demands validation through reason, *ratio*. Also, mystical experience (that sudden and overpowering intrusion of the sacred into the individual) seeks its confirmation, understanding and expression through the word, *logos*, often a coded symbol, which then becomes the basis of a *credo*, a philosophical movement or an individual soteriological quest. Although the very "object" of the experience of transcendence, i.e., God/Goddess/Divinity, is indefinable and inexpressible, mystics usually try to express this experience in terms rooted in their tradition and culture. In this way, the mystical experience begins to function within an interpersonal and social framework.

Ecstasy is a special kind of theophany indicating a phenomenon of *going beyond* experienced by the ecstatic (followers, yogis, ascetics), but also by God/Goddess – crossing oneself towards the Other. While divine motives can be debated but never fully recognized, for the mystic their paths from aesthetics (sensual factors, esp. beauty) to the ecstasy become the only possible way of life. Thus, *homo mysticus* walks *via mystica* into transpersonal reality, the mystery of the coexistence of the Absolute and Creation, ineffable darkness, in mystical fear.

For this reason, we call mysticism: “[...] intensely aware experience of the sacrum “inside” man, as the highest or only value. [...] The value of the sacred will be understood differently in mystical religions, which do not necessarily talk about a dialogue between the mystic and the Absolute, and differently in prophetic religions, which recognize the substantial separateness of the subject and object of mystical experience. Nevertheless, there will be a common element in both traditions, this conscious participation in the very center of holiness.”¹ This sacred incursion, which takes over the human emotional and mental whole, and often also the body one, has many aspects.

In the space of transcendence, the individual “self” may temporarily disappear, leading to deification and the birth of a “new self”. In order to achieve mystical experience, various ascetic efforts are undertaken such as: sensory deprivation, meditation, silence, breathing techniques. There are many testimonies of experiencing the presence of the Divine, facing God/Goddess (to recall only the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai described in the *Book of Exodus*). Does God can make effort to encounter His Beloved? – the theme of mystical fusion or mystical love, combining mysticism with eroticism, returns in many forms in very different traditions (the concept of divine *bhakti* in Hinduism, Jewish and Christian interpretations of the *Song of Songs*, Sufi poetry). There are also divine entrances into the body of an ecstatic, as well as divine intoxication and other practices of transgression and divine madness (e.g., in Śaivism and Śakti left-hand tantrics, Tibetan Vajrayāna adepts, and Jurodivas in Russia). Then, secret knowledge, hidden from the world (e.g., the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Pāñcārātra, Pythagorean and Orphic teachings) may also be revealed. The divine presence was experienced during the ancient Greek or Egyptian mysteries, in religious and philosophical fraternities, and in later times in the circles of some modern secret societies. In the Christian tradition, mysticism, before it was associated with a specific form of spiritual experience, and on a philosophical and theological basis with knowledge of the apophatic type (the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius,

¹ P. Kłodkowski, *Homo mysticus hinduizmu i islamu. Mistyczny ruch bhakti i sufizm*. Dialog, Warszawa 2015, p. 11.

Eriugena, and later Rhenish mystics), was associated with the mystery character of the Christian teachings reserved for the group initiated (Greek adjective μυστικός, "mystical", shares the same root with the word for "mystery", μυστήριον). Although mysticism should be distinguished from esotericism (and the related categories of gnosis or magic) – it is an expression of the pursuit of direct union with the Deity by crossing the sphere of the imagination, a key and indispensable factor in various esoteric currents – both of these spheres often interpenetrate with each other (for example in Jewish Kabbalah, Hermeticism and mystical alchemy, in Renaissance Neoplatonists who profess the concept of *prisca theologia*, and later in Jacob Boehme, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Emanuel Swedenborg, and the romantics inspired by them, or in later trend of perennialism).

Art appears both as a form of invoking the Deity and an expression of divine love and presence, ecstatic dance (in Sufis, in Kerala teyyam ...), music and singing (South Indian Bauls, Álvares and Nayanars ...). Common literature – from the Arthurian cycle and the legend of the Holy Grail to *The Aleph* by Jorge Luis Borges and the *Night of Fire* by Eric-Emanuel Schmitt, going through the works of Novalis, William Blake, Victor Hugo, and symbolists, provides countless examples of translating mystical themes into language of poetry and prose.

Mystical experience is also the subject of keen interest in the numerous varieties and currents of new spirituality, dynamically developing over the last decades (including the vast and diverse New Age culture), combining eagerly Far Eastern traditions with Western sensibilities. It is also a recurring theme in the broadly understood post-secularism, i.e., a trend of thought that questions or exceeds (in axiological, philosophical or sociological terms) the belief in the progressive secularization of the world. We can mention here works by Charles Taylor, John Caputo, Jacques Derrida, Emanuel Carrère or Julia Kristeva, and in cinematography, films by Bruno Dumont. Mystical experience becomes here an element of reinterpretation, transformation and a new reliving of religious experience and religious traditions in the world after the "death of God", in which neither church structures based on dogmatism nor materialistic atheism, enclosing man in the pure immanence of the natural system, can no longer appear as satisfactory answers to basic questions about the human condition.

Although the phenomenon of mystical experience has been of such great importance for centuries in the cultural and personal context, it has become the subject of serious empirical, mainly neuroscientific, research only recently. The observations of the psychobiological activity of modern mystics (Carmelite Sisters, yogis and Buddhist monks who practice meditation) so far shed new light on the mechanism of inducing mystical experiences and lead to interesting comparative conclusions.

We propose that our scientific meeting should cover the following issues:

- Mystical experience and biblical traditions
- Mystical experience and world religions
- Comparative studies on mystical experience
- Mystical experience and its expression
- Mystical experience and literature / theater
- Mystical experience in post-secular contexts
- Mystical experience in historical perspective
- Mystical experience in the currents of Western esotericism
- Mystical experience and philosophy

- Mystical experience and neuroscience
- Mystical experience and psychoanalysis
- “Wild” or non religious mystical experience
- Mystical experience in the works of Edith Stein

NOTES TO PARTICIPANTS:

Location of the meeting:

University of Wrocław
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 pl. Bp. Nankiera 4, 50-140 Wrocław

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 Tomasz Szymański (UWr)

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 Zofia Zarębianka (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)

Application deadline: 31 July 2022

Acceptance of abstracts: 5 September 2022

Duration of speeches: 20 minutes (+10 minutes of discussion)

Conference languages: Polish, English, Spanish, French and Italian

Fee: 100 euro / 450 zł

(it covers the costs of: gala dinner, coffee breaks, conference materials, concert, and co-financing of the publication of a post-conference monograph)

How to apply:

by email to the following addresses:

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with an attachment in Word format containing the following information:

1. name, surname
2. Academic title / degree
3. affiliation
4. e-mail address
5. mailing address
6. phone number
7. title of the planned speech
8. discipline(s)
9. Abstract of the speech (approx. 200 words)

A post-conference publication in the form of a monograph is planned in a publishing house from the ministerial list.