

SPIRITUALITY SEMINAR

This year's seminar was coordinated by Elizabeth Liebert and Michael Downey. Approximately thirty CTSA members participated in each session of the seminar. Three presentations were offered in view of the convention theme "Experience and Theology: A Critical Appropriation."

In the first session, David Granfield (Catholic University of America) provided a synopsis of his recent work *Heightened Consciousness: The Mystical Difference* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1991). Granfield's work is an attempt to formulate an integrated understanding of mysticism from the perspective of conscious intentionality brought to completion through the Holy Spirit in a heightened consciousness of the loving presence of the Trinity. Discussion of his work focused on the issue of "mediated immediacy" and the modalities of mediation in the mystical experience of God. This is not a new question (it was pointed out by one seminar member that Teresa of Avila wrestled with the same issue). But Granfield's treatment of it opens up fresh perspectives and further possibilities for greater clarity.

In Granfield's treatment of mystical consciousness he attends to the role of affirmative means through created analogies in the kataphatic way to God, as well as to the negative means through transcending created forms and inordinate desires in the apophatic way. In his schema, however, the kataphatic way appears to occupy a transitional and secondary, albeit necessary, place in the mystic's journey. Here the mystic must set aside, "give up," positive or affirmative images in the approach to God, and pass through the apophatic way to the God who "dwells in light inaccessible." For Granfield, apophaticism is the characteristic difference in mystical consciousness, that is, the consciousness of the mystic is essentially apophatic.

In contrast to Granfield's description, it was suggested that the kataphatic and apophatic ways represent two parallel paths to God. In such a view the kataphatic is not understood as preparatory for the apophatic, something to be "given up" as one moves to a "higher stage," but is *in se* a mystical path. The same could be said for the apophatic path, in such a way that each path might be followed on the mystical journey with very little, if any, crossing from one to the other. Granfield's position as rearticulated in the session, while not intended to denigrate the positive and affirmative way to God, is that the kataphatic is prelude to authentic mystical consciousness.

Discussion of Granfield's work also brought to the fore the question of the theological premises that underlie one's approach to spirituality and mysticism. Seminar participant Sandra Schneiders observed that the operative understanding of the Trinity which lies at the foundation of Granfield's work would likely be

found questionable by some Roman Catholic scholars in the field of trinitarian theology. If this be true, what are the implications of such diverse understandings of the Trinity in Roman Catholic theology and in the Christian churches at large? And what, then, about the other theological premises on which Granfield's work rest, for example, regarding the human person, revelation, grace, sin? There are at least three ramifications here for those who study and teach spirituality and mysticism informed by Roman Catholic theological traditions (to say nothing of those in other faith traditions). First, such differences must be recognized in the study and teaching of spirituality and mysticism. Second, once recognized, these differences may be understood as giving rise to very different spiritualities and approaches to mysticism. Third, these differences may be so vast as to appear irreconcilable.

In the second session two papers were delivered in view of David Granfield's work. Joan Nuth (John Carroll University) presented "Julian of Norwich: The Theological Consciousness of a Mystic." Elizabeth Carr (Smith College) presented "Edith Stein: Twentieth Century Mystic."

Since Joan Nuth did not analyze Julian's mystical experience in her book *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), she took the seminar as occasion to do so. Though Julian of Norwich is often understood primarily as a "kataphatic mystic," Nuth demonstrated that Julian was engaged in the entire mystical process as described by Granfield: kataphatic prelude, apophatic venture, and anaphatic return. Julian's experience fits Granfield's description of the kataphatic prelude, more specifically, "negative kataphatics," the affirmation of God's wisdom and benevolence in the face of suffering and death. Her consciousness of the incomprehensibility of God is apparent in her account of her revelations, indicative of her participation in the apophatic venture. Most instructive was Nuth's attention to Julian's anaphatic return, a point deserving fuller attention in Granfield's treatment and in others' discussion of it. In addition to the kataphatic prelude and the apophatic venture, the mystical path Julian followed included the return with a strong incentive to pass on to others the fruit of contemplation. Herein Julian entered fully into what today would be recognized as the vocation of the theologian.

Nuth then turned attention briefly to the impact of mystical experience in bringing about deeper doctrinal insight. She provided an example of the way Julian's experience of the mercy of God provided insight that served as corrective to commonly held understandings of God's wrath, sin, and forgiveness. In conclusion, Nuth raised helpful questions about the role of visions in supplying doctrinal insight, particularly for those throughout Christian history who were illiterate. What might be learned by examining such visionary experiences for their doctrinal content? What might be lost by ignoring them?

Elizabeth Carr examined the life of Edith Stein as a twentieth-century mystic with an eye to Granfield's description of mysticism as "a heightened consciousness of the loving presence of God." Based upon a reading of Stein's poetry,

writings on the interior life, and essays and lectures on women, Carr spelled out Stein's mysticism in terms of light, openness, and love. In these writings Carr finds a mysticism rooted in a contemplative knowledge of God and expressed in the commitment to engagement with the world through contemplative action. Stein's mysticism is centered in the Cross which is a symbol of love and light stronger than death, and the focal point in her mystical journey. For Carr, Stein serves as a model for the integration of contemplation and action grounded in the experience of God's presence in both the depths of the soul and the contingencies of human history, both in light and darkness, life and death.

Discussion followed the presentations by Nuth and Carr. David Granfield concluded the second session by expressing gratitude for the attention given to his work, particularly by Nuth and Carr, who brought their investigations into conversation with his own.

In preparation for next year's convention, members discussed President-Elect Lisa Sowle Cahill's request that, due to restrictions in availability of hotel "break-out rooms," all seminar conveners might consider having at least one joint session with the members of a different continuing seminar. Long-standing members and younger participants in the spirituality seminar expressed the conviction that, because of the increasing strength of the seminar, participants should continue to have the opportunity to meet in two sessions. However, in response to the President-Elect's request, Elizabeth Liebert and Michael Downey have developed (together with Francis Clooney, outgoing convener of the Comparative Theologies seminar) a program which would include the members of the Comparative Theologies seminar for one session at the 1993 meeting. During that session the focus will be on "*Kenosis* in Christian and Buddhist Perspectives." During the second session the spirituality seminar will focus on "Spiritual Transformation in Interfaith Perspective." The work in both sessions is to be undertaken in light of the theme for the 1993 convention, "Ecumenism, Interreligious Relations, and Evangelization."

Finally, Elizabeth Carr is preparing to take on responsibility as convener of the seminar, beginning in 1994.

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