

International Conference in India on Mysticism

From 05–08 January, 2011 at Christ University in Bangalore, India, was held an International Conference “Mysticism without Bounds”. It was organized by above the mentioned university and Dharmaram College. More than one hundred scholars from India, Belgium, USA, United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, Lithuania, Philippines, Korea, as well as from many other European, Asian, and African countries, presented their papers during the conference. The event attracted a number of people that were interested in mysticism – many listeners attended the conference presentations.

Christ University is located in the central part of Bangalore (in the Indian Kannada language: *Bengalūru*) city, which is the capital of the Indian state of Karnataka. Bangalore is India’s third largest city with a population of 5.8 million and is known as the Garden City of India because of its many public parks.

Both Christ University and Dharmaram College are lead by the Catholic congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). It is the first indigenous religious institution in the Syro-Malabar Church of India¹. The spirituality of the congregation is rooted in the Indian, Oriental and Carmelite spiritual traditions. The first monastery of the congregation was established in 1831 at Mannanam, state of Kerala.

The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate started with preaching retreats in all the parishes in Kerala. They brought about vitality throughout the church. Fathers introduced into the local church communities many devotional practices like the Eucharistic Devotion, Rosary, Way of the Cross, etc. which became very popular. The academic contribution to the Church’s life the Congregation began by starting a seminary for the training of the clergy.

The CMI congregation is the largest religious congregation for men in the Syro-Malabar Church. At present the Congregation has more than 2800 members including 5 bishops, 1539 priests, and about 1300 brothers in formation. Over 300 of the priests are working as missionaries in 23 countries around the world.

Christ University, formerly Christ College, was founded in 1969 by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. It was born out of the educational vision of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805–1871), one of the founders and the first Superior General of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. University is spread over a large campus with beautiful gardens which is part of the Dharmaram College campus as well. It offers a variety of academic disciplines including Humanities, Law, Business Administration, Commerce, Management, Sciences, and Social Sciences. The University has about 7000 students from all over

India and from around 30 countries. The core values of the University are declared as: faith in God, moral uprightness, love of fellow beings, social responsibility, and pursuit of excellence.

Dharmaram College (full name – Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram) is a Pontifical Athenaeum for higher learning and formation, established by the Holy See Congregation for Catholic Education, as an independent institute, empowered to grant degrees, including Doctorate in Theology and Philosophy, Licentiate in Oriental Canon Law and Master in Formative Spirituality and Counseling. Dharmaram College, established as a Seminary at Mannanam in 1833, was moved to Bangalore in 1957. The name *Dharmaram* is a combination of two Sanskrit words, *dharm* (virtue) and *aram* (garden), which together mean *Garden of virtues*. The College's motto is "*Isabhakti paramjnanam*" ("Devotion to the Lord is the Supreme Wisdom"). Dharmaram aims at educating people through a holistic, spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation and thus prepare them to commit themselves to the service of the Church and the world. Now it has a strength of 800 students hailing from 17 dioceses and 75 religious congregations.

Conference "Mysticism without Bounds" presented an intellectual attempt to explore the mystical communion with the Absolute or conscious awareness of an ultimate Reality from different points of view, like religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, Sikhism), sciences (biology, new physics, neuroscience, logic), humanities (theology, philosophy, spirituality, psychology) and art forms (poetry, visual arts, music, dance, rituals). It brought together scholars from all over the world to exchange and to share their research and findings on contemporary topics of mystical life.

One of the main aims of the conference was to highlight certain common grounds that exist among the world's religions, theologies, sciences, philosophies, and various art forms, as well as the emergence of a new world-view, which would create an awareness of the essential unity of humankind. All the major religions and theologies had developed mystical teachings which, when compared to one another, exhibit an amazing aspects of cross-cultural accord.

Topics analyzing Carmelite mysticism, understanding of mystic love, mysticism in St. Paul's letters, meditation and mysticism, contemporary revival of mysticism, Eastern Christian mysticism, Indian Christian mysticism, Hesychast mysticism, mistagogy of the Upanishads, mysticism of daily life, Sufi ritual and mysticism, Buddhist mystical experience, power of prayer in Sikhism, Daoist mysticism from the Christian point of view, African culture and mysticism, Eucharist and mysticism, religiosity of the Celt, mysticism by Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart and Catherine of Sienna, a series of papers devoted to Aristotle, Ibn Sina, Kant, Bergson, Levinas, Nietzsche, Fenelon, Derrida, Lonergan, Teilhard de Chardin, Wojtyla, mysticism in poetry, music and dance, psychology and mystical experience, medical materialism and mysticism, Cosmo-theandric mysticism and many others were presented and discussed during this very informative and multilateral conference.

Speakers of the conference indicated that mysticism is a complex phenomenon both *within* religion and *of* religion, and so the a-temporal and institutional-critical aspects cannot be denied. It serves to renew and to revitalize various religious traditions. Mysticism

is the very heart of religious life. In a person's life mysticism is commonly understood as covering an inward journey. A mystic way consists in a painful transformation of a person and a mystical death, because "one man died for all, then all have died. <...> So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:14–17). The details of methods of contemplative life in religions may vary but some of the essential approaches remain fundamentally identical: sacred reading, remembering a divine name or sacred formula, concentrations, silent prayer, solitude, contemplation, identification or communion with the Deity, contemplation on divine love and compassion, withdrawal of the senses and the purifying of thought, quietude. There is no inherent conflict between mysticism and involvement in economic or political activity. If the person in his/her inner journey really touches God, love and peace as well as responsibility and social activity emanate from that person's heart.

During the conference, every day in the early morning, there was an opportunity to participate in the Eucharistic celebration in the beautiful Dharmaram College chapel, dedicated to Christ the Divine Guru², whose figure is executed in ceramic tiles on the front panel of the chapel. The Holy Mass was concelebrated by the Carmelite fathers in a syro-malabar rite.

ENDNOTES

¹ Syro-Malabar Church of India is in full communion with the Holy See.

² The Sanskrit term *guru* is a combination of *gu*, "darkness", and *ru*, "that which dispels".