The first time Jean Séguy came to Padova to hold a series of lectures, he asked me if he could stay in a guest accommodation at a monastery. That was in 1983. His request posed no problem: right in the historic center of Padova, not far from St Anthony’s huge Basilica, there is a Benedictine monastery with an original nucleus that dates back to the 6th century, which was restored in the 17th century to the form that we see today. This is where Séguy stayed, to his own and the monks’ mutual satisfaction, as the latter soon came to appreciate his...
intellectual and interior qualities, and when Séguy returned a few years later for a second series of lectures, the monks offered him the room normally reserved for the Bishop.

I had known Séguy since 1977 and had already learned a great deal from his way of re-reading the classics. It was he who introduced me to Ernst Troeltsch, making me see how Christianity could be analyzed using sociological tools, still taking its historical dimension into account, but using a grid for interpreting it that could serve as a compass in both senses of the word, i.e. helping us to find our way in the great sea of history and also enabling us to broaden or restrict our range of vision with ease to suit our needs.

With Troeltsch, we can trace abstract ideal types of ethical-spiritual models and see how they generate a like number of diverse organizational models, just as we can exercise our minds in analyses of more circumscribed issues, such as the development of asceticism in Christianity and how it came to be a part of the monastic experience. For Troeltsch, asceticism and mysticism were the keywords to help us embark on research in this field with the right mindset. He also saw asceticism and mysticism as a sort of cognitive map with which to find his way to understanding the complexio oppositorum typical of Christianity – and of Roman Catholicism in particular.\(^2\) He considered monasticism like an open-air laboratory in history and society, where people with a calling to follow Christ (sequela Christi, Matthew 19:21) have been trying to combine the ideal of detachment from this world without denying the beauty of creation reflected and resplendent therein, to be ascetically separated, segregated from the world, apparently concealed within the monastery's cloisters, but mystically at one with the salvific tension that the world expresses. *Ex captivitate salus.*

What interested Séguy, in the wake of the classical studies by Weber and Troeltsch, was the ambivalence and, at times, even the paradox of monastic life in relation to evangelical radicality, and its claimed ability to combine mystical contemplation with an ascetic lifestyle. In particular, Séguy was fascinated by the sociological dimension of mysticism, the third type of socio-religious aggregation that Troeltsch discussed in the *Soziallheren,\(^3\) i.e. the

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3 *Die Soziallheren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen.* Tübingen: Verlag J.C.B. Mohr, 1912. The first English translation dates back to 1931, followed by an Italian one in 1941, while the text has yet to be translated into French.