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MYSTICISM IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Systematic Theology**

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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity**

**by
Elmer William Matthias
June 1945**

Approved by: *Thos. Frachino*
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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is not to present an extensive survey of Catholic mysticism. The field is too broad to do that in a paper of this type. Only the salient features are mentioned with the view of presenting the fundamentals so that the working principles of mysticism are laid bare. With this object in mind the writer proceeded.

I wish to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Dr. Graebner who graciously assisted and guided me in arranging and preparing the material. Special thanks is also due him for permission to use his essay "The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer" as the basis for the final chapter on true Christian mysticism.

I also wish to thank Dr. F. M. Mayer for his interest and assistance. He suggested the topic, and it has proven itself both interesting and profitable.

MYSTICISM IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

I. General Characteristics of Mysticism

'Mysticism', as it is commonly employed, is a word of very uncertain connotation. Generally it is so vaguely and loosely used that it conveys no precise meaning, and, therefore, has become very ambiguous.

It has come to be applied to many things of many kinds: to theosophy and Christian science; to spiritualism and clairvoyance; to demonology and witchcraft; to occultism and magic; to weird psychical experiences, if only they have some religious color; to revelations and visions; to otherworldliness, or even mere dreaminess and impracticability in the affairs of life; to poetry and painting and music of which the motif is unobvious and vague.¹

The history of the word dates back to the Greek mysteries. A mystic (*μυστικός*) is one who has been, or is being, initiated into some esoteric knowledge of divine things. The term was taken over into theology by the Neoplatonists along with other technical terms.² However, in the Latin Church

¹ Dom Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism, p. 2.
² William R. Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 4.

the word was not 'mysticism', but 'contemplation'. The modern use of the word is due to the writer now known as pseudo-Dionysius, probably of the fifth century, who gave the title Mystical Theology to the little treatise that was the first formulation of a doctrine on the experience of the direct knowledge of God received in contemplation. The word 'mystical' did not become current until the later Middle Ages.³ Its ambiguous connotation is of modern origin.

Mysticism is found in all the major religions of today. In our Western civilization it is largely the Catholic Church that keeps it alive. Their teaching of a mysticism other than that taught in the Bible dates back to about the fifth century, and is still strongly adhered to. As the centuries rolled by there was a gradual development of mysticism in the church which reached its peak in the later Middle Ages just prior to the Reformation. There is no iron-clad system for mysticism, but there are certain propositions and essentials which are basic.

The consistent claim of all the mystics down through the ages is enunciated in St. Augustine's celebrated formulation of what may be called the 'Great Mystic Postulate': "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is rest-

³. Butler, Op. cit., p. 3.

less till it rest in Thee."⁴ The mystics experience a union with God in this life. To define mysticism comprehensively is difficult. Various writers of different schools of thought have attempted to formulate it in such ways as these:

Mysticism may broadly be described as the effort to give effect to the craving for a union of the soul with the Deity already in this life.⁵

Christian mysticism is the cultivation of the consciousness of the presence of God.⁶

Mysticism is the sense of the presence of a being or reality through other means, than the ordinary perceptive processes or reason.⁷

Mysticism is the soul's possible union in this life with Absolute Reality.⁸

It is the direct intuition or experience of God.⁹

St. Bonaventura writes: It is the reaching out of the soul to God through the yearning of love.¹⁰

It is the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or more generally, as the attempt to realize, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal.¹¹

Religious mysticism is an immediate, intuitive, experimental knowledge of God, or one may say it is consciousness of a Beyond, or of a transcendent

4. Augustine, Confessions, 1, I, quoted in Butler, op. cit. p. 36.
5. Dom Cuthbert Butler, Benedictine Monachism, p. 76.
6. William Kelly Wright, A Student's Philosophy of Religion, p. 287.
7. James Pra't, The Religious Consciousness, p. 337.
8. James Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, IX, p. 83.
9. Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church, p. 9.
10. Quoted in G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama, p. 287.
11. Inge, op. cit., p. 5.

Reality, or of Divine Presence.¹²

Goethe wrote: It is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings.¹³

It is a direct and objective intellectual intuition of Transcendental Reality.¹⁴

Some of these definitions, or descriptions, are couched in the terminology of metaphysics; 'Transcendental Reality', 'Absolute Reality', 'Reality' and 'Being' carry the meaning of 'God' for the mystic. So the mystic's claim is a perception by experience of God, His Presence, and His Being, and especially 'Union with God'. This union "is not merely psychological, in conforming the will to God's Will, but it may be said, ontological of the soul with God, spirit with Spirit."¹⁵ In other words, God and the soul, the spirit, become as one.

This assertion of the mystics will be illustrated by a selection of passages from representative Catholic mystics:

St. Bernard: To be thus affected (to reach 'Union') is to be deified. As a drop of water mingled in wine is seen to pass away utterly from itself, while it takes on the taste and color of wine; as a kindled and glowing iron becomes most like the fire, having put off its former and natural form...: so it will needs be that all human affection in the Saints will then, in some ineffable way, melt from itself and be entirely poured over into the Will of God.¹⁶

12. Rufus Jones, Flowering of Mysticism, p. 251.

13. Quoted in Coulton, op. cit. p. 519.

14. Fr. A. B. Sharpe, Mysticism, quoted in Butler, Mysticism, p. 3.

15. Butler, Mysticism, op. cit. p. 4.

16. Quoted in ibid., p. 159.

Richard of St. Victor: The third grade of love is when the mind of man is rapt into the abyss of the divine light, so that, utterly oblivious of all exterior things, it knows not itself and passes wholly into God.... In this state the mind...strips off self and puts on a certain divine condition, and being configured to the beauty gazed upon, it passes into a new kind of glory.¹⁷

St. John of the Cross: The end I have in mind is the divine Embracing, the union of the soul with the divine Substance. In this loving, obscure knowledge God unites Himself with the soul eminently and divinely.¹⁸ It is a complete transformation of the soul in the Beloved, whereby each surrenders to the other the entire possession of itself in the consummation of Love's union; herein the soul becomes divine--becomes God, by participation in God--go far, that is, as in this life may be possible.¹⁹

St. Francis of Sales: As melted balm that no longer has firmness or solidity, the soul lets herself pass or flow into What she loves: she does not spring out of herself as by a sudden leap, nor does she cling as by a joining or union, but gently glides, as a fluid and liquid thing, into the Divinity Whom she loves. She goes out by that sacred outflowing and holy liquefaction, and quits herself, not only to be united to the well-Beloved, but to be entirely mingled with and steeped in Him. The outflowing of the soul into her God is a true ecstasy, by which the soul quite transcends the limits of her natural way of existence, being wholly mingled with, absorbed and engulfed in, her God.²⁰

Instances could be multiplied to substantiate the point that Catholic mystics are exponents of 'Union with God.' The union is not the complete and perfect condition which

17. Quoted in *ibid.* p. 7.

18. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12.

19. E. Allison Peers, *Spanish Mysticism*, p. 30.

20. Quoted in Butler, *Mysticism*, *op. cit.*, p. 13f.

will be experienced in heaven, but it is a foretaste of the glories to be experienced when body and soul partake of the 'beatific vision' in all its fulness and majesty.

This 'Union with God' is the immediate aim of mysticism. A secondary object is that through the experience of union the mystic will be endowed with special power to lead a more God-pleasing life for the benefit of his fellow man. The Roman mystic is, therefore, one for whom God and Christ are not merely objects of belief, but living facts experimentally known at first-hand; and mysticism for him becomes, insofar as he responds to its demands, a life based on this conscious communion with God.

The mysticism found in the Roman Catholic Church is not the only type of mysticism. Basically there are only two kinds, namely, a true and a false mysticism. The true mysticism is the mystic union between God and the believer which is Biblical. All other types are false, and there are many of these. Pantheism comes under this category, as does the mysticism of the Buddhists, Yogis, Hindus, Sufis, Chinese, and Catholics.

In the Catholic Church mysticism manifests itself under different types. Men react to the mystical experience in different ways. Perhaps the broadest general distinction is to differentiate between a mild and an extreme mysticism.

"The former is commonplace and easily overlooked; it is found in perfectly normal persons, and is never carried to

extremes. The other is usually so striking in its intensity and in its effects that it attracts notice and is regularly regarded as a sign either of supernatural visitation or of a pathological condition."²¹ The milder form experiences occasional visions of the Divine, but the event does not disturb the normal life of the individual. He still goes about doing his task in life without undue change. Augustine and St. Bernard are examples of this type. They very definitely experienced the Divine, and the experience was very real and true to them, but they did not, as it were, lose their sense of balance, and make their aim in life merely the 'Union with God'. One might even say that they lived a more useful and profitable life as a result of their visions.

Just where to draw the line between the mild and the extreme form is difficult, in fact, impossible. The extreme type is an intensified mild mysticism. The extreme mystic will experience the vision of the Divine more violently; it will, at times, become almost a mad ecstasy. He will be so impressed by it that his whole object in life will be to recapture the experience of 'Union'. He no longer lives for, or thinks of, society; he becomes an introvert, a hermit, a recluse. He makes mysticism an end in itself.

The mystic of this more intense type carries to an ex-

21. Pratt, op. cit., p. 339

tre two characteristics which are common to all mystics. "I refer to the mystic's demand for immediacy and his love of the romantic. For him the mediate, the merely reasoned, the conceptual and discursive is relatively valueless. He regards conceptual knowledge as ever unsatisfying or meaningless, and immediate experience as the only trustworthy guide and the only solid satisfaction.

"It is for him the only trustworthy guide, because it is the only solid satisfaction. And this brings us to the second of the two characteristics....The mystic is essentially a romanticist. By saying this I mean he exhibits in a large degree that confidence in emotion and imagination which are at the bottom of romanticism. He is usually gifted with more intense feeling and vivid imagination than most people... His confidence in them is usually considerable, and he often makes a deliberate effort to cultivate both."²²

St. John of the Cross, a Spanish mystic, was of this intense type. He had no regard for the weak brother. In his mysticism he started from a high level and never looked down.²³ Stigmatization, experienced by St. Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, may occur in intense mysticism, as do other physical phenomena. These phenomena will be discussed later.

²². Ibid., p. 366

²³. Cfr. Peers, op. cit. pp. 29 ff.

Another classification of mysticism is threefold: theopathic, theosophic, and theurgic.²⁴ The theopathic is subdivided into transitive and intransitive. In general, theopathic mysticism "resigns itself, in a passivity more or less absolute, to an imagined manifestation." The transitive mystics feel themselves urged on to act, to do something, as a leaf driven by the mighty wind of the Spirit. They are the would-be prophets and religious fanatics. The mysticism of the intransitive kind consists principally in contemplation, in quietism, and in negation. Suso and Ruysbroek are of this type; St. Bernard is also in this class. His was the contemplative and intransitive mysticism of the cloister. Insofar as he was an inconsistent devotee to his mysticism he was active in society.²⁵

The theosophic mystic "is one who gives you a theory of God, or of the works of God, which has not reason, but an inspiration of his own for its basis." While the mystic of the theopathic type is satisfied to contemplate, to feel, or to act, the theosophic mystic "aspires to know and believes himself in possession of a certain supernatural divine faculty for that purpose."²⁶ He probes the mysteries of nature and of God.

24. Robert Vaughan, Hours With the Mystics, v. 1., p. 36.
 25. Cfr. ibid., pp 36-38.
 26. Cfr. ibid., pp 36-45.

The third type, theurgic, "characterizes the mysticism which claims supernatural powers generally,--works marvels ...by the virtue of talisman or cross, demi-god, angel, or saint." The saints become religious magicians. "A divine efficacy is attributed to rites and formulas, sprinklings or fumigations, relics or incantations, of mortal manufacture."²⁷ Today, shrines of healing and holy water are more generally used.

This classification of Vaughan's limps in this respect that the theosophic mystic is not in a class by himself. All mystics lay claim to supernatural knowledge. The theosophic is also found in the theopathic, therefore it cannot be considered a separate type.

An early authority on mysticism, St. Gregory the Great, makes this distinction among the mystics: some are active, others are contemplative. This is somewhat similar to the mild and extreme forms. The active mystic is one who has a more or less normal existence. His experiences of God do not hinder, but rather help, him to lead a useful and practical life. The mystic given to contemplation devotes his life, his time, his talents to the end that he may achieve a complete and lasting union with God, that is, as far as that is possible in this life. His goal is to become one with God in all

27. Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 45-47

his thoughts, deeds, and desires, and therefore, he practices contemplation continually. The philosophic mystic, as St. Bonaventura, who seeks after abstract truth, is of the latter type. He is introverted, and loses all interest in society.

Gregory the Great considers both types valuable. The ideal, however, is a golden mean, a careful balance between the two. Contemplation must be present, but it should serve as a means to an end; it should add fuel to the fire and result in a more active life. But a strictly contemplative life is always preferable to the absolutely active.²⁸

Many Catholic mystics, among them Augustine, Gregory the Great, Eckhart, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, and others, have made Martha and Mary symbols of these two lives.

Martha, the active symbol, is a good woman. She ministered to the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless. Her work was holy and blessed. But it was not the highest or the best way of life. It was in the temporal sphere, and it was doomed to 'pass away' and come to an end, as all such services must do. Mary, the symbol of the contemplative life, hath chosen the better part....Her treasure is eternal and unfading....It has not only the present, but also the beautiful future. In contemplation God is all in all and He suffices now and forevermore.²⁹

Gregory the Great also symbolized these two lives

28. Butler, op. cit., cfr. pp. 213-293.
29. Jones op.cit., p. 32.

with the two wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel; Leah is symbolic of the active, and Rachel of the contemplative.

For Lia is interpreted 'laborious' and Rachel 'the sight of the Beginning'. The active life is laborious,...but the contemplative, being single-minded, pants only for the sight of the Beginning,--Him, namely, Who said: 'I am the Beginning'. But holy Jacob desired Rachel, but in the night received Lia; because everyone who is converted to the Lord, desires the contemplative life, longs for the rest of the everlasting Country; but first it is necessary that in the night of the present life he work what good he can, and exert himself in labor: that is to say, receive Lia, that afterwards in the embraces of Rachel he may rest in the sight of the Beginning....Therefore the active life ought to pass on to the contemplative, and yet sometimes the contemplative, by that which we have inwardly seen with the mind, ought better to call us back to the active. Thus Jacob after the embrace of Rachel returned to that of Lia, because after the sight of the Beginning the laborious life of good works is not to be wholly given up.³⁰

Another author offers this classification:

There are three ways in which the mystical passion breaks out through humanity. The apostolic type: the men of action, dynamic manifestations of the Spirit. The prophetic type: men of supreme vision, enlarging the horizons of the world. The martyr type: men of utter sacrifice and complete interior surrender.³¹

This division is hardly adequate; the field is not covered well enough. There is no provision for the mild and intense forms of mysticism, which distinction is

30. Quoted in Butler, Mysticism, op.cit., pp. 215,216.

31. Evelyn Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 61.

necessary for a proper understanding of the subject.

The difficulty encountered in attempting to break down the mystics into types is great. No exact lines can be drawn, for very few, if any, fit under a certain category. Rather there is generally a blending of several characteristics with one remaining predominant. Perhaps the best distinction to make then, and the most usable, is the broad division of the mild and intense, or the active and contemplative. This allows for any peculiar twist an individual mystic may possess.

The foregoing picture of mysticism given by the definitions, and the attempt at classification, point to some definite conclusions:

1. Mysticism teaches a possible communion and union with God in this life. God and the soul, or spirit, unite, become one; this union is not the complete union of God and believer in Heaven, but it is a foretaste of the final 'beatific vision'.
2. The mystical experience is immediate; it is God dealing directly with man. It is above reason, and more reliable than reason. The ordinary means of comprehending and knowing God are by-passed.
3. The mystical experience of Union leads to a closer reading of truth, and to an apprehension of the divine unifying principle behind experience.³² In all fields of

32. Cfr. ibid., p.6.

learning, theology, philosophy, or science, difficulties are solved, contradictions are erased, naked truth, reality, is known. A body of truth which is above the normal consciousness is open to the mystic.

4. To attain 'Union' the mystic must deny the flesh. Any sensuality or selfishness is disqualifying. The body and the mind must conform to the will of God.

5. The mystical experience begins where reason and normal consciousness stop. God, in His grace, comes down and effects a union with man. "On God's part, grace is the cause of contemplation, special as well as ordinary graces; ..."³³

33. Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 14, p.621.

II. The Mystic Way

The major principles of mysticism have been mentioned; a few more will appear in the description of the normal development of the mystic consciousness. In describing the mystic way these principles are put into action. The difficulty here lies in the fact that all mystics differ one from the other, as all human beings do.

No one mystic can be discovered in whom all the observed characteristics of the transcendental consciousness are resumed, and who can on that account be treated as typical. Mental states which are distinct and mutually exclusive in one case, exist simultaneously in another. In some, stages which have been regarded as essential are entirely omitted; in others, their order seems to be reversed. We seem at first to be confronted by a group of selves which arrive at the same end without obeying any general laws.¹

However, by taking a number of definitely mystical persons, and making of them a composite picture, a representative type will emerge. True, all of the outstanding characteristics will be included while minor variations will be suppressed, but a workable model and standard will be set up. Exceptions will be found and acknowledged, but the rule will stand.

Using this or a similar approach, authorities on mysticism have quite generally agreed that there are

1. E. Underhill, Mysticism, p.204.

three stages in the mystic way. They are purgation, illumination, and union.²

Many mystics, in analysing their way of life, also distinguish three steps:

Richard of St. Victor says that there are three phases in the contemplative consciousness. The first is called dilation of the mind, enlarging and deepening our vision in the world. The next is elevation of the mind, in which we behold the realities which are above ourselves. The third is ecstasy, in which the mind is carried up in contact with truth in its simplicity..... Jacopone da Todi says there are three heavens open to man. He must climb from one to the other; it is hard work, but love and longing press him on. First, when the mind has achieved self-conquest, 'the starry heaven' of multiplicity is revealed to it. Its darkness is lit by scattered lights; points of reality pierce the sky. Next, it achieves the 'crystal-line heaven' of lucid contemplation, where soul is conformed to the rhythms of divine life, and by its loving intuition apprehends God under veils. Last, in ecstasy it may be lifted to the ineffable vision of imageless reality and 'enter into possession of all that is God'. Ruysbroeck says that he experienced three orders of reality: the natural world, theatre of our moral struggle; the essential world, where God and Eternity are indeed known, but by intermediaries; and the superessential world, where without intermediary, and beyond separation, 'above reason and without reason', the soul is united to the glorious and absolute One.³

2. Cfr. Inge, Op. cit., p. 9f; Pratt, op. cit., pp. 374ff; George Cutten, Psychological Phenomena of Christianity, p. 31; Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, pp. 12-20. In an earlier work, Mysticism, E. Underhill had five great steps: 1. Awakening or Conversion; 2. Self-knowledge or Purgation; 3. Illumination; 4. Surrender or Dark Night; 5. Union. However, in Essentials of Mysticism she combines stages 1 and 2, and 3 and 4, thereby accepting the standard of three stages.

3. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 10.

Augustine (354-430) speaks of two steps that precede union: the first is purification, and the second he calls "introversion", or "recollection".⁴ St. Gregory the Great also distinguished three similar division.⁵ But St. Teresa, in a unique way, describes her pilgrim's progress towards the goal of union as that of a traveler walking through several rooms of a palace till he reaches the innermost room of all. She has seven Mansions, but the first two come under the broader division of purgation, and the last four deal entirely with various aspects of union proper.⁶ St. John of the Cross has a tripartite division: Spiritual Betrothal, similar to purgation; the Dark Night, an exceptional phase of which more will be said later; and Union.⁷ The mystics listed here are a select group, and perhaps an equal number could be found who advocate different stages, but the three-fold division is broad and covers the field adequately, while allowing for exceptions. Therefore this classification of the mystics will be followed.

The first phase, purgation, is a preparatory step. It is the foundation for the would-be follower of the mystic life. At this stage he attempts to subdue all his baser emotions, and also some emotions and thoughts

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4. Butler, Western Mysticism, pp. 36-38.
 5. Ibid., p.99.
 6. Cfr. Peers, op. cit., pp. 24ff.
 7. Cfr. ibid., pp. 36ff.

that are not base. All bodily needs are to be controlled. Natural impulses are blunted; natural desires are thwarted; natural wants are denied. Underlying this mode of attack is the belief that the finite, the material, is evil. The finite must be subdued in favor of concentrating every bit of attention on the Infinite. The farther one can remove himself and his impulses from the finite, the closer he is to the Infinite. God is infinite and cannot be approached through the finite; therefore, the finite must be subdued. "The only way in which God can be known is to sink the self into nothingness, close the door of the senses, insist on an absence of definite, sensible images, cease all thought, and approach God by abstraction. The self must be transcended, and all reason must be subdued...."⁸ This aspect of the mystic way is entirely negative. It is called the via negativa.

Moral purity is a necessary condition of the mystic life. Ordinary moral purity is not sufficient. It must be offensive, not merely defensive. The flesh must be mortified. "Like SS Augustine and Gregory, St. Bernard (1090-1153) is insistent that the necessary preparation and indispensable condition for progress in contemplation is the serious exercise of asceticism, of self-discipline,

8. Cutten, op. cit., pp. 31, 32.

mortification, and the practice of virtues. This appears in such passages as the following '...I would have you cleanse your conscience from every defilement of anger and murmuring and envy and dispute;'"⁹ The Catholic conception of moral purity, and the great aim of asceticism, is freedom--freedom from the things of this world and the distractions of the body. This view of human nature is thereby implied, namely, that the body and soul are regarded as distinct "substances" joined together temporarily in a rather external fashion, and they carry on a constant warfare with each other.¹⁰

To attain freedom methods calculated to produce indifference are employed. Emphasis is placed on the senses, "the portals of the body." St. Dorotheas suggests cultivating indifferences to the world in little things:

You take a walk and curiosity makes you desire to look at something; you resist the desire and turn your eyes away. You feel an impulse to take part in a conversation concerning unimportant things; you impose silence on yourself and go your way. The thought comes to you of going to your cook and telling him to prepare your dinner; you don't go. You see an object and you are filled with desire to ask who bought it; you do nothing and keep quiet. By mortifying yourself in little things you contract the habit of mortifying yourself in all things; and whatever happens to you, you are just as satisfied as if it had happened as you wished. Thus you see how useful these little things are....in

9. Butler, Western Mysticism, p. 142

10. Pratt, op. cit., pp. 375, 377.

controlling your will.¹¹

However, some mystics are not satisfied to curb their will in this mild manner. They go a step farther, and gladly walk the road of self-crucifixion. Suffering and pain become a necessity; they inflict self-torture to their bodies with joy. St. Teresa (1515-1582) said: "Let me suffer or die."¹² Such a statement sounds strange to our ears, but she saw no alternative. She was conscience-bound to suffer. The goal of union was not her only motive for thinking in that way, but she had the living conviction that it was her duty to mortify, subdue the finite body to please God. Likewise, Suso (1300-1366) is an example of the intense mystic in this respect. His methods of torture and purgation were inhuman. One of his biographers relates the following:

From his eighteenth year on for twenty-two years he sought to break his 'wild spirit' and his 'pampered body' by an unintermitting series of painful practices.... For a long time he wore a hair shirt and an iron chain, later a hair undershirt with nails, which pierced his flesh at every motion and whenever he lay down. In order not to be able to avoid the bites of the vermin (for he did not bathe in the twenty-two years) he put his hands in slings during the night. He bore a cross a span long, with thirty nails and seven needles, bound upon his bare back; every day he lay upon it or threw himself upon it. For a long time a door was his bed.

11. Ibid., p. 378.

12. Underhill, Mysticism, p. 243.

The pains of cold, hunger, thirst, and bloody flagellation he inflicted upon himself for so long a time and with such severity that he came near dying. He says of himself (speaking in the third person): 'His feet came to be full of sores, his legs swelled as though dropsical, his knees bloody and wounded, his hips covered with scars from the hair shirt, his back wounded with the cross, his body exhausted by endless austerities, his mouth and his tongue dry from thirst, his hands trembling from weakness'.¹³

Of the multiple austerities practiced by the intense mystics fasting is one of the most popular. St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) fasted regularly for long periods twice a year. One of her biographers says that for twenty years "she evidently went for a fairly equal number of days--some thirty in Advent and some forty in Lent, seventy in all annually, with all but no food." Louise Lateau for nineteen years took each day only a piece of apple and a piece of bread with a little beer; and this finally proved too hearty a diet and had to be reduced.¹⁴

The unchristian philosophy of extreme asceticism can lead to an unhealthy attitude toward family ties. This is illustrated by the words of Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), a "worldly" woman who entered the Franciscan order at middle age:

In that time and by God's will there died my mother, who was a great hindrance unto me in following the way of God; my husband died

13. Pratt, op. cit., p.382.

14. Ibid., pp. 380, 381.

likewise, and in short time there also died all my children. And because I had commenced to follow the aforesaid Way, and had prayed God that He would rid me of them, I had great consolation of their deaths, albeit I did feel some grief.¹⁵

The evangelical counsels of the monasteries, poverty, celibacy, and obedience have as their aim the reshaping of the will to God's Will. Poverty takes into consideration the bodily wants which make for physical comfort. Celibacy covers the large field of sex. And obedience includes everything not contained in the two previous counsels. Obedience to the rules of the Church, or of the order, must be absolute, and these rules cover every phase of daily life. The counsels are merely another device to bring the will into submission.

The ascetic life of the Catholic mystic is defended by Alvarez de Paz with this bit of logic:

The ardors of passion are cooled in the man who deprives himself of superfluous and delicate food. To throw wood on the fire and at the same time pray that the fire may go out is to ask of God a miracle. In like manner you tempt God, you ask an unnecessary miracle when you gorge yourself with food and in your prayers long for chastity.¹⁶

The fanatical zeal with which the mystics live the purgative life is amazing. But it is understandable if one remembers, as mentioned above, that the body and

15. Underhill, Mysticism, p. 261

16. Pratt, on. cit., p. 381.

matter, in other words, the world and all things therein, are considered inherently evil because of their finiteness; they are a block in the way of reaching the Infinite, God. By purging the body and mind of earthly, finite tendencies through ascetic practices the obex on the path toward God is removed. This active purification leads to a "purity of conscience, or aversion to the slightest sin; purity of heart, this being the symbol of affections--it must be free of everything that does not lead to God; purity of spirit, i.e. of the imagination and memory; purity of action."¹⁷ The will is bent Godward, and now the mystic is ready for the second stage, illumination.

While the purgative life dealt largely with the body, the illuminative life busies itself with the mind. This general definition will be acceptable: "The illuminative life is the concentration of all the faculties, will, intellect, and feeling, upon God. It differs from the purgative life, not in having discarded good works, but in having come to perform them, as Fenelon says, 'no longer as virtues; that is to say, willingly and almost spontaneously. The struggle is now transferred to the inner life.'¹⁸ The last sentence strikes the keynote of this stage; the struggle is now in the inner life; the mind must be brought to total concentra-

17. Aug. Poulain, "Mystical Theology", Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 14, p. 631.

18. Inge, op. cit., p. 12.

tion upon God. While the purgative life was negative, the illuminative life is positive. It explores and exercises new ways of acting, thinking, and feeling.

To describe further this phase another author says that it "is a mental and emotional enhancement, whereby the self apprehends the reality it has sought."¹⁹ Snatches and glimpses of the Eternal are received by the devotee; he sees God through a veil, not yet face to face. Accompanying these fleeting visions of Reality are emotional and mental sensations. In fact, "all the personal raptures of devotional mysticism, all the nature mystic's consciousness of God in creation, 'the world of imagination and vision' belong to the way of illumination."²⁰ Therefore, all visions of the mystic, and all physical sensations, strictly speaking belong to the second step. When the peak of rapture and vision is reached the subject is ready to enter the final lap in the mystic way.

Before proceeding to Union the methods employed in the illuminative life will be described. In contrast to the destructive character of purgation, illumination is constructive. On the ruins of destroyed patterns of thought, action, and feeling, a new scaffolding is erected for the will, intellect, and emotions, with total concentration upon God as the Goal

The most popular method is the "practice of the presence

19. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 15.

20. Ibid., p. 18.

of God;" the habit, diligently cultivated, of keeping constantly either in the fringe, or in the center, of one's mind the thought that God is present, or that He is even within one. If this is too difficult at first one should imagine God, or Christ, present at his side. Then the presence of God about him--to see Him by the eye of faith. Finally he will be able to realize His presence within him."²¹

To achieve this end the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) are highly recommended. The following is a summary of his methods:

The first exercise consists of a preparatory prayer, in which God's grace is sought that the exercise may be faithfully performed in His service; (2) an attempt to imagine visually Christ, or the Virgin, in some definite place and time in their lives; (3) to make a petition to God, appropriate to the event visualized (joy for the Resurrection--shame and confusion for the Passion); (4) to exercise the memory, reason and will upon the sins of Adam and Eve; (5) similarly to ponder over how for one single sin better men have been lost forever; (6) to imagine Christ upon the cross and to make to Him a colloquy, addressing Him 'just as one friend speaks to another, as a servant to his master', and reviewing how 'He has come to make Himself man...and so to die for my sins', 'looking at myself' 'to consider what I have done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what I ought to do for Christ, and so seeing Him in such condition fastened on the cross, to think over what shall occur.'²²

These steps are to be followed daily for weeks at a time; it is quite obvious that they will produce a profound

21. Pratt, op. cit., p. 387.

22. Wright, op. cit., p. 293.

impression on a person's mind. It is hoped and expected that during the practice of these spiritual exercises the individual will be carried away into the realms of Reality, or at least to its outer edges.

The Jesuits practice the spiritual exercises of Loyola to this day, but a new element has been added. Already in his day Loyola "Taught that even those who did not possess supernatural illumination, infused into the soul, of which the mystic thought highly, could achieve perfection by their own efforts and pains."²³ The ecstasy is no longer necessary for union. The method is still the exercise of the will.

In the words of Loyola the purpose of the exercises is "that we make ourselves indifferent in regard to all created things." We must desire only that "which may better lead us to the end for which we were created."²⁴ This indifference "is merely a necessary pre-condition, so that the will may free itself from all disturbing, confusing attachments and inclinations, and may learn to act solely in accordance to the divine will."²⁵

The divine will is identified with the will of the superior that obedience is for him a kind of unio mystica with the will of God....As the mystics see the highest form of perfection in union with God, in complete extinction of the

23. Rene Fulop-Miller, The Power and Secret of the Jesuits, p. 4.
24. Ibid., p. 5.
25. Ibid., p. 6.

ego, so the Jesuits seek to attain to God thru 'blind obedience' and the sacrifice of the will."²⁶

Unlimited obedience even to the sacrifice of conviction is required. The Jesuit must never indulge in any interior questionings whether his superior is in the right. He must obey joyfully and with zealous enthusiasm. In reality it is a "corpse-like obedience."²⁷

The exercises to complete this end must be successfully before a man becomes a full-fledged Jesuit. The tests wipe out the power of the will; they run the gamut of the senses and emotions; they reduce a man to a state of servility. This is the Jesuit's way of attaining oneness with God.²⁸

God is not the only object of meditation and contemplation.

This rather complete list occurs in a Catholic writing:

The objects of contemplation: God, His attributes, the Incarnation, the Sacred Mysteries of the Life of Christ, His Presence in the Eucharist, the supernatural order, every creature of God in the natural order, animate or inanimate, particularly the Blessed Virgin, the angels, the saints, Providence, the Church.²⁹

The meditation of the illuminative life is, according to St. Bernard, really the first step in contemplation; what has gone before is merely preparatory. It is only in prayer of this type that the individual actually begins to concentrate

26. Ibid., p. 19.

27. Ibid., p. 20.

28. Ibid., pp. 3-37 for further details and effects.

29. Aug. Poulain, loc. cit.

wholly on God. In this meditation the mind "gathers itself to itself" and banishes all sense perceptions and images of creatures and detaches itself from human affairs that it may contemplate God.³⁰ "Thus when a soul quits discursive meditation and ceases from the operations of the imagination and reasoning in its prayer, so that its prayer becomes wholly a working of the affection, and acts of the will,... it has then entered the way of contemplation."³¹

In other words, a mystic, while faithfully performing the duties of contemplation, will reach the point where he suddenly experiences a feeling of being close to God; his normal processes of reason stop; his only sensations are love and desire for God, for Truth, for Reality; he is carried beyond himself. This is illumination! He may see visions, and he experiences something out of this world; it beggars descriptions, but it is the most wonderful thing that ever happened to him. He no longer fully understands himself in what he does or thinks or speaks. But this too is in his favor and to his credit. St. Anthony (ca. 250-350) says: "That prayer is not perfect in which the monk understands himself."³² St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) also considers the cessation of conscious meditation as the true beginning of contemplation. He describes it as "being purely, simply,

30. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, p. 87

31. Ibid., p. 107

32. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 91.

lovingly, intent on God." Pere Poulain, S. J., a present day authority on mysticism, speaks of it in the same light, calling it the "prayer of simple regard", or "prayer of simplicity."³³

The mystics believe that when conscious meditation ceases then the rest is up to God. God in His grace can come down and lift them into the heights of ecstasy. The heart is full of nothing but love for God; it yearns for God, but it can do nothing of itself to reach God. It can only love. But God sees this manifestation of the heart's love for Him and He is moved to be with that heart; he desires to unite with it. When God does effect the union, then the mystic has reached his goal of Union with God.

In response to the question: What amount of such contemplative prayer is requisite?--Fr. Baker, a writer for the Benedictines, attempts to solve the problem when he says: "We must yield to our souls two spiritual repasts in the day, if possible we may; at least one serious one....To tell you how much time should spend at your mental prayer, I say half an hour at least,..."³⁴ The intense mystics spend much more time than this.

Illumination does not occur at every session of prayer; in fact, its occurrences are quite rare. Months or even years may intervene between such visitations. Nor are they

33. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, p. 107
34. Ibid., p. 108

of long duration. Usually they last only from a number of seconds to a few minutes. But the impression left on the mind of the subject is terrific, and he seemingly never tires on his attempts to recapture those moments when his soul yearned in love after God, catching fleeting glimpses of Him.

There is another phase in the illuminative which is not uncommon to it, yet it does not always occur in the development of all mystics. It receives its name from that outstanding mystic, St. John of the Cross. He first called it the "Dark Night of the Soul". This terminology is still in use today. For St. John, and other mystics, this experience served as the bridge over the final gap between the soul and complete union with God.

In it 'the spirit is purified and laid bare, to be disposed and made ready for union in love with God.' The full light of the Divine Wisdom beats upon the soul not yet perfected. She sees nought but the blackness of her own wretched state, and most of all she is afflicted by 'what seems to her a clear perception that God has abandoned her--that He utterly loathes her and has cast her into darkness. The thought of abandonment by God is a great and grievous affliction....All this, and even more, the soul feels now, for with fearful apprehension she dreads that it will be so with her forever.'³⁵

The soul, having just reached the height of the illuminative life in which it saw God as from a distance, is now plunged into the darkest abyss of despair, seeing only its own sinful nature. Mystics believe that it is final purification of self hood. Its chief characteristic is pain.

35. Peers, op. cit., pp. 26ff.

Its principle forms are the following: (1) The loss of the presence of God. (2) The acute sense of imperfection. (3) The loss of mystic feeling--spiritual ennui. (4) Intellectual impotence--the will and intellect do not function properly. (5) The pain of God, or dark ecstasy--an intense passion for Reality that causes acute anguish, which occasions a negative rapture, an ecstasy of deprivation.³⁶ In this phase of mysticism the pendulum has again swung downward preparatory to its great upward swing into the dizzy heights of complete union with Reality. Union is almost certain to follow, for as St. John says: "But on through the Night the soul pushes forward, on fire with the love of God and reaches Union."³⁷

Often the lesser ecstasies of God enjoyed in illumination are mistaken for true union. The mystics firmly believe that they have been completely one with God until they actually experience union in the real sense. This is expressed by Jacopone da Todi: "I thought I knew Thee, tasted Thee, saw Thee under image: believing I held Thee in Thy completeness I was filled with delight and unmeasured love. But now I see I was mistaken--Thou art not so as I thought and firmly held."³⁸ The minor degree of ecstasy confuses the mind of the novice mystic.

36. Cfr. Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 453-475.

37. Peers, op. cit., p. 21

38. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 21.

To avoid any misconception concerning the stages of purgation and illumination it is well to note that while they follow each other logically, they do not necessarily follow chronologically. In fact, both phases are practiced simultaneously throughout the lifetime of the mystic. The practice is continued even after union has been reached in the hope that a more complete and lasting union will be effected.

Somewhere in the advanced phase of illumination, no mystic can say just where or when, the mystic commences to unite with God. This is the goal; everything previous pointed to this moment; this is Union. To describe accurately this condition is impossible; the mystics themselves are unable to do this. To the non-mystical minded person much of the following will seem irrational and inane gibberish. That is a common reaction. But the mystics will be permitted to speak for themselves as they attempt to convey to others the nature of union.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173): The soul gazes upon Truth without any veils of creatures-- not in a mirror darkly, but in its pure simplicity.³⁹

Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) speaks of it as: an unwall'd world; neither this nor that. This fruition of God is still and glorious and essential Oneness beyond the differentiation of the Persons, where there is neither as outpouring nor as inpouring of God, but the Persons are still and one in love, in calm and glorious unity...There is

39. Ibid., p. 20.

God our fruition and fathomless bliss.⁴⁰

We behold that which we are, and we are that which we behold, because our thought, life and being are simply uplifted, and united with the Truth which is God.⁴¹

St. John of the Cross expresses unification by having the soul speak: Let me be so transformed in Thy beauty, that, being alike in beauty, we may see ourselves both in Thy beauty; so that one beholding the other, each may see his own beauty in the other, the beauty of both being Thine only, and mine absorbed in it. And thus I shall see Thee in Thy beauty, and myself in Thy beauty, and Thou shalt see me in Thy beauty; and I shall in Thee in Thy beauty, and Thou Thyself in me in Thy beauty; so shall I seem to be Thyself in Thy beauty, and Thou myself in Thy beauty; my beauty shall be Thine, Thine shall be mine, and I shall be Thou in it, and Thou myself in Thine own beauty; for Thy beauty will be my beauty, and so we shall see, each the other, in Thy beauty.⁴²

The physical side of ecstasy is thus described by Augustine: When the attention of the mind is wholly turned away and withdrawn from the bodily senses, it is called ecstasy. Then whatever bodies may be present are not seen with open eyes, nor any voices heard at all. It is a state midway between sleep and death: The soul is rapt in such wise as to be drawn from the bodily senses more than in sleep, but less than in death.⁴³

St. Teresa speaks in a similar vein: In the orison of union the soul is fully awake as regards God, but wholly asleep as regards things of this world and in respect of herself. During the short time the union lasts, she is as it were deprived of every feeling, and even if she would, she could not think of a single thing....In short, she is utterly dead to the things of this world and lives solely in God....Her intellect would fain understand something of what is going on within her, but it has so little force now

41. Underhill, Mysticism, p. 506

42. Butler, Western Mysticism, p. 323.

43. Ibid., p. 71.

that it can act in no way whatever.⁴⁴

The ability to perceive former mysteries clearly is also brought out by Teresa:

One day, being in orison, it was granted me to perceive in one instant how all things are seen and contained in God. I did not see them in their proper form, and nevertheless the view I had of them was a sovereign clearness, and has remained vividly impressed upon my soul. It is one of the most signal of all the graces the Lord has granted me....The view was so subtle and delicate that the understanding cannot grasp it.⁴⁵

From the quotations listed three aspects of ecstasy are evident, a feeling of oneness with God, an insight into truth, and a cessation of mental processes. In comparison to illumination, "the most striking difference is the substitution of passivity for activity."⁴⁶ Wilful, active participation on the part of the mystic ceases. He is entirely passive; he relaxes, allows things to happen as they may. What is to follow, if anything, is left up to God.

This also can be noticed that the mystic runs into difficulty when he tries to describe his union with Reality.

Mystics have two ways of communicating the results of their contacts with God, by description and by suggestion, or a combination of the two. His descriptions are addressed to the intellect, his suggestions to the imagination....These two ways of telling the news--oblique suggestion and symbolic

44. William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 408, 409.

45. Ibid., p. 411

46. Pratt, op. cit., p. 395.

image--practically govern the whole mystical artist often approaches the methods of music. His statements do not give information, but they operate a kind of enchantment which dilates the consciousness of the hearer to a point at which it is able to apprehend new aspects of the world.... In prose writing the mystics often use the so-called negative language of mysticism, which describes the supersensuous in paradox by refusing to describe it at all; by declaring that the entry of the soul upon spiritual experience is an entry into a Cloud of Unknowing, a nothing, a Divine Darkness, a fathomless abyss.... This sort of language, this form of paradoxical, suggestive, allusive art is a permanent feature in mystical literature.⁴⁷

Examples of this are copious:

Eckhart (ca. 1260-ca. 1327): a still wilderness where no one is at home; Tauler: The quiet desert of the Godhead. So still, so mysterious, so desolate. The great wastes to be found in it have neither image, form, nor condition; St. John of the Cross: The soul in dim contemplation is like a man who sees something for the first time, the like of which he has never seen before.... hence it feels like one who is placed in a wild and vast solitude where no human being can come; an immense wilderness without limits. But this wilderness is the delicious, sweet, and lovely, the more it is wide, vast and lonely; for where the soul seems most to be lost, there it is most raised up above all created things.⁴⁸

However, regardless of the literary device the mystic may use he still feels himself more helpless and inarticulate than when the common man tries to express his exact and inmost feelings. In the ordinary process of thinking we start from a comparatively simple foundation and build higher and higher until the furthest limits of coherent thought are reached.

47. Cfr. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, pp. 68-72.

48. Ibid., p. 75.

"The mystic starts where coherent thought ends--or at least consciously coherent thought--and tries to solve the Riddle of the Universe not by systematic observation and measurement of each detail, but by focusing the entire mental horizon into one single vision in which all detail is lost, and the solitary impression left upon the mental retina is a vague, but overpoweringly real and harmonious image of the Infinite One and All"⁴⁹

This accounts for the fact that the greater share of mystical literature has little appeal for the non-mystical minded person. The utterances of the mystics can be understood and appreciated only by mystics; all others are left in a fog of bewilderment. Even mystics fail to comprehend the writings of their brothers because only the one who is writing is sure of what he is saying, and sometimes even he is in doubt. After ecstasy has passed he has no clear conception of what occurred. His mental processes did not function during union. All that remains is a powerful impression on the mind, and few threads of the whole event. The lack of apprehension and retention is explained away in this manner. The finiteness of human thought, expression, and experience prevents a description of the infinite God. The finite cannot express the infinite.

There are also degrees of Union. One might distinguish two of them, partial, and complete. They do not differ in

49. Coulton, op. cit., p. 519.

kind, but in degree and in effect. Although the ultimate goal of all mystics is complete union, this state is reserved for a select few.

Complete union differs from partial union in this respect that it is a permanent Unitive State. As the mystic way is a progress, a growth, in love, that is, a deliberate fostering of the inward tendency of the soul toward God, so it is only natural that the proper end of this love is union. The common term is Spiritual Marriage. It is a "perfect uniting and coupling together of the lover and the loved one." It means that man's life is invaded and enhanced by the Absolute Life. Man is now a superman; he has an insight into problems of life that is beyond normal comprehension. He has the solution to the problem of life. As examples of spiritual marriage the most frequently cited are St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa, and St. Catherine of Siena. St. Francis and Ignatius Loyola outdid themselves in advancing the cause of Catholicism, receiving the strength to do so only after complete surrender to God in marriage. St. Teresa, a chronic invalid over fifty years of age and weakened physically by ill health and mortification, left her former way of life and reformed a religious order, likewise receiving strength from marriage. Also St. Catherine (1347-1380), an illiterate, after three years of retreat consummated the mystic marriage and let her influence be felt in Italy.⁵⁰

50. For further details of this phase cfr. Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 509-518.

The spiritual marriage of automatically guided activity generally comes last. This is the supreme climax of the whole. According to Poulain it has three characteristics: first, permanence; second, its transforming nature, the mystic feels that his acts are not his own, but God's; third, the continual vision of God or sense of His presence in the midst of and undisturbed by great activity.⁵¹

The mystic who experiences only a partial union does not live such a well-ordered life. His ecstasy leaves a profound impression on his mind, but acts largely as a stimulus to attain the permanent unitive life. At times such mystics experience periods of "dryness" or "aridity."⁵² They long to regain the "beatific vision", but find themselves unable to do so. This occasions remorse and disappointment; the heart is in pain because of its intense love for God, unrequited love. Asceticism usually follows to condition the body and mind for the desired vision of the Absolute.

Before concluding this section on the mystic way a few salient features mentioned indirectly previously will be noted to give a more complete picture of mysticism in action. The role of love is discussed first.

Love is the pathway to God in mysticism. A favorite maxim with some of the mystics is that "love changes the lover into the beloved."⁵³ In proportion to the strength and sincerity of love, such is the measure of success in contem-

51. Pratt, op. cit., p. 436

52. Ibid., p. 353.

53. Cutten, op. cit., p. 381.

plation. However, love is not an emotion by itself, but it contains other elements, especially of will.⁵⁴ Therefore, "desire and intention are the true explorers of the Infinite; the instruments of our ascent to God. Reason comes to the foot of the mountain; it is the industrious will urged by the passionate heart which climbs the slope."⁵⁵ As love and the will push towards Reality, so does Reality rush in on it. "Grace and the will rise and fall together."⁵⁶

Love should give two things to contemplation: ardor and beauty. The first is in the highest degree intimate and personal; the second is aesthetic. Ardor, like real human love, is a spiritual passion which is in no way sentimental. Beauty is poignant vision of loveliness, a more eager passion for Beauty, as well as Goodness and Truth.⁵⁷

The mystics' conception of love and their use of the word covers a multitude of things. "The description of love is made to include much not normally in it, and rapture and passion are known by this name. 'Love unites the soul to God, and the more degrees of love the soul holds, so much the more deeply does it enter into God, and is concentrated in to Him (St. John of the Cross).' From this it can be seen that the experience, which may start in and with love, ends by going

54. Ibid., p. 382.

55. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 106.

56. Ibid., p. 108

57. Ibid., pp. 111ff.

far in excess of our normal experience of love."⁵⁸ This also makes for confusion in reading their prose and poetry.

"This all embracing love has its prototype in the consuming passion of the lover for his mistress, when all his thoughts, desires, and, actions center about her. In fact, some of the great saints have seemingly made a mistake in the character of their love and carried on 'an endless amatory flirtation' with the Deity."⁵⁹ Obvious examples are the emotional and amorous relations in which many Catholic mystics believed themselves to stand to Christ and the Virgin Mary: the Holy Ghost saying to Angela of Foligno, "I love you better than any other woman in the vale of Spaleto."; the human raptures of Mechthild of Magdeburg with her Bridgroom; St. Bernard's attitude toward the Virgin; St. Teresa's "wound of love".⁶⁰ As a love poem the Song of Solomon is a favorite of the Catholic mystics. Instead of interpreting the lover of the story as Christ and the maiden as the Church, "the tendency of Catholic Mysticism has been to make the individual soul the bride of Christ, and to treat the Song of Solomon as symbolic of spiritual nuptials' between Him and the individual 'contemplative!'"⁶¹

Another element of interest is the influence of Neoplatonism

58. Gutten, op. cit., p. 33.

59. Ibid., p. 34.

60. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, pp. 19, 20.

61. Inge, op. cit., p. 378

on mysticism. Pseudo-Dionysius introduced Neoplatonic ideas into mysticism, and the taint has been permanent.

He (Dionysius) thinks of God as utterly transcendent....The universe, according to his system, has flowed out from God. It is a divine emanation, and there is also a cosmic process of 'return' back to the Eternal One....No predicates, not even moral ones, can be attributed to God....He is above all concepts, even that of 'Being.' He is beyond the range of any faculty man possesses....The only possible approach, therefore, is the way of negation.... We must give up our human activity and wait until God by supernatural grace effects the ascent by ecstatic union.⁶²

The finiteness of man and his inability to reach the Infinite through any finite means, the via negative, are remnants of the Neoplatonic Christianity and mysticism of Dionysius.

The major phases and the outstanding features of mysticism have been mentioned. To summarize, one might say that three things, (1) contemplation and ecstatic joy, (2) suffering (asceticism) and 'dryness', and (3) active service, guided and inspired by the love of God, make up, together, the life of the great mystic.⁶³

62. Jones, op. cit., pp. 34, 35.

63. Pratt, op. cit., p. 434.

III. An Examination of Mysticism

Now the questions arise concerning the phenomenon called mysticism. Is it real? Is it true? Or is it a product of the imagination? Is it a purely psychological phenomenon with a religious tinge? Is it a false prophet dressed in the apparel, expression, and language of Christianity? Is it a working of the evil spirits? These questions must be answered. In the final analysis, the only possible answer is the following: "Mysticism, whether in religion or philosophy, is that form of error which mistakes for a divine manifestation the operations of a purely human faculty."¹

Catholic mysticism is not a divine manifestation because it operates on principles that are definitely unscriptural and antiscritptural. Its fundamental assumption is that God deals with a select few immediately, without the means of grace, and in this immediate relationship bestows special favors of a spiritual nature. The Bible disagrees and teaches that God works on the hearts of men mediately, showing no favors. Our Confessions say: "The Father will not do this (draw any one to Himself) without the means, but has ordained for this purpose His Word and Sacraments as ordinary means and instruments."² This fact undermines the whole of mysticism.

1. Vaughan, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

2. "Formula of Concord", XI, 76, Concordia Triglotta, p. 1087.

However, a few more errors of mysticism can be mentioned, not for the purpose of discussion and expansion, but to impress upon the mind the viciousness of the Catholic theology of mysticism. It ignores the doctrine of total depravity and original sin; it minimizes and sets aside the vicarious atonement of Christ; it encourages work-righteousness, and leads to carnal security. To examine and expand upon these errors would be profitable and interesting, but the procedure is not in the purpose of this paper.

There is an impressive array of evidence that indicates mysticism is ^{an operation of} a purely human faculty. A close examination of the facts and practices indulged in by the mystics reveals this to be the case. Their practices in general follow a definite plan, a scheme which destroys or weakens certain faculties while strengthening other faculties which are more or less hidden in the human organism.

There are two methods in use to reach the mystic state; the one is negative, the other positive. The negative, purgation, is practiced for the sake of the positive, illumination. Therefore it is prior to it logically, though not necessarily in point of time. They are to a great extent contemporaneous.

The value of the negative methods and their psychological explanations may be summed up in the word inhibition. Their aim is to keep out from the mind the undesirable and to leave it free from all that is irrelevant and distracting. The value of the positive methods may be expressed by

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another common psychological term: auto-suggestion. They are the means which the mystic uses to get his attention under control of the proper ideas and emotions, so that these may dominate his whole mind and his whole activity. To say that inhibition and auto-suggestion sum up the aim and result of all preparatory methods, both negative and positive, may seem like undue simplification; but if these terms be taken in a large sense they do cover the whole ground.³

In other words, the methods employed by the Catholic mystics are merely applied psychology. This does not seem to indicate that the resultant ecstasy is a divine and supernatural manifestation.

What conditions bring about the periods of ecstasy is a question often asked. There is no simple and final answer to this question. The last years of adolescence seem more productive of the mystic state than either extreme youth or age. Sometimes poor health is an aid, or a fair degree of health, or the influence of a beautiful natural scenery, of music or poetry. In fact, anything that tends to arouse aesthetic emotion is likely, in religious persons, to induce the mystic experience. The wilful practice of solitude and silence may help.⁴ Also repentance and contrition, coupled with the general methods outlined in the previous chapter, act as contributing factors. At a given time any number of little things may send the mystic into a state of ecstasy.

3. Pratt, op. cit., p. 387.

4. Ibid., pp. 354-361.

There is no absolute method or series of practices which, if faithfully performed, will guarantee the mystic experience. The means used by the individual, no matter how carefully planned and exactly carried out, can never make attainment of the goal a certainty. "There is always an incalculable element to be reckoned with, say the Catholic writers, a supernatural and direct gift of God--which may be interpreted to mean some obscure but important psychical conditions which lie too deep to be induced by any methods yet devised. These particular conditions are connected with those larger and more obscure general conditions which we call temperament and mood."⁵ Not everyone can become a mystic, nor can a mystic always force his moods and ecstasies. But if given a person with the proper temperament the traditional training may result in the desired mental state.

The principles and methods involved in inhibition and auto-suggestion are exactly what might be suggested to bring about auto-hypnosis.⁶ Mysticism is chiefly hypnotism with a religious flavor. By inhibition the attention is narrowed blocking out all undesirable things; by auto-suggestion the attention is focused on the proper things (ofr. the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola).

Professor Coe believes that the very conditions of

5. Ibid., p. 372.

6. Cutten, op. cit., p. 43.

trance are such as to explain, in perfectly natural and naturalistic fashion, the content of the mystic revelation. He says: "The typical mystical process is, formally considered, nothing else than partial or complete hypnosis.... Therefore the most direct method of examining the formal conditions that now interest us is to make the experiment of self-hypnosis." The character of such an experiment when tried, with no religious ideas in mind, were found to be the following:

First, the bodily sensations were modified. A sense of strangeness came on, and it increased until the mind seemed to be there rather than here--alive, yet not 'mine' in the old intimate way....Second, the self-feeling underwent an equally marked change. It seemed as if the self melted into its object, or as if two fluids were poured together. The result was like a generalization without particulars, or a sort of pure being. Attention has been narrowed to such a degree that the usual contrasts and antitheses by means of which we define our world had grown dim. Consciousness was absorbed, as it were, in the bright object at which the eyes gazed, and this one object seemed somehow to become a One-All, at once subject and object, and yet neither one. Here is a counterpart of the absorption into deity of which the mystical saints speak, a parallel to the realization of a larger life continuous with our own and of the same quality, of which Professor James speaks....Third, the feeling-tone of the whole was agreeable....It is indeed obvious that muscular relaxation was in this case a chief ground of the agreeable feeling-tone. Moreover, it is easy to see how, from this beginning, if religious auto-suggestion had been active, or even if the strange experiences of the hour had been met with naive wonder instead of scientific coldness, pleasurable motion, a common phenomenon

of any degree of intensity might have developed. Here, evidently, is the root of the mystical feeling of attainment, of resolution, of discords, of the goodness of the All.

In short, the mystical revelation can be traced down to the formal conditions, physiological and psychological, of the mystic himself....The mystic acquires his religious convictions precisely as the non-mystical neighbor does, namely through tradition and instruction grown habitual, and reflective analysis. The mystic brings his theological beliefs to the mystical experience; he does not derive them from it.⁷

These words seem adequate and prove quite conclusively that mysticism is not a work of the Divine. Professor Coe's last statement is of special import. The mystics claim to dip into a reservoir of real truth and knowledge on their ethereal journeys. This is to them a proof of the reality of their union with God. But this too is an illusion.

The mystic does not receive anything from his union that he did not have before union. "The particular theological beliefs which the mystic carries away from his trance he first brings to it, usually in the form of dogmas explicitly held, sometimes as ideas up to that time buried in the unconscious or subconscious regions of the mind."⁸ The "new" truths are merely considered obvious relations because they were never consciously held. No thinking and informed person today considers such phenom-

7. Pratt. op. cit., pp. 449, 450.
8. Ibid., p.450.

ena divine revelations. The study of the unconscious and the subconscious is yet young, but it already offers solutions to such problems as these. Perhaps in future years a fuller explanation can be given.

William James, the eminent thinker and philosopher, held the view that in periods of ecstasy the human consciousness comes in contact with a body of truth and reality which normally is not accessible to the individual.⁹ However, this is only a hypothesis; it cannot be demonstrated; and certainly there is nothing original or new about this guess. It appears to be an attempt at a reasonable explanation of the aspect of cognition in mysticism.

Mental and nervous disorders also account for a share of the visions. The experience is comparable to that of hallucination. "In view of the spiritual exercises engaged in by the mystics, in which they endeavor to bring images or persons and events as vividly as possible before the imagination, it can readily be understood that they may occasionally so well succeed in making these images vivid that they partially or even wholly mistake these products of their conscious and subconscious imagination for objective reality."

As a matter of fact, records show that visions may be experienced by a group of people. In 1889, in a rural

9. James, op. cit., pp. 423, 508.

10. Wright, op. cit., p. 296.

section of France, Marie Magoutier, age 11, nervous and imaginative of temperament, saw the Virgin in a hole in the wall of a country place. The news spread rapidly. Many visited the spot. On August 11, 1889, 1500 people assembled there. A considerable number after prayer and contemplation, saw the Virgin, and a few experienced ecstasy. So the contagion may spread to others. The French clergy, in this instance, discouraged publicity on the matter and the fame soon died away.¹¹

Another author opines that "many of the lesser ecstasies have been simple cases of mental pathology, differing from other unfortunates only in the fact that their particular kind of insanity had a religious tinge." He continues by pointing out that books on psychiatry report a great number of cases of weak-minded and degenerate men and women who see visions, hear voices, and experience thrills quite a similar to those described by some mystics. He also states that there is something pathological in many experiences of the great mystics.¹²

The phenomenon of stigmatization is referred to by the Catholic Church as a sign of the Divine, an absolute working of the finger of God. This too is a false assumption. The occurrence is not infrequent among the mystics.

11. Ibid., p. 297.

12. Pratt, op. cit., pp. 369, 462.

The marks are genuine. The wounds of Christ appear on the individual: the nail prints on the hands and feet, the wound in the side, and more rarely the marks left by the crown of thorns and the lashings on the back. They appeared on Good Friday, also on every Friday of the week, depending on the frame of mind of the individual; on which occasion in severe cases they bleed, the wound in the side emitting a watery substance mixed with blood.¹³ A remarkable and unusual thing it is true, but also a pathological phenomenon according to neurologists, pathologists, and experts in the field.¹⁴

Louise Lateau of Belgium, in 1868, caused a sensation by becoming stigmatized. The accustomed marks appeared and occasionally bled. However, Theodor Schwann, a distinguished biologist and professor at Louvain, and himself a Roman Catholic, refused to regard the occurrence as supernatural, but diagnosed the case as a physical and mental condition.¹⁵

To avoid the impression that stigmatization has become outmoded by the present modern age of science the case of Marie Rose Ferron (1902-1936) of Woonsocket, R. I. could be cited. She was a stigmatized ecstatic, and received the name "Little Rose." The stigmata first appeared in

13. O. A. Boyer, She Wears a Crown of Thorns, pp. 124-153.

14. Cutten, op. cit., pp. 78-88.

15. Ibid., pp. 85-87.

1927 and continued until her death in 1936. She bore the usual marks on the hands and feet, the side, the back, and head. A few more were added to these which makes her truly unusual. An interesting account of her life and her sufferings is found in the book She Wears a Crown of Thorns written by O. A. Boyer, S.T.L. This book, bearing the imprimatur and the nihil obstat, is written with the hope that ultimately Marie Rose Ferron will receive the title of Saint. Other recent occurrences of stigmatization could be mentioned, but there is no necessity of doing that.

Likewise, levitation is only an illusion, a subjective feeling that one is moving through the air without support. Father Ribet, a Catholic authority on mysticism, loyally defends what the church teaches with the pious remarks: "There are but few ecstasies who have not been seen, at one time or another, during their ravishment elevated in air without support, sometimes floating and swinging in the slightest breeze."¹⁶ This statement is hardly factual, since the consensus of opinion of psychologists is that levitation is a subjective sensation which induces the mental picture of moving about without material support.¹⁷ Catalepsy and glossolalia fit into the same category of

16. Pratt, op. cit., p. 422.

17. Ibid., pp. 421, 422.

stigmatization and levitation.

The most conclusive evidence that Catholic mysticism is a purely human faculty is based on undeniable facts. A cursory examination of other types of mysticism not Christian gives revealing information; this includes the Buddhists, Yogis, Hindus, Sufis, and Chinese.¹⁸ Every phenomenon found in Catholic mysticism can be duplicated in one form or another in their pagan practices. The feeling of oneness with the Absolute, the phenomena of vision, catalepsy, and other physical reactions, the sensation of seeing and knowing absolute truth, the stimulating after-effects of the experience for body and mind, all these are reproduced with the same genuineness and certainty on the part of the pagan as one finds among the ardent devotees of Catholic mysticism. The Catholics condemn the practices and results of pagan mysticism labeling them as works of the devil. Yet they condone and encourage identical practices in their own circles because the element of Christianity is present. This is an inconsistency which an objective judge cannot overlook lightly.

In the light of the Word of God and science the proper view of mysticism must be that it is a human manifestation. Self-hypnotism, mental and nervous disorder, and insanity are all possible and probable explanations. Very likely no single factor in itself accounts for ecstasy, but a

18. Similar phenomena are found in various phases of Pentecostalism such as speaking with tongues, the holy barks and the holy jerks.

combination of the three. The possibility of an interven-
tion on the part of the devil is remote, although not entirely
out of the question. The thinking and informed person will
condemn Catholic mysticism as systematized delusion.

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1. St. Thomas Aquinas, 'The Substantiation of the Eucharist in
the Host of the Eucharist,' *Summa Theologiae*,
Part II, 2^a 2^e 113, 114, 115, 116, 117.

IV. True Christian Mysticism

The chief reason for presenting briefly the Scriptural doctrine of mysticism is to show by contrast the error of Catholic views, and to set up a standard whereby their views may be judged.

The only mysticism that is true and valuable is the mysticism which the Bible teaches. Scripture teaches the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the heart of the believer. "A wonderful doctrine it is, the doctrine of the mystic union of God with the believers. That God personally dwells in the Christian is certainly a teaching so lofty that, if we did not find it taught on many pages of Holy Writ, we should not dare to make any such claim.... Our God is an Infinite, a vital Presence throughout, and far transcending all creation."¹

Abraham Calov gives the definition of the mystic union: "It is a union of believers with God which is more than an agreement of his will with the divine; for it is a real presence, an actual union and communion, by which the divine essence, in a mysterious way joins itself to the believer's person."² As it is evident from this definition, there is a distinction between

1. Theodore Graebner, "The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer," Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. I, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

the doctrine of God's omnipresence and the doctrine of His presence in the believers. "Concerning all men indeed it can be said that 'in Him we live and move and have our being.' As the Absolute, God upholds all things and is the true reason of their existence. As the Infinite, He dwells in everything, also in every human being. But while He upholds all things by His almighty power, He is present in a spiritual way only through the operations of the Word of God. Where the message of the Gospel is proclaimed and savingly apprehended, there the Spirit occupies heart and mind, draws the soul into communion with Christ, and makes it a dwelling place of the Holy Trinity."³

Before the Lord departed into heaven he revealed to his disciples that intimate and blessed union which would follow upon his return to the Father. He told them the parable of the Vine and the Branches. Vine and branches have one life, are one thing. He speaks more plainly than this in his Sacerdotal Prayer. When addressing the Father, He says: "As Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, (I pray) that they also may be one in Us, that the love wherewith Thou has loved Me may be in them and I in them."

The promise given in the gospels is fulfilled in the epistles. Paul writes to the Romans: "The Spirit of God dwells in you." He asks the Corinthians: "Know ye not your

3. Ibid., p. 17.

own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you?" The word "mystic union" which has been used by the church from ancient times is derived from Eph. 5, 32, where the apostle speaks of the union between husband and wife as symbolical of that between Christ and the Church and says: "This is a great mystery." Writing to the Colossians he again speaks of the "mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The depth of this mystery is indicated when Paul exclaims Gal. 2, 20: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," or in 1 Cor. 6, 17 where he asserts that "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit," and again in Eph. 5, 30: "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." The most astounding assertion is found in 2 Pet. 1, 4, where it is stated that every believer has "become a partaker of the divine nature."

The mystic union of the New Testament was also taught in the Old Testament. The promise "I will dwell among the children of Israel and be their God," was the fundamental article of the covenant between God and Israel. It was typified, symbolized through the presence of the luminous cloud in the sanctuary. That was the living presence of God among His people. Ezekiel, during the days of exile, saw the glory depart from the sanctuary, but this same prophet foretells the age when God would again be united with His people in a new and more spiritual manner. "I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their

flesh....They shall be my people, and I will be their God."

And again, to the Israelites in Captivity, Jeremiah foretells the days of the New Covenant, or New Testament: "I will put My Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts and will be their God, and they shall be My people." And how shall this union come about? "I will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sin no more." Furthermore, God speaks through Hosea to the church of the New Testament: "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercy."

"The source and beginning of the believer's union with God is his regeneration. To speak with Luther: "Being rooted in Him through faith and drawing from Him the elements of a new life as the branches from the vine, He and I became united in substance and essence, so that the fruits which I bear are not my fruits, but the fruit of the Vine in which I am a branch."⁴

In his Commentary on Galatians: "Christ is so closely inwardly present with us as light and color are united with a wall. The Christian can say, Christ and I are one. Through faith you are so closely united with Christ that you and he become, as it were, one person, which can no longer be separated or distinguished."

4. Ibid., p. 19.

5. Ibid., p. 19.

The Scriptural, and Lutheran, doctrine points out that the union with Christ and the believer is effected by faith. Therefore, it is not an immediate but a mediate union. Also there is no actual fusion of the divine and the human substance. Man is not God; man is still man, and God remains God. Justification is distinguished from the mystic union. The union flows out of justification by faith, as a result. The Formula of Concord says: "Christians, being justified through Christ and reconciled with God through faith, are temples of the Holy Trinity."⁶ The indwelling of the Trinity follows upon the justifying action of divine pardon.

Quotations from Luther indicate how real and intimate he conceived of this union: "Faith appropriates Christ: and all that is Christ's; it is the personal union with Him, with the result that Christ and the believers become one body." "In and with Christ we have that person in which the Father lives bodily, so that I become one with Christ and with the Father."⁷

Christ has ascended into heaven, that is, He has been exalted over all creatures, is in them all and above them all. Through faith He dwells in our hearts. But we are to find Him only in one place, and that is in His Holy Word. Luther considers this a greater miracle than His presence in the

6. Ibid., p. 19.
 7. Ibid., p. 19, 20.

Sacrament: "This is a loftier doctrine than even that of His presence in the bread and wine." "Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, but He is also in your heart--the same Christ who fills heaven and earth. I say He is seated at the right hand of God and rules over all creatures, sin, death, life, world, devils, and angels; if you believe that, you have Him in your hearts. And so your heart is in heaven, not figuratively or in a dream, but really and truly. For where He is, there you are. John 17, 23. And this is the experience of the Christian."⁸

The indwelling of the Trinity is not a special grace reserved for an elite few. The mystic union is present in every believer whether he be acclaimed a great saint or an average Christian. Every child, young man, or old man who has faith in Christ is the dwelling-place of the Holy Trinity.

Now to mention the effects the divine indwelling world in the Christian's life. The Christian is illumined with spiritual knowledge. As Christ, according to Isaiah, was annointed with "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," Is. 11, 2, so the believer receives this same knowledge and wisdom through faith. It is more than simply a knowledge of the head. "The divine nature penetrates our personality. It operates within the mainsprings of action,

8. Ibid., p. 20.

the human emotions and will, now sanctified unto spiritual services. Paul refers to the indwelling of Christ as 'the power that worketh in us!' Eph. 3, 20. A new dynamic begins to work. We are 'carried along' by the Spirit of God. Rom. 8, 14. We are endowed with a new life, a life in Christ, a life together with Christ, Rom. 6, 8."⁹ The Christian's life is identified with the life of Christ. The essence of this life is love, the first fruit of the Spirit. John says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." "Everyone that loveth is born of God. God is love." "He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him and God in Him."

This dogma of the church is related to the every-day life of the Christian. It is the basis for Christian living. St. Paul realizing this in admonishing the Corinthians to "Flee fornication" backs up his demand with the reminder: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?.... He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." This approach vanquishes the powerful hold which sin has on a Christian; the Christian is elevated above sin. This is one of the practical applications of the doctrine of the mystic union.

Furthermore, the mystic union enables Christians to do the impossible. In the first place, they rejoice in sufferings. They do this because in the indwelling of the Trinity is a promise of the resurrection. Rom. 8, 11. The "Christ in them,"

9. Ibid. p. 85.

was "the hope of glory." Col. 1, 27. Paul could say, "to live is Christ," and also add, "to die is gain." Phil. 1, 21. A second impossible is "to love your enemies." The New Testament speaks: "Charity envieth not, beareth all things, hopeth all things." "Recompense to no man evil for evil." "If thine enemy hunger feed him." "Overcome evil with good." 1 Cor. 13; Rom. 12. "All the achievements of humanity are trivial compared with the reborn soul which is able to love personal enemies, help them, and pray for them. Here is a work truly divine."¹⁰ A third impossibility is "deny thyself." With Paul the believer rejoices in being "offered upon the sacrifice and service of faith." Phil. 2, 17. The heart of Christian stewardship is self-denial and self-sacrifice. Unselfish self-denial is impossible outside of the mystic union.

Another principle is at work in the mystic union. Christ lives and operates in the regenerate. Luther says: "This is the high art and experience of faith that on the one hand we are in Christ and have been saved from sin and death through His righteousness and life; on the other hand, that He is in us, speaks through us and is active in those things which we do as members of His kingdom."¹¹

"The union of God with the believer has a two-fold aspect. On the one hand, it is the active and constant coming of

10. Ibid. p. 88

11. Ibid., p. 89.

Christ to His saints. On the other hand, viewed from the standpoint of the believer, it is the new life controlled by the principle of love."¹²

The relationship between God and the believer is very close. Each individual soul stands in direct relation to its Maker and Redeemer. The kingdom of God is within you. The Holy Spirit works the assurance of faith in man. The guaranty of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit Himself. From this source flows the Protestant demand for freedom of action for the conscience. Authority of any kind, church or state, is not permitted to command conscience or legislate against its demands. This is the Christian liberty of which the Confessions speak.

Yet this liberty which the Christian has through the presence of Christ's free Spirit imposes certain obligations. The foremost of these is the duty of confession. The Christian does not confess under constraint or compulsion, but this too is the work of the Spirit within us. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4, 19. St. Paul says, "We cannot but speak by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." 2 Tim. 1, 14. This also calls for a confession of faith in the face of danger after the example of the early Christians and Martin Luther. Moreover, Christians must confess and defend the whole teaching of the Bible.

12. Ibid., p. 90

There is another implication in this doctrine. Christians are the "temple of the living God," "the Church, which is His Body." As such we are separated from the world. "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers." 2 Cor. 6, 14. In the same chapter, verse 17, "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." Although we are separate and distinct, yet we are the salt of the earth, a leaven unto good; the separation is not isolation. But the separation must remain absolute in respect to retaining the Word in all its truth and purity. The Spirit also works this attitude of separation within us.

Other phases and features of the mystic union could be mentioned, but the bare essentials suffice for our purpose. The true Christian mysticism is calm, sane mysticism, comforting and inspiring. Above all, it is truly spiritual, supernatural, and the work of God. By placing the Catholic views and the Biblical views side by side the discrepancy between the two becomes obvious; the former is overshadowed by the latter. To the Christian no other comment is necessary.

Conclusion

Mysticism in general, and Roman Catholic mysticism in particular, is no longer shielded by a curtain of ignorance. Today it stands and falls on its own merits. The days of superstition lie in the past. Its claims of supernatural intervention on the part of the Deity are unfounded. The various phenomena of ecstasy have no objective reality; they have no real, separate existence of their own, no substance. They are the products of a disordered mental and nervous condition, of insanity, of self-hypnosis, or a combination of all three. To the individual the experiences are real, but they have no objective reality as would be the case if God were really the cause behind them. The cause is human, subjective, and the results are human, fictional.

Christian mysticism, the indwelling of the Trinity in the heart of the believer in the supernatural way outlined in the final chapter, is the only true mysticism, the only mystic union between God and man. In it God is the cause and the worker. This gives it reality and truth. This agrees with the Word of God. The mystic union is the Word of God.

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