

Call for Papers

DOWN TOWN / DOWN SOUL

Early Modern Mysticism & The Political

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, René Descartes coined the human Self as man's unique source of certainty beyond any possible doubt. This was, according to many, the birth of Modernity and the modern subject. Yet, that same century was not without counter-movements putting this self-assured subject thoroughly into question. One of those movements was the mystical wave that went over France and Western Europe. The so-called 'spirituality of the inner life' (*spiritualité de la vie intérieure*) was as much focussed on the human Self as Descartes was, but not in order to establish its self-assured position, but to analyse the position of that newly acquired modern Self and to lay bare the abyss on which it was built. In this spiritual literature we find a genuine "science of the subject" or "anatomy of the soul". To the construction of the modern subject, these authors added, so to speak, its 'deconstruction'. In a paradigmatic way this movement shows how modernity is bound to theories and formations of subjectivity in an era marked by confessionalisation and the emergence of a variety of models for piety and faith in different contexts – France, Spain, England, Germany, the Low Countries.

This construction/deconstruction of the modern subject that took place in the milieu of early modern mysticism was not without a socio-political dimension. It had an impact on both the way the citizen understood himself as subject of the new political order, and the way political power understood itself. The struggle in and with the individual's inner Self resonates in the political struggle in which the individual citizen establishes his Self within a state which conceived itself as a Self as well. The inner struggle of the early modern mystical Self must be examined in its relation to the struggle in the heart of the political Self.

The Titus Brandsma Institute is a Research Center for Christian Spirituality and Mysticism. In 2018 it celebrates its 50th anniversary. One of the events that year is a two-day international conference, entitled "**Down Town / Down Soul: Early Modern Mysticism and the Political**", organized by the Titus Brandsma Institute, in collaboration with the Oblate School for Theology San Antonio, Texas, US. The conference will take place at the Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, on Wednesday 13 and Thursday 14 June 2018.

The theme of the conference is twofold:

1. The impact of early modern mysticism on the formation of the modern subject: In what sense can the "science of the subject", present in early modern 'spiritualité' authors, be read as 'deconstructing' the upcoming modern subject?
2. The relation of early modern mysticism to the politics of its time; and, more specifically, the influence of the early modern mystical subject on the emerging political subject, and vice versa.



Proposals (max. 300 words) and short CV can be sent to Marc De Kesel (Marc.deKesel@titusbrandsmainstituut.nl) before November 30th, 2017.