

14/6 Mysticism and the Bride today - Afternoon

Mysticism:

Today we live in a largely desacralized society. Mysticism has a very different significance compared to Angela's times. Our society is largely based on science, etc., mysticism is a private fact; not social, as in the Renaissance, when the supernatural was part of everyday life.

However, the situation is more complex. First, there are some residual forms, such as Natuzza Evolo in the South of Italy, a mystic woman who is consulted regularly by professionals, politicians, and churchmen. Second, the supernatural is still important as we can see in places like Lourdes and Fatima (Catholic Europe); in the cult of relics and saints (in Italy and Spain at least), in the popular preachers (USA). The supernatural and religion in general are also strong at different levels in our society: in popular culture (movies, tv series, talk shows) and even as a serious subject (creationism has become stronger, religious subjects have recently attracted the interest of scholars, political conflicts are often described as religious conflicts).

Partly this can be explained with the fall of big ideologies (religion fills a void or becomes important again in connection with the end of communism, the final affirmation of capitalism, and with the emergence of anti-ideological philosophies, such as revisionism); with the democratization of knowledge (internet; anything can be said; there are no hierarchies of knowledge: popular culture and irrationality emerge) and globalization (fear of relativism, emergence of radicalism: religious traditions are defended firmly).

In this respect, perhaps the Ursulines feel a difference with Angela's attitude?

Body and penance:

Penance is still practiced, but many religious meanings are lost (imitation of Christ, salvation of souls, etc.). It is interesting that today the male body is becoming more important and it is not a coincidence that last century two important figures who have used the body as a space for

expressing religious meaning are men: Padre Pio and Woytila (the second copied the first). In secular society the male body is becoming a sexual object.

How do the Ursulines feel about penance, the body of saints, etc.?

Bride of Christ:

Furthermore the concept of the Bride of Christ is historical, and as we have seen was based on a particular notion of the female. Today women no longer identify simply with the role of the Bride, or with sexuality and reproduction. Today women work, participate to the construction of society and could also propose new values. We hope that women could propose policies that are perhaps less competitive, less violent, more diplomatic, more based on solidarity, more interested on humanity.

How do the Ursulines today relate to mysticism and the role of the Bride of Christ? Are there Ursulines who find the idea of Christ with many brides inappropriate to our times? Are there Ursulines who want to shape the relationship with Christ in other terms? Is there something in Angela's notions of mysticism and bride that can be useful for the Ursulines today? For example the image of the bride is very close to that of "another-Christ" (in both Catherine and Angela): as we have seen union with Christ and identification with Christ were very close concepts. It is true that the identification consisted in repeating Christ's suffering and salvific role. In Angela's theology, to be a Bride of Christ also meant to follow Christ's teachings: detachment from worldly values, not to seek one's own good (being selfish), don't judge others, to love God and to reproduce the love he has for us, to be charitable (to seek the well-being of others, try to do what is good for the other person, to be patient and humble, to be positive, constructive and gentle instead of being negative, rough, and doing things grudgingly), to be open to the needs of people. Angela describes these attitudes in the evangelical counsels of virginity, poverty and obedience.