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THE RELATION OF THE UNIO MYSTICA
TO THE
CORPUS DOCTRINAE

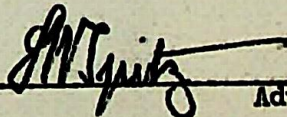
A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

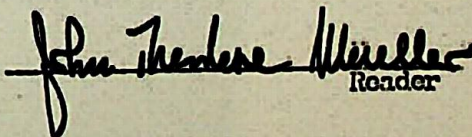
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Advisor



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the unio mystica, the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the heart of the believer, is one of the wonderful doctrines of the Christian faith. That God personally dwells in the heart of the Christian is certainly a teaching so lofty that, if we did not find it taught on so many pages of the Holy Bible, we would not dare make such a claim. The theologian who would present the divine truth most completely and truthfully cannot fail to lay stress on the unio mystica. Because this is so weighty and precious an article of faith, it is fitting that we investigate it thoroughly.

It is the purpose of this paper to consider the relation of the unio mystica to the body of Christian doctrine. We will note first of all how so many well-meaning people have practiced all sorts of mystical exercises which they believed would obtain and strengthen their union with God. Many have believed and taught this doctrine as the basis of man's justification, saying that "faith justifies . . . as the germ of renewal, or as the means of ingrafting into the new humanity."¹ Others seem to overlook this doctrine altogether, in spite of the fact that the unio mystica has more Scriptural proofs than many doctrines that are discussed at greater length in dogmatical literature and seem, therefore, to be given a more prominent

¹Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, trans. from German by Theo. Engelder and J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), II, 556.

position in the corpus doctrinae. Perhaps we hesitate to discuss this doctrine because the unio mystica is, in the words of Ephesians 5:32, "a great mystery." We realize that we cannot satisfactorily explain the union between God and the believer nor the manner of it. The very title of the doctrine indicates this by the use of the word "mystica", which means "relating to mysteries"; or "secret". The unio mystica is an invisible and intangible union, one that is imperceptible to the senses. But all of this should not deter us from making a thorough study of this doctrine so that it may assume its rightful position both in the dogmatical formulations of our Lutheran theologians and in the Christian lives of our people.

Even though the unio mystica is in the fullest sense of the term "mystical", we dare not interpret this doctrine according to our own notions. As we define the unio mystica we will note that it is a union of the believer with God which is more than simply an agreement of his will with the divine. 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. Scripture clearly teaches that the unio mystica is an actual and real union. In fact this doctrine is taught so variously and abundantly on the pages of Holy Writ that to deny it is to deny inspiration itself.

We also observe how the unio mystica affects other doctrines of the corpus doctrinae. Union with God is not an act of man, but the act of God through Christ. It begins when the Word of God is preached and as the Holy Spirit works faith in that Word. It continues in the communication and reception of the Word and it exists in the constancy

of faith and confession in the truth of the Word. The Word of Christ and the Spirit given by Him must first come to us and do His work in us, and then we shall be able to abide with Him and in Him by virtue of His power. We observe that there is no regeneration without establishing the mystical union with Christ. And there is no mystical union with Christ but in the regenerate. These two can never be separated; and on the way between the act of regeneration and our final and completed sanctification in heaven above, the unio mystica should never be forgotten. Even though the source and beginning of the unio mystica is regeneration, it properly belongs under Christian sanctification. This is also evident from the objects or blessings of the unio mystica considered in one of the last chapters of this paper. We note especially the assurance and the comfort this doctrine gives to believers in Christ. May the Holy Spirit be with us and in us to guide and strengthen us as we take up a more detailed study of the relation of this wonderful doctrine to the corpus doctrinae!

CHAPTER II

MAN'S FALSE NOTIONS OF GOD AND UNION WITH HIM

Man is definitely and incurably religious. There is no race or people without some form of religion, without some idea of a god or gods, at least in the form of supernatural power.¹ The experiences of age and suffering, of sickness and death that surround mankind oftentimes tend to completely destroy the enjoyment of the boundless, worldly, sensuous pleasures. The tragedies of life in many cases show men that there is a more enduring and deeper meaning to life than that which is found in the lusts and sensuality of worldly pleasure. "The recognition of the transitoriness of all things temporal raises the question of eternity."² The limitation of all scientific investigation, the short span of all human activity drives men to seek some avenue to a final, more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the universe. A feeling of defectiveness, a longing to overcome human limitations makes men strive for communion with God. Man will strive earnestly to satisfy his craving after the true Reality when he realizes that secular values can give no lasting satisfaction. He then recognizes the need of aspiring to God and unites in the longing cry that is the hidden theme of all human history: "Dona nobis pacem."³

¹P.E. Kretzmann, The God of the Bible and Other Gods (St. Louis: Concordia, 1913), pp. 1 ff.

²Adolf Köberle, The Quest for Ibliness, trans. from German by John C. Mattes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 1.

³Ibid.

But unfortunately men are blinded with false notions of God and communion with Him.⁴ A Lutheran pastor once asked a doctor: "Do you believe in the existence of God?" He answered, "Yes, I see God in nature, in the flowers, in everything. He is a spirit, and He is everywhere. But He is not a person; for He could not be a spirit, and He could not be everywhere if He were a person." This view that God is an unconscious force active in nature is popular today. "God is considered as the soul of the world, the spirit animating nature, the universal force which takes the myriad forms of heat, light, gravitation, electricity and the like."⁵ In other words, according to this view, God is merely a sacred name for all existence. This view of God is essentially pantheism since it denies the personality of God and ascribes to Him merely an immanent existence in the world. According to the pantheists God and the world are identical - two names for the same thing.

Since pantheism operates with two factors, two pantheistic views have developed. According to one view, proceeding from the unity of nature, God is merged in the world. This view, which is called pan-cosmism, was held by Spinoza, Goethe, the German and English Romantists, Haeckel and other materialists. Spinoza taught that the All is "deus sive natura", and the great multiplicity of phenomena in the universe are merely modes of the two attributes of God, thought and

⁴ Cf. Romans 1:21-23; I Cor. 1:21; Acts 17:22-25, 29.

⁵ A.C. McOiffert, The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas, as quoted by John Horsch, Modern Religious Liberalism (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Ass'n., 1938), p. 58.

extension, and God has no reality except through His manifestations in nature. Spinoza's pantheism exerted a great influence on Herder and Goethe and the post-Kantian philosophers and theologians: Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Schleiermacher.⁶ According to the other view, proceeding from the infinite and eternal God, the universe is merged in God. This view, which is called acosmism and which fundamentally denies the world or regards it as an illusion, is found in Brahmaism and Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism looked upon the phenomena of the universe as emanations of the Deity, while Brahmanic philosophy created the conception of Brahma, the world-soul. Only he can obtain salvation, that is, release from transmigration, who through profound contemplation has come to the realization of the illusion of phenomena and the identity of the ego with Brahma.⁷ Thus many Indian Hindus say: "I am Brahma," identifying themselves in that way with God. This pantheistic view is closely related to animism, the heathen idea held by millions of savages in India, Africa, and other remote sections of the world, which regards God as the soul, the breath of life, that always fled at death.⁸ These savages also see souls in non-breathing things.

⁶"Pantheism", The Concordia Cyclopaedia. Edited by L. Fuerbringer, Th. Engelder, P.E. Kretzmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1927), p. 563.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Lewis Browne in his book This Believing World (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 32 tells us: "That is why the Japanese word for soul used to be 'wind-ball', and the one for death, 'breath-departure'. Similarly, that is why the Hindu word for soul is still atman, parent of the German word Atem, meaning 'breath', and of the English word 'atmosphere'".

Indeed, he sees souls in all the things he comes in contact with. His whole world is filled with souls. For ages it has been the delusion of the natives of India, who call God: Shauki (force, energy) and will pray to a tree or a stone, saying, "Shauki is everywhere; he is in the tree; he is in the stone." All these pantheistic notions of God are, however, only fascinating deceptions of the devil.

Closely related to the pantheistic ideas of God is the notion of divine immanence. The word "immanence" denotes the presence of God everywhere and always in the universe. God is nowhere absent from the universe and He is never separated from its life. By this doctrine the modern theists attempt "to interpret the facts of God's universal presence and tell what that presence signifies or accomplishes."⁹ Immanence is similar to God's omnipresence. In the notion of immanence "we simply read the fulness of the significance of God into the announcement of His universal presence."¹⁰ God is the supernatural being who is the creative, quickening, inspiring Life, while the natural beings and things are acts or products in which the living will is expressed. The tendency of the doctrine is undoubtedly pantheistic. However modern theists, while accepting the doctrine of divine immanence, have striven to distinguish it from pantheism and to safeguard the interests imperilled thereby. Thus they claim that while God is immanent in the universe, He also transcends it. All things are

⁹William H. Clarke, The Christian Doctrine of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 330.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 341.

pervaded by Him, but He is more than all. So while the pantheist identifies God with the totality of men and things, the theists preferred to recognize God as including this totality and still being more and greater than it. This form of theism is called pantheism and is characterized by the formula - 'all things are in God', not 'all things are of God'.¹¹

Specific definitions of immanence vary. Some take it crassly and boldly as a quantitative conception: God is larger than the universe of men and things, which exhausts only a part of His being, or the universe is but His activity in space while He Himself in His immensity transcends all space. Others interpret it temporally: God is eternal and the universe is but a passing expression of Him, His manifestation in time, while He Himself transcends time.¹² The objections to pantheism are avoided by the insistence upon the personality of God. Personality seems to involve limitation - a self and a not self - and hence seems to be inapplicable to the being who includes all and embraces all. But the modern theists who propound immanence assert the essence of personality lies not in the distinction of self from not self, but in free intellectual and volitional activity. Such personality it is claimed belongs in complete measure only to the absolute or finite being, God.¹³ The religion of immanence

¹¹ A.C. McGiffert, "Immanence", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), VII, 171.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

asserts then that the divine is identical with the deepest self of man. Such modernist preachers as H.E. Fosdick say, "God and man belong together and in each other are fulfilled." "We reveal God, since the best in us is God in us."¹⁴

The opposite of immanence is transcendence, God's apartness from or elevation above the world. "In the word transcendence comparison is made between the two units of existence, God and the universe; while the companion word, immanence, tells of the closeness of their mutual relation."¹⁵ God is transcendent to the world, not in His abode or method, and the transcendence is not necessarily local or quantitative in any sense, nor occasioned by the moral condition of the world, nor established by any special will of God. The point is simply that of the two units of existence, one transcends, exceeds, excels the other, and the difference is a real difference in the objects that are compared. God is greater than all besides, and in every sense superior. In all in which God excels He is infinite, absolute, unlimited and free in the exercise of His powers.¹⁶ The two conceptions, transcendence and immanence, may exist together: God is wholly in the world or He is wholly apart from it. In their emphasis on the transcendence of God, the Barthians assert that God does not reveal Himself through nature. "We hold that God cannot

¹⁴In his book The Modern Use of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 366-7.

¹⁵W.N. Clarke, op. cit., p. 316.

¹⁶Ibid.

be known by His active presence in the world. His presence in nature and history is not denied, but is regarded as hidden so that what God is, is not revealed."¹⁷ The Barthians thus refuse to recognize a 'revelatio generalis', and reject the doctrine of a 'theologia naturalis', the natural knowledge of God.

But on the basis of such passages as Romans 1:19-20 and Acts 14:15-17 we must say that there is a revelation known to all men from the works of creation. Romans 2:15 tells us of the law which is written in the hearts of the heathen and clearly indicates a knowledge of God. So against the pantheists on the one hand, the Bible compels us to say on the basis of Ps. 115:3; Luke 11:3 that even though God reveals Himself in nature and is present in all, nature is not God or part of God, Who is rather transmundane and transcendent. On the other hand, the Bible likewise compels us to say against the Barthian view in the light of passages like Acts 17:28, "For in Him we live and move and have our being." that there is a general presence of God even among the unregenerate. This general presence, unlike the unio mystica (as we shall later note), applies to all creatures, even the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air. This presence is testified by the consciences of all men. Likewise this immanent omnipresence of God is testified in Scripture passages like Ps. 139:7 and Amos 9:2. Natural man who praises God when he sees the wonders of

¹⁷ Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 134 as quoted by Holmes Rolston, A Conservative Looks to Barth and Brunner (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1933), pp. 57-8.

nature receives somewhat of a conception of God's power and influence, of His overwhelming presence. But this knowledge of God as a result of sin has been obscured and leads to idolatry and enmity against God. In nature we meet with the general presence of God, but not with the gracious presence which blesses and sanctifies our souls. The contemplation of God's general presence cannot save anyone. Nature only reveals that there is a God; who and what He is and has done for sinful mankind is alone revealed in His Holy Word, the Bible. There alone can we find Jesus our Savior from sin.¹⁸

In addition to the false notions of the pantheists, theists and others thus far discussed, there are the many and varied notions of God and ways to attain union with Him that are held by philosophers and scholars who are termed 'mystics'. As Rufus Jones points out, "a large element of confusion attaches to the word 'mysticism'."¹⁹ The word 'mystic' was born in connection with the mystery religions of Greece. It came into use in the early schools of Neo-Platonism. Now the term 'mystic' is applied to all those who attempt to reach a communion or union with the divine through an immediate, intuitive, or experimental knowledge of God. One may say that 'mysticism' is "a consciousness of a Beyond, or of a transcendent Reality, or of a Divine Presence."²⁰ Mystics look upon mysticism as a special third

¹⁸ Acts 4:12; Luke 11:28.

¹⁹ In his book, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 250.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 251.

kind of knowledge above sense perception and reason. Mysticism usually arises out of intensified sensation. Mystics themselves admit that mysticism is "a feeling state issuing from a great tidal wave of emotion."²¹ The mystic through discipline and contemplation comes to have this peculiar mystical knowledge or sense which enables him to apprehend truths of the divine not available through any other means.

Mysticism has existed in all civilized European countries for the last 1400 years and undoubtedly many centuries longer in the countries of the Middle and Far East. Yet in spite of this wide temporal and geographical distribution, there is a remarkable simplicity and uniformity in the mystical declaration of principles wherever found. Three metaphorical terms especially have been used for the act or fact of knowing in the mystical way: Union, Love, and Ecstasy. Union emphasizes what is claimed as the fundamental characteristic of this act, namely that the subject who knows, and the object which is known, become in the act one and the same, by the one being absorbed in the other. Love signifies the force which attracts and binds together the two. Ecstasy means literally a 'standing out', or getting out of one's self, and alludes to the union of the knowing subject with the known object.²² The object with whom the mystics desire union is some form of the divinity.

²¹Herman Wieman & Bernard Meland, American Philosophies of Religion (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936), p. 117.

²²Knight Dunlap, Mysticism, Freudianism and Scientific Psychology (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1920), pp. 16-17.

Most mysticism lives on the assurance that in the depths of men's souls flow hidden springs of the divinity - a fundamentally pantheistic notion. Mysticism has been well defined as "the form of piety that finds its highest satisfaction in the immediate union of the soul's essence with the divine essence."²³

The East is the natural home of the mystic. There we find the most complete development of the teaching of the essential unity of the human soul with its divine source. This teaching as revealed in the literature of the Hindus and Brahmans has already been discussed when we considered pantheism.²⁴ The same idea weakened to the soul's similarity to its primal source is found in the Chinese Tao-mystic, in Persian Sufism, and among Orphic or Dionysian cults. As Adolf Köberle well points out:²⁵

Whether it be the enthusiastic cry "Ois. eip." at the Taurobolium, or the Neo-Platonic conception of the soul that regards the soul as an outflowing of the ocean of divine reason, or the belief of the fanatic emanations "from the flowing light of divinity" are received; whether it be the presumptuous identification of God and man in Angelus Silesius' Cherubic Pilgrim, or in the modern mysticism of the Stundenbuch, where God, who cannot live without humanity, first reaches perfection by developing in us - all these, regardless of all differences of time and infra-worldly divine nature of the essence of the soul.

Western mysticism, while obviously dependent upon the stimulus of the East, has a distinctive tradition of its own. Undoubtedly much

²³ Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁴ Supra., p. 2: Brahmanic philosophy.

²⁵ In his book, The Quest for Holiness, pp. 8-9.

of the mysticism found in the days of the early Christian Church can be traced to Gnosticism. The Gnostics were primarily interested in the redemption of the spirit of man from his material environment. Christ, they believed, in revealing God to man, had placed redemption within the grasp of those capable of receiving and understanding his message, and through the knowledge imparted by him he had brought about a union with God, which means ultimately a complete and permanent break with the flesh and the world, and an eternal life in the spiritual realm.²⁶

Another source of western mysticism which actually had more influence than the Gnostics on early Christian leaders was the Neo-Platonism developed by Plotinus in the third century. Plotinus belonged to the so-called Alexandrian school of philosophy. His theories were edited by his pupil Porphyry in six Enneads. Plotinus considered himself a follower of Plato's philosophy and thus the Alexandrian philosophy is usually called Neo-Platonism. Nevertheless, Semitic influences are discernible, probably from Philo. Some think he obtained some of his views from Dionysius, who will be discussed later. According to the Alexandrians, that which is known, in the higher or third kind of knowledge, is Divine Being or God. In the act of knowing, therefore, in union or ecstasy, the knower is absorbed into and

²⁶ Arthur C. McGiffert, "Mysticism in the Early Church," The American Journal of Theology, XI (July, 1907), 411. - McGiffert quotes Hippolytus (Phil., X, 13) as saying of the Gnostic Valentinus: "He asserts . . . that Christ came down from within the pleroma to save the erring spirit who resides in our inner man, which they say obtains salvation on account of the indwelling Spirit."

is indistinguishable from the Divine Known. This union is not attained at any moment at which the mystic may desire it, but is the consummation of long effort and is achieved but occasionally. Plotinus, according to Porphyry, attained the mystic experience but four times during his lifetime and Porphyry himself achieved it only once. "Indeed his goal, his purpose, his end was to approach the supreme divinity and to unite himself with the divinity."²⁷

Plotinus obviously was not a Christian; but his influence was later felt in the mysticism of medieval Catholicism. Mysticism was a constituent part of philosophical Christianity from the beginning. It had a strong hold especially on the theology and piety of the Eastern Church. In the Western Church John Scotus Erigena was the first exponent of importance. About 850 A.D. he translated into Latin from the Greek the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite who is supposed to have been converted by St. Paul. However, Dionysius' collection of writings seem to have been written about 500 A.D.²⁸ It seems the aim of this work was to incorporate Neo-Platonism into the teachings of the Church and thus remove it as an opponent. John's chief work, De Divisione Naturae, really bridged the way from Neo-Platonism to the speculative mysticism of the Middle Ages. John Scotus was not a mystic in the complete sense of the word, but he laid the foundation and provided the stimulus for the mystical thinking of

²⁷ Knight Dunlap, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁸ Cf. J.L. Nove, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1913), I, 167.

the next five hundred years.

Soon after John Scotus a movement fostering mysticism that led to piety became evident. Classical expression was given to the aims of this movement by Othloh of Emmeram (d. 1083). He gave subjective treatment to all the materials of doctrine and faith and popularized the mystic attitude. From this time on the laity welcomed contemplation. New monastic orders arose with a rigorous discipline. One of the immediate results was the enthusiasm engendered for the Crusades. The new piety of the Crusades developed the desire to follow Christ in all the stages of His sufferings. Negative asceticism, employing self-denial and emphasizing self-abnegation received a positive purpose: to follow Christ and to become like him. Mysticism, embracing Christ, as indicated by Augustine and enlarged upon by John Scotus, became a mighty current. In the teachings of Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1141), the leader of the Victorines, we find an exposition of the method employed by the mystics. He emphasized three stages through which the soul attains knowledge of divine things: 1) sensual perception; 2) a search after the secret spiritual meaning of that which is perceived; and 3) an untrammled vision of the essence of things which is possible alone through the Spirit of God. Hugo endeavored to create the personal experience of salvation and of union with Christ. "We can come to Christ only on the same path on which He came to us, through humility and suffering."²⁹ Hugo's mystical writings found much of its stimulus in the writings of Augustine.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 186.

However the most popular mystic of this time was the saintly monk, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153), who in protest against the hard mind of Abelard, sought to mold Christian thought nearer to the sentiments of the heart and to the practical cultivation of the divine life. He created a coherent system of the order of salvation, which is Christ-centered, built on religious experience, and ended in mystic ecstasy. The chief source of Bernard's mystic piety are his eighty-six sermons on the Song of Solomon which are highly allegorical and only reach the first verse of Chapter III. Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ is said to be a mosaic from St. Bernard. Bernard is a mystic who is really active in works for Christ. For him the active life followed the contemplative life.

The noblest representative of the Bernardian mysticism is St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). Born as the son of a wealthy Italian merchant, he left all he had and followed Jesus in His lowliness with the greatest sincerity. Francis was a true mystic, a 'God intoxicated man', who finds God everywhere.³⁰ His stress on external poverty was for him a means and not the end it became for his more fanatical followers. He is credited with calling poverty "the heavenly virtue whereby all earthly things and fleeting are trodden underfoot and all hindrances lifted from the soul, so that she may be free to unite

³⁰ For this reason St. Francis was deeply in love with nature around him as illustrated in the hymn of the Creature, Il Cantico del Sole, "The Song of the Sun." So was his love for stones, trees, flowers, birds, and even the art. Cf. James J. Walsh, High Points of Medieval Culture (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1937), pp. 258-274.

herself to the Eternal God."³¹

Dominican mysticism becomes the practice of several groups in the Netherlands and in Germany during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Historically the rise of this mysticism is to be traced back to the female monasteries under the supervision of the Dominican order. The new mysticism is Thomistic in principle, although the Aristotelian outlook was broadened by Platonic and Neo-Platonic principles which had reached the West through the writings of John Scotus. For this reason the Dominican mysticism was to some extent more philosophical and thus in danger of pantheism and sometimes less Biblical than the Bernardian type of mysticism.³²

Among the most prominent of the Dominican mystics are:

- 1) Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), known as the father of German mysticism;
- 2) Henry Suso (1295-1366), who interprets Eckhart's mystical approach in terms of the intensely passionate love lyrics of an age of chivalry;
- 3) John Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), a Flemish mystic, who after a career as a parish priest in Brussels, at the age of fifty,

³¹Evelyn Underhill, The Mystics of the Church (New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), p. 91.

³²J.L. Neve, *op. cit.*, I, 213. . The author goes on to say: "It (Dominican mysticism) showed little interest in the historical foundations of Christianity, but rather centered its interest in the emancipation of the soul, its illumination and blissful communion with God." This may have been true in individual cases, but when one considers the 'Brethren of the Common Life' and their emphasis on having the Bible in the secular language of the people, one hesitates to make such a sweeping judgment of the mystics of this period. The author does point out that the German mystics showed a deep appreciation for an active Christian life of duty, and says the mystics did not depart in any marked degree from the teaching and practice of the Church.

accompanied by several companions, retired to a hermitage in the forest of Soignes and there founded a religious community; 4) John Tauler (1300-1361), a preacher of great power in Strasbourg. He and Suso were members of the loosely organized mystical band known as 'Friends of God.' Tauler's mysticism is truly evangelical and Christ-centered: 5) Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) the alleged author of The Imitation of Christ, which has had the most marvelous circulation of all theological literature. Thomas à Kempis was a member of the 'Brethren of the Common Life' which in the century preceding the Reformation became the foster soil for mystic speculation and practical piety.

The emphasis placed by Protestant reformers on personal rather than institutional religion might be expected to encourage the mystical approach to God and to produce flourishing schools of mystics. But this does not seem to have been the case. But some modern mystics like to include Luther as one of the mystics.³³ While it is true that Luther was deeply influenced by the Theologia Germanica and even edited its publication in 1516 and re-edited it in 1518, he seems to have been misled by its serious devotional fervor. The contents of this work are thorough-going Neo-Platonism. Luther also had great respect for the German mystics. He liked their practical emphasis on the way to God, their translation of the ideas of the dogmaticians into practical religious truths expressed in the mother tongue; also the

³³ Cf. Evelyn Underhill, op. cit., p. 212. Miss Underhill even goes on to say: "The Lutheran faith, which is the foundation of Luther's theology, has far more the character of mystical adherence to God than of mere belief."

religious and evangelical depth which was found in their writings. But his aversion to quietism, his vivid sense of personality in God and man and his strong ethical interest kept him from embracing mysticism in its peculiar character.³⁴

Even though mysticism has never really been at home in the Lutheran Church and still less in the Calvinistic Churches, nevertheless mysticism continued on the fringe of Protestantism as well as in Catholic circles. Within Catholicism, however, under the pressure of the counter-reformation, the speculative aspect of mysticism vanished, and thus the Catholic mysticism of this period became mainly the practice of spiritual exercises and was fostered in Spain by Saint Theresa (1515-1582) and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). St. John of the Cross is perhaps the greatest writer on mystical theology which the Roman Catholic church has ever produced.³⁵ Other Roman Catholic mystics of this era are Michael Molinos (d. 1697), and Saint Francis of Sales, Bishop of Geneva (1567-1622). Molinos was one of the early leaders of the Quietist movement in Spain. He claimed to find peace and assurance by a quiet, mystical surrender of self into the hands of God. His teachings were similar to the "inner light" and "inner word" of the Anabaptist Quietists and the Quakers in the Protestant Church. The essence of his teaching was explained in "The Spiritual Guide", and it appeared to render superfluous the rites, ceremonies, and institutions of the Roman Church. The Jesuits quickly recognized this feature of the Quietist movement,

³⁴J.L. Neve, op. cit., I, 220.

³⁵Douglas V. Steere, "St. John of the Cross" in An Encyclopedia of Religion, edited by Vergilius Ferm (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 399.

and secured the condemnation of Molinos by a papal bull of 1687.³⁶

But meantime Quietism found a new stronghold in France where Madame Guyon (1648-1717) popularized it by her writings. Fenelon, archbishop of Cambrai (1651-1715) adopted Quietist views. A new Catholic revival began to sweep over France. But the severe opposition of the Jesuits soon reduced it to a mere ripple. Madame Guyon was imprisoned for ten years. Fenelon was permitted to retain his position as archbishop, but a number of his Quietist statements were officially condemned by a papal bull of 1699. The Quietists held to a pessimistic doctrine of human nature and the correlative doctrine of the need for and the fact of divine initiative in man's salvation. God may act on man only as he surrenders himself utterly. Pure faith is beyond ideas and beliefs; pure love is without a love of any particular thing, but a love for love's sake. Absolute calm unmixed with self ambition is the true receptive mind for divine grace. Rufus Jones calls the Quietist movement "the most acute stage of European mysticism."³⁷ Among the other conspicuous representatives of the Quietists were: Michel and Mme. Bourignon. Mme. Bourignon (1616-1680) believed herself in direct communion with God and divinely appointed to restore the spirit of the Gospel. She taught that Christianity consisted not in faith and practice, but in internal emotion and supernatural impulse. Bourignonism spread

³⁶ Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church (Revised Edition; New York: Nelson, 1942), p. 376.

³⁷ As quoted by Vergilius Fern, "Quietism", An Encyclopedia of Religion, pp. 631-32.

through Holland and into Scotland, where a solemn renunciation of it is still, in the Established Church of Scotland, required from every entrant to the ministry at the time of his ordination.³⁸

Mysticism continued in Protestantism in the form of the theology of the "Inner Light" or the theology of "Spiritualism". There is a close relationship between this Spiritualism and the mysticism of the Middle Ages. Yet an appreciable number of the exponents of this movement were influenced more and more by the Reformation. They started with the same questions that were raised by the Reformers, and the conclusions reached by the Reformation did not leave them unaffected. Certain aspects of this movement appeared before the Reformation, such as Anabaptism, and went far beyond it. The first leaders of the movement: Muenzer, Karlstadt, and Schwenkfeld - were contemporaries of Luther. They started from Luther's principle of the Word, but energetically insisted upon an immediate revelation still to be experienced. Introspection was supposed to reveal an "inner light" which was to guide them. Actually Muenzer and Karlstadt and most of the Anabaptists in general were practical reformers and not theologians. Thus they became involved in secular and political movements, such as the Peasants' Revolt. Schwenkfeld (d. 1561) was the originator and typical exponent of a mediating spiritualistic theology. He considered the Bible as only an imperfect human image of what God wrought directly within the hearts of

³⁸ "Antoinette Bourignon", in Webster's Biographical Dictionary (First Edition; Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1943), p. 179.

the prophets and apostles. To him it was not the Word which brings the Spirit, but man who is filled with the Spirit brings that Spirit with him to the Word. "The divine light must be brought to the Scriptures, the Spirit to the letter, the truth to the image, and the master to his work."³⁹ In his "immediacy of the Spirit"

Schwenkfeld was a Spiritualist, and in his whole development he was a natural result of the great German spiritualistic and mystical movement among the laymen in the later Middle Ages. The Baptists and Mennonites especially in the United States have been influenced by Schwenkfeld.

Another group of Spiritualists of this time were of a naturalistic and rationalistic type. The most important of this group was Sebastian Franck (d. 1542). To him the Bible was full of contradictions and did not have the power to bring about a new, moral life. God cannot reveal Himself through the letter, but only through the Spirit. With him the Holy Spirit of revelation becomes the spirit of man as a divine element. This divine element is at first only potentially present, and hindered in its development by that which is sensual and sinful, but man is fully capable of himself to bring the divine within him into full consciousness and power, and to conquer sin by his own strength. This is done through quiet and patient waiting. Man becomes a believer by calling into life the Word that dwells within him, and by yielding himself to the dominion of the

³⁹ Schwenkfeld's Concerning the Holy Scriptures, VI, 5, as quoted by J.L. Neve, op. cit., II, 41.

indwelling Spirit of God. Franck sacrifices the peculiar character of Christianity as a religion of redemption in order to foster a rationalistic-pantheistic religiousness. Theobald Thamer (d. 1569) follows the premises of the naturalistic-ethical conception to their logical conclusions. For him the original revelation of God lies in conscience and nature. Valentine Weigel (d. 1588) stressed that "God, Spirit and Word are within us," and therefore "the spiritual understanding flows forth from within."⁴⁰ Weigel complicated and confused his otherwise inherently consistent pantheistic and psychological system by joining it to the central thoughts of Christianity. Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) was a composer of an obscure religious and philosophical system that influenced German pietism and English Quakerism. Boehme's suggestive doctrine of the play of contraries within the will at the heart of all creation furnishes a Christian theosophy which has still to be fathomed.⁴¹ Spiritualism in Germany continued in a long line of agnosticizing thinkers, mystically and pantheistically inclined.

German Spiritualism spread to England especially after the Puritans overthrew Anglicanism in 1643. Many sects arose which stressed individualism. A sect of special interest was the "Familists" or "Family of Love". It was a sect of Anabaptists that had come from Holland. All their interest was in the baptism of the Spirit and in

⁴⁰ Gueldener Griff, chap. 12, as quoted by J.L. Neve, op. cit., II, 44.

⁴¹ Douglas V. Steere, "Jacob Boehme" in An Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 81.

the communion through the Holy Ghost. They believed that special revelations came by dreams and mystical experiences. Another sect which has endured are the Quakers. Quakerism was precipitated by the ministry and personality of George Fox (1624-1691). His preaching in 1647 and following made converts among Seekers, Independents, Baptists, and other sectarians, who loosely united as "Children of the Light", "Friends", or "Friends in the Truth". Fox and his followers protested against "the idolatry of the Bible", against "worshipping the records instead of the Spirit which gave the records". The Quakers would not limit inspiration to the age when the Bible was written, and they would not admit that the spirits of man after that age could have no inspiration. In terms of church history this was Montanism, which is also an outstanding trait of all the Spiritualists that have been discussed. Other leaders among the Quakers include William Penn (1644-1718) and Robert Barclay (1648-1690). The latter was the real dogmatician of the Quakers and his doctrinal formulations incline to and actually develop into the leading principles of Socinianism. Barclay was much interested in proving the objective character of the Spirit's immediate revelation. The theology of Penn included a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. In Christology their emphasis was not upon the historic Christ, but upon the "Christ within us" who was declared to be in all men. Penn pointed to Plato, Plotinus, Seneca, Epictetus, and Antonius⁴² as men who had been obedient to the light of the "Christ within us".

⁴² Cf. J.L. Neve, op. cit., II, 45-49.

About the same time as the rise of the Quakers, the mysticism of Neo-Platonism was revived by the Cambridge Platonists, who said "God is more in the mind of man than anywhere else in the universe." They were led by Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) and his work was designed to refute Thomas Hobbes who advocated a mechanical theory of ethics. Among other members of the group were Henry More, Samuel Clarke and Richard Price. The man who earned the title "The English Mystic" was William Law (1686-1761). Shortly after being ordained to the ministry, he refused the double oath of allegiance to King George I and abjuration of the Stuart Pretender and thus lost every chance of preferment within the Church. After this he supported himself as best he could through tutoring and private chaplaincies and devoted himself in the utmost simplicity to the life of prayer, study, writing and good works. He was influenced by Jacob Boehme and many of his later writings are mystical in the normative sense of the word. Law's writings influenced John Wesley, bearing fruit in his mature doctrine of Christian perfection.⁴³

Mysticism in its modern forms is the natural culmination of the subjective emphasis of the liberal theologies that have flourished since Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher grounded theology on the appeal to religious experience. Of the Bible he said, "Every sacred scripture is but a mausoleum of religion. . . . He does not . . ."

⁴³ Charles W. Lowry, "William Law" in An Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 437.

have religion who believes in a sacred scripture, but rather he who does not need one and could make one if he so desired."⁴⁴ Since the time of Schleiermacher there has developed what is called "Experience Theology", and much of this theology is mystical and can be termed with what was earlier called "Enthusiasm". The language of modern mystics also shows that they are heavily indebted to the philosophies of their times. Modern mystics have also turned eastward to the natural home of mysticism. Another influence has been the change within the thought structure itself due to the growing awareness of man as a phenomenon as brought out in psychology and the writings of William James (1842-1910). The mystical mood has also been popularized by the intuitional philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Movements which give evidence of mystical tendencies include Swedenborgianism, the Moravians, Christian Science, Moral Rearmament (formerly Oxford Group Movement), and various Theosophic cults. Leading mystics with Christian leanings in our time include Friedrich von Hügel of England, Rudolph Otto of Germany, Rufus Jones, Evelyn Underhill and W.R. Inge, "the gloomy Dean". Von Hügel and Otto are exponents of a modified form of supernaturalism. The American mystic, Rufus K. Jones, holds that "we have no other adequate origin than from the Spiritual Deeps of a World-Mind, or World-Reason, out of which we have emerged into individual form and struck for being into personal bounds."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Schleiermacher's Speeches as quoted by Norman Sasse, Here We Stand, trans. by T.G. Tappert (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), p. 45.

⁴⁵As quoted by J.L. Neve, op. cit., II, 316.

Some form of mystical experience is also found today in the Russian Orthodox Church, Mohammedanism, and among the religions of India and China.

The mysticism of the Christian Church, which has been the chief interest in our discussion, in contrast to all other forms with their timeless and unhistorical tendencies has always been restrained and limited by the historic fact of the revelation in Christ. The Christian mystic does not seek so directly the immediate union of his soul's essence with the divine essence. He is too firmly bound by his dependence on the historic facts of revelation, too much restrained by the written and revealed word of Christ. So here there is a continual and often desperate conflict between the unhistorical, immediate enjoyment of God and the union with God that is conditioned by an historical revelation. So, for example, the Neo-Platonic mysticism of the infinite cultivated by the Victorines is much more unrestricted and unhistorical than the devotio erga carnem Christi of the mysticism of Bernard or of the Brethren of the Common Life. But in spite of all the historical limitations, at the end Christian mysticism finds itself in the company of the unempirical, immediate contact of Platonic ideas. The connection with a Biblical faith exists only at the beginning. The Word and Sacraments are means for furtherance of contemplative rapture. The real interest of the mystics, however, is centered in the emancipation of the soul, its illumination and blissful communion with God. Thus in the end the history of salvation is left far behind.

⁴⁶Cf. Adolf Köberle, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

As we have seen in our survey of the mystics, mysticism holds that there can be a genuine experience of God, a real encounter with the Spirit of God, even apart from the external word of the Gospel. More than that, it maintains that the immediate experience of the presence of God is the uttermost which can fall to the lot of man. To experience this loftiest privilege, moreover, reports of historical events in the past are required just as little as the preaching of the church and the written word of the Bible. It does not inquire after the revelation which was given two thousand years ago, but after that which comes today and about which one can speak from personal experience. This type of religion can rightly be called "Enthusiasm" and is rejected in the Augsburg Confession. In the fifth Article of the Augsburg Confession mysticism of all ages including its philosophical consequences is excluded from the church.⁴⁷ Luther in his own inimitable fashion, made the rejection even clearer when he wrote these words in the Smalcald Articles:⁴⁸

All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through outward words. Just as also our enthusiasts condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they fill the world with pratings and writings, as though indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings and spoken word of the apostles, but (first) through their writings and words he must come.

⁴⁷The part of Article V of the Augsburg Confession referred to reads as follows: "They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works." Concordia Triglot, the symbolical books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 47.

⁴⁸"Smalcald Articles", part III, Article VII, Concordia Triglot, pp. 495-6.

In a word, Enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning and that whatever without the Word and Sacraments is extolled as Spirit, is the Devil himself.

What is rejected in Luther's words? It is not the religion of pagans, but the religion of the great so-called Christian mystics: Meister Eckart, St. Francis of Assissi, Sebastian Franck, Jacob Boehme, Schleiermacher, to mention only the most prominent names. All these heroes of Christianity fall under Luther's categorical judgment: "This is the old devil." When it is said that modern man cannot simply accept the Bible without first testing it, and that one must have the Spirit before contemplation and study of Scripture, Luther would protest as he did against his contemporary enthusiasts "who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day; who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare."⁴⁹ In fact this conviction that something eternal and divine dwells by nature deep down in our ego which enables us to contemplate the divine and to pass sentence on revelation - in short, this "innerliness" of which the mystics of all time testify - is placed by Luther alongside the claim of the pope: "Because the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

whatever he decides and commands with (-in) his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word."⁵⁰

Even from a strictly scientific point of view much of the basis of mysticism is discredited. The mystic is essentially a tender-minded person who finds the hard labor and slow progression of science toward the attainment of knowledge intolerably slow. The mystic is moreover not satisfied with the tentative nature of scientific truth. Science offers only working hypotheses of increasing exactness of application. It does not pretend to absolute or final certitude. The mystic thus finds a shorter and easier way for such certitude:

Mysticism is the pursuit of the ultimate, objective truth or it is nothing. Not for one moment can it rest content with that neutrality or agnosticism with regard to the source and validity of its intuitions. The mystic is not interested in the states of his consciousness. He cares very little whether he is conscious or unconscious, in the body or out of the body. But he is supremely interested in knowing God, and if possible in seeing Him face to face. 51

The tender-minded person longingly raises his eyes from the rough and tiresome road of science to look with despair toward the (to him) uninspiring goal, and soon ceases to struggle onward. Mysticism adopts without scruple a type of reasoning against which science constantly struggles: the type known to logicians as the fallacy of the ambiguous middle term. In scientific reasoning it is

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 4.

⁵¹William Ralph Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus (Third Edition; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929), I, 3.

important to use a term always in the same meaning; mysticism makes no such demands. A term is used to suggest the particular meaning desired and the same term is used to suggest different meanings in different places. "Cognition" or "knowledge" is used by the philosophical mystics sometimes in the real psychological meaning, sometimes to mean something quite different. Then, because the same term has been used in the two cases, the two meanings are treated (when it is convenient to do so) as if they were the same. The ambiguous middle term is used by the mystic philosopher in an open and undisguised way.⁵²

Furthermore the so-called Christian mysticism is not essentially any different from purely philosophical and pantheistic mysticism. In the writings of so-called Christian mystics we find the same naturalistic symbols that are found in India, Persia and Greece, whose ascetic charm dare not blind us to the fact that the personal and voluntary relationship between God and man that is taught in the Bible has been utterly betrayed and forgotten. The sickly, sentimental, erotic bridal metaphors of the syncretistic Hellenistic cults, the passionately sensuous language of the Persian Sufis, have been permitted to cross the threshold of Christian devotional literature unhindered in the allegorizings of the Song of Solomon by Bernard, Theresa, and Zinzendorf. While the Old Testament with unmistakable clearness, uses the frequently recurring metaphor of "betrothal" as a picture of fidelity, but uses it in the strictly, legal, moral

⁵²Knight Dunlap, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

sense; Christian mysticism revels in the most turgid, questionable pictures of sexual impulses as the expression of the loss of personal consciousness in the ecstatic union.⁵³ It is not without significance that the description of ecstasy in many cases would pass equally as well as a description of sexual orgasm. Nor is it a matter of chance that the state of union, of identification with the divine is insisted upon as the essential character of knowledge. Moreover, the ancient metaphor by which sexual intercourse is described as "knowledge" is an indication of the tendency to link sexual emotion with noetic experience.⁵⁴

The goal of the mystics is an individual one and progress towards it is the working out of an individual's salvation. Mysticism starts with the presumption that man possesses qualification for exultation in himself, a clever ladder is devised by which, if we use sufficient persistence, we must at last reach the vision of God. Every power of the soul that man possesses is exerted to produce a state which shall result in a holiness worthy of God and which will bring union with Him. In all the variations of mysticism the same great fundamental theme is constantly recurring: the idea of passing by an elevation, purification, deepening, on to final deification. Mysticism is thus a form of work righteousness, it is the rejection of God's pure grace in Christ Jesus and an attempt to reach God

⁵³ Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁴ Knight Dunlap, op. cit., p. 40.

without and outside of the Gospel.⁵⁵

Without the Bible, where God reveals Himself to mankind, man cannot come to know God. All the searchings of man for God into nature, all the attempts to possess Him through discipline and devotion, are in vain. These attempts to compel God's favor by moral fervor are only vain struggles to gain personal righteousness by way of the Law. All these attempts have one trait in common, they do not regard the human will as evil, as something that absolutely separates us from God, that is deadly offence against His holiness, but only as something that is weak and imperfect, whose defects must continually be overcome. This attitude shows itself in two types of men. First we see the ascetic and penitent, filled with anxious introspection, subjecting himself to painful discipline and despondently tormenting himself with the thought of the unattained goal: to appear just before God. The other type is that of the confident, untroubled man who in proud consciousness of his good fortune and with unshaken confidence in himself continues to carry on his previous achievements. But whether the feeling of depression or that of confident victory is dominant, the fundamental thought that permeates the whole life is the idea that man will finally be able to liberate his spirit from the prison of a base sensuality, and, thanks to his personal efforts to gain holiness, he will be able at last to appear just before God.⁵⁶ God preserve us from such false notions!

⁵⁵Cf. Adolf Köberle, op. cit., pp. 11-16.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 2-6.

CHAPTER III

THE FORMULATION AND DEFINITION OF THE UNIO MYSTICA

The doctrine of the unio mystica is one that has not received a very prominent position in the dogmatical literature of the Lutheran Church. In fact the majority of printed systems of doctrines of all church groups contain no chapter or section on the unio mystica or union with Christ and the Trinity. The ordinary Christian today much more frequently thinks of Christ as a Savior outside of him, than as a Savior Who dwells within. This all seems rather odd especially when we note the many Scriptural references to this doctrine.¹ The comparative neglect of the doctrine is doubtless a reaction to the exaggeration of a false mysticism which has been discussed in our previous chapter.² In our present chapter we want to discuss the doctrinal formulation and definition of the unio mystica as well as to consider some of the earlier references to this doctrine in Luther and the church fathers.

The dogmatical formulation of the doctrine of the unio mystica in the Lutheran Church did not take place until after the middle of the 17th century. The fuller treatment of this doctrine and the actual adoption of it as a dogmatical locus by Lutheran theologians of the 17th century was to meet the various extravagant opinions of a false mysticism which were widely prevalent at that time in Germany. At

¹Infra., pp. 49-74.

²Supra, pp. 4-34.

first we might think the expression, a mystical union, could not have found acceptance in the Lutheran Confessions, especially after Luther's harsh rejection of anything approaching quietism and enthusiasm.³ A. Ritschl interprets the introduction of the doctrine of the unio mystica as a lapse of the post-Reformation period into medieval mysticism and adoption of Catholic elements which deformed and corrupted genuine Protestantism.⁴ It is true that when we examine John Arndt (1555-1621) we find unrelated Lutheran and medieval influences existing side by side. In his works he describes in fervent language the marriage of the soul with a heavenly spouse, with Christ the loveliest Bridegroom. "The toying with the fruitio dei, where the soul becomes intoxicated by the super-abundance of eternal desires, if it did not exclude the stern seriousness of the idea of justification certainly supplanted it. That Tauler, Weigel, Thomas à Kempis and the Theologia Deutsch were its sponsors is quite evident."⁵ Arndt with these features of mysticism paved the way for the pietistic movement. After Arndt the unio mystica appeared as a new locus in dogmatics under the leadership of Huelsemann and Calovius, or Calov (1612-1682), who developed it from what Luther and Melancthon taught about the sacramental union. Ritschl insists that Calovius, by incorporating

³Cf. Supra, pp. 16-18.

⁴In his book IV of Geschichte des Pietismus (II, pp. 3 ff.) as referred to by Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1930), footnote 49, 229.

⁵Adolf Köberle, Quest for Holiness, pp. 110-1.

into his system the exercise of faith as trust, which he takes as an effect of the mystical union, was obliged to cover the intellectualistic adulteration of the original Lutheran doctrine of justification.⁶

But the introduction of the new locus, the *unio mystica*, did not mean a mystical secularization of Lutheranism, as Ritschl asserts. The Lutheran theologians who developed the *unio mystica* into a recognized topic of theology are among the most noteworthy supporters of the theology of justification and the most pronounced opponents of Reformed teaching. These theologians include J.A. Quenstedt (1617-1688) and D. Hollax (1618-1713), whose definitions and explanations of the doctrine of the *unio mystica* we shall later note. All of the orthodox Lutheran theologians from that time on accepted the *unio mystica* as a locus of theology. These men were all earnest, mighty preachers of the Cross and yet on the basis of Scripture could also teach the real, living indwelling of God in His believers. They could do this without departing even in the slightest degree from the essentials of the Reformation faith. Their conviction of the doctrine of justification preserved them from falling into exaggerated talk about a magical transformation in describing the *unio mystica*.

Even though the *unio mystica* was first adopted in the 17th century as a locus of theology in the Lutheran Church, the concept and teachings of this doctrine are present long before. This, of course, is an

⁶ See O. Ritschel, Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus, IV, 218 ff., as referred to by J.L. Neve, op. cit., I, 325.

evidence of the Scriptural nature and proof of the doctrine. Even in the works of the early church fathers there are evidences of the unio mystica. In fact it seems the very term "unio mystica" was originated and used by the fathers of the early church.⁷ There are quite a number of references in the Apostolic Fathers which recognize the presence and power of the Spirit in the lives of Christians.⁸ In the very early days the presence and power of the Spirit were widely and vividly felt. But as time passed, the consciousness of His activity waned somewhat, and the literature of the second century in general shows far less trace of it than the literature of the first. Oftentimes the Spirit was not so much considered as the abiding power of the Christian life, but rather as a divine visitant who comes to our aid under special circumstances, or who interferes in one way or another at certain crises, and who dwells more constantly with some than with others.⁹

It may be well that we examine a number of references to the unio mystica in the church fathers. There is an interesting passage pointing to the mystical union in Ignatius' Epistle to the Philadelphians:¹⁰

⁷I have not been able to trace such a reference. But Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. from Dutch by Henri De Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), p. 327, in speaking of the union of believers with Christ says: "In the fullest sense of the word it is mystical - unio mystica, as Calvin, after the example of the early Church, called it."

⁸Cf. Martyrdom of Polycarp, 14; Eusebius, Hist. eccl., I, 10, 23, 34, 43; II Clement, chap. 14; Epistle of Barnabas, chap. 16; etc.

⁹Arthur C. McGiffert, "Mysticism in the Early Church," The American Journal of Theology, XI (July, 1907), 418-23.

¹⁰Chap. 7, as quoted by A.C. McGiffert, op. cit., p. 410.

For even though certain persons desired to deceive me after the flesh, yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God. For it knoweth whence it cometh and whither it goeth, and it searcheth out the hidden things. I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice: "Give ye heed to the bishop and the presbytery and deacons." Howbeit there were those who suspected me of saying this, because I knew beforehand of the division of certain persons. But he in whom I am bound is my witness, that I learned it not from the flesh of man; it was the preaching of the Spirit who spake on this wise: "Do nothing without the bishop; keep your flesh as a temple of God; cherish union; shun divisions; be imitators of Jesus Christ, as He himself also was of his Father."

To Ignatius Christian life means union with the divine. But from other references it seems his interest in the mystical union was primarily physical. He is chiefly concerned in the endowment of our mortal bodies with immortality and he considered the chief fruit of our mystical union with Christ as immortality. We shall be holy, yes and we shall be wise, but above all we shall be immortal, for we shall be divine, when we have become completely one with, and so transformed by, Deity.¹¹

Tatian in his "Address to the Greeks" has a chapter on the necessity of a union with the Holy Spirit. He connects this mystical union to the image and likeness of God. "Only by those whom the Spirit of God dwells in and fortifies are the bodies of the demons easily seen, not at all by others, - I mean those who possess only soul."¹²

Irenaeus also lays stress on the union with the divine. He writes a man must work out his own salvation, which is a reward of virtues;

¹¹ Cf. Eph., chaps. 4, 10, 11, 15, 20; Magn. chaps. 12, 14; Phil., chap. 7; Poly., chap. 8; Trall., chap. 2; Rom., chap. 6.

¹² The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (New York: Scribners, 1899), II, 71.

yet he cannot attain true life unless his nature be transformed by the indwelling of Deity - an indwelling made possible by the incarnation of the divine Christ. "How shall a man pass into God unless God passed into man?"¹³ Irenaeus also lays stress on the part the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist play in imparting and nourishing the union. He also lays stress on the fact that the transformation of man's nature brought about by his union with the divine extends even to his flesh.¹⁴

Athanasius also clearly portrays the unio mystica. Seeberg remarks that here Athanasius adopts traditional ideas. Since we have become one body with Christ, His death is our death, and His victory over death is ours. "All men being ruined in accordance with the transgression of Adam, the flesh of this one was first of all saved and set free, as being the body of the Logos itself, and thereupon, we, as being of one body (σὸσσωματι) with him, are saved . . ."¹⁵ Athanasius goes on to say Christ dwells in us and by the power of His Spirit gives us a new eternal life. There are also a number of references to the unio mystica and its blessings in the works of Augustine. Augustine particularly lays stress on the blessing of the unity of the Church. Köberle believes, however, that Augustine never

¹³Adv. Haer., IV, 33, 4; as quoted by A.C. McGiffert, op. cit., p. 426.

¹⁴Cf. Adv. Haer. I, 21, 1; III, 17, 10; IV, 18, 5; V, passim.

¹⁵Epistle to Afros, II, 61, as quoted by Reinhold Seeberg, Text-book of the History of Doctrine, trans. from German by C.E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), I, 213-4.

really overcame his Neo-Platonic past and through him Hellenism came into the western church.¹⁶ These ideas were developed with great clearness and conclusiveness in the ontological realism of medieval philosophy which taught that in the act of thinking a direct contact is established between the human and divine spirit.¹⁷ Another evidence of this Neo-Platonism, which we perhaps have noted even before Augustine in the references given above, is in the understanding of God's redemption only as a sanctifying infusion of grace, as a mystical, sacramental transformation, and not as a simple word of forgiveness that has restored our communion with God. The entire Middle Ages continued to be determined by this oriental, Alexandrine idea of salvation and its relation to the unio mystica. Most of the Scholastics as well as the mystics of the Middle Ages thus sought justification before God through a progressive medicinal, moral infusion of grace by which the sinful defects in man's soul would gradually be obliterated.

The Biblical teaching of complete redemption through Christ's work and word of forgiveness as the key which restores our union with God welled up again in its original power in Luther. While Luther emphasized most strongly Christus pro nobis, he did not forget, but combined this great truth with Christus in nobis. There

¹⁶In his Quest for Holiness, p. 13.

¹⁷This was the opinion of the older Franciscan school (Alexander of Hales, Bonaventura).

are thus many references to the unio mystica in his writings. We note first this strong feeling of union with Christ in his work, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty." Here he says:¹⁸

Faith . . . unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. And by this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage, nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but frail types of this one true marriage, it follows that all they have in common, the good as well as the evil, so that the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as if it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as His own.

Luther also refers to the mystical union in various sermons, as in the wedding sermon for Caspar Cruciger (1536). It is the text from Ephesians 5 which gives Luther the occasion to speak of the mysterium magnum of the communion between Christ and the believers. A condensation of Luther's treatment of this doctrine is given to us by H.E. Jacobs:¹⁹

Christ thus inhering and bound up with me (literally, 'glued to me', *conglutinatus mihi*) and abiding in me, lives in me the life which I am living; yea, the life by which I thus live, is Christ Himself This inherence frees me from the terrors of the law and sin, takes me out of my own skin, and transfers me into Christ and His Kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation is in me is that of Christ Himself, and, nevertheless, it is mine through that union (*conglutinationem*) and inherence which is by faith, and whereby Christ and I are made as it were one body in spirit! . . . You are so bound up with

¹⁸Works of Martin Luther, trans. from German by W.A. Lambert. (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Co., 1915), II, 320.

¹⁹In his book, A Summary of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), pp. 215-6.

Christ, that from you and Him there is made but one person, which cannot be separated, but so perpetually adheres to Him, that you can say with confidence: "I am Christ," i.e., Christ's righteousness, victory, life, etc., are mine; and Christ, in turn, says, "I am that sinner," i.e., his sins, death, etc., are mine, because he adheres to Me, and I to him; for by faith we are joined into one body and one bone (Eph. 5:30). This faith joins Christ and me more closely than the husband is joined to the wife. (On Gal. 2:20)

How modestly and with what an exalted tone Luther in these references uses the picture of the bride and bridegroom that is so common in mystical literature, and how unsensuous are the descriptions of the "exchange" that takes place in faith as we find them, for example, in the letter to the Augustinian monk, Geo. Spenlein. The real reception of exchanged possessions is maintained, but the erotic taint is nowhere to be found. To receive "the wedding ring of faith" is a "joyous exchange", a "joyous business," not an ecstatic love union. Faith, even when endowed with God's richest blessing, continues in a state of pure humility.²⁰ And so the atmosphere of Die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen is entirely different from the sweet flirtation with dem lieber Jesulein of various mystical writers. Similarly the retention of the mystic-magical element in Luther's doctrine of the Communion certainly has a different religious motive from the Bernardine piety, the "Song of Songs feeling" to which Bernard again and again returns as the source of bridal relations with Christ.²¹

We also find the concept of the unio mystica present in Martin Chemnitz (1522-1580) and John Gerhard (1582-1637). In the Formula

²⁰ Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 106.

²¹ Max Weber, op. cit., F.N. 49, pp. 229-30.

of Concord we find in its teaching of christology as well as in its pneumatology and doctrine concerning the sacraments the personal, indwelling of the deus ipse, and it even rejects the teachings of those who declare that only the gifts of God are present in the believer.²² In the post-Reformation period Lutheranism used for prayers and hymns many items that had come from the medieval devotional literature of the mystics. But through Luther's efforts an altogether Scriptural meaning and atmosphere was put into this mystical literature. Due to a lack of emphasis on the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, the literature of the mystics could be misleading. We also must mention the many Lutheran hymns of the 17th century, especially the communion hymns, which point out the doctrine of the unio mystica. We think for example of Johann Hermann's "Herr Jesu Christi, mein getreuer Hirte," Joh. Franck's "Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele," and some of Paul Gerhard's hymns; as "Zeuch ein zu deinem Thoren."²³ In these hymns we find a holy restraint

²²Cf. Art. III, 54-66; Triglot Concordia, pp. 935-7: "We unanimously reject and condemn . . . 6. That not God dwells in the believers, but only the gifts of God." Cf. also John Gerhard: "Spiritus Sanctus non est separatus a donis suis, sed in templo illo, quod donis suis coronat, etiam ipse habitat." - as quoted by A. Köberle, op. cit., p. 104, F.K. 18.

²³See The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941) for English translation of J. Franck's hymn (no. 305) and Paul Gerhardt's (no. 228):

"Oh enter Lord, Thy temple,
Be Thou my spirit's Quest . . .
Oh enter, let me know Thee
And feel Thy power within.

and an attitude of simple faith by which the presence of the Lord is received, and this attitude is far different than the accounts of the ecstatic confession of the medieval mystics.

We also find evidences of the unio mystica in the writings of the Reformed theologians. Even though Calvin may have been the most rigid among the reformers, yet we find the unio mystica, this spiritual union with Christ, presented again and again. Calvin in speaking of the importance of union with Christ: "I attribute the highest importance to the connection between the head and the members; to the inhabitation of Christ in our hearts; in a word, to the mystical union by which we enjoy Him, so that, being made ours, He makes us partakers of the blessing with which he is furnished."²⁴

The Reformed theologian Kuyper tells us that all the Reformed theologians, from Beza to Comrie, and from Zanchius to Kohlbrugge, present the mystical union of Christ with the believers in their works.²⁵

A.H. Strong quotes John Bunyan as follows:

The Lord led me into the knowledge of the mystery of union with Christ, that I was joined to him, that I was bone and flesh of his flesh. By this also my faith in him as my righteousness was the more confirmed; for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and on earth at once - in heaven by my Christ, my risen head; my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person. 26

²⁴As quoted by A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), p. 808.

²⁵In his The Work of the Holy Spirit, p. 325.

²⁶In his Outlines of Systematic Theology, p. 808.

Melanchthon wrote in 1551: "It must be admitted that God dwells in our hearts, not only in such a manner that He is there efficacious, though not present with His own essence, but that He is both present, and efficacious. A personal union, however, does not take place in us, but God is present in us in a separable manner as in a separable domicile."²⁷

Having noted evidences of the unio mystica in the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as in the writings of both Lutheran and Reformed theologians: we will now attempt to define the doctrine of the unio mystica. The conception of the unio mystica in its definition presupposes faith. There can be an indwelling of the Triune God only in the regenerate and justified believer. Really we can only define the unio mystica by saying it is the peculiar indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity in every regenerate and justified believer. Practically everything else that is stated in defining the unio mystica only describes this wonderful doctrine as to the time, means, benefits, etc. It is fitting to refer to several definitions of the mystical union especially to see how extremely careful the Lutheran dogmatists were in defining this doctrine so that it would not disagree with other fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Thus Werner Elert tells us:²⁸

²⁷ C.R. 7,781; as quoted in the "Historical Introduction", Triglott Concordia, p. 161.

²⁸ In his Der Christliche Glaube (Berlin: Im Furche Verlag, c. 1940), p. 629.

Sie sind im Gegenteil sorgfältig darauf bedacht, den Zusammenhang mit der Rechtfertigungslehre nicht zu verlieren. Das zeigt sich sofort darin, dass zum Beispiel Quenstedt seiner ganzen Darstellung Epheser 3, 17 zugrunde legt. . . . Quenstedt will sogar die unio mit Rechtfertigung, Wiedergeburt und Erneuerung praktisch in puncto mathematico zusammenfallen lassen (III, 621). Nur in der begrifflichen Unterscheidung sollen Rechtfertigung und Erneuerung der unio vorangehen.

It is justification which effects the mystical union of the Holy Trinity and the believer. This union is a real union, not a pretense, nor a mere mental union. Quenstedt defines the unio mystica as follows:²⁹

The unio mystica is the real and most intimate conjunction of the substance of the Holy Trinity and the God-man, Christ, with the substance of believers, affected by God Himself through the Gospel, the Sacraments, and faith, by which, through a special approximation of His essence, and by a gracious operation, He is in them, just as also believers are in Him; that, by a mutual and reciprocal immanence they may partake of His vivifying power and all His mercies, become assured of the grace of God and eternal salvation, and preserve unity in the faith, and love with the other members of His mystical body.

This wonderful union of God with believers has also been called "unio spiritualis", since it is the spiritual conjunction of the Triune God with the justified man in whom God dwells as in a temple hallowed to Himself.³⁰ God dwells in the justified man with a special personal presence; not the presence of separated gifts, but of substance bringing the gifts and operating by a gracious influence in

²⁹As quoted by Revere Franklin Weidner, Pneumatology or the Doctrine of the Work of the Holy Spirit. (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1915), p. 173.

³⁰John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), p. 351.

him. As a part of this mystical union there is a conjunction, true and real, and most close, of the divine-human nature of Christ the God-man, with the renewed man. "It is a mystery of the deepest kind that God the Infinite dwells in the human heart and perfects His work there through His indwelling Spirit in a supernatural mode."³¹

We will discuss the nature of the unio mystica in more detail in our chapter entitled, "The Unio Mystica as it Affects Other Doctrines."³² Suffice it to say at this time that to be a Christian is to be in Christ. Christ lives in us. The Spirit of Christ is in us. We are led by the Spirit. Our bodies are members of the body of Christ. We are made partakers of the divine nature. We are partakers in the moral characteristics, the love and holiness of Christ. The believer is the temple of God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make their abode in him. The saint is the temple of the Trinity, not, however, the mere locality of their presence, but knit to them by the bond of the mystical union, and the believer is also thereby adopted as the son of God. All this will be noted in the next chapter on the Scriptural proof of the unio mystica.³³

³¹R.F. Weidner, op. cit., pp. 169-70.

³²Infra., pp. 75-100.

³³Infra., pp. 49-74.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF THE UNIO MYSTICA

After having considered what the unio mystica involves, we now examine its Scriptural basis. The unio mystica appears much more frequently in the Scriptures than many doctrines which are given a more prominent position in the dogmatical literature of the Christian Church. This does not mean, however, that the unio mystica appears everywhere in Scripture with the same emphasis. Paul and John present the larger share of passages that show the union the Triune God has with Christians. But this does not mean that we only rarely find the unio mystica in the rest of Scriptures. All through the Holy Bible we note references to this most wonderful doctrine of the Christian faith, especially in those places where the Holy Spirit and His work are presented. While we may not be able to understand the manner and the full implications of the union these passages of God's Word teach, it is nevertheless our faith to accept and believe these precious words. Perhaps in many cases we should rather adore than to try to understand.

A frequent Biblical reference to the mystical union is found in the New Testament use of the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ and related phrases. This ἐν formula occurs 164 times in the Pauline epistles, 8 times in Acts and I Peter and 24 times in John's writings. G. Adolf Deissmann¹ has made a complete study of this formula. First he

¹In his book Die neutestamentliche Formel "in Christo Jesu", Tuebingen (Marburg, 1892) Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) (Seit 12, XI, 1910).

investigates the secular usage of ἐν. From this investigation he concludes that: 1) in any sense the ἐν must have a local meaning and should be accepted thus; 2) the person's name joined with ἐν must denote a living person. He concludes that the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is the technical expression for the New Testament thought of the κοινωνία with Christ. The translation 'in Christ' can be misunderstood; and it is better rendered, 'within Christ', according to Deissmann.² Goodspeed would translate: 'in union with Christ Jesus'.³

The phrase ἐν πνεύματι occurs 19 times in Paul's letters and 15 of these are very similar to the formula ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.⁴ The idea 'in the Spirit', and its reverse 'the Spirit in you', are brought together in a most illuminating way. Plainly Paul thinks of the Christian as living and moving and having his being in a πνεῦμα element which is the very breath of life. This thought is so much similar to the harder phrase 'in Christ' that we can thus use it to elucidate the formula. Just as it might be said that the human body is in the atmosphere that surrounds it on every side, and yet the atmosphere is also within it, filling it and vitalizing it, so it may be said of the Christian soul τις ἐν Χριστῷ and Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ. Christ is the redeemed man's new environment. His spirit is breathing

² Ibid., p. 84.

³ Edgar J. Goodspeed, Problems of New Testament Translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915), p. 147.

⁴ Cf. I Cor. 12:9, 6:11; Rom. 8:9, 14:17; Col. 1:8; etc.

a nobler element. Deissmann concludes his discussion by saying the formula ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ was created by St. Paul with the use of an already existent secular language usage to characterize the relation of the Christian to Jesus Christ as a locally conceived condition (finding oneself) in the pneumatic Christ.⁵ This thought, for which there is no real analogy in any other relation of man to man, we can clarify through the analogy which the expressions ἐν πνεύματι and ἐν τῷ ἄρει refer, taking as their basis the analogy of lingering in the air and comparing it to the pneuma element. "The formula is a characteristic Pauline expression of the innermost conceivable communion of the Christian with the living Christ."⁶

Deissmann however seems to have a different view of Christ than the common Biblical and Lutheran concept. He thus gives a subjective mystical meaning to many of the passages in which the formula ἐν Χριστῷ occurs.⁷ James S. Stewart asks "Is the full mystical meaning present in every occurrence of the phrase in Paul's epistles? Probably not."⁸ This he terms Deissmann's mistake. Having made this discovery, he is inclined to apply it without exception. He gives to certain passages a weight more than the words can really bear. Sometimes ἐν has the sense of διὰ; and the translation "through Christ"

⁵ Adolf Deissmann, op. cit., p. 98.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., Cf. chapter 9, pp. 99 ff.

⁸ In his book, A Man in Christ (New York: Harper & Bro., n.d.), p. 157.

would best convey the meaning. Occasionally "in Christ" seems to be simply synonymous with "Christian". At the time when Paul was writing, "Christian" was still a term of reproach; and was therefore not in the vocabulary of the Church; and the Apostle Paul may well have fallen back on his favorite phrase where we today would use the single word 'Christian'.⁹ It should also be noted that where the Synoptics speak of the disciples' fellowship with Jesus, the preposition they use is μετά, never ἐν.¹⁰ This fact together with the considerations mentioned before seem to me to show that not every time the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ occurs does it refer to the unio mystica. But undoubtedly in the majority of cases the formula is speaking of the mystical union.

In most cases then the words ἐν Χριστῷ and related phrases have what may be called a local meaning. We think for instance of the well-known passage, Phil. 2:5 — "Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus." At first glance we perhaps will take this to mean simply: "Let Jesus' attitude be yours."; and this is how the words have frequently been understood. Lightfoot translates: "Reflect in your own minds the mind of Jesus Christ." To obtain this meaning involves straining the Greek and supplying a most unlikely verb in the relative clause. But all that is needed, not only to

⁹ Ibid., pp. 157-8. Stewart mentions Philemon 16: "in the flesh and in the Lord", which Moffatt translates, "as a man and as a Christian".

¹⁰ Cf. Matt. 12:30, 25:31, 26:23, 38, 40; etc.; Mark 3:14, 5:37; Luke 11:23, 23:43; etc.

overcome the linguistic difficulty, but also to discover a far richer and more pointed challenge in the words, is to interpret the phrase "in Christ Jesus" in its strict local sense. The meaning which then emerges is this: 'See that you apply among yourselves, in your community life, the spirit which has been born within you by union with Christ.' Paul is reminding the Philippians that their own experience 'in Christ' must be the controlling and directing factor in all their treatment of one another. Very similar is the passage in the fourth chapter of Philippians where Paul begs Euodia and Syntyche to "agree in the Lord," (Phil. 4:2). Here again, "in the Lord" must be given full weight. It is as though he said to those two Christians who had become estranged, "Remember your common union with Christ. Remember that it is not in two different spheres that your spirits are living; the two spheres coincide; there is but one, and it is Christ. Realize this and act on it, and your present differences will vanish. In the Lord you will agree." These passages illustrate the important fact that very often Paul's real meaning will yield itself up only when we refuse in any way to thin down or reduce his great watchword, 'in Christ'. To Paul this concept struck the keynote of Christianity and echoed the deepest experience of his soul¹¹

It is not necessary to consider all of the 196 occurrences of the formula ἐν Χριστῷ, nor can all of the occurrences be referred to the unio mystica. When Adam and Eve were first created, they were

¹¹ James S. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

united to God and lived in constant communion with Him. They were created in the image of God, and besides being free from all sin, they had a knowledge of God so blissful that they loved Him with all their faculties and were happy in the enjoyment of communion with Him.

¹² But this union with God was broken by man's fall into sin. Since the Fall man realizes that the relation between him and his Maker is not what it should be and imagines that he can do something to regain God's favor and be united with Him again. But man can do nothing to reunite himself to God, because his sins completely separate him from God (Is. 59:2, Col. 1:21). This separation from God is due to man's ignorance and hardness of heart (Eph. 4:18). Being separated from God, man is without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). This state leads to all sorts of ungodly works and sins.

¹³ God has, however, promised that He will dwell in the hearts of His people. St. Paul refers to this when he writes: "For we are the temple of the living God, as God said, I will live in them and move among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people," (II Cor. 6:16). This passage is quoted from thoughts in the Old Testament as found in various places. ¹⁴ God promises to live in the human heart, to be on friendly terms with fallen man, to bring about a union between

¹²Cf. Gen. 1:27; 31; Eph. 4:24.

¹³Cf. Eph. 4:19; Col. 3:8-9; Rom. 1:29-32.

¹⁴Cf. Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33, 32:28.

Himself and the sinner. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, neither will I always be wroth," (Is. 57:15,16). David in Ps. 63:1 expresses his longing for communion with God, and Moses in Ps. 90:1 indicates the union of the believer with God when he says, "Lord Thou hast been our dwelling place."

Christ also promises union of the Father and Himself with His followers saying, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him," (John 14:23). Christ also promises to send the Holy Spirit as the Comforter to dwell with His disciples (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). Our Lord seems to refer to the union (inhabitatio) of Himself with all believers in His discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:13-16). In His high priestly prayer Jesus prays: "That they may all be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us," (John 17:21). Here we have a direct reference to the unio mystica. All believers can be one with each other only by each of them being one with the Father and Jesus. Union with God and Christ makes believers a unit in themselves. This mystical oneness as believers is in resemblance to the essential oneness of the divine Persons.¹⁵ In John 14:20 Jesus refers to the mystical union

¹⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, An Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), pp. 1133-7.

when He says concerning Pentecost: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Luther has this notable comment on this verse:¹⁶

This is the heart of all Christian conviction, that the believer is assured, first of all, that the Man Jesus Christ is true God and God in Him; secondly, that He, Jesus, in whom God is essentially, also is within us and we in Him. The Son comes from the Father and inheres in us; we inhere in Jesus and through Him come to the Father. Thus an endless chain has been made between Him and us and the Father, and through this union and communion, sin and death have been abolished, life and salvation have become our own . . . through faith we become one body with Christ and He with us. Through the Word and Sacraments He unites Himself with us. Thus we have the three great unions: The Father and the Son united in the Deity; the man united in Christ; Christ united, becoming one with the Church.

The most extensive presentation of the unio mystica by our Lord is found in John 15 where Christ pictures the union in this way, "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing (v. 5). As the branches do not give anything to the vine, but receive all their life from the vine, so the Christians are dependent on and united with Christ. In the previous verse Jesus admonishes His disciples, "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." The ev in this verse contains the unio mystica like the recurring phrase ἐν Χριστῷ. To abide in Jesus is to remain in Him always and since the chief business of faith is to receive from

¹⁶ Martin Luther "Predigt ueber Joh. 14, 20.", Saemtliche Schriften, edited by J.G. Walch (St. Louis edition) (St. Louis: Concordia, 1887), VIII, 421-9.

Him, abiding (better translated, "remaining") means ever receiving "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). The words, "I in you" are a promise that Jesus will remain in us. We in Him and He in us - these always go together. In John 15:9, Jesus says, "As the Father has loved Me; so have I loved you; abide in My love." This gives us the secret of Christ's indwelling - remaining or abiding in His love. The expression "abide, remain, or continue, in Me" occurs no less than ten times in John 15. Jesus Himself is in us when by faith we remain in Him. This remaining in Him is mediated by the Word, as Jesus points out in v. 7, "If . . . My words abide in you." It is impossible to remain in Christ without the divine means of the Word and Sacrament.

John in his first epistle general describes the unio mystica with God as "being in Him" (2:5, 5:20); "abiding in Him" (2:6, 3:6a); "being born of God" (3:9, 5:11); "being of God" (3:10, 4:11); "being in the light" (2:9); "abiding in the light" (2:10); "dwelling in Him and He in us" (1:13, 15, 16). John also tells us (3:24). "By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." "The anointing to χρίσμα, the Spirit which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him;" (2:27).¹⁷

¹⁷ Anointing or unction is the translation of χρίσμα, a designation of the Holy Spirit, as C. August Hardt points out in his "Fellowship with God," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (August, 1944), 519.

There seems to be some dispute among scholars about which of the Holy Writers lays the greatest stress on the unio mystica. Kahnis states, "Paul lays the greatest stress on justification; John on the mystical union; Peter on sanctification as a preparation for eternal life."¹⁸ But recent scholars have declared that Paul is the leading teacher of the unio mystica. Deissmann, as we have noted,¹⁹ claims Paul is the originator of the formula ἐν Χριστῷ, not in the sense of being the first to employ 'ἐν' with a personal singular, but in the sense that he used an existing idiom to create a new technical term for religion. Albert Schweitzer makes the claim that the central element of St. Paul's religion is the "mysticism of being in Christ and of having died and risen with Christ."²⁰ Schweitzer conceives of Paul's mysticism of being in Christ as growing out of the conception which the Apostle has of the coming of the Messianic Kingdom and of the end of the world. While we may not be ready to say positively that Paul lays the greatest stress on the unio mystica and makes it his central teaching, we do find in Paul's writings more references to the unio mystica than in the works of any other Biblical writer.

We see how often St. Paul refers to the unio mystica when we examine some of his many references to it. Paul discusses the unio

¹⁸As quoted by H.E. Jacobs, A Summary of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), p. 246.

¹⁹Supra., p. 51; see G. Adolf Deissmann, op. cit., p. 70.

²⁰In his The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, trans. from German by W. Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt & Co., c. 1931), p. 119.

mystica in II Cor. 5:17, when he says, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation." This is true because in Christ we Christians have been born again "of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) Luther is reported to have said that all religion lies in the pronouns, and when we consider Gal. 2:20 "The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," we see real truth in this dictum. But when we consider the phrase "in Christ," we can go a step further and say that our religion also resides in the prepositions and in one in particular; namely "in". We recall that Paul uses the formula "in Christ" (or some cognate expression, such as "in the Lord," "in Him") 164 times in his writings. This favorite phrase of St. Paul denotes a deep and vital union; it means being in Christ really, not by supposition. This union of Christ and His followers is so deep and vital that one cannot describe it without first actually experiencing the union and being a Christian. The unio mystica for a non-Christian makes little sense since it is invisible, spiritual, and undefinable. But for the Christian being in Christ is a personal, constraining, purifying, and everlasting experience of faith. This is not just a doctrine of faith, but an essential union with Christ. It is not a physical or natural union, but a mystic, metaphysical, yet real union. Thus for a man to be in Christ means Christ is actually in him with a new power of creative life.²¹

St. Paul not only discusses the unio mystica from the viewpoint of our being "in Christ," but also from our own standpoint that Christ

²¹William Newton Clarke, An Outline of Christian Theology (Second Edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 357.

dwells in us; He is with us. Possibly the most spontaneous of all these references is found in Gal. 2:20 "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Paul begins this verse by saying, "I have been crucified with Christ, I am entirely placed out of my own self. I am entirely placed into Christ. For me to live is Christ, Phil. 1:21. Everything else within me is dead. Christ alone is the one who works and governs everything within me. Christ's mind is within me, I Cor. 2:16. Christ's heart is within me, Phil. 1:8, Col. 1:29. Christ's power is working in me."²² The context leads us to supply the thought of new life which flows from our justification. By grasping faith through Christ, Christ lives in us, because we have come out of ourselves and entered Him. Our whole being and life, as it were, is submerged in Christ. This thought is further amplified when Paul adds, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." So Paul can say, "it is no longer I that live." This applies to his life in a spiritual sense. In the physical sense of time he still lives physically, but his life is one of faith. Faith in Christ is the element in which he moves. And it is faith that connects him so intimately with Christ that He and Paul - Christ and all Christians - can boldly say, "I am now one with Christ. Therefore, Christ's righteousness, victory, and life are mine." On the other hand, Christ may say, "I am that big sinner: His sins and death are mine, because he is joined to Me, and I to him."²³

²² L. Fuerbringer, "Galatians" (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeo Co., n.d.), p. 26.

Paul discusses the unio mystica in more detail in Romans 6. In the section from v. 3 to v. 14; he tells us that through Baptism we have entered into living union with Christ and in that way have died to sin. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We are buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Paul is in this section opposing the opinion which would make mockery of God's grace by finding in it the occasion for committing sin again. He does so by reminding the Roman Christians of what took place when they were baptized. Baptism not only symbolized the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; but also identifies us with these events in our Savior's life. By Baptism we have a real share in the death and resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, the "rising with Christ" is a necessary consequence of "dying with Christ." Thus Paul points out in v. 11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ's resurrection. In Christ we are to regard ourselves as such - dead to sin and alive to God. The essence of our faith is, therefore a union with Christ in which His experiences become our experiences. Paul's earlier reference to Baptism shows us that it is the means by which the believer is actually identified with Christ in His redemptive work. This section from Romans 6 reminds us of Gal. 3:26 f.

²³Martin Luther, comments on Gal. 2:20, as found in A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, trans. from German by Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), pp. 88-9.

where Paul defines "being in Christ" as "putting on Christ" by being baptized. The "putting on Christ" or "being in Christ" which is a result of Baptism is then a compact expression for the dying and rising again of the believer with Christ in Baptism. It means a very real identification with Christ, so very real that it can best be described as incorporation into Christ.²⁴

The note sounded by Romans 6 rings out again and again through Paul's other epistles. We hear it in Col. 3:8, "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God;" in Col. 2:20, "If with Christ you died . . . why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?"; in II Cor. 5:14, "We are convinced that one died for all; therefore all have died;" in Gal. 5:24, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh." Belief in Christ for Paul means that he "may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" (Phil. 3:10). Paul could thus speak about a union with the crucifixion of Christ. He could say, "I am crucified with Christ," (Gal. 5:24), and "far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). Paul boldly turned his back on his former life before the vision on the road to Damascus. He did this that Christ with new life might dwell in him.

Therefore Paul can say that he also arose with Christ. Union with Christ means both an end and a beginning more absolute, clear cut,

²⁴Walter Bartling, "The New Creation in Christ," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (June, 1950), 404-5.

and radical than any other transformation in the world. Everything that Paul associates with salvation, joy, peace, power, progress, is gathered up in that one word he so frequently uses with his rising with Christ; namely, the word "life."²⁵ Through his resurrection with Christ, Paul becomes really "alive." Existence outside of Christ was not worthy of the name. Paul thus speaks of "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4); of "the life of Jesus" being "manifested in our bodies" (II Cor. 4:10); of "the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ" (Romans 8:2). In this way Paul shows us that since Christians are risen with Christ, they have passed out of relation to sin into real, eternal life - life with and in Christ. "So you must consider yourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

The results of being in Christ are defined both negatively and positively, the negative associated with "dying with Christ," the positive with "rising and living with Christ." It must always be emphasized that while in Christ a believer is a new creation of God (II Cor. 5:17), yet insofar as the believer is still flesh (Gal. 5:17), he has one foot in the old world. Therefore the believer must, as Luther emphasizes in his explanation of Baptism, "by daily contrition and repentance drown the Old Adam in us and again allow a new man to daily come forth and arise who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."²⁶ St. Paul describes the Christian at the same

²⁵James Stewart, op. cit., p. 192.

²⁶In his "Small Catechism," Triglott Concordia, IV, 12, p. 551.

time as being glorious and dreary, or "having attained" yet "still far off." This means tension for the man in Christ, tension and strenuous effort.²⁷ But the man in Christ is constantly sustained by the knowledge that in Christ he is a son of God, through faith (Gal. 3:26). Paul's teaching of the unio mystica is well summarized by the following poem entitled "With Jesus."²⁸

I am crucified with Jesus, (Gal. 2:20)
 Who for me was slain,
 Who on Calv'ry's holy mountain
 Hung in bitter pain.

I am joined in death with Jesus (Rom. 4:8: II Tim. 2:11)
 For my sins who died,
 That my soul, with His united,
 Might be justified.

I was buried with my Savior (Rom. 6:4)
 In Baptism's flood,
 Freed from all my sins forever
 By His holy blood.

I am risen with my Savior, -- (Col. 3:1)
 Empty lies the grave, --
 Death with all its might is vanquished:
 He has power to save.

I am now with Him united (John 17:21)
 In the bonds of love,
 That with Him I live forever
 In the Home above.

The sublime intimacy of our union with Christ is shown in various illustrations used by the Holy Writers. We have already noted Christ's picture of this union in His words, "I am the Vine, you are the

²⁷ Cf. Phil. 3:12-16; Eph. 3:17-19; Romans 8:21; also I Pet. 1:6.

²⁸ Anonymous. I have a reference to the Lutheran Sentinel, 1913; but have not been able to trace the issue and author.

branches."²⁹ St. Paul uses marriage to picture the unio mystica. He represents Christ as the Bridegroom or Husband, and the Church and its members as His bride, or wedded wife (Eph. 5:23-27, 32). Jesus left His heavenly home and came into the world, taking upon Himself our nature, our flesh and blood, in order to woo and win our souls, the Church, His bride. As a wife shares her husband's name, so the Church after Christ is called Christian; as the wife shares her husband's goods, so the Church possesses the grace and glory of Christ.³⁰ Hosea brings us this same picture in his beautiful prophecy (chap. 2:19-20), "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness and in judgment and in lovingkindness and in mercies, I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness and thou shalt know the Lord." Another picture of our union with Christ is that of the head and the body. God gave Christ to be Head of His Church which is His body, and we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, and He nourishes and cherishes His body (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:29-30). Because Christ is the Head and Christians are members of His body, whatever we do to Christians, we do to Christ. When Saul went to Damascus to persecute the Christians, Christ met him and said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:1). On account of the intimate connection between Him and

²⁹Supra., p. 56; John 15:5.

³⁰William Dallmann, The Holy Ghost (St. Louis: Concordia, 1930), pp. 50-1.

His followers our Savior also says, "As you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). A fourth illustration is that of the temple (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-22). Christ lives in the Christian, for the Savior says, "If a man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23; cf. also Rom. 8:9; I John 2:24; 4:12, 16). So God in love will stoop down to be a tenant of the soul of man. Christ will be the Guest of the Christian and accept entertainment at the hands of His host, for it is graciously said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20) Surely if Abraham is called the friend of God (Is. 41:8), after such signal proofs of God's love, we may also gladly accept and cherish that title with all it implies (Of. John 15:15; Rom. 5:5; 8:15; Gal. 4:4-6).

Peter's declaration is also remarkable, "We have become partakers of divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Bold as these words seem, they do not go beyond other statements of Scripture which say we are "born of God," that we are "God's children" or "partakers of Christ." Most certainly we cannot understand these words in any pantheistic sense, that we are absorbed into the divine nature so as to lose our individuality. The reference is rather to the nature of God, His holiness and righteousness. Christians as new creatures have been renewed and thus become participants of God's holiness. That is shown by statements such as these: "that we may share His

holiness" (Heb. 12:10) and "be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29; cf. also Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Thus in the believer the divine image is renewed insofar as he is and remains united to God in Christ through the Spirit.

This same thought is implied in the Scriptural formula ἐν Χριστῷ. If we concede that in most cases the meaning of ἐν Χριστῷ is being in union with Christ, we must conclude from the many passages using this phrase that "being in Christ" includes the entire work of God for and in the Christian. St. Paul thus tells us that in Christ men are justified (Gal. 2:17), in Him they are sanctified (I Cor. 1:2), in Him they receive grace (I Cor. 1:14). In Christ men have freedom (Gal. 2:4), are led in triumph (II Cor. 2:14), and shall be made alive (I Cor. 15:22). In Christ there is grace (II Tim. 2:1), salvation (II Tim. 2:10), redemption (Rom. 3:24), eternal life (Rom. 6:23). In Christ God's redemptive activity is daily actualized.³¹ This is brought out in those passages which relate the effects of God's redemptive activity to the believers, to those who are in Christ. "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Rom. 8:1). "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17). "In Christ Jesus you are all the sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26). "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21; cf. Phil. 3:8 ff.). From these passages we must conclude that being in Christ is

³¹Walter Bartling, op. cit., p. 103.

being taken up into the sphere of God's redemptive activity.

We have already noted that being in Christ for Paul did not mean a mystical, exclusive, and highly subjective experience, but it is Paul's expression for a universal Christian experience. Paul meant by this phrase that Christians are actually identified and incorporated into Christ.³² Men are by means of Baptism actually identified with Christ in His work of redemption (cf. Rom. 6:1-14). There is then an actual identification of the believer with the great events of Christ's life. A description of this is contained in the highly pregnant New Testament concept of κοινωνία. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the κοινωνία (fellowship) of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Cor. 1:9). The essence of κοινωνία in the New Testament is a life shared in common, and κοινωνία with Christ includes a real sharing in the great events of Christ's historical life. This is admirably expressed in the host of passages in which the believer is drawn into the events of Christ's life by means of the preposition σύν, which, as Arthur Carr has noticed, is in close etymological connection with κοινός.³³ Paul shows that our κοινωνία consists in our sharing Christ's suffering in Phil. 3:10, where he states this as the aim in his life, "that

³²Supra., p. 61.

³³In his "The Fellowship (κοινωνία) of Acts 2:42 and Cognate Words," The Expositor, 8th Series, V (May, 1913), p. 163, Carr notes, "to be with Christ (σύν Χριστῷ εἶναι) is equivalent to be in union or fellowship with Christ" (ἐν κοινωνίᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι).

I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and may share κοινωνία His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death." Christ predicted that fellowship with Him would involve participation in His sufferings (John 15:19-20). Therefore we are asked not to "be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you . . . but rejoice insofar as you share κοινωνεῖτε Christ's sufferings," (I Pet. 4:12-13). The Christian's sufferings are not for the purpose of supplementing the expiatory work of Christ, but they are suffering which Christ endures in the members of His spiritual body, the Church. We should be more than glad to share Christ's sufferings, for we know that "as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (II Cor. 1:5). We are "fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him" and we also shall share in His glory and reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11-12). On Judgment Day Christ will even "change our lowly body to be like His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). What a glorious prospect for Christians and for the Church that is under affliction for Christ's sake and the Gospel's!³⁴

The word κοινωνία, communion or fellowship, is always used to describe a close and intimate relation between two or more persons. Sacred writings use κοινωνία to denote the union mystica. This word leads us to emphasize that the union with Christ is a communion between two personalities who still are distinct from each other. If

³⁴ Cf. C. August Hardt, "Fellowship with God," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (Aug., 1944), 505-29, for a complete discussion of κοινωνία.

the believer became the same personality with Christ, Christ and the believer could not commune. Communion with God does not represent a way whereby we can become God. However close the bond is, it ever remains a fellowship of "I" and "Thou". When Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," (Gal. 2:20, he means that while he is distinct from Christ, he has identified himself with the Christ he loves. Communion is not a merging of two persons, but a voluntary uniting of the two in life and purpose. Paul, remaining himself, surrenders his living to his Lord and accepts his Lord's will as his own.³⁵ A Christian blacksmith was once asked, "What do you Christians mean when you say 'that you live in Christ and at the same time that Christ is in you?'" The blacksmith answered by directing the inquirer to look at a glowing piece of iron he picked out of the fire. "Do you not see the iron in the fire, and that fire in the iron?" This is a splendid illustration of the unio mystica, the fellowship we have in Christ and how Christ is in union with us. The hymn writer August Francke sings so beautifully:

Thou art in me and I in Thee
And yet, I seek unceasingly
A deep, closer union.

It becomes clear that to be a Christian not only means having faith in Christ, but also to experience something with Jesus.³⁶

³⁵ D.S. Ching, A Plain Account of Christian Experience (London: Epworth Press, 1947), pp. 52-3.

³⁶ Olaf Guldseth, "What is Christianity?" a tract translated from Norwegian by Margith Guldseth (Minneapolis: Augsburg), pp. 14-5.

The word πλήρωμα also helps explain the unio mystica for us. The fullness of the Godhead assumed human nature in the person and body of Christ (Col. 2:9). In this fullness the believers have a part. All believers form the body of Christ, the Church universal, or the Una Sancta, of which Christ is the Head. The whole body is in Him (Rom. 12:5), the several parts 'grow up in every way into Him' (Eph. 4:15). The whole body is even identified with Christ, for "as a body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (I Cor. 12:12). In the Una Sancta, the whole company of believers, Christ is "all in all" (Col. 3:11). So Christ's fullness is given to the Church universal. The Church becomes the medium of the self realization of Christ. The Church is to aim at the perfection of God, which dwells permanently in Christ (Col. 2:9), and so far as Christ dwells in us, the perfection of God dwells in us. The ultimate measure and ideal of the Body is the perfection of God in His many attributes, so that it may be as full in its capacity of fullness as God is in His.

"You must be perfect (τέλειοι) as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). That is the end (τὸ τέλος), the final purpose of the existence of the Body. Towards such a πλήρωμα is made. This is the destination of the life-journey as "attain" in Ephesians 4:13 suggests. Progress is also suggested in this passage when it says, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Jesus expresses this same thought when He says,

"that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11) Christ's joy is absolute, while the disciples' is progressive. St. John notes in his Gospel (1:16), "from His fullness (πληρωμα) have we all received, grace upon grace." What is true about joy is also true about knowledge. Christ, whose knowledge is absolute, fills all Christians with spiritual wisdom and knowledge, enabling them to teach and admonish one another (John 7:38, 39; Num. 11:29). Of course Christians base all their teaching not on their own wisdom, but on the Word of Christ (Col. 3:16).³⁷

In Ephesians 1:22,23, it is noted that the Father "made Him (Christ) the Head over all things for the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The fullness (πληρωμα) is in Christ, belongs to Christ, and therefore cannot be found either wholly or partially outside of Him. Christ is also in all those who believe in Him and is thus the Church. As Christ is in us and we in Him, so Christ becomes all things through and in Christ. And what applies to the individual, applies to the whole, the Body, or the Church Universal. Christ is the Head of the Church; His Body. He is the Vine, His followers are the branches. He dwells in the Church as life dwells in the living body. He fills it with His life, replenishes it with His strength, feeds it with His comeliness, calms it with His peace, brightens it with His holiness, and finally glorifies it with His glory. In fact, Christ's relationship to and with the Church is so close that in I Cor. 12:12 the Church is directly called Christ

³⁷ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, trans. from German by Theo. Engelder & J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), II, 340.

(*ἡ Χρυσή*), because it is united with Christ in one mystical body. Speaking of Christ in the same relation, I Cor. 3:23 says, "Christ is God's." Christ, who fills all in all, is filling the Church with Divine blessings out of the infinite stores of the kingdom of heaven. All true believers, the communion of saints, experience His riches, exuberance, overflowing abundance, and happiness which is so conspicuously ascribed in Ephesians to the grace of God.³⁸

In studying the Scripture references to the unio mystica we again see that we can never rightly express the truth of God with one statement. We can only exclaim with the Apostle Paul as we consider the wonderful truth of the unio mystica, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33) While Lutheran theologians place the doctrine of the unio mystica under sanctification, we must ever remember its close connection with justification. The basic thought of Calvary is Reconciliation and Union. God created man for Himself. God's plan is incomplete without man. Man is incomplete without God. Man of his own free will - selfishly - has sinned and thus separated himself from God. God in His justice could only demand the penalty for the guilt of sin; but God in His great love gave His only Son into death on the Cross in order that man might be reconciled to Him. The Cross is incidental since it was only the way of bringing Reconciliation of God with man and an opportunity for man

³⁸F.R. Montgomery-Hitchcock, "The Pleroma of Christ," The Church Quarterly Review, Vol. 125 (Oct.-Dec., 1937), p. 9-18.

to be united with God. Of course the Cross has made Reconciliation and Union possible. But let us not paint the Cross with glowing colors and forget the fundamental fact God shows us by the Cross: At-one-ment, Reconciliation, Union with Him. Union is the end, the goal. The Cross is only the means. The Cross has made man's destiny possible: Union with God. We understand the At-one-ment through Christ when we consider St. Peter's words, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God." (I Pet. 3:18) This is man's destiny: Reconciliation and Union with God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" and now God appeals to man through us "Be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:19-21). Therefore after the Last Supper Jesus prayed, "That they also may be in Us" (John 17:21). Union of God and man has ever been the heavenly desire. Now through and in Christ this union has been accomplished.³⁹

³⁹ Berthold von Schenk, The Presence (New York: Ernst Kaufmann, Inc., 1915), pp. 59-63.

CHAPTER V

THE UNIO MYSTICA AS IT AFFECTS OTHER DOCTRINES

In point of time regeneration, justification, union, and re-
novation are simultaneous, since these acts of God's grace so co-
here that they cannot be separated. Yet to our mode of thinking and
in order that we may understand in a measure, we say on the basis of
Scripture that regeneration precedes, that faith may be attained;
justification follows, which is of faith; and then the mystical
union occurs, which is succeeded by renovation and sanctification.¹
In and with faith and justification, the Holy Spirit becomes the
principle of a new life and the bond of real internal fellowship
of life with the Triune God continues in the unio mystica. We have
entered this union by the faith given us in Baptism, the Lord's
Supper and the Word. The Holy Spirit comes to us in order to create
our faith and dwells in us when we believe. The believer or saint
is the temple of the Trinity, being knit to it by the bond of the
unio mystica.

The unio mystica is effected then through the means of grace. On
the divine side the means of the mystical union are the Gospel, Bap-
tism and the Lord's Supper. On the human side the means is faith,

¹J. Quenstedt's order as given by R.F. Weidner, Pneumatology or
the Doctrine of the Work of the Holy Spirit (Chicago: Wartburg
Publishing House, 1915), p. 173.

which is created through the Word and Sacraments. St. Paul says, "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (II Cor. 11:2).

This Paul did through the Gospel. Christ dwells in our hearts as a result of faith. In Holy Baptism we put on Christ and are brought into union with the blessed Holy Trinity, Gal. 3:26-9. In the Lord's Supper we are in union with Christ. Jesus comes through the earthly bread and wine to dwell in our souls and to feed them with heavenly food, His body and blood, to nourish us unto life everlasting. "The cup of blessing; which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation (or communion) in the body of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16)

In speaking about the unio mystica, we must remember to distinguish it from other unions God has with man. The unio mystica must first of all be distinguished from the general union of all men with the substance of God the Creator as shown in Acts 17:28, where the preposition "in" expresses the general presence of God with men. The unio mystica must also be distinguished from the personal union in Christ, the God-man. God dwells in Christ essentially, - He dwells in all men by His power and in believers by His grace. Hollaz emphasizes this when he says,² "The special mystical union is partly a gracious one in the Church Militant, whereby God dwells in the regenerate by His substantial presence, and operates in them by His special concurrence, John 14:23; 17:11, 12; and partly a gracious

²As quoted by R.F. Weidner, op. cit., p. 174.

one, the triumphant assembly of the elect whereby God fills and delights the elect with the plentitude of His grace, I Cor. 15:28." We distinguish the unio mystica from the presence of God in all creatures, since it is a privilege of the Christians distinguishing them from the world. All who refuse to believe in the Gospel are the dwelling and sphere of operation of the devil, Eph. 2:2.

The unio mystica must not be reduced to a mere operation of God in the believer nor to the indwelling of divine gifts. God Himself dwells in the believer, John 14:23, and not merely His gifts, as the papists and Calvinists say. The indwelling does not occur only, as the Jesuits and the Calvinists wish - "per spiritum, fidem et charitatem, . . . verum etiam conjunctione reali, quae fit per modum sessionis ad dextram Dei praesentum et participationem (ut Cyrillus loquitur) corporis et sanguinis in sacra coena."³ The unio mystica is not substantialis formaliter, i.e., like a grafted branch forms a unit with the tree. God dwells in the Christian, but the abode is not changed to the Indweller, nor vice versa. God can take His departure from man and therefore His indwelling is not an incarnation. Through the unio mystica we put on Christ, but that which is put on is not identical with the person upon whom it is put. It is true Hollax calls the union a "substantial presence,"⁴ but he simply means that the divine substance is united with the human substance in a mystical

³Stephan Gerlach as quoted by Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (Muenchen: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931), I, 138.

⁴Supra., quotation, p.p. 76-77.

way. So it is called a substantial union not from the mode of union, but from the result obtained. Something divine filters through to the nature of a Christian; he is leavened by it. In fact II Peter 1:4 tells us that "we become partakers of the divine nature." It is well to remember the maxim of John Gerhard:⁵ "Spiritus Sanctus non est separatus a donis suis, sed in templo illo, quod donis suis coronat, etiam ipse habitat." The unio mystica is not merely a moral union. It does not consist merely in the harmony and tempering of the affections, as when the soul of Jonathan is said to be united with David, I Sam. 18:1. The union implies a great deal more, as Christ Himself says in John 17:21: "that they may be in us." "To be in some one" implies the real presence of the thing which is said to be in, not figuratively as a lover in the beloved. Heinrich Schmid affirms:⁶ "By this mystical union more is expressed than a mere agreement of the will of man with the will of God, or a mere union of both in love, or a mere influence and communication of spiritual gifts on the part of the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit and the whole Trinity actually do dwell in each believer so that the Apostle Paul calls Christians "God's temples," I Cor. 3:16.

On the other hand we dare not pantheistically say that the unio mystica is a transformation of the essence of the Christian into the substance of God. The believer is indeed a child of God, but is not

⁵As quoted by A. Köberle, Quest for Holiness, p. 104, footnote 18.

⁶In his Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. from German and Latin by Charles Hay & Henry Jacobs (Fourth Edition; Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), p. 480.

made wholly divine. The believers partake of the nature of God, but are not changed into the divine nature. Hollaz explains:⁷

"God dwells in us as in temples, by the favor of the unio mystica, I Cor. 3:16; but the habitation is not changed into the inhabitant, nor the inhabitant into the habitation. By the unio mystica we put on Christ, Gal. 3:27; but the garment is not essentially one with the person who wears it. The divine nature is very distinct from the human, although God comes to us, and makes His abode with us, John 14:23; but He can depart from man to whom He has come. The unio mystica is, indeed, called a union of substances; but, strictly taken, not a formal substantial union . . . but it is an accidental union."

The unio mystica should not be termed an essential and corporeal union as the followers of Weigel and Schwenkfeld maintain. On the other hand we must maintain that God Himself, and not merely His gifts, dwells in the believer. Our Lutheran Confessions especially in the Formula of Concord teach just as emphatically in their christology as well as in their pneumatology and doctrine concerning the sacraments, the personal, indwelling of the deus ipse, and even reject the teachings of those who declare only the gifts of God were present in the believer.⁸

The unio mystica is, however, not a personal union or "a coalition of extremes united into one hypostasis or person, such as is the unio personalis in Christ, the union of the divine and human nature; so that the believer, united to Christ, could say, 'I am Christ.'⁹ The union of God and man in Christ is unique. It is a union in which

⁷As quoted by R.F. Weidner, op. cit., pp. 175-6.

⁸Formula of Concord, Art. III, 65, Triglot Concordia, p. 937.

⁹J.A. Quenstedt as quoted by R.F. Weidner, op. cit., pp. 174 ff.

"God and man are not merely united mystically, but form one Person and Christ's blood is the blood of God, Rom. 5:10."¹⁰ The unio mystica, on the other hand, does not abolish the difference between God, the Creator, and man, the creature. To speak of a 'specialis approximatio Dei secundum substantiam ad substantiam credentium,' which has been debated among Lutheran theologians is hardly permissible; since God in His essence fills heaven and earth equally in His illocal, divine manner. The Apostle Paul teaches that Christ and believers being mystically united, remain distinct persons, Gal. 2:20. Quenstedt informs us:¹¹

"This union does not consist in transubstantiation, or the conversion of our substance into the substance of God and of Christ, or vice-versa, as the rod of Moses was converted into a serpent. Nor in consubstantiation, so that of two united essences there is formed one substance. . . . The mystical union differs from the sacramental union and communion."

The unio mystica is a true and real union nonetheless, and not a pretense or mere mental union. It is a union of God in the believer that is not metaphoric and ideal. It is "itima," so that God approaches the believer and enters into a special relationship with him. In a relative sense God is omnipresent and can therefore enter into a special mystical union with the believers. He fills them with all the fullness of God, operates in and through them with all wisdom and

¹⁰ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, trans. from German by Theo. Engelder and J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), II, 95.

¹¹ III, 621, as quoted by H. Schmid, op. cit., p. 1185 ff.

power. C.E. Lindberg calls this union a "concurus in a higher degree."¹² Abraham Calov writes:¹³ "It is a union of the believer with God which is more than simply 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." This union has also been described as a vital union. A.H. Strong says:¹⁴

"It is a vital union in which Christ's life becomes the dominating principle within us. This union is a vital one, in distinction from any union of mere juxtaposition or external influence. Christ does not work upon us from without, as one separated from us, but from within, as the very heart from which the life-blood of our spirits flows . . . Christ's life is not corrupted by the corruption of his members, any more than the ray of light is defiled by the filth with which it comes in contact. We may be unconscious of this union with Christ, as we often are of the circulation of the blood, yet it may be the very source and condition of our life."

The unio mystica is an indissoluble union in the same sense as a Christian's election to grace is indissoluble, as Matt. 28:20; John 10:28; Rom. 8:35-39; and I Thess. 4:14, 17 show. Of course God does depart from those who fall from faith and the unio mystica is broken as a result of the individual's own fault. But these people fall just because they do not depend entirely upon Christ, nor believe fully in His presence within them. The unio mystica is a

¹²In his Christian Dogmatics, trans. from Swedish by C.E. Hoffsten (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana, 1922), p. 352.

¹³As quoted by Theodore Graebner, "The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer," Concordia Theological Monthly, I, 17-18.

¹⁴In his Systematic Theology (Philadelphia, Judson Press, 1907), p. 801.

spiritual union whose source and author is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit originates and maintains the union as Rom. 8:9-10 and Eph. 3:16-17 show. The means God employs to bring about the unio mystica has already been indicated,¹⁵ namely the Gospel and Sacraments. Quenstedt states:¹⁶ "The mystical union . . . effected by God Himself through the Gospel, the sacraments, and faith, by which, through a special approximation of His essence, and by a gracious operation, He is in them, just as also believers are in Him." Since Christ's Word shall not pass away, Matt. 24:35, the believer, who remains with the word and is in union with God through it, shall not pass away or perish. The unio mystica is then a union which, consistently with Christ's promise and grace, can never be dissolved. In the Church militant the unio mystica is "gratiosa," while it is "gloriosa" in the Church Triumphant.

Since the Reformed reject the means of grace and say the Holy Spirit works immediately instead of mediately, through the Word, they have also confused the place of the unio mystica in the corpus doctrinae. In most instances they list this doctrine under soteriology, calling it "union with Christ." A.H. Strong gives this doctrine first place under the section he terms: "The Application of Christ's Redemption in its Actual Beginning."¹⁷ The Reformed dogmaticians are correct

¹⁵Supra., p. 76.

¹⁶As quoted by R.F. Weidner, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁷In his Systematic Theology, p. 793.

in asserting that we are in Christ by faith. But it is not Scriptural to say as Strong does¹⁸ "union with Christ logically precedes both regeneration and justification." Nor is it Scriptural after listing as one of the consequences of this union "participation in His merits" to say that the believer is "thereby justified."¹⁹ It is true Scripture speaks of justification as being "joined or united to the Lord," I Cor. 6:17; "receiving Christ Jesus," John 1:12 and Col. 2:6; "putting on Christ," Gal. 3:27; "attaining righteousness," Rom. 9:30; etc. But this "joining oneself to Christ" does not refer to the unio mystica, the Christ in us. We do not obtain grace or forgiveness through the Christ in us, but through the Christ for us, who has once for all purchased remission of sins for us and now offers it to us in the means of grace. Hollaz calls the union that is brought about by clinging to Christ outside of us the "unio fidei formalis" in distinction from the unio mystica, which results from the former.²⁰ The Scripture passages quoted above all denote the "fides actualis" which with cordial trust lays hold of Christ and His forgiveness and with heartfelt confidence relies on Him. Some Lutheran dogmaticians probably in attempting to explain these passages and others which say "in Christ we are

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (New York: Scribners, 1883), p. 227.

²⁰As quoted by Francis Pieper, op. cit., II, 134, footnote 65. Pieper also quotes Luther: "Justifying faith seizes and takes us far beyond ourselves and beyond our heart. It takes me to Christ, whom I do not see, feel, or hear; faith would have me cling to the Son of God and believe in Him . . ." (St. Louis VII: 224 f.).

justified," Gal. 2:17; "in Him we have redemption," Rom. 3:24; "salvation," II Tim. 2:10; etc., have said the unio mystica may also be considered as an act, inasmuch as it takes place instantaneously.²¹

They then use the term "unitio" defined as "the act of union, which is transient and momentary, and takes place at the same time with regeneration and justification."²² Unio is then the continuous state that remains unbroken as long as the justified person avoids voluntary sins. But I feel this distinction need not be made and only tends to confuse the relation of the unio mystica in the corpus doctrinae.

We see such confusion shown in Heinrich Schmid's discussion of the unio mystica, when he says:²³ "According to another mode of considering this, it may be said that union precedes justification, inasmuch as faith precedes justification; and in faith, as the organ by which the union is effected, its beginning is already presupposed." In support of this view he quotes Hollaz (993):²⁴

"Although the mystical union, by which God dwells in the soul as in a temple, may according to our mode of conception, follow justification in order of nature, it is however to be acknowledged that the formal union of faith, by which Christ is apprehended, put on, and united with us, as the mediator and the author of grace and pardon, logically precedes justification. For faith is imputed for righteousness, so far as this received the merit of Christ, and so unites it with ourselves as to make it ours.

²¹ Cf. C.E. Lindberg, op. cit., p. 350; and H. Schmid, op. cit., pp. 481 f.

²² H. Schmid, op. cit., p. 482. He seems to be quoting Hollaz.

²³ Op. cit., p. 481.

²⁴ Ibid.

On the contrary, the believer is justified the moment he receives faith. There is no middle stage. A man cannot in his unjustified state stand before God or claim union with Christ. It is easy thus to confuse the act of God justifying the sinner and the unio mystica. In other words many identify the result with the cause. The Reformed dogmatician Strong shows this when he says:²⁵ "As Christ's union with the race secures the objective reconciliation of the race with God, so Christ's union with believers secures the subjective reconciliation of believers to God." While the conversion of the believer and the beginning of the unio mystica are simultaneous, they cannot be intermingled. In order to conceive of the act of reconciliation or justification as the beginning of faith, the results of justification, or the fruits of faith, are said to follow after justification has taken place. The unio mystica is then one of the blessed fruits of conversion, or subjective reconciliation, which is justification of the individual sinner.

In a similar way our Lutheran Confessions, the Formula of Concord in particular, condemn those who confuse justification and the unio mystica, declaring:²⁶ "We reject and condemn the error that faith looks not only to the obedience of Christ, but to His divine nature as it dwells and works in us, and that by this indwelling our sins are

²⁵In his Systematic Theology, p. 807. In support of this view he quotes Jonathan Edwards: "The justification of the believer is no other than his being admitted to communion in, or participation of, this head and surety of all believers." p. 805.

²⁶Article III, 63 (4), Triglot Concordia, p. 937.

covered before God." This and later statements in the same article were directed against Andrew Osiander who taught that the essential indwelling of Christ is the believer's righteousness before God. Osiander looked upon justification as a medicinal process whereby the essential righteousness of Christ was gradually absorbed by the believer and thus he said Christ becomes our Righteousness. He taught the hope of the believer was the divine nature of Christ dwelling in his heart. From this the believer takes and acquires righteousness before God. This is confusing the doctrines of justification and sanctification. The unio mystica which is classified under sanctification, is the effect of faith, not its object. The object of faith in justification lies not within, but outside of man, namely in Christ and His work which gains righteousness for sinful men.

As we have noted,²⁷ the unio mystica begins when a person is converted to faith. After the heart is regenerated and faith implanted through the word, then the mystical union begins as one of the blessed fruits of justification. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ," Gal. 3:27. Through the means of grace Christians are brought to faith, through the same means they are strengthened in their faith, and through these same means they are also brought into intimate union with Christ and the entire Trinity. This union becomes stronger as believers use the means of grace and grow in the knowledge of them. We must always

²⁷Supra., p. 75.

emphasize the part the means of grace play in the beginning and sustaining of the unio mystica. Then we will keep justification and the unio mystica separate. All synergistic and enthusiastic explanations of the unio mystica are thereby avoided. A theological maxim among Lutheran dogmaticians is "inhabitatio Dei sequitur iustitiam." The unio mystica takes place after justification, after the kinging of faith in the heart of the believer. We have noted this order as the one given by the Lutheran dogmatician, Quenstedt.²⁸ Werner Elert comments:²⁹

Quenstedt will sogar die unio mit Rechtfertigung, Wiedergeburt und Erneuerung; praktisch in puncto mathematico zusammenfallen lassen (III, 621). Nur in der begrifflichen Unterscheidung sollen Rechtfertigung und Erneuerung der unio vorangehen. Das richtet sich selbstverstaendlich gegen den Irrtum des alten Osiander und gegen seine pietischen Nachfolger.

Some say the unio mystica is only partly a result of faith. The Dutch Reformed theologian, Abraham Kuyper, avers:³⁰ "To say that this unio mystica is the result of faith is only partly correct." He thereby seems to infer that something besides faith is needed to enter this union. We see what he adds when he goes on to describe what he calls the five stages of the unio mystica.³¹ The first of these is predestination, next the incarnation of Christ, then the regeneration

²⁸Supra., p. 75.

²⁹In his Der Christliche Glaube (Berlin: Im Furche Verlag, 1940), p. 629.

³⁰In his The Work of the Holy Ghost, trans. from Dutch by Henri De Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), p. 335.

³¹Ibid., pp. 335 f.

of the believer, followed by the conscious exercise of faith, and finally death. To explain the unio mystica in this way seems to be unduly complicating the whole explanation of this doctrine. Of course the first stage reflects the undue emphasis the Reformed place on the doctrine of predestination. The second stage connecting the unio mystica with the incarnation of Christ makes the incarnation really only an example of the unio mystica. I am sure Kuyper does not want to leave us with that impression. But many more liberal theologians do just that when they speak of the unio mystica. H. Wheeler Robinson tells us:³² "The human life of Jesus of Nazareth shows us how a human personality may be integrated into the divine . . ." This is confusing the unio mystica and the unio personalis in Christ. The union of God and man in Christ is unique. In no way can the unio mystica of Christ in the believers explain or be compared to this personal union of God in Christ, or vice versa. God dwells in Christ essentially, He dwells in believers only by His grace. Thus the unio mystica is always wholly, and not only partly, a result of faith.

The Reformed who have no means of grace, naturally also deny that these means are necessary for the unio mystica. They say faith is there before the Sacrament of Baptism is applied. That may be true, but that does not remove the power of the means, nor prove that the faith before Baptism was produced without the Word of God. A. Strong

³² In his The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit (New York: Harper & Bros., 1926), p. 276.

contends:³³

Perhaps the most pernicious interpretation of the nature of this union is that which conceives of it as a physical and material one, and which rears upon this basis the fabric of a sacramental and external Christianity. It is sufficient to say here that his union cannot be mediated by the sacraments presupposes it is already existing; both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are designed only for believers. Only faith receives and retains Christ; and faith is the act of the soul grasping what is purely invisible and supersensible: not the act of the body, submitting to Baptism or partaking of the Supper.

First of all, this misrepresents the Lutheran teaching. Lutherans have no ex opere operato benefit for the sacraments. We do not eliminate faith as the receiving means for the benefits of the sacraments. But we must insist on the basis of Scripture passages like Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ," and Acts 22:16, "Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins," that faith acts only through the means of grace. Without faith there can be no unio mystica. Through faith the unio mystica is begun, maintained, and sustained. But it is the faith that is grounded and maintained in the means of grace, the Word and sacraments. We have noted that faith is the subjective means of the unio mystica.³⁴ The Holy Spirit through the Word kindles faith in the heart of man and thus he is justified. Immediately thereafter through the newborn faith, the unio mystica is begun. As faith in Christ and His Word is nurtured and grows, the unio mystica is begun. As faith in Christ and His Word is nurtured and

³³ In his Systematic Theology, p. 800.

³⁴ Supra., p. 75.

grows, the unio mystica becomes deeper and more intense. But the unio mystica ever remains the fruit of our faith in our blessed Savior and His wonderful work of redemption.

The Reformed dogmaticians explain that the sacraments consist in symbols or in the experiences of the union with Christ. The Baptist dogmatician, A.H. Strong, points out:³⁵ "As baptism symbolizes the incorporation of the believer into Christ, so the Lord's Supper symbolizes the incorporation of Christ into the believer. We go down into the water, but the bread goes down into us." A. Hodge avers:³⁶ "In the spiritual reception of the holy sacraments, they (the believers) do really hold fellowship with him (Christ)." It is indeed true that the unio mystica is symbolized by the sacraments as well as being one of the subordinate effects and not the essential experience of the sacraments. The Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are present in a special manner wherever the means of grace are administered. The unio mystica as a subordinate effect of the Lord's Supper rests not in part only, but entirely on the fact that the Lord's Supper is a means of remitting sin. There is no other communion with Christ than the one mediated

³⁵In his Systematic Theology, p. 941.

³⁶In his Outlines of Theology (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1866), p. 373. Hodge apparently makes a distinction between baptism and the Lord's Supper regarding the experience of union or fellowship with Christ. On Baptism he says (p. 479): "It is done with the design to signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." On the Lord's Supper he says (p. 503): "In partaking of this Sacrament, the fellowship of the believer with Christ is established and exercised in a mutual giving and receiving."

by faith in the forgiveness of sins bought by His blood. The teaching of the Scripture is that the entire Holy Trinity make their abode in the heart of every man who has come to faith.³⁷

It seems strange that the Reformed dogmaticians accept the doctrine of the unio mystica, yet reject the doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Apparently they feel the union of the believer with Christ is only with the divine nature of Christ. But no such distinction is found in Scriptures, as for example, Matt. 28:20 points out: "Lo, I am with you always." Also in the Lord's Supper Christ's body and blood predicate His presence according to the human nature. Of course this the Reformed dogmaticians from Zwingli and Calvin to the present day cannot accept, since they believe it is impossible for the body and blood of Christ to be present in the Lord's Supper. They believe His body is confined to heaven since His ascension into heaven. Thus they make the elements of the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine, only symbols of Christ's body and blood. But they seem to realize little is left with such a sacrament. Many Reformed dogmaticians have therefore spiritualized the Lord's Supper and tell us the important thing in this sacrament is the living communion with Christ.

As the Reformed dogmaticians spiritualize the sacraments, so also do they seem to spiritualize the union with Christ. They actually have no real unio mystica, one with the whole person of Christ, divine and human. They cannot have such a union since they say Christ's human

³⁷Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, trans. from German by Walter Albrecht (Springfield, Ill.: Concordia Mimeo Co., 1939), III, 230 f.

body is in heaven since the ascension, so He could not be with us according to His human nature. But the ascension of Christ into heaven is not a local removal. It is simply His exaltation above all creatures, so that He can be in them all and above them all. Through the ascension He has become closer to us than we can come to one another. This is in the *unio mystica*. Yet we are to find Christ only in one place and that is in the means of grace, His holy Word and sacraments.³⁸ Not only do the Reformed deny the presence of the whole Christ in their teaching of the mystical union, but they also deny the means of the union and so make it an immediate union instead of a mediate one.

A note should be added about the difference between the sacramental union of the Lord's Supper and the *unio mystica*, which is one of the effects of the Lord's Supper. While in the Lord's Supper both believers and unbelievers receive the true body and blood of Christ, in the *unio mystica* only the believers are united with Christ through their faith in Him. In the Lord's Supper, only those who believe receive the benefits of that sacrament, even though all who partake receive the body and blood of Christ. Unbelievers receive the body and blood to their damnation as I Cor. 11:29 shows. Furthermore the sacramental union is a temporary act lasting only during a person's partaking of the Lord's Supper, his eating and drinking of the Lord's body and blood, in with and under the bread and wine. The *unio mystica* is a permanent state of a Christian

³⁸Theo. Graebner, op. cit., p. 20.

existing because of his faith. J. Baier confirms this by quoting Quenstedt:³⁹

Differt quoque ab unione et communione sacramentali unio mystica. Ibi enim quam hic, dum ibi infirmi et hypocritae, hic soli fideles uniuntur; ibi communio consistit in actu transitorio, hic in permanente etc.

Certain Reformed groups make much of the unio mystica, or union with Christ, as they usually term it. Of the larger groups the Methodists are the most pronounced. As a rule they cultivate an emotional type of religion to bring about conversion and entire sanctification, urging that every one should strive to feel the witness or the indwelling of the Spirit in his heart.⁴⁰ Many holiness bodies also stress union with Christ as the means of entire sanctification. Simpson writes:⁴¹

When we are dedicated to God (entirely sanctified), Christ comes to live in us and transfers His life through our being He lives in us as truly as though we were visibly dwelling under His wing. God is again manifest in the flesh.

Many holiness teachers declare that in sanctification the "living physical Christ comes into our life, sharing His physical life with ours in a union which is closer than our connubial life," and that because of this union "we shall have the power of Christ in our

³⁹In his Compendium Theologiae Positivae (St. Louis: Lutheran Concordia Verlag, 1879), III, 294.

⁴⁰Theo. Engelder, F.E. Mayer, et. al., Popular Symbolics (St. Louis: Concordia, c. 1934), p. 285 f.

⁴¹In his The Fourfold Gospel, p. 39, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 336.

bodies," i.e., divine healing.⁴² The Holiness teachers say there is no relationship between justification and sanctification. They assert sanctification is instantaneously complete since it consists in the indwelling Christ. The Salvation Army feature an Enthusiasm which is much like the Quakers.⁴³ They reject the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper saying "our communion with God is not conditioned on human instrumentality."⁴⁴

The Mennonite groups, which are an outgrowth of the Anabaptist movement, also make much of the mystical union.⁴⁵ They invert the Scriptural relation of good works to justification and make union of the believer with Christ the basis and not the result of justification. They view regeneration as a moral transformation and continually identify justification with sanctification.⁴⁶ The Moravians are a group which probably make more of the mystical union than any other religious denomination. Count Zinzendorf, one of the leaders of this group in the eighteenth century, tried to popularize the

⁴²The Fourfold Gospel, p. 61, & Wholly Sanctified, p. 129, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 336.

⁴³Supra., Quakers, p. 24-25.

⁴⁴Salvation Army Handbook Appendix, p. 3, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 327.

⁴⁵Cf. Anabaptists, pp. 12, 17, 18.

⁴⁶The Dort Confession declares: "All men without distinction, if they are obedient, through faith, follow, fulfil, and live according to, the precepts of the Law of Christ, are God's children," Art. III, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 261.

Ihle Pictism and in this endeavor was carried to such extremes that his mystical subjectivism became sickly and puerile. Though the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) later on was purged from this sentimental extravagance, it is still definitely committed to the mystical principles. Moravians seek a "positive unity, i.e., the personal, mystical union with Christ as the living force of Christianity and offer the hand of fellowship to every one who accepts this basis . . ."⁴⁷ They believe that the peculiar purpose of their Church is to keep their members in constant confidential intercourse with Christ.⁴⁸ In order to stress the believer's mystical union with Christ, more specifically the atoning Savior, Moravians have adopted a spiritualized view of the Lord's Supper and make it "an opportunity for self examination and for renewing the union with the Lord."⁴⁹ The Catholic Apostolic Church, also known as the Irvingites, stress union with Christ. They relegate the doctrines of the vicarious atonement and of justification to the background, because they teach that, in rising from the dead, Christ became the Head of redeemed humanity and that the believers must be united to the body of Christ through the Sacraments.⁵⁰

It is important to know the truth of the doctrine of the union

⁴⁷Resolutions of 1909, quoted in Corpus Confessionum, s.v. Moravians, IV, 6, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 270.

⁴⁸Moravian Manual, pp. 88 ff., as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 279.

⁴⁹Corpus Confessionum, #22, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 260.

mystica and its relation to the corpus doctrinae also because the Seventh Day Adventists have the wrong conception of this doctrine. Adventists make much of the believer's union with Christ, which they say results in man's moral transformation and the ability to keep the Law of God. They teach that man is saved from the power of sin by the indwelling Christ. Justification is therefore not based on the "Christ for us," but on the "Christ in us." Mrs. Ellen White writes:⁵¹ "Our only ground of hope is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and in that wrought by His spirit working in and through us." Faith is not viewed as the hand which appropriates Christ and His merit, but is said to take hold of Christ's divine power, "inducting the believing into the covenant relationship where the Law of God is written on his heart, and through the enabling power of the indwelling Christ his life is brought into conformity to the divine precepts."⁵²

The Roman Catholic Church stresses the mystical union in its teaching. They apply the term "mystical union" in its strict and special sense to special acts and experiences or states of the soul produced by extraordinary forms of prayer and higher forms of

⁵⁰ W. W. Andrews for Schaff, Creeds, I, 911, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 325.

⁵¹ In her book, Steps to Christ, 68, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 355.

⁵² Fundamental Beliefs, as quoted by Popular Symbolics, p. 355.

contemplation. But they also say every baptized person is mystically united to God. They make the objective of their catechetical teaching the union of the soul with Christ.⁵³ God's grace is always considered the principle or cause of the union. The grace which brings about the union is termed actual grace, which in turn leads to the habitual or sanctifying grace through which the union is sustained.⁵⁴ The union with God which Catholics say is given as a free gift cannot be preserved or increased without our cooperation. Roman Catholics cooperate by attending mass and partaking of Holy Communion. External reverence and proper assistance at mass and visits to the Blessed Sacrament effect exterior union, which in turn promotes and increases interior union with Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Holy Communion more intimately incorporates the faithful into the Mystical Body than Baptism. The primary effect of Communion is to bring about the transformation produced in St. Paul: "I live, no, not I, but Christ liveth in me," Gal. 2:29.⁵⁶ Prayers are also a

⁵³A.N. Fuerst, The Systematic Teaching of Religion, in the Phole-Preuss Series of Dogmatic Textbooks (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1939), p. 322.

⁵⁴The Roman Catholic Church defines actual grace as the "transient supernatural help given by God from the treasury of the merits of Jesus Christ for the purpose of enabling man to work out his eternal salvation," Joseph Pohle & Arthur Prouss, Grace, Actual and Habitual (7th Edition, St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1934), p. 3. Actual grace leads to habitual or sanctifying grace "which is the state that renders men pleasing to God," Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁵A.N. Fuerst, op. cit., pp. 322-3.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 386.

means as well as evidence of the union, especially prayers said without words. The wordless prayer "may be in its entirety a union of the soul with God - a whole-souled harmony of thought and will of God, the prayer of union."⁵⁷

The prayer of union is a special grace of God and usually the result of a long purgative and unitive process which has taken place in the soul. Therefore it falls under the special sense in which the Roman Catholics use the term "mystical union." Only the saints actually reach this state of infused contemplation in which union with God is experienced in an almost habitual manner.⁵⁸ This mystical union is a result of spiritual perfection acquired by the practice of virtue, particularly by the observance of the counsels of the Church. These states or experiences of union are the special or unusual graces as well as ordinary graces; the virtues, theological as well as moral, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic mystical theology gives an account of the processes of active and passive purification through which a soul must pass to reach the mystical union. Some of these are purity of conscience, purity of heart, purity of spirit, i.e. of imagination and memory; and purity of action. Passive purification are trials encountered by the souls in preparation for contemplation, known as desolation, or dryness, and weariness. The contemplations lead to a union so

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

⁵⁸ Luigi Sturzo, "The Mystical Union," The Ecclesiastical Review, CVII (March, 1913), 166.

intimate and so strong that it can be expressed only by the terms "spiritual marriage." In the state of union special miracles, prophecies, revelations, and visions are said to stem. God, of course, wills all His faithful to be pure and perfect in His sight and does not give His beatific vision, the perfected union, without the complete purification from every stain (and in purgatory faithful souls expiate what they have not purified on earth), yet not all will have the same degree of perfection and of merits, on earth or in heaven.⁵⁹

From the different conceptions of the mystical union given above, it is clear that many look for union with God outside of the place where He has promised to be with us and in us, namely, His holy Word. Some even believe union with God gives them special miraculous powers such as healing and prophecy. All these views are derived from the imagination of the heart and are not found in the revelation God has given man. Many also look to the unio mystica as the way of salvation. The unio mystica becomes justification for them. But God comes to us and abides with us as a result of our justification. Because Christ died for us and has saved us, He can also be in us. The unio mystica must always be taught, not as the cause of justification, but as a result. The unio mystica thus properly belongs under sanctification. In fact, as one

⁵⁹ Aug. Foulain, "Mystical Theology," The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Co., c. 1912), XIV, 621-2.

theologian points out:⁶⁰

The state denoted by this expression can only be the highest point of sanctification or identical with it. It must be considered as none other than the presence of the Holy Spirit abiding in the heart of the regenerate through the Word of the Gospel, such presence being inseparable from a peculiar, gracious presence of the entire Trinity.

These views of different dogmaticians and various church groups on the unio mystica show that there is much studying to be done on this doctrine. The Scriptures frequently make reference to this doctrine, and we must with the help of the Holy Spirit study and explain the doctrine clearly and precisely. It is our hope that we in a measure have done that in this thesis. But let us not forget the other doctrines of the whole body of Christian truth as it seems some are wont to do. It is well to remember what one Lutheran theologian says regarding arrangement of doctrines:⁶¹

It is bad theology to compartmentalize the individual doctrines. A good dogmatician makes it his business to show how, according to Scripture, one doctrine is related to the other; and in discussing the chief doctrines, he will continually draw in other related doctrines.

This is especially true in the study of the doctrine of the unio mystica. After all there is only one way for the dogmatician to preserve the Scriptural connection of Christian doctrine. The Apostle

⁶⁰ A. Schaeffer, M.S. Lectures on Dogmatics, as quoted by Henry E. Jacobs, A Summary of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing House, c. 1905), p. 247.

⁶¹ Francis Pieper, op. cit., II, 421.

Paul mentions it in the words: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).⁶²

⁶²Francis Pieper quotes Martin Luther who similarly said: "In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I may have at any time, day or night." (St. L., IX, 2), loc. cit.

CHAPTER VI

BLESSINGS OF THE UNIO MYSTICA

We can also realize what the correct position of the unio mystica is when we note the many blessings which result from it. We have a practical application of this doctrine to Christian life when we consider these blessings. There would be little purpose to God's union with believers if there were no results from such a union. But God again and again in His Holy Word shows us the many rich blessings which arise from His union with His own. It is a wonderful assurance for our faith to know that God is with us and in us, and through this presence is blessing us beyond measure. By this indwelling we have a guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. This and other blessings of the unio mystica we consider as we now discuss the object of the unio mystica. We can well say these blessings are God crowning in us the works of His mercy.

The first object of the unio mystica is to have fellowship with God. The Apostle John testifies in the first chapter of his first epistle general that the reason the apostles are preaching about what they have seen and heard in Jesus Christ is that their hearers "may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ," [John 1:3]. The fellowship of the apostles and all Christians is not with the Father alone, but with both the Father and the Son. There is no other fellowship worth having. Apart from Jesus Christ no man can be in fellowship with God. Thus

only those who have fellowship with the apostles and their teachings have fellowship with God and with His Son.¹ In the Apostolic benediction we are likewise assured of the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit," II Cor. 13:13. The fellowship or communion of the Holy Spirit is not just communion with Him. It is participation in Him, the holy fellowship mediated by His indwelling with the Father and with the Son, and with all that belong to the one mystical body of Christ.² The dogmatician Gerhard remarks on John 14:23:³

Think of the majesty of these guests (the Father and the Son) and you will better understand the kindness of this coming (we will come to him and make our home with him). Since in this life we cannot ascend to God, so as to be present with Him (II Cor. 5:8), but as long as this life lasts, 'we are away from the Lord' (v. 6). God, of His immense kindness, descends to us, and comes to us, i.e. the highest majesty comes to the most abject vileness, heaven to earth, the Creator to the creature, the Lord to the servant. What love for men! 'Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?' (Ps. 8:4). How men are pleased when earthly kings and princes turn aside to visit them! But what is this compared with the coming of God! Earthly kings become a burden to those whom they visit, because of the expense attending their entertainment; but these heavenly guests come, not with empty hands, but with stores of priceless gifts.

The Psalmist remarks (73:23-24): "I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." This again shows us

¹R.H.C. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, c. 1938), p. 307.

²Heinrich A.W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, trans. from the Fifth Edition of the German by D. Douglas Bannermann, rev. & edited by William Dickson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1894), p. 712.

what it is to be in fellowship with God. Many Christians realize they are in fellowship with God. They are persuaded they are living in His presence and that they are governed by His hand and sustained by His power. But sometimes God, unperceived by them, puts upon them a bridle by which, when they go astray, He secretly restrains them, and prevents them from totally apostatising from Him.¹

The second object of the unio mystica is the assurance of our faith. The Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" II Cor. 13:5. Putting oneself to this test has the result of one discerning himself what is really the necessary consequence of being in the faith: that Christ is in one (by means of the Holy Spirit) present and active. It is your Christian duty to "know what is the hope to which he has called you; . . . what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might" Eph. 1:18, 19. Christ's command, "Abide in me, and I in you" John 15:4 implies that we are both to realize and to confirm this union, by active exertion of our own wills. We are to abide in Him by an entire consecration, and to let Him abide in us by an appropriating faith. We are to give ourselves to Christ, and

³As quoted by H.E. Jacobs, A Summary of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), p. 216.

⁴John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, trans. from Latin by James Anderson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmanns, 1917), III, 151.

to take in return the Christ who gives Himself to us - in other words, we are to believe Christ's promises and act upon them. Being conscious then of Christ's union with us, we are assured of our faith in Him.⁵

There should be no uncertainty about our spiritual status. We do not merely hope that all will be well at last. We need not walk under the clouds of doubt. Through the unio mystica, the very presence of God within us, "we know whom we have believed" II Tim. 1:12. We can be sure of our faith by examining ourselves and actually realizing that Christ is in us. Then we can say with the Apostle Paul: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" Rom. 8:38-39.

We now turn to the third object of the unio mystica, which is to increase the Christian's spiritual knowledge. A Christian's life is really bound up in that one word "salvation," and salvation comes through the illumination of the soul with spiritual knowledge. Christ's own anointing with the Holy Spirit, according to Isaiah, was to be an anointing 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. This same Spirit of

⁵A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), p. 808.

wisdom and understanding, and heavenly knowledge dwells in the Christian's heart through faith. Our Savior promises that He and the Father will come to the believer and make their home with him.⁶ Then He adds that by this indwelling the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, will be given to us, and "He will teach you all things" John 14:23-26. All knowledge that we have of spiritual things, the understanding of God's loving counsel toward us, of Christ's work of redemption, of our reconciliation to God, of all those things which make us "sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6) are the result of the Spirit's inward teaching. When Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, says the Apostle Paul, we are "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19) and thus "have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of God, Eph. 3:18.

The Apostle Peter exhorts Christians "to long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" I Peter 2:2. The spiritual milk referred to is the pure spiritual truth of the Gospel, the message of the person and work of Christ for our salvation. Christ's words are inexhaustible and the Spirit's teaching is to unveil more and more the infinite significance that lies in the apparently least significant of them. Every believer by virtue of his faith and the unio mystica which results from this faith has the

⁶ Theodore Graebner, "The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer," Concordia Theological Monthly, I (Jan.-Feb., 1930) 65-69.

ibly Spirit for his teacher. Even the humblest Christian may, if he will, learn from Him and be led by Him unto profounder knowledge of our great God and Savior. Thus St. John writes to Christians: "you have been anointed by the Iblly One, and you know everything" I John 2:20. In verse 27 John adds, "the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him." Of course God's Word is the standard and the means of this spiritual knowledge, from which the increase in spiritual knowledge must come. We can well pray with the Psalmist: "Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." Ps. 143:10. There is thus an indissoluble connection between the real knowledge of God's will and truths and the practical holiness of life. Christian sanctification depends and feeds on this knowledge of Christ and His Word. May we ever increase in real spiritual knowledge through the indwelling Spirit in our hearts!

Closely connected with spiritual knowledge are the good works which flow from such knowledge and prove its genuineness. Good works are then the fourth object of the unio mystica. When the Spirit gives us heavenly knowledge and spiritual wisdom, this is not simply knowledge of the head. The divine nature penetrates all our personality. The Spirit sanctifies our human emotions and will so that we can perform good works. St. Paul refers to the indwelling of Christ as "the power at work within us," Eph. 3:20. We are endowed with a new

life, a life in Christ and this life in its very essence is activity. Paul writes to the Galatians that by the Gospel which he preached to them "Christ is being formed within them," 4:19. The whole nature and essence of God is love. The indwelling God in Christians shows himself by this love. The first fruit of the Spirit is love, Paul tells us, Gal. 5:22. According to John brotherly love is the very essence of Christian life. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren," I John 3:14. "He who loves is born of God and knows God . . . for God is love," I John 4:7-8. "He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him," I John 4:16. "All who keep His commandments abide in Him, and He in them," I John 3:24. May our prayer be the words of that familiar hymn:

Oh, grant that nothing in my soul
 May dwell but Thy pure love alone!
 Oh, may Thy love possess me whole,
 My Joy, my Treasure, and my Crown!
 All coldness from my heart remove;
 My every act, word, thought, be love.⁷

Our Savior Himself gives us a wonderful illustration of how this love works in the lives of His followers. This is found in John chapter 15 where Jesus tells us: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit." (v. 5). The point of this illustration is "much fruit." This is no ordinary vine, but one with unlimited life and vitality. But "apart from me ye can do nothing," (v. 5b). Only two alternatives:

⁷v. 2 of Paul Gerhardt's hymn, "Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me," trans. by John Wesley. The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), no. 319.

"much fruit" or "nothing" at all. Joined to Jesus in the union mystica and under the Father's care as vinedresser (v. 1), so much grace comes to us that the result is always "much fruit." All the holy thoughts, words, and works of Christians are altogether fruit of the branches which remain in the vine, with the vine's living sap in them. The power to love comes then from the abundance of Christ, who is the treasure of love. Only from Christ can Christians derive the living power for bearing fruit, for doing the works of love which show our fellowmen that we are Christians. "Man, when brought to the life in Christ, is not like a clock which, when once wound up, runs 24 hours, but he is like a spring of water which ceases to flow the moment its hidden reservoir beneath the earth is cut off."⁸

The love from the indwelling Christ makes it possible for Christians to love their enemies. Our Savior says: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," Matt. 5:44. The epistles reecho this admonition: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," I Cor. 13:7; "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them;" "Repay no one evil for evil;" "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; "Overcome evil with good," Rom. 12:17, 17, 20, 21. Possessing the spirit of Christ, Christians are able to overcome the natural feelings of resentment under insult, of vengeance under injury, and are able to do good to them that hate them and to bless

⁸ Messer as quoted by R.H.C. Lenski, An Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), p. 1036.

those who persecute them. For natural man this is a sheer impossibility. But for a reborn soul this impossibility becomes possible as one of the blessings of the unio mystica. All the achievements of humanity are trivial compared with the Christian who can love personal enemies, help them, and pray for them. Here is a work truly divine.⁹

Furthermore Christians are able to rejoice in sufferings because their mystical union with God assures them of His comfort and help in trouble. This is the fifth object of the unio mystica. John tells us: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world," I John 4:4. The greater one in Christians is God (3:24), while the one in the world refers to the devil (3:10). God is in believers and believers are in God, therefore the Christian has the greater power of God against the devil and his cohorts. The life of God in the soul of man is the great secret of a Christian's existence in time of trouble, temptation, and persecution. Franz Pieper well says: "By virtue of the unio mystica God identifies Himself with His suffering saints; their blood is precious in His sight, Ps. 72:14; and so He avenges it, Ps. 9:12."¹⁰

God through his prophet Isaiah (57:15-18) tells us: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones . . . I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will

⁹Theodore Gruebner, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁰In his Christian Dogmatics, II, 53.

lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." When God condescends to visit the contrite and humble person, the immediate effect is to comfort, console, and revive. His presence is a welloof life, springing up within the soul to everlasting life, John 4:14. All the heavens are not too great for the dwelling place of God, nor a human heart too small. He who dwells on Cherubin, among the praises of the Seraphim, does not disdain to dwell among
 11
 the sighs of a poor human soul.

God's presence in the heart of a Christian enables him to rejoice in sufferings. Sufferings often are the necessary lot of Christians. Paul writes: "We share abundantly in Christ's sufferings," II Cor. 1:5. But at the same time he calls upon his readers to rejoice in "the sufferings of this present time which are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us," Rom. 8:18. Since the lives of Christians are so bound up with that of Jesus Christ, they are able to say with Paul "to live is Christ, and to die is gain," Phil. 1:21. There are no more happy people on earth than Christians. None others can bear affliction patiently and bear it with a spirit filled with gratitude. Only they have learned the secret of being happy when the tide of fortune has turned against them, when they are betrayed by friends, when they are afflicted with disease and the debility of old age; only of them can it be said that their joy is
 12
 never so perfect as at the approach of death.

¹¹Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, authorized trans. From Third Edition, German, by James Denney (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., n.d.), II, 349.

¹²Theodore Graebner, op. cit., pp. 87-8.

The sixth object of the unio mystica is the right desire to pray and that we know how to pray aright. Knowing that we are united to God as a loving Father, we "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. 4:16. God's act of sending the Holy Spirit to take residence in the hearts of Christians has as one of its purposes to give us a consciousness of the filial relationship between ourselves as the sons of God and God our Father. We can look upon God as our Father with whom we have the privilege of living as His sons. The indwelling Spirit makes us conscious of this relationship and He makes it possible for us to pray aright, as St. Paul explains: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: 'Abba! Father!'" Gal. 4:6. The Spirit is said to utter this cry of prayer when He moves us to utter it. Surely we cannot imagine God not answering the prayers of His children, prayers that have been started by His own spirit. St. Paul even goes further writing to the Romans (8:26): "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." As a true Advocate and Paraclete the Spirit finds us in our weakness, speaks in our behalf in a way in which we could not pray in our own behalf. When a Christian is in the depths of affliction and knows neither how to pray nor what to pray for, the Spirit intercedes for him by crying with unutterable sighs to God from out of the heart of the believer. The Spirit is said to "sigh" in our hearts and thereby

He intercedes for us with God, to Whom, as the Heart-Searcher, the desire of the Spirit's sighing in the heart is known.¹³

The importance of prayer for Christian life is pointed out by our Savior when He says: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you," John 15:7. Here we are shown how prayer is the great aid for the production of much fruit, for many works of love. We may ask anything for which we have need, at any time. We - as remaining in Jesus with our will; we - with His words remaining in us; we - who will thus seek and will nothing "apart from Jesus," nothing contrary to Him and His Word. Our will is to bring forth much fruit. To help us, we not merely may ask, we must ask. This is one of the Gospel "musts." No limit exists, the only limit is in our faith. And there is no question about receiving: "it shall be done for you."¹⁴

Our next and seventh object of the unio mystica is found in the close union of Christians and the unity of the church. Christ prays for His followers in His high-priestly prayer: "that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; . . . that they may be one even as We are One," John 17:21-22. Our mystical oneness as believers is a resemblance to the

¹³ H.A.W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans, trans. from the Fifth Edition of the German by J.C. Moore and Edwin Johnson, revised and edited by William Dickson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), p. 331.

¹⁴ R.H.C. Lenski, An Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), pp. 1040-41.

essential oneness of the divine Persons. The oneness of the Father and Son is to be the model and pattern for the oneness of the believers. The object Christ has in referring to the reciprocal fellowship between Himself and the Father is to encourage the unity of all His followers. The Father and the Son should be the element in which they live and move. All believers being in the Father and the Son will certainly be one. This oneness bears the divine stamp: a oneness in the true God, in actual spiritual union with Him. We believers can be one with each other only by each of us and all of us being one with the Father and the Son. Union with God and with Christ makes us a unit in ourselves. Being spiritual and mystical, this unity is, of necessity, invisible and does not consist in any form of outward organization. We are as much one with each other and with God and with Christ as we believe, teach, live, and confess all that is contained in the Word of God. Subjection to this Word of Truth will bring the Christians closer together in outward unity. The oneness of faith voicing the Word, adhering to it in every part, obeying its every precept, is what acts powerfully on the world. In that way Christians are united with the Father and Son and among themselves.¹⁵

It is the unity of the Spirit in grace and truth, not that of a great corporation, that Christ's prayer desires. This unity is arrived at by the Christ-given, Christ-likeness in each Christian. It is Christ in us and we in Christ that fuses us into one. Thus

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 1155-6.

Paul several times uses the illustration of a body, for example, when he asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" I Cor. 6:15. Christ, as the Head of the Christian Church, stands to it in the closest and most inward fellowship of organic life (Eph. 4:16) and forms, as it were, one moral Person with it. The bodies of the individual believers, who in fact belong to the Lord, and He to them for this world and that which is to come, may be conceived as Christ's members, just as from the same point of view the whole church of Christ is His collective organ, His body (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19; I Cor. 12:13; etc.). Paul likewise calls the bodies of Christians God's temple, as follows: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? . . . God's temple is holy, and that temple you are," I Cor. 3:16-17. Each Christian community is in a spiritual way the temple of God. There are, therefore, not many temples, not many scattered buildings, but each one of us is the same true spiritual temple of God. The temple which forms the means of comparison with one great stately building, unified in plan, serving a single purpose, points to the unity of the Christian Church. As God dwelt in the actual temple of the Old Testament, so He dwells in the ideal temple of the Christian Church of the New Testament by His gracious presence, working and ruling in it, through His Spirit, in whom God communicates Himself.¹⁶

¹⁶ H. A. W. Meyer, Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, p. 76 and 111.

These same references to the unio mystica in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians also serve as a warning. Paul is warning his readers against the seductiveness of the heathen immorality for which the city of Corinth was famous, or rather infamous. He enforces the admonition: "Shun immorality" by reminding the believers that by defilement of the body through an immoral life they become guilty of a most horrible inconsistency, exclaiming: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" I Cor. 6:19. "He who is united to the Lord becomes one Spirit with Him," I Cor. 6:17. With this clear reference to the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, Paul quenches the flame of carnal lust and by this very admonition lifts his readers above the temptations that surround them. This is one of the practical applications of the doctrine of the unio mystica.¹⁷ Another application in the form of a warning is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:30): "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Paul is admonishing his readers against evil talk in the previous verses. Evil talk is so opposed to the holy nature and aim of the divine Spirit, who dwells in the Christians, that He cannot fail to be grieved by it. The Christian becomes conscious of this grieving of the divine Spirit when he, who has become through the atonement and sanctification the dwelling place of the Spirit, no longer receives from this Spirit the testimony that he is the child of God, Rom. 8:16.¹⁸

¹⁷Theodore Graebner, op. cit., p. 86.

The final object of the unio mystica which we consider is the guarantee it makes of our future resurrection, heavenly inheritance, and eternal life. The Apostle Paul tells us: "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; He has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee," II Cor. 1:21-22. This passage clearly teaches that the indwelling of the Spirit here and now is an installment, a first-fruit of what is to come, and so a very special pledge of its certain attainment. The Spirit is the first down-payment of our inheritance and makes certain that in due time the inheritance in full will be turned over to us. As God has fulfilled the vital promise that He would give us His Spirit, so He will fulfill the rest of His promise and eventually give us our heavenly inheritance. The Spirit is more than an affixed seal, He is even the first part of our inheritance and is already now made ours. Doubly blessed is our lot. The idea is that of greatest assurance.¹⁹

Paul speaks even more specifically of the guarantee of immortality when he later writes: "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as guarantee," II Cor. 5:5. "This very thing" refers to the eternal glory of heaven. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we shall not fail to be clothed with the heavenly body at the Parousia. The Christian desire is

¹⁹ H.A.W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Galatians and Ephesians, trans. from the Fifth Edition of the German by G.H. Venables, revised & edited by Henry E. Jacobs (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), p. 182.

thus not mere exemption from the burdens of life, its duties, its labors, or its suffering, but to be raised to that higher state of existence, yes, to be brought into the presence of God to be made the life of God, the divine and eternal life. Paul likewise writes to the Ephesians (1:18); "That you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints." In the section immediately preceding (vv. 13, 14) Paul calls the Holy Spirit "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." The Holy Spirit is thus the guarantee that Christians shall become actually partakers of the heavenly blessedness. The enlightenment by the Holy Spirit is to make the glory of Christian hope more and more known, because the citizenship of Christians is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) where their thoughts and efforts are directed. Paul in the last part of Ephesians chapter one shows what the power of God has accomplished in Christ's resurrection, exaltation, and appointment as Head of the Church. This further assures Christians that their hopes will surely be fulfilled by virtue of their fellowship with Christ.

The unio mystica is also an assurance that we shall rise again on the Last Day. Paul points to this fact in the eighth chapter of Romans especially verses eleven and twenty-three. Paul points out too that we are fully redeemed both in body and soul and mind. And the entire man will be made alive again in the final Day of Salvation, also the corrupt, carnal, and mortal body. This body, which has also

191. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians . . . 307.

been under the dominion of sin, will be made alive and recovered to the service of God. This will be done by the Spirit that dwells in us, because that Spirit has restored life to our souls, abides with us with His purifying influence, and because the design of His indwelling is to purify the entire man and restore all to God. We are thus "sealed" by the Holy Spirit "for the day of redemption," Eph. 4:30. The great resurrection chapter, first Corinthians fifteen, also assures us of the bodily resurrection. Because the Spirit has already been given to us as a pledge and already dwells in us, God will complete what He has pledged to us.²⁰

All these points can be comprehended in that one phrase "eternal life." St. John writes: "Let what you heard (i.e., the Gospel) from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what He has promised us, eternal life," I John 2:24,25. There can be no promise to compare with this - that we should share eternal life, the life of God. Union with the Son and the Father is the essence or principle of that which is promised, namely, eternal life. In John 17:3, the knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ is substantially eternal life. But this knowledge is union with its object. "Oneness in will with God, and partaking of His nature is itself eternal life."²¹

²⁰ Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, "Romans" (London: Blackie & Son, n.d.), IV, 178.

The first part of St. John's words quoted above emphasize the means of the union. The true doctrine of the Gospel as heard by Christians is the divine means for uniting them with the Son and the Father, and the continuance of this union depends on the fact that what they have heard ever continues to remain in them. Divine union and fellowship are connected with right doctrinal faith. Likewise eternal life is the promise if we remain in the Word and consequently in the Son and the Father. This eternal life is divine life, the spiritual and true life, or "the life indeed," I Tim. 6:19. Every Christian has this eternal life the moment he believes. Not only are all the elements which go to make up eternal life in believers even now in existence and action, but also the consummation, the perfection, and the perpetuity of the life which now exists and develops in growth, are all a matter of distinct and definite promise. In fact, this is the promise in which all lesser ones are contained. Dusterdieck strikingly observes:²²

The present reality of eternal life in believers is no more annulled by the fact that it is not yet perfected in them than that inversely continued growth, a holy and fruitful development, and the final glorious perfection are excluded by its real possession.

The work already completed in the soul of the believer is a prediction,

²¹Henry Alford as quoted by Henry A. Swatelle, "Commentary on the Epistles of John" in Vol. VII of An American Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Alvah Hovey. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publishing Society, c. 1888), p. 31.

²²As quoted by John Peter Lange, Commentary of the Holy Scriptures "Epistles of John," trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), XXIII, 80-1.

an assurance that it will be carried on to completion, I Cor. 2:9; Phil. 1:6; etc. Abiding with Christ and in Him in the steadfastness of faith and faithfully following Him means we have eternal life.

When we consider some of these blessings of the unio mystica, we see that it is real happiness when God dwells in us. But oftentimes there is a gradual increase of the conscious realization, of the lively feeling, and of the free enjoyment of this mystical union. A child possesses its mother from the first moment of its existence. But the sensible enjoyment of its mother's love gradually awakens and increases with the years, until he fully knows what a treasure God has given him in his mother. Thus too the consciousness and enjoyment of what we have in our Savior becomes gradually clearer and deeper, until there comes the time when we fully realize how rich God has made us in Christ and in union with Him. It is then that we realize some of the many blessings of the unio mystica which we have considered in this section. We cannot live otherwise than by nourishing the unio mystica within us. This mystical union is really the seed of eternal life in us. Not only the beginning of a blessed life is to be found in the knowledge of Christ, but also its perfection. Through the unio mystica we are able to rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, even though we do not see Him. But much remains to be revealed to us. Therefore our union with God does not attain its fullest unfolding until every lack be supplied and we see Him as He is. In that blissful vision we shall be like Him, for then He will give us all that He has. This is the true glory of our Christian hope sustained by our faith and assured by the mystical union with

our God. We see thus that the unio mystica is one of the chief points in Christian sanctification.²³

²³Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. from Dutch by Henri De Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), pp. 336-7.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper an attempt has been made to show that the doctrine of the unio mystica has its rightful place in Christian sanctification and its relation to all other doctrines of the body of Christian truth is governed accordingly. We have not tried to decide whether we should treat the unio mystica as a separate dogma under the heading of sanctification or whether we should call it the highest point of sanctification or something identical with it.¹ From the considerations presented in the chapter on the blessings of the unio mystica it would seem best to consider this doctrine as a separate dogma under the more general heading of sanctification. It is quite evident from the scanty presentations of the unio mystica in most dogmatical literature that much study remains to be done on this doctrine and its place in the corpus doctrinae. Unfortunately the term "unio mystica" and its treatment in our own Lutheran dogmatical literature is not entirely satisfactory. The treatment it has received as a distinct article of dogmatics has been determined to a large extent by the polemical motive or necessity.

We hope our presentation of the Scriptural evidence and proofs for the unio mystica will inspire more study of this wonderful doctrine of our Christian faith. We have noted St. Paul's emphasis of

¹Supra., p. 99.

this important doctrine. Paul particularly emphasizes the unio mystica as the believer's assurance of a complete moral transformation. The Christian life is no more an earthly, but a heavenly life; no more carnal, but spiritual; no more corrupt, but holy. St. John, on the other hand, emphasizes the wonderful fruit of increased spiritual knowledge assured by the union of the believer with God. Elsewhere in Holy Scriptures there is no lack of evidence of the unio mystica as we have noted. Although we are clearly shown from Scriptures the fact of the unio mystica, we cannot fully explain the manner of this wonderful doctrine. We must not on this account reject it, any more than we would the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, because we do not understand it.

The source and beginning of the believer's union with God is his regeneration. The union is established by faith and is therefore not an immediate, but a mediate union. God remains God, and man remains man. Yet the union is a very real one, by which the life of the Lord Jesus directly effects and controls Christians. Kohlbrugge describes the union in these strong terms: "One may be born again, one may be a child of God, one may be a sincere believer, yet without this mystical union with Christ he is nothing in himself, nothing but a lost and wicked sinner."² Of course the great acts of God's in a man's life - regeneration, justification, union, and renovation - are simultaneous. But to our mode of conceiving them, regeneration precedes,

²As quoted by Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. from Dutch by Henri De Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), p. 324.

that faith may be attained; justification follows, which is of faith; the mystical union then occurs, which is succeeded by renovation. We must distinguish between justification, which is the divine act of bringing man into the right relation with God, from the mystical union, which flows out of justification as a result. Our Lutheran Confessions point this out as follows: "Christians, being justified through Christ and reconciled with God through faith, are temples of the Holy Trinity."³ This indwelling of the Trinity is not the same as the righteousness of faith through which we are justified. This indwelling or union follows upon the justifying act of divine pardon. We must always strongly emphasize that the unio mystica is a result of justification. Whoever makes it the basis of justification is mixing sanctification with justification.

Finally we have emphasized that the unio mystica is effected through the means of grace, the Gospel and the holy sacraments. The same Word of God through which faith is worked in our hearts is the Word which begins, continues, and sustains the mystical union. This union, then, is the active and constant coming of Christ and the Trinity to Christians. We have also noted the many blessings which are ours as a result of this union. Above all the unio mystica is ever an assurance of our eternal life in the presence of our blessed God and Lord. May we ever thank God that He in His marvelous grace and mercy towards us has condescended to dwell in us in this most wonderful way and with such wonderful blessings!

³The Formula of Concord, XI, 73, Triglot Concordia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 107.

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