

Carmelite and Chan/Zen Interfaith Conference to Be Held in Avila, Spain in July 2020

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CITEs headquarters, Avila. From mystica.es

The International Centre of Teresian and Sanjuanist Studies (CITEs) in Avila, Spain, plans to host a conference between Buddhist and Christian leaders from 22–26 July 2020 focusing on a dialogue between Chan and Zen teachers and the Order of the Discalced Carmelites. The conference is formally titled “2nd World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue: Chan/Zen Buddhism and Carmelite Spirituality: On Love and Compassion” and jointly organized by CITEs and the Centre of Buddhist Studies (CBS) at The University of Hong Kong (HKU).

The event will be held at the CITEs headquarters. Both English and Spanish will be spoken at the event, with simultaneous translation available, and video coverage of the event will be made available online.



The upcoming conference is a follow-up to the landmark symposium held in July 2017, which focused on dialogue between experts on two figures from each tradition. These figures, the Carmelite reformer and writer Saint Teresa of Avila and Buddhaghosa, early Buddhist author of the *Visuddhimagga*, served as thematic anchors for the conference's exercise in comparative theology.

Next year's conference will bring together two different figures: Huineng the sixth patriarch of Chan (638–713) and Saint John of the Cross (1542–91). As with the first conference in 2017, the encounter between Carmelites and Buddhists will revolve around papers and presentations, panel discussions, meditation workshops, and rituals and chanting, all conducted in an atmosphere of conviviality, fraternity, and open-mindedness.

According to the *Platform Sutra*, the seminal text of the sixth patriarch, Huineng preached extensively on compassion as the essential foundation of the bodhisattva's path, while Saint John of the Cross's mystical writing explored love as a crucial component of theological reflection. Another striking affinity between Saint John of the Cross and the Chan or Zen tradition as a whole is the tendency towards "negative" language, which emphasizes the ineffability of the transcendent experience and unknowability of the Ultimate through conceptual thinking.

As with all legitimate interfaith activity or comparative theological exercise, it should be noted that there is absolutely no intent that the conference ignores or deny the differences between the two traditions. Instead, dialogue is to be conducted in the spirit of equality, deep respect, openness, and wish for cooperation. The aim is to foster genuine engagement, enhance mutual growth, and to explore ways of

cooperation to approach the pressing social and environmental concerns of today and help improve the welfare of mankind.



CITeS is extending a warm invitation to Buddhist brothers and sisters, in particular those affiliated with the schools of Chan, Zen, and Seon, to participate in the event. Buddhist speakers from around the world are welcome. Interested parties from East Asia are also strongly encouraged to join this symposium.

Concurrently, there is a call for the third “International Prize Teresa of Jesus and inter-religious dialogue,” which is devoted to comparative studies between Discalced Carmelite spirituality and other religious traditions. Submissions for this prize will be considered for inclusion in a special commemorative volume.

Buddhistdoor Global will publish more information on this event over the coming months.