

“Faith-filled eyes in the night”: a network of saints for our times

A lecture delivered at Bellarmine College, February 1996

by **Fernando Beltrán Llavador**

Good evening. It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Robert E. Daggy, who kindly invited me to share with you my views and news from Spain regarding spirituality and social change. My apologies if my English does not sound very familiar to you. I will do my best to be clear. My wife, who was then my *fiancée*, and I came to Louisville and Gethsemani, and in fact to the United States, for the first time in 1990. I was in the process of finishing my doctoral research on Thomas Merton and the New American Adam and, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Robert E. Daggy, I spent a couple of unforgettable weeks learning from the wisdom of the volumes in the Thomas Merton Studies Center. Brother Patrick Hart also offered us his friendship and he was a perfect example of Cistercian hospitality in Gethsemani’s “*paradisus claustralis*” during a delightful weekend there and then, before we left, we visited the beautiful *La Belle of Louisville*.

In short, everything went very well after much preparation in Spain. In an unexpected way I found myself, like the young Merton, thinking that, in some sense, Gethsemani (which for me is closely linked to the Merton Center) was indeed the center of America. Although many scholars have pointed out that this statement was one of Merton’s exaggerations (which was quite understandable under the spell of his baptism) when one comes from over the ocean with the spirit of a pilgrim it is easy to understand that this first and fresh impression had a profound and sincere meaning for him. It still has, and perhaps more so for those of us who are not born American but who feel America has some wonderful treasure to offer us. It is my firm belief that in the process of idealizing America - and he did idealize both Americas -, Thomas Merton was pointing towards the hidden and sacred potential of a unique land and its people, uncovering its half-forgotten but not completely lost innocence. In saying that Gethsemani was the center of America, it seems to me that Merton was starting to convey a very clear message to his fellow citizens which he would later qualify and transform into often harsh but honest and compassionate criticism out of love for *his elected* country from *his elected* silence. The message, which albeit not new demanded a new voice, was one which I would like to think still has relevance today, namely that for any radical social, cultural, political, human change to be real and truly effective in the long run it has to be spiritual. For Merton the presence of God had the power to transform a group of individuals or a set of social structures or even a whole country or the world itself into a community.

Fernando Beltrán Llavador teaches in the Department of English Philology at the University of Salamanca in Spain. This address was given at Bellarmine College, a Scholar’s Retreat sponsored by The Thomas Merton Center Foundation in February, 1996. Fernando is especially interested in relating Thomas Merton to the Spanish Mystical tradition.

Prayer houses, in their different fashions, are the power houses of these small and large communities, the suppliers of an energy which changes “individuals” into “persons,” to use Merton’s way of differentiating between alienated and integrated people. It took him a whole life to fully realize the manifold implications of this very basic truth and to bridge the gap between spiritual contemplation and engaged social action. Merton came to oppose and resist the scourges of our age (the rage of racism, the devastation of war, the unjustified madness of the atomic bomb, the banal pyrotechnics of mass media, the burning cruelty of capitalism) with the fire of prophecy stemming from a spark of nothingness and utter poverty within the soul: *scintilla animae*. He sang and prayed for the whole world at a time of darkness:

*Lord to you I raise
 Wide and bright
 Faith-filled eyes
 In the night
 You are my protection
 Bring me home
 And receive my prayer
 Sweet as incense smoke
 Rising from my heart
 Free of care*

During my stay in Louisville and in my visit to Gethsemani I also realized how the landscape can have a tremendous impact on the inner development of men and women, and Merton was no exception. It was then as a result of my research on Merton and thanks to his own personal voice that I came to reassess and appreciate all the more the richness of Spanish spirituality, a process of assimilation which has no end. Since I live in Salamanca and work as a teacher trainer in Avila, I had until then been privileged to be immersed in the climate of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila, but I had had no perspective to appreciate it from a distance. However, after I came back from the United States, on the way from Toledo to Segovia and from there to Avila in passing through certain areas which are completely flat and naked, huge stretches of bare land under an uninterrupted sky, the ascent to Mount Carmel described by Saint John of the Cross as *nada, nada, nada, y en el monte nada* (“nothing, nothing, nothing, and on the summit nothing”) made perfect sense. It was not abstract theology but concrete, almost material truth: Reality (with a capital “R”) within plain reality. If landscapes are expressions of *soulscapes* and vice versa, I can assure you as well that Saint Teresa’s images of the thresholds and the abodes of the soul, her images of water, her whole Castillian outlook and nobility fit perfectly well in the town of Avila. The walls surrounding the granite historical buildings which seem unaffected by the rhythm of our times help create the impression of a cloistered urban setting.

Due to Merton’s tremendous capacity for empathy, he grasped at once and intuitively the inner core of John of the Cross’ and Saint Teresa’s teachings. So you are now lucky to benefit from their spirituality through Merton. However, and this is partly my reason for being here today, this shall not prevent me from suggesting that Spain still has this particular, very precise yet undefinable, difference to offer. It has little to do with the advertising rhetoric used during the Olympic Games of Seville World Exhibition in 1992. It has of course nothing to do with whatever clichés and stereotypes you may have about Spain. It is simply a quality

which is breathed in the air, heard in the language, embedded in the landscape, manifested in the architecture and perceived in the many little patterns of sensitivity and behaviour of its inhabitants. I am well aware that I am making a conscious and deliberate effort to idealize Spain for you now, because I would like to think, like Merton did with the American Continent, that the jewel of its promise is still there, waiting for us all to uncover it, together . . . And I would like to add that there are many people in Spain who would feel honoured to act as host to you if you ventured to explore a region of the world which is probably also a piece of your soul jigsaw.

So my modest agenda concerning Merton and Spain is to try and make Spain more Mertonian in the sense that, through him, our spirituality can be “revisited” and attuned to the present concerns of modern men and women while at the same time making Merton more Spanish, claiming that at least three of our saints, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross played a vital role in the shaping of this monk with a thousand names and no title. Part of that connection was initiated with the kind acceptance of Dr. Robert E. Daggy to come to Spain and give a lecture both in Avila, precisely in a building which had formerly been a Cistercian monastery and at the University of Salamanca. Sister M^a Luisa López, a missionary in Japan, has also recently visited Louisville. She has devoted one of her articles on Merton to “Merton y lo español” (*Merton and the Spanish*).

What follows is a sequel to the first providential contact. So now I am with great pleasure fulfilling a task as an ambassador of sorts, and I would like to bring four special greetings from Spain for all of you:

One comes from Father Francisco Brändle, Provincial of the Carmelites in Castille and for many years the organizer of retreats on St. John of the Cross and/or different spiritualities of East and West, in what is commonly known as “La Fuencisla” Monastery in Segovia. The monastery has the coffin of Saint John of the Cross and several important mementos to the time he spent there. My wife and I have attended several two-day intensive sessions on Saint John of the Cross when I had the chance of presenting Merton’s understanding of his religious path. Father Brändle gave me a brief note to let you know that he would like “to express his recognition and gratitude to all those in Louisville who work towards the development of humanity and who are directly in touch with the people with an experience of God.”

Another one comes from Father Salvador Ros, a Carmelite residing in the birthplace of Santa Teresa in Avila, in what is known as “Plaza de la Santa” (you see, she is affectionately known as “the” saint). He is Director of an international one-year study programme on the spirituality of Saint Teresa and Saint John which is open to professed and lay people and scholars from all over the world, mainly South America but also Africa, Korea, Canada and the United States and East European Countries. He says: “. . . through Fernando . . ., a friend and collaborator of this house, we send a cordial greeting to Merton’s friends in Louisville. Merton is a very dear figure for us and on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his death we devoted several lessons to his assimilation of Saint John of the Cross. We would like you to know that our programme is at the moment being followed by 30 students from 15 countries, and you are also invited to participate in it in the future.”

The third one comes from Father Francisco Rafael de Pascual, a Cistercian monk from Cobreces

(Asturias) and the director of their magazine, *Cistercium*, a kind of Spanish *Cistercian Studies* publication, where he has lately published some articles on Thomas Merton. He is helping in many ways to make him better known within his own order in Spain. You see, Father Francisco Rafael de Pascual has this special warmth and sense of humour. He studied in Spain, USA (Buffalo) and Rome. He loves his fellow-monks but he is well aware that there are up to four generations living together in some Spanish monasteries. The eldest, in a very real sense, belongs to the Middle Ages whereas the youngest belongs to the age of the Internet, and so there is a gap. So he himself is caught somewhere in between the extremes and very often smilingly appreciates both the foibles and the grandeur of such a quixotic mixture. He is very much in touch with Dr. Robert E. Daggy and Brother Patrick Hart and he would love to see more of Merton's works or writing about them translated into Spanish. He has the virtue of patience, which means he will get his way in the end. His own view is that 40% of the contemplative orders in the world are still found in the Iberian Peninsula, and out of them 80% are feminine orders. Eighteen thousand five hundred contemplatives in Spain make of it a particularly powerful spot in the world's "geography of holiness," with a vast potential for boosting global change or for preventing it from happening. This is why he most sincerely thinks that monastic renewal could be greatly benefited by the rediscovery of Merton's message amongst his brothers and sisters, particularly the young generations and the nuns. With enormous confidence he encouraged me to finish a book on Merton, which will soon be available in a Spanish edition and he has been so kind as to write a prologue for it which is full of insights, a few of them about some obstacles to the reception of Merton in Spain. I hope I am only paving his way so that he can soon come in person and talk to you about this in more detail. He sends this message to you:

...

And finally I would like to bring you greetings from Lorenzo Piera, who is in charge of the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Místicos (International Center for Mystical Studies)* in Avila, of which I will tell you more in a minute. Here is his letter:

"Dear citizens of Louisville,

As representative of the "Centro Internacional de Estudios Místicos de Avila," I feel very happy about this event, which I sincerely hope will serve to bring the goals of our center closer to Merton's summons to explore the heart in creative and fruitful ways.

It is my conviction that we can learn a lot from both our predecessors and contemporary pioneers who dared to enter their solitude out of love for their specific communities and for the world at large. Institutions such as ours can be, and should be, means of promoting dialogues and encounters, they should act as vehicles for the emergence and the convergence of integral answers to the crisis of our times.

Let me invite you to Avila and to the "Centro . . ." so that we can share lessons from the past and prophecies for the present, so that we can start to build peace out of small and friendly acts of recognition. Come and feel the presence of our saints in the town and in the countryside, and bring along with you the message of Merton and like-minded people. They are already very gently pushing us to meet."

I will devote the rest of my talk to this center because I think it has much to do with what I tried to convey in the title. I am using the word “network,” not as a substitute for the meaningful expression “communion of saints” but rather to suggest that we take it as a working model for the kinds of connections we can make here on earth, however pale a reflection of their communication it may turn to be. My contention is that in order to contribute to world peace today we need a vision of cooperation that embraces personal, communal and global levels within a networking dynamic. We learn this comes from the life and work of people who have reached final integration, those who have become peace-makers through their wholeness and holiness. Their faith-filled eyes still shine for us like silent lamps in the darkness of our collective night.

On the first and personal level, the seed of change lies within the soil of prayer, where we find a deep communion with the Spirit, with the whole of creation and with humanity, with all its historical lore and woundedness. Moreover, we find inspiration in, communication with and the full support of saintly presences from different times, places and faiths. The Christian will find Christ to be the alpha and the omega of his or her inner and outer life. Christ will illumine life from within. She or he will have eyes and ears full of prayer (in other words, the Christian will be “pray-earing” and “pray-eyeing”). Interfaith dialogue starts within, between the scattered pieces of our soul, and in some exceptional cases it may even develop into intrarreligious dialogue, the conviviality of different religions within the heart of a single person.

However, the seed of contemplation has to expand and grow, be exposed to sun and rain, mature under the light of communal expression and development. This, in our times, asks for a balanced sense of daring and prudence, openness and discretion, and for much flexibility on the part of structures if we want them to be servants and not masters of the spirit. That means, on the second level, breaking all sorts of fake epistemological frontiers, social labeling and categorizations in order to abolish inequalities, not differences, because unfortunately, the argument for diversity is very often perverted into a legitimization of dominance and power politics even under the guise of “higher,” “spiritual” interests. Fears of the other, automatic suspicion of what lies beyond our own narrow confines, outside our territory of thought or geography, can and should be easily dispelled by promoting face to face encounters with people from the other side of the mirror. After all, in the end we all share the same dreams, hopes and fears. We are inheritors of a common origin and a common destiny. We all have to face the mystery of birth and death. Encounters, forums, study or work groups, networks of a plural character can do much to honour the particular gifts of each, to avoid oversimplifications of the foreigner, the alien, the different, to transmute confrontation into appreciation and respect.

Finally, on the global scale, facing structural problems endemic to an unjust economic distribution as well as discriminating between real globalization and imperialistic policies and acknowledging that we are in debt to those who are brutally indebted to us is crucial if we are to build a common world, and to construct common sense, i.e., one which is meaningful for all. With different emphasis and from different standpoints people like Thomas Merton, the Dalai Lama, Vaclav Havel or the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize from Burma, Augn San Suu Kyi, are all saying that today’s politics need to be enlightened, purged off the “pathology of power,” put to the service of the whole community of living beings on earth rather than to self-aggrandizement strategies. We need a joint spiritual and ethical alternative to power politics, a conscious collective effort to

ground political action in genuine religious practice, that is, *charitas*, not fundamentalism.

It may be useful to remember now that the Latin root of the word “culture” means cultivation of the soil, that is, adjustment to the rhythms of the earth. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth means a whole reinterpretation of culture and religion, a marriage of action and contemplation based on a creative, life-bearing, inspirational worldview rather than a destructive and deadly one or, put it bluntly, it means allowing love to flow through human endeavours rather than letting it die of stagnation through bureaucracy, routine and inertia.

As a corollary of this scheme, I would like to read the final reflections of a magnificent study on *Culture and Imperialism* by the American professor Edward Said, not without mentioning that he acknowledges his debt to Hugo of St. Victor, the twelfth-century monk from Saxony. He says:

“No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things; in Eliot’s phrase, reality cannot be deprived of the ‘other echoes [that] inhabit the garden.’ It is more rewarding - and more difficult - to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us.’ But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how ‘our’ culture or country is number one (or *not* number one, for that matter).”

Within the large framework of this multilayered connecting work of peace-making, dialogue-promoting, and dream-daring initiatives I think centers like the Merton Center, increasingly open to the challenges of our world, and the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Misticos de Avila*, have a modest yet relevant, role to play.

The *Centro* . . . was created in 1990 as a Municipal Public Foundation and a non-profit organization depending on the Town Council of Avila with the support and the specific sponsorship of UNESCO, “with the aim of contributing to the knowledge and development of studies on mystic phenomenon as part of the integral history of humanity, of propitiating the analysis of this phenomenon today and its effect on social life, of identifying the common characteristics of the different cultural manifestations that concur in the mystic phenomenon, of systematizing and disseminating all the information relative to this phenomenon and of training specialists in mysticism” (Article 1 of its statutes).

Although the choice of Avila as the site of this Centre is associated with its symbolic nature as birthplace of Saint Teresa and St. John of the Cross, “the CIEM, by its very nature as an International Centre, wished to offer, right from the start, the widest possible general view of all kinds of mysticism, whatever the religion may have been in which it was practiced or developed, although, as is natural, greater attention is given to mystic phenomena of the monotheistic religions.”

The whole philosophy of the CIEM is summed up in the introduction to the project which was presented for approval before its creation. It reads as follows:

“Mystic studies are not at present a speciality in university departments. Their teaching and research are included in a small portion of the History of the Literature of the 16th and 17th centuries, or else in the History of Religions and the History of Thought. Thus, the undoubted importance of these studies is, unfortunately, reduced because all the “phenomenological” aspects (Illuminism, pseudo-mystics, those possessed of the devil, etc), Hebrew, Arab and Oriental mysticism, and the new mystic trends (charismatic movements related to Grace, Theology of Liberation, Protestant mysticism, etc . . .) are not included.

The above-mentioned aspects only represent a small part of the mystic movement, since, to some extent, all religions have their own mysticism. Consequently, the bringing together, from a scientific point of view, of all the mystic studies would be an effective support for research into the History of Religions and the History of Culture in general.

(. . .) The creation in Avila of the International Centre for Mystical Studies would give rise to the training of university specialists who would make a contribution to an integral history and a greater knowledge of different societies throughout time, such as, for example, 16th century European society, evangelizing movements consequent to the Age of Discovery, religious conflicts in the 17th century, the understanding and deeper study of Orientalism, and even the explanation of certain social movements in the present day Third World.

All in all, the International Centre of Mystic Studies, with the creation of this speciality and by means of the courses it will organize, seeks, on the one hand, to occupy the vacant space there is at present in the field of studies on mysticism and all the problems related to this movement (History, Society, Thought, etc . . .), and, on the other hand to bring together and concentrate in the Centre each and every one of the manifestations which the mystic phenomenon may present currently no matter how different they may be . . .”

The original project foresees the creation of three Departments: 1) Teaching and Studies, 2) Documentation and Research, and 3) Cultural Activities, of which only the third one has started to work with great intensity as you may appreciate through the posters I have brought. I would like to illustrate the scope and ecumenical approach of the work of this department by listing some of the initiatives:

- two different three-day courses on Islamic Mystic Literature, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Institute for Cooperation with the Arab World, including lectures on Sufi spirituality and literature, Islamic culture and philosophy, and the figures of Ibn Arabi, Avicenna or Algazel, etc...
- another three-day course on Great Contemporary Mystics of India, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Indian Embassy in Spain, directed by Professor Raimundo Panikkar, which focused on the figures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharsi, and Anadamayi Ma, and which culminated with a performance by the Indian dancer Alarmel Valli.
- an International Seminar on Jewish Mysticism, in collaboration with the UNESCO and the Israeli Community of Madrid. Topics of the Seminar included: studies on the Cabala and the Zojar, the Jewish presence in Avila and in Spanish mysticism, and on figures such as Nahmanides and R. Shem Tobn Ibn Shem Tob, by professors from France, Germany, Italy, Israel and Spain.
- a second International Seminar on Comparative Mysticism, which included as guest speakers Ernesto Cardenal, Maria Kodama (the wife of Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges) Annemarie Schimmel of Harvard University, Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, etc . . . with papers from social, literary, historical, religious and psychoanalytic angles on figures as diverse as St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, Miguel de Molinos and Roger de Lauria, Muhammad Iqbal and Thomas Merton.
- a congress on Music and Spirituality, with performances of Oriental Dances, Classical music from India, Orthodox religious music, Sufi music and dervish dance, Gregorian chants, Sephardic spiritual songs, Flamenco mysticism of Flamenco and a contemporary mystical music and poetry workshop.
- a three-week summer course on different aspects of contemporary spirituality, which included the presence of eminent speakers like Leonardo Boff and Roger Garaudy.

The courses have been attended by 1,250 students but personal or written/postal approaches and requests to the Center have been made by more than 8,000 people.

- And finally an exhibition on St. Teresa and the 16th century which is called "Interior Castle" and has been set up in the cathedral-fortress of Avila. It is to date, the most ambitious activity carried out by the CIEM, with great media coverage and great response from the public which comes to visit in numbers of, on an average, two thousand people a day or more, which means about three hundred thousand visitors in all. The exhibition, which will be on until May, occupies the whole building, even the cloister, until now closed to the public, and the bell towers of the cathedral, also out of bounds to general curiosity until now and to which access is permitted for this purpose. The exhibition will culminate with another international congress on the patron saint of Avila, Saint Teresa.
- The Centre has also been active in different symposia in Spain, Istanbul, the Dominican Republic, and in joint meetings on the history of religions with UNESCO and the Vatican.
- It has regular contacts with Spanish and foreign universities and has already signed a cooperation agreement with the Institute of Hebraic Studies in Palermo (Italy).

- Last, but not least, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Thomas Merton's death, the Center invited Dr. Robert E. Daggy to acquaint Avila citizens with the spirituality of Thomas Merton. Conversations were then initiated to study the possibility of signing another cooperation agreement with the Thomas Merton Studies Center in Louisville, which would mean Avila could be a future site of yet another Merton Conference.

Beyond the institutional cooperation, although without disregarding it, a meeting of burning, faith-filled eyes in the night which precedes the dawn of the new millennium, is urgently needed. I am sure their gaze has already joined the cosmic dance and they are duly celebrating the festivity of togetherness. But we may be empowered here by having a vision of them as connected and connecting, life-bearing presences, interceding in unison for the sake of the world. As a Christian, I do believe that living flames like Thomas Merton, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa and many, many others are already participating in heavenly communion. But what really matters for us is that their communion can be imitated and invoked through our networking, a sort of trigger of ecumenical synergy. What is more, by bringing together the archetypal models of different saintly lives we can perhaps learn to extract a few basic but extremely important lessons for our times and check how the news of the Gospel strikes a familiar chord in different humanistic and religious traditions. Here are some common features which may define these lives which at the same time were unique and inimitable:

- All of them face the basic mystery of birth and death without flinching.
- Humility, not self-importance, is the mark of their steps on earth.
- They see others as brothers, as their other selves.
- They have a deep reverence for all life and the world of creation. Hence their elected poverty yet feeling of abundance.
- They act out of love, compassion or charity. As they demonstrate their love through service of some sort, it expands until it becomes universal, though still concrete and down to earth.
- They practice an exacting discipline to separate reality from appearance. They are ready to forgive people but will always condemn ignorance for it leads to injustice and suffering.
- They are fully human, never aiming to be inhuman.
- They always point to an undefinable reality beyond / within themselves. Thus, they do not have a fixation on their self or social images.
- Their heart is grateful towards their ancestors and responsible towards their successors.
- They are radical, that is rooted. They have, and irradiate, a deep sense of belonging; at the same time, they provoke a sense of longing.
- They practice the art of inner and outer listening.
- Words and acts go hand in hand for them. They do what they preach, or keep silent in which case silence becomes very eloquent.
- They exhibit, without exception, a sense of humour to varying degrees according to temperament.

- Though they have models for reference and imitation, they are never spiritual clones. They are who they are to the full.
- They live life with perspective and spaciousness.
- They adapt to set structures which eventually adapt and are moulded by them.
- All the above features find expression in the world of the every day. Big changes and effects are brought about by them, whether they witness them or not, after many small, insignificant acts fully pervade their lives until they gain momentum and give way to something new.

I would like to finish with two passages by St. Teresa. Let us try to apply what she has to say in reference to the soul to our whole world, beholding it as the outer manifestation of the Interior Castle while following the unsophisticated advice of Thomas Merton, who (in a letter to the radical theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether dated March, 19, 1967) suggested: “What is needed is for the doors to open and for people to get around more and learn a little.” St. Teresa wrote:

“The soul is like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places . . . (T)he soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight. So then, what do you think that the abode will be like where a King so powerful, so wise, so pure, so full of all good things takes His delight? I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity.” (CI.1.1)

and later:

“You mustn't think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other, but turn your eyes towards the center, which is the room or royal chamber where the King stays, and think of how a palmetto has many leaves surrounding and covering the tasty part that can be eaten. So here, surrounding this center room there are many other rooms; and the same holds true for those above. The things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious, large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine, and the sun that is in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places which are above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such dignity.” (IC 1.2.8)

This, rather than soulless artifice or spiritual technology, is what I mean by a network of sainthood, an opening of all doors from within, and illumination from every saintly look that leads to finding the soul as the center of every chamber and room and passage and dwelling structure, be it social, cultural, religious or simply human, as center of thought and action, and indeed as center of transformation as we turn a page on the book of history and leave behind an age of extremes. Thank you very much.