

SOME REFLECTIONS ON MYSTICISM

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD¹EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY KIT LEE²

'Some reflections on mysticism' was originally delivered as a lecture to a student audience, and first published in 1970 in the now-defunct journal *Dyn*. Reflecting E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 'inner life' and his profound and wide-ranging interest in mysticism, the lecture presents common threads across Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mystics, poets and writers, in addition to many of the classics of mystical literature in Britain at the time. A new introduction situates Evans-Pritchard's lecture within the context of his Catholic faith and contemporary Catholic theology at large, and argues that it should be read as part of the longstanding relationship and ongoing dialogue between anthropology and theology.

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Introduction (by Kit Lee)

'Some reflections on mysticism' was delivered originally as a lecture to a student audience, only a few years before E. E. Evans-Pritchard passed away. Afterwards, he famously commented to Meyer-Fortes, who was in the audience, that 'It must have been apparent to you, if not to them, that this is my inner life' (Barnes 1987: 480).

Evans-Pritchard was formally received into the Catholic Church in 1944, at the cathedral in Benghazi. At the time, he was serving as the liaison between the Bedouin and the military administration of Cyrenaica, and later wrote that he 'could not have faced the dangers [he] had to face in Africa and during the Second World War had [he] not known that [he] had

¹ E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) was one of the pre-eminent and influential British social anthropologists of the twentieth century, spending the majority of his career at Oxford as the Chair of Social Anthropology and fellow of All Souls College. He shaped the field permanently via his classic studies of the Azande and the Nuer, as well as his famed (at the time, notorious) insistence that anthropology should be regarded and developed not as a natural science but as a member of the humanities.

² Kit Lee is Associate Researcher in anthropology at East China Normal University, and Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics, School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. Their research interests include Catholicism, anthropological theory, and the Andes.

divine support' (1973: 37). His conversion was the product of lifelong consideration and desire: it had been 'nothing sudden or anything to write about... [rather] it was a slow maturing' (1973: 37); he had, in his own words, 'always been a Catholic at heart (most of my friends have been Catholics or Jews) and...it took me thirty years to take that final dive; so "conversion" can be a very confusing term. I have no regrets' (1973: 37).

His faith was deeply important to him: Godfrey Lienhardt wrote that the only things more important to Evans-Pritchard than belonging to Oxford were 'his home and his religion' (1974: 302). In an obituary, Lienhardt described Evans-Pritchard as having 'not [been] what is called a "good Catholic"' (Lienhardt 1974: 303). Evans-Pritchard did occasionally apply the moniker of a 'bad Catholic' to himself, saying for instance that 'bad Catholic though I be, I would rather be a bad one than not one at all' (1973: 37). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that he was not in fact devoutly Catholic; it seems that mostly what Lienhardt meant was that Evans-Pritchard did not regularly attend Mass (which, as Larsen wryly comments, more makes him simply a typical Catholic). Certainly, he did not attend the local parish church—despite the efforts of his contemporary at Oxford, J. R. R. Tolkien—preferring instead to worship corporately at Blackfriars, the Dominican priory at Oxford, where his 'uninhibited spaniel Barko...joined him in [the] chapel for his occasional prayers' (Lienhardt 1974: 303). But, as Larsen notes drily, Evans-Pritchard was the sort of 'bad Catholic' who 'has his spiritual autobiography printed in a publication of the English Dominicans' (Larsen 2014: 92).

Evans-Pritchard's faith has, however, largely tended to be regarded as isolated from his scholarship. This seems likely, at least in part, due to some of his colleagues finding his conversion 'so against the grain of what a great anthropologist ought to be and do as to be almost unable to absorb it' (Larsen 2014: 91)—the explanation Larsen offers for why T. O. Beidelman, who knew Evans-Pritchard very well, wrote after his death that Evans-Pritchard had converted to Catholicism from the Church of England 'at the close of his career' (Beidelman 1974: 3) when actually it occurred when he had only been 42 and had not yet been appointed to the Oxford chair he would occupy for a quarter of a century subsequently. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard recounted that was 'often...asked by incredulous, though well-meaning, people—and almost apologetically—"Why did you become a Catholic?"' (1973: 35), with 'the suggestion being that there must be some explanation to account for such a strange, even a remarkable, lapse from rational behaviour on the part of one supposed to be some sort of scientist' (1973: 35).

As such, this lecture is perhaps best known for how it puts Evans-Pritchard's 'spiritual side on display in a refracted way' (Larsen 2014: 101) and 'covertly reveals Evans-Pritchard's own inner life by presenting the devotional resources that meant the most to him' (Larsen 2014: 102). Certainly, as Evans-Pritchard himself puts it in the introduction, the lecture makes 'no attempt to answer...sociological questions... Nor shall I enter into historical questions' (1970: 103). Instead, it aims to 'suggest...a few features that [different branches of mysticism] have in common' (1970: 103). The resulting discussion reflects the depth and breadth of Evans-Pritchard's interest in mysticism, and tries to find common threads across not only Christian but also Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mystics, poets and writers. It also covers many of the classics of mystical literature in Britain at the time—such as Evelyn Underhill's

Mysticism, William James's *Variety of Religious Experiences*, and Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*—as well as touching particularly on the English Catholic tradition with a discussion of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous 14th-century English guide to mysticism.

At the same time, the lecture—and Evans-Pritchard's faith and interest in mysticism—are not divorced from his scholarship. For one, his colleagues did note the influence of Catholicism in, for instance, *Nuer Religion*—whose famous final line reads 'At this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist' (1956: 322)—and roundly criticised him for it. It was a 'commonly held view that while his earlier monographs...were works of outstanding scholarship, his *Nuer Religion* (1956), which followed his conversion to Roman Catholicism, marked a sad degeneration, attributable to the intellectually debilitating effect of his new faith' (Hamnett 1986: 72). Edmund Leach wrote of *Nuer Religion*, 'no doubt refracting his own dismissive view' (Larsen 2014: 110), that 'cynics have remarked that it exhibits the Nuer as first-class Jesuit dialecticians' (Leach 1980). Beidelman wrote that 'Some consider that his conversion accounts for a falling off in Evans-Pritchard's analytical acuity' (Beidelman 1974: 186).

For another, however, a close examination of Evans-Pritchard's own scholarship shows that—contrary to the colleagues who criticised *Nuer Religion* on the grounds that 'no anthropologist can be a sincere Catholic' (Douglas 2002: 19) (as they commented to Mary Douglas, another Catholic anthropologist)—he saw no inherent contradiction between anthropology and faith; to the contrary, his regard for the Catholic Church was both intellectual and moral (Lienhardt 1974: 302), and his Catholic and anthropological interests often ran in tandem. He was active as a Catholic intellectual, publishing and reviewing regularly in *New Blackfriars*—the academic journal of the English Dominicans, formerly called *Blackfriars*—and such a steadfast fixture in such circles that 'the editor of the venerable Catholic newspaper, the *Tablet*, so took Evans-Pritchard's support for granted that he once sent him a book to review without even bothering to first inquire whether or not he would be willing to do it; as it seemed, he was' (Larsen 2014: 94).

In his anthropological writings, too, he sought a discipline which would be not only amenable towards Catholicism, but also more inviting for Catholicism to engage with. For him, 'fundamentally there were never any real grounds for dispute between what natural science teaches about the nature of the physical world and what the Churches teach about faith and morals' (Evans-Pritchard 1960: 117). Rather, conflict stemmed from the 'scientific' 'claims of social scientists, or very many of them...for...sociological determinism and the teachings of Jesus are irreconcilable' (1960: 117). Evans-Pritchard suggested that a turn towards the sociologist or anthropologist as moral philosopher might open up a bridge between anthropology and his faith, via the long tradition of Catholic moral philosophy—while he conceded that it was 'unlikely that social anthropologists, with one or two exceptions, will study Catholic moral philosophy' (1946: 414), he cheerfully suggested that 'a bridge can...be built between the two disciplines by some Catholic moral philosophers studying social anthropology' (1946: 414). The anthropological development of comparative religion—rooted in ethnographic evidence and fieldwork rather than 'what was for the most part rationalist speculation' (1953: 218)—was the source of great potential for such bridges, as it meant that social anthropology was 'now in a better position to make a contribution to other

subjects concerned with problems of religion, such as Theology, the Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and critical and exegetical studies of Sacred Texts, and I believe that its significance for these related disciplines will become increasingly evident and important' (1953: 218).

It is in light of this desire for a theologically-engaged and theologically-friendly anthropology which 'Some reflections on mysticism' is situated. Mysticism itself was a crucial, profound subject for Evans-Pritchard: in an interview in 1970, the year this lecture was delivered and in which he retired, he said that one of his next projects would be a book on 'religious mysticism' (Larsen 2014: 100). In the lecture, Evans-Pritchard initially posits that a mystic might be, in the religious sense, simply defined as someone who had 'an acute awareness of God' (1970: 102); and thus, mysticism was, as Evans-Pritchard put it, 'the intuitive, inward, imaginative, poetic, and therefore personal and highly subjective, element in religion' (1970: 102). By the end of the lecture, however, Evans-Pritchard goes further and asserts mysticism as a matter not of belief, but of experiential knowledge—and, that he understands this experiential knowledge to be something which can only be accessed through sharing the same kinds of experience:

What, if I understand them rightly, all the mystics are trying to tell us in their different religious idioms is that they have incontrovertible [sic] knowledge of God, conceived of in one way or another, and that this knowledge is experiential and therefore verifiable; indeed St. Thomas Aquinas defines mysticism as *cognitio experimentalis*. The mystic does not believe, he knows. It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma. (1970: 115)

First, this assertion of the importance of experiential knowledge enters into a longstanding tension in Catholicism between mystical and scholastic theology—demonstrating Evans-Pritchard's own intellectual engagement with and positioning within theology. The famous Catholic theologian Jean Gerson, for example, defined mystical theology as 'an experiential knowledge of God that comes through the embrace of unitive love' (*theologia mystica est cognitio experimentalis habita de Deo per amoris unitivi complexum*) (Harmless 2008: 5); for Gerson, 'theology is God-talk, and as he saw it, the God-talk of the mystics offers us some genuine insight into God. What makes the mystics' knowledge of God unique is its roots: it is *experiential*' (Harmless 2008: 5, emphasis original). It was given this understanding that Gerson contrasted scholastic theology (which his predecessors at the University of Paris had been instrumental in creating, and which centred on developing theology as an academic discipline) with mystical theology (which he thought had been neglected in the process): where 'mystical theology' was personal, interior, and of the '*affectus*', scholastic theology was public, exterior and of the mind (Harmless 2008: 6). By the time Evans-Pritchard was writing, this tension was—and still is—a longstanding one within Catholic theology. Indeed, one stalwart defence of scholastic theology in the 1950s noted mysticism's inherent separation from scholastic theology, since it 'tends to regard itself as essential and experimental and *a posteriori* science, rather than an *a priori* one' (Greenstock 1950: 592)—a tendency which he saw as posing a

‘very real danger which the traditional theologian must be fully prepared to meet’ (Greenstock 1950: 592). Gerson had simply already recognised in the 15th century ‘what has [since] become obvious...that scholastic theology, in its efforts to be scientific, unwittingly severed the intimate link between theology and spirituality, between theologians’ public thinking about what the Church believes and believers’ personal encounters with God in prayer and worship. Scholastic theology seemed abstract, devoid of devotion, cut off from the heart and from the personal’ (Harmless 2008: 7).

Second, mysticism in the way Evans-Pritchard lays out, rooted in experience as a form of knowledge, thereby serves as a way to approach religion and theology through an anthropological lens. Larsen has posited that for Evans-Pritchard, mysticism was a ‘wider anthropological category which would shed light on the specific case of Christianity’ (2014: 225). Certainly, mysticism’s focus on experiential knowledge aligned well with his well-known critique of anthropology, delivered as part of his 1950 Marett lecture, as having been ‘dominated consciously or unconsciously, from the beginning...by positivist philosophy’ with the result that anthropologists ‘have aimed...and for the most part still aim...at proving that man is an automaton and at discovering... sociological laws’ (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 123). Instead, he famously suggested that anthropology should rather be understood as ‘ultimately of philosophy or art’ (1950: 123). As he was very careful to state, these were ‘conceptual, and not merely verbal, differences’ (1950: 123)—leading to an anthropology which is understood not as a member of the natural sciences, but ‘one of the humanities’ (1950: 118), studying ‘societies as moral systems and not as natural systems...interested in design rather than in process, and...therefore seeks patterns and not scientific laws, and interprets rather than explains’ (1950: 123). Mysticism’s experiential nature works as an instance of such a ‘conceptual, and not merely verbal, [difference]’ (1950: 123) which helps to shift anthropology—and theology—away from the more ‘objective’, positivist approaches to religion.

More than this, however, the emphasis on the intellectual validity and worth of mysticism’s experiential knowledge indicates how mysticism serves for Evans-Pritchard not just as a way for anthropology to analyse Christianity, but as a potential nexus for profound, genuine engagement between anthropology and theology—what Robbins has termed a ‘transformative’ relationship, wherein ‘anthropologists would look to theology to unsettle in one way or another [anthropology’s] understandings of its own goals and potentials’ (2020: 3). In particular, this is so because mysticism is, as Evans-Pritchard asserts, a matter not of belief but of experiential knowledge (‘The mystic does not believe, he knows’), an experiential knowledge which cannot be gained via logic or rationalisations but only via shared experience (‘It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma’). Scholars have often focused on the role of belief in Evans-Pritchard’s work: Engelke, for instance, has argued that for Evans-Pritchard ‘belief became an element of method’ (2002: 4), a ‘tool in [his] anthropological projects, a way of bridging the distance between [himself] and “the other”’ (Engelke 2002: 8); Larsen argues that ‘Christianity for Evans-Pritchard was mystical in the sense that one could experience it as an immediate apprehension of the

presence of the Almighty but—if one did not—then the only way to belief was forever barred by an angel with a flaming sword’ (Larsen 2014: 101). However, Evans-Pritchard here evades the ‘problem of belief’ altogether by explicitly framing mysticism not as belief but as knowledge. Although, as Larsen said, there is perhaps no path for belief—a matter Evans-Pritchard leaves aside in the lecture—there explicitly is a path for knowledge through ‘those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience’ (1970: 115). It is shared kinds of experience, then—and not belief—which grants knowledge, and his remarks make it clear that this is not meant as a completely forbidding requirement: Evans-Pritchard did not claim ‘any esoteric knowledge’ of mysticism himself, and went ‘no further than to say that if we are to have any comprehension of what the mystics are trying to tell us we must contribute some of it ourselves’ (1970: 101-2). As he lays out at the beginning of the lecture, one ‘does not have to practise the mystic’s way of life and have some understanding of it any more than one has to write poetry or understand poetry; or, as Dr Samuel Johnson put it, “He who drives fat oxen need not himself be fat”’ (1970: 101). Mysticism could be understood by anyone. As he put it ‘anybody who is capable in some degree of imagination and reflection can understand it and participate in it’ (1970: 101).

Evans-Pritchard was a deeply committed and engaged Catholic intellectual at the same time that he was someone who has a ‘good claim to being simply *the* pre-eminent social anthropologist of the mid-twentieth century, [without whom] the late twentieth-century discipline is hardly thinkable’ (Fardon 2003: 21-22, emphasis original). Although his work on mysticism was never completed—Evans-Pritchard died just a few years after he delivered the lecture—‘Some reflections on mysticism’ not only provides a glimpse of Evans-Pritchard’s theological and Catholic knowledge and predilections, but also an indication of how the transformative dialogue between anthropology and theology (c.f. Lemons 2018; Robbins 2020) is not only possible but has a precedent in figures such as Evans-Pritchard.

Some reflections on mysticism (1970)

*The prayer-mat stain with wine, if so
The Magian’s favour thou canst win,
For travellers in the land should know
The ways and custom of the inn.*

This is a stanza from Hafiz (Palmer 1938: 1), and this lecture is about those travellers who hope to reach a knowledge of God at the end of their journey. The mystic way, the *via mystica*, as the words ‘way’ and ‘via’ imply, is often spoken of as a journey, and this brings to mind other words, such as *tariqa* and *tao*. Likewise the gnostic journey of the soul and the opening line of the *Divina Commedia*. And some of you may also be thinking of *Piers Plowman* and *Pilgrim’s Progress*; the metaphor is common enough.

I shall endeavour to set before you some general features of mystical thought, but it must first be said that mysticism is a very vague term. It ranges from what some mystics tell us about their raptures to Lévy-Bruhl’s use of the word in contrasting the ideas of primitive and civilised man, and even, in a very general sense, to the non-rational. In the first and

narrowest, and some may estimate the highest, sense of the word it would seem necessary for anyone who wishes to understand its meaning to experience what it is the mystics say they have experienced since they have often declared that the experience is incommunicable in words. That remarkable scientist Swedenborg (1688-1772), for instance, who lived in a world of angels, practised no ascetic practices and fell into no ecstatic trances. Indeed I would like to make it clear right away that such experiences, for which there is much evidence, as visions, levitation, glossolalia, stigmata [sic] and so forth may have little to do with mysticism or are at any rate peripheral to it. I quote Ansari of Herat: 'Can you walk on water? You have done no better than a straw. Can you fly in the air? You have done no better than a bluebottle. Conquer your heart; then you may become somebody' (Huxley 1966: 265).

So I am here going to use the word in a broader sense, a sense in which anybody who is capable in some degree of imagination and reflection can understand it and participate in it. One does not have to practise the mystic's way of life and have some understanding of it any more than one has to write poetry or understand poetry; or, as Dr. Samuel Johnson put it, 'He who drives fat oxen need not himself be fat.' So I do not claim any esoteric knowledge of the subject and would go no further than to say that if we are to have any comprehension of what the mystics are trying to tell us we must contribute some of it ourselves.

It is perhaps always a mistake, and especially in a topic like this, to attempt formal definitions at the outset of a discussion, but some, even if a vague, indication must be given of what is being talked about, so let us say, initially, that it is religious mysticism about which I wish to make some observations, and that for the time being we need go no further than to say that in the religious sense a person is a mystic who has an acute awareness of God³ (however conceived of). Mysticism may then be said to be the intuitive, inward, imaginative, poetic, and therefore personal and highly subjective, element in religion in contrast to the formal, external, conventional, institutional, dogmatic, ritual and liturgical side to it.

These are not opposites. Religious mysticism has invariably been practised within the framework of institutional religion, however much it may have transcended it and however much the official clergy may have frowned upon it. Mystics have not been antinomians, anarchists and heretics, as some seem to have supposed. Indeed it has generally been recognised by the great mystics themselves that, if not anchored to institutional religion, any form of mystical exercises can be both futile and dangerous; and, it may be added, mystical notions may easily become self-delusion, sentimentality, and an almost meaningless pseudo-metaphysic. Nevertheless, mysticism, though it may wear the clothes of conventional piety is not the same as it. We may even contrast those who perform their conventional religious duties, who are sound in both faith and morals, with those who see in the most ordinary things what the eye cannot see, the visible with the invisible church. For the mystics, there being a God, there is nothing else worth bothering about. For them Thy lily and Thy rose. For them the vision of the many-splendored thing.

Since mysticism is rooted in institutional religion, that is to say, in one or other traditional culture, it must vary in form and idiom of expression from one part of the world to another. Obviously a Christian is most unlikely to contemplate Muhammad. Also it is a

³ This is more or less the definition given by Rufus M. Jones in his comprehensive survey of Christian mysticism (1909: xv).

phenomenon found in one form or another in every religious movement. When one thinks of Christian mysticism one may think first of the renowned Catholic mystics, but there were also Puritan mystics, John Bunyan and George Fox, for example; and there were Montanists, Beghards, and any number of different types of Pietists, Quietists, Anabaptists, etc. Moreover, mysticism need not always have what most people would regard as a theistic content: Jain mystics, some of the Hindu mystics, and those of Zen Buddhism can be held to be atheists, though this is a questionable word. Then, clearly the monistic mysticism of Vedantic India cannot be expressed in the same terms as the dualistic mysticism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Nevertheless the contrast may be more apparent than real for it can be maintained, as Dean Inge has noted, that 'mysticism is independent of time, place, nationality and creed. In reading extracts from great mystics we might often be in doubt whether the writer was a Neoplatonist, a Sufi, a Buddhist, a Catholic or a Quaker' (Inge 1930: 121). Like dreams, like archetypal themes in myth and poetry, it is a universal language, a universal faith, the sea into which all rivers flow and are united. The late A. J. Arberry says the same (1950: 11), and the same point is made, though with more caution, by Gershom G. Scholem, in his great book on Jewish mysticism (1941: 5-6).⁴

It is my hope that in this lecture I may be able to suggest to you a few features they have in common, why it is that the Dean felt that they have all been telling us the same in different tongues, that there is a *Philosophia Perennis*, a Perennial Philosophy. But here, and before making those suggestions, I must qualify what I said earlier, that mysticism is intensely personal. I did not mean that it was entirely individualistic. The mystics have not been isolated figures but the product of a long history of thought. Nor were the mystics hermits. There were schools, orders, seminaries of mystics (e.g. the Sufi orders, the Essenes, and the chain of Rabbinical teachers); and some mystics have played a considerable part in public affairs (e.g. St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Catherine of Siena and Swedenborg). Even the mystics among the Pietists, whom one might suppose to be highly personal, individualistic and emotional in their religious thought and practice, belong to a broad and deep tradition.

If the line between institutional religion and its mystical expression is blurred so is the line between poetry and mysticism, so much that it is difficult to decide which of the poets should be included among those who may be said to be religious mystics. Indeed the intoxication of poetry much resembles mystical rapture. Each must make his own choice. Some might include Wordsworth, Browning and Matthew Arnold. I would not. If anyone is to be included I suppose it would be people like Henry Vaughan,⁵ Blake, Tennyson, and Francis Thompson. The matter is further complicated here in that it is in the nature of the subject, as will be apparent to you, that mystical writings are, and perhaps have to be, in the language of poetry, even when in prose, a language full of metaphors and allegories and other more or less hidden allusions taken from everyday things. This is well illustrated by the terms used by the Sufi mystics, e.g. 'new wine' is 'divine love', 'darling' is 'the manifestation of the beloved (God)', 'tavern' is 'the stage in which the seeker after God is immersed in the divine mysteries',

⁴ See also Evelyn Underhill (1930: 3, 80, and in many other places).

⁵ We have been told that Vaughan was no mystic (Dixon 1967: 19) a verdict I cannot accept. The editor was giving the word 'mystic' the narrow sense of the *unio mystica*.

and 'ruby lip' is the 'conscience'. These are simple examples. Some are more esoteric, and they are sometimes deliberately obscure for sake of protection. So until one becomes used to their vocabulary mystical writings may be confusing and may be so even when one has become familiar with it. I have earlier quoted a verse from Hafiz. More familiar examples could be taken from the quatrains of Omar Khayyam, such as:

You know, my friends, how long since in my House
For a new Marriage I did make Carouse:
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

Indeed it has never been finally agreed upon whether in such verses Omar is speaking of the intoxication of wine or the intoxication of mystical experience. I have no doubt that it is the latter, but whether so or not, it must be recognised that mystics have often hidden in their verse their acute sense of the transcendental, what lies behind the veil. Sometimes they have taken on the garment of erotic passion, as we see in *The Song of Solomon* and as we find in some of the what are to me rather sugary writings of some of the Catholic mystics.

Furthermore, it might be questioned whether in a very general way of speaking there can be any poetry which does not have a religious source. Even avowed atheists like Swinburne drank deeply from that pool. It might also be observed that many hymns, which are religious poems, could well be included in an anthology of mystical verse, though the only well-known one that has got into the *Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* is Newman's 'Lead kindly light' ('*The Pillar of the Cloud*').

At this point and before we go any further I wish to say that I shall in this lecture make no attempt to answer such sociological questions as from what sort of social background did the mystics come? Why did they flourish, sometimes simultaneously in different religions and in different countries, at some periods and not at others? And why is it that women played so prominent a part in Catholic mysticism and none at all in Jewish mysticism? Nor shall I enter into such historical questions as the spread of Buddhism from India to China and from China to Japan, the influence of Neo-Platonism on Christian thought, the possible Hindu origin of Islamic Persian mysticism, or what was the impact on Jewish mystical thought of the exodus from Spain in 1492. My object is rather to suggest some features mystical thought has in common at all times and in all places.

I would begin by saying that, as in Plotinus, it tends always to be monistic,⁶ pantheistic if you wish, and this even in such starkly dualistic religions as Judaism and Christianity (as in the writings of Eckhart, Suso and Boehme, and in German Hasidism and in the English 17th Century Ranters), though not in them to the degree we find it in Vedantic Hinduism. Concisely stated, monism asserts that there is nothing but God; hence obviously everything is God. Pure monism is therefore not only much the same as pantheism but is also strangely alike to certain forms of atheism, e.g. Jaina mystical thought; for to say that everything is God is in some ways very much the same as saying that there is no God – a paradox we find in much Hindu writing.

⁶ Prof. Zaehner does not agree (1957, *passim* but especially chap. X).

As Hindu thought underwent many changes during the millennia of its development some of its concepts have been found difficult to translate with precision and consistency into English and are not always easy to grasp even when so rendered. So I commence by citing to you two verses of the well-known poem *Brahma* by Emerson as an example of the impression Hindu monism made on a sensitive western mind well acquainted with its literature:⁷

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

We find the same vein of pantheism in most, if not in every, form of mysticism. This is from the Sufi Jami (Browne 1893):

His beauty everywhere doth show itself
And through the forms of earthly beauties shines
Obscured as through a veil.....
Where'er thou seest a veil
Beneath that veil he hides.

We shall have to get used to this paradoxical metaphor of the veil, the phenomenal world which is both God and hides us from him. It is the unveiled God, the *Deus revelatus* behind which is the concealed God, the *Deus absconditus*. We read in Isaiah (45, 15) 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel', and elsewhere that he 'is clothed with light as with a garment.' Then the veiled God of the Old Testament becomes the revealed God of the New Testament; or, if you prefer, God revealed through a veil, as in Charles Wesley's hymn 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see.'

This is what the Sikh mystic Gobind Singh says: 'God is in the water, God is in the dry land, God is in the heart, God is in the forest, God is in the mountain, God is in the sea, God is in the earth, God is in heaven..... Thou art in the tree in its leaves, thou art in the earth, thou art in the firmament. Thy name is repeated again and again, thy name is fixed in man's heart..... Thou alone art' (Macauliffe 1909: 269). And we are told in the Koran: 'I am nearer to him than his jugular vein' (Palmer 1938: 27). Meister Eckhart declares 'God is nearer to me than I am to myself' (quoted in Jones 1909: xxvi). Tennyson, who is known to have fallen into mystic trances tells us the same (1867):⁸

Glory about thee, without thee; and thou fulfilllest thy doom,
Making Him broken gleams, and a stifled splendour and gloom.

⁷ Emerson's poem is easily parodied, as it was by Andrew Lang.

⁸ *The Higher Pantheism* (parodied by Swinburne in *The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell*)

Speak to Him for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

But all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.⁹

Now it follows from all this in the logic of monistic mysticism that God being all, we are God. This may seem an outrageous thing to say, and yet we have been told that the kingdom of God is within us; and there is the famous passage in St. Augustine in which he says he went wandering like a strayed sheep seeking God, 'and I found thee not, because in vain I sought for him who was within myself.' And here is what a Sufi says (Palmer 1938: 42):

All the earth I'd wandered ever seeking still the beacon light,
Never tarried in the daytime, never sought repose at night;
Till I heard a reverend preacher all the mystery declare,
Then I looked within my bosom, and 'twas shining brightly there.

Ibn al-Arabi tells us the same, that we are God. And so do the other Sufi mystics.

So it follows from the famous Vedantic doctrine that the *Brahman* is the *Atman*, roughly-speaking that God and the soul are one, not only that there is no 'thou' and 'I' but only 'thou', or if you prefer only 'I', but also that you and your brother are one, so that you love your brother as yourself because he is yourself. Hence the famous Hindu formula 'That art thou' or 'Thou art that'. The Upanishads (c. 800 B.C.) centre round this teaching, developed by Sankara in his doctrine of *advaita*, non-duality, a monistic doctrine which denies the existence of the world as separate from God. Hence when we are in the presence of another being like ourselves we are in the presence of God (in the rather impersonal sense of what has been called the ground of all existence) – beneath that veil he hides. We are told the same in the Torah (Lev. XIX, 18): 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', meaning the other is yourself (Scholem 1941: 279). The same sentiment has often been expressed: 'And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me' (Matthew, 25, 40). And it is related that Muhammad 'declared that God said to Moses: "O my servant, I was sick and thou didst not visit Me. I begged of thee and thou gavest not to Me" with other like expressions, pointing to the fact that the existence of the beggar in His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence' (Smith 1944: 210).

And not only people but every creature must likewise be treated with love and respect. This is the ethical basis of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, avoiding harming any sentient creature. There are many charming stories of kindness to beasts, such as how Yudhishtira, the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, would not enter paradise without his dog, saying 'Such glory do I nowise covet for which I must renounce a creature loyal to me.' Nevertheless he was reprov'd for still being bound by human love (Zaehner 1966: 125). From a different part of the world we hear how when the Polish patriot and mystic Towianski was asked why he allowed a strange dog to jump at him and cover him in mud he replied 'The damage he does to my coat is

⁹ Tennyson was clearly influenced by Hindu monist philosophy. So were many others, e.g. Swinburne, who draped oriental mysticism round the rather unlikely figure of Hertha.

nothing in comparison with the wrong I should inflict upon him in case I were to remain indifferent to the manifestations of his friendship' (quoted in James 1902: 281 (footnote)). And even then the inanimate world should be treated with respect: 'Gently brother, gently pray.'

So much for monist ethics. How about the philosophy underlying the ethics? In Indian mystical thought it is more or less taken for granted that the world is meaningless and that it is for man a countless succession of births and deaths in an endless chain of misery. The only sensible thing to do is to opt out of the illusion of mundane existence and through elimination of all desire and all attachments to become absorbed into the ultimate source of all being. The Buddha says of Brahm in Sir Edwin Arnold's poem *The Light of Asia*:

Nor him nor any light
Shall any gazer see with mortal eyes,
Or any searcher know by mortal mind;
Veil after veil will lift – but there must be
Veil upon veil behind.

Stars sweep and question not. This is enough
That life and death and joy and woe abide;
And cause and sequence, and the course of time,
And Being's ceaseless tide.

Which, ever changing, runs, linked like a river
By ripples following ripples, fast or slow –
The same yet not the same – from far-off fountain
To where its waters flow

Into the seas. These, steaming to the sun,
Give the lost wavelets back in cloudy fleece
To trickle down the hills, and glide again;
Having no pause or peace.

and so it must go on for ever unless the self can be annihilated and the dewdrop slip into the shining sea.

Everything is in a state of flux, of ceaseless ebb and flow, as wave after wave beats aimlessly upon a barren shore without meaning or respite. It only makes some sense of this unintelligible divine sport if there is some means of finding stillness – what the Western scholastics would have called the *nunc stans*, the timeless now (far away from the *nunc fluens*, the now in time); and this can only be done by renouncing the world and all desire by living only in the present, for, as the Buddhists say, the past is beyond recall and the future is entirely unknown.

The monist position is of course full of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. How do we know that we cannot know what is behind the veils? How can we will to end desire in a world of inflexible cause and effect? Then, if everything is God apparent opposites are the same: existence and non-existence, love and hate, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, good and bad. It would all seem to be a dream of a shadow play in which God takes all the parts.

For Ramakrishna (b. 1834), we are told, good and evil cease to have meaning once liberation (*moksha*) has been achieved, for whatever is good because it is God, and just as the poison in the snake does the snake no harm, so what appears evil to men who are still in bondage to their egos, is in itself not evil but good (Zaehner 1966: 164). Dean Inge has not been the only one to be shocked by the apparent lack of ethical content in some aspects of monistic philosophy and its doctrinal implications, that God spoke through Ovid as much as through Augustine. This seeming disregard of morality is set forth in a beautiful poem, *Krishna*, by G. W. Russell (1917: 498-499):

I paused beside the cabin door and saw the King of Kings at play,
Tumbled upon the grass I spied the little heavenly runaway.
The mother laughed upon the child made gay by its ecstatic morn,
And yet the sages spake of it as of the Ancient and Unborn.
I heard the passion breathed amid the honeysuckle scented glade,
And saw the King pass lightly from the beauty that he had betrayed.
I saw him pass from love to love; and yet the pure allowed His claim
To be the purest of the pure, thrice holy, stainless, without blame.
I saw the open tavern door flash on the dusk a ruddy glare,
And saw the King of Kings outcast reel brawling through the starlit air.
And yet He is the Prince of Peace of whom the ancient wisdom tells,
And by their silence men adore the lovely silence where He dwells.
I saw the King of Kings again, a thing to shudder at and fear,
A form so darkened and so marred that childhood fled if it drew near.
And yet He is the Light of Lights whose blossoming is Paradise,
That Beauty of the King which dawns upon the seers' enraptured eyes.
I saw the King of Kings again, a miser with a heart grown cold,
And yet He is the Prodigal, the Spendthrift of the Heavenly Gold,
The largess of whose glory crowns the blazing brows of cherubim,
And sun and moon and stars and flowers are jewels scattered forth by Him.
I saw the King of Kings descend the narrow doorway to the dust
With all his fires of morning still, the beauty, bravery, and lust.
And yet He is the life within the Ever-living Living Ones,
The ancient with eternal youth, the cradle of the infant suns,
The fiery fountain of the stars, and He the golden urn where all
The glittering spray of planets in their myriad beauty fall.

Now, if all this seems to you and me to be a maze of enigmas, paradoxes, contradictions and delusions it could be that we are unenlightened, that we have not sensed the unity of all things. Here we come to the most difficult part of monist philosophy, the unity of opposites. "A is made possible only by not-A". This simple principle contains within it all the complexities of the dialectic as it developed from Heraclitus, through Plato and Aristotle, to Jakob Boehme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel' (Vysheslawzeff 1969: 10-11) In the history of Western philosophy Hegel has been the most forthright in stating this unity of conceptual opposites, regarding change itself as identity. Indian mysticism goes beyond this what might be regarded as a dialectical game. It asserts that there are no opposites in reality, that diversity and multiplicity are illusions, and therefore so also is all change and movement. There is no object and no subject; that is merely illusion.

So if the opposites merge into identity both cease to have any meaning, cease to be. It follows that if the self has an existence only in relation to the non-self, the 'I' in relation to the 'non-I', then if the subject-object relationship can be got rid of, seen to be an illusion, both subject and object are united in nothing. The self is eliminated, or rather the ego is eliminated. The true self, the soul, the *atman* survives but as it were in a deep dreamless sleep, as a dewdrop in the sea, as a drop of wine in a cask of water. This is the final mystery.

How does one proceed to reach this delectable state? The mystics of every religion agree on the first and absolutely necessary step: to detach the self from worldly interests and desires, to rid oneself of the foul stinking lump of self, as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* has it, of all self-willing and self-pleasing. Richard Rolle tells us 'from the earliest moment on till the present day no man has ever attained to the contemplation of everlasting love until he has utterly forsaken the vanity of the world' (quoted in Joseph James 1950: 170). 'But thou, O dear Timothy,' admonishes Dionysius the Areopagite, 'leave behind both sensible perception, and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence; and all things being and not being, and be raised aloft as far as attainable – unknowingly – to the union with Him above every essence and knowledge' (James 1950: 185). All the mystics say the same:

If thou couldst empty all thyself of self,
Like to a shell dishabited,
Then might He find thee on the ocean shelf,
And say, 'This is not dead',
And fill thee with himself instead. (from T. E. Brown, *Indwelling* quoted in James 1950: 107)

So the only thing to do is to empty the self of all the self – the self-oblivion we read of in the Talmud. But how is it to be done? How is one to make a void of the self so that God may enter in? Self-naughting, as it has been called, can be achieved in various degrees in many ways. One can get drunk or take drugs or anaesthetics. There is the path of energy or exertion, the path of contemplation (the *via contemplativa*), the path of resignation or submission, the path of good works, and the path of just trust (*pistis*). One can sometimes escape from the self for a time in madness, in human love (*eros*) (even in dissipation), in art; or one can withdraw from the phenomenal world into that of ideas, as some of the Greek thinkers did. It is generally accepted, however, that the only really effective and lasting mode is the complete abandonment of the self through total intellectual detachment from all that makes one cling to the world, from wealth, distinction, ambition, carnal desire – to become completely disinterested, to achieve what in Western mysticism is sometimes called holy indifference. Certainly power and wishing to be important are wellnigh incompatible with enlightenment. Says Jalal-uddin Rumi, (quoted in Huxley 1966: 130) one of the most famous of the Islamic mystics:

Once the noble Ibrahim, as he sat on his throne,
Heard a clamour and noise of cries on the roof,
Also heavy footsteps on the roof of his palace.
He said to himself, 'Whose heavy feet are these?'
He shouted from the window, 'Who goes there?'

The guards, filled with confusion, bowed their heads, saying,
 'It is we, going the rounds in search.'
 He said, 'What seek ye?' They said 'Our camels.'
 He said, 'Who ever searched for camels on a housetop?'
 They said, 'We follow thy example,
 Who seekest union with God, while sitting on a throne.'

Even religious duties may be a hindrance. Writes Palmer, summarising what the Sufis say, 'Wealth and Dignity are great hindrances; but too much praying and fasting are often hindrances too. The one is a shroud of darkness, the other a veil of light' (1938: 16). And at the last even worldly love must be surrendered, as we have seen in the story of Yudhishthira and his dog, and as we may also see in the pathetic story of Gautama, the companion of Mahavira, who could not give up loving his family. And have we not been told what Jesus said about his family!

The Hindu mystics tell us that the secret is realisation that the phenomenal world as known to us by our senses and what we deduce from that knowledge by our reason is all an illusion. To the mystic the phenomenal world, the world which seems most real to us, is *maya*, an illusion or a dream or, as it is often spoken of, a veil or veils. It is the *jalāl* of the Sufis, the majesty which veils God from human sight; and it is Plato's cave of shadows, the prison of the sense. This does not mean that the phenomenal world does not exist but it does mean that it does not exist as we think we know it, thereby giving us the illusion of the duality of the 'I' and the 'it'. The basic delusion, says the Roshi, the venerable teacher, is 'that the world and oneself are separate and distinct. Inherently there is no such bifurcation. The world does not stand outside me – it is me' (Kapleau 1965: 131). Plotinus tells us the same.

The senses cannot give us this understanding, and certainly not the intellect, which is perhaps the greatest of all obstacles to the goal; nor precepts nor dogmas; only the divine light, what we might call grace, can do that. In no other way can the One be apprehended or comprehended. So in Zen Buddhism the mind has to be emptied of all thought by the performance of certain exercises (*za zen*) demanding total concentration, then sooner or later will come enlightenment. Says Yasutani-Roshi in his commentary on the *koan MU* 'The opinions you hold and your worldly knowledge are your delusions. Included also are philosophical and moral concepts, no matter how lofty, as well as religious beliefs and dogmas, not to mention innocent thoughts. In short, all conceivable ideas are embraced within the term "delusions" and as such are a hindrance to the realisation of your Essential-nature. So dissolve them with the fireball of MU!' (Kapleau 1965: 79-80). (Of MU more anon). Al-Ghazali likewise tells us 'Let him reduce his heart to a state to which the existence of anything and its non-existence are the same to him' (James 1950: 203). This condition, which we might call in our commonsense language making the mind a blank is what the mystic calls the darkness of unknowing. All the mystics, of whatever faith, seem to say the same. This is Ibn al-Arabi: 'It is necessary that thou know, after this fashion, not by learning nor by intellect, nor by understanding nor by imagination nor by sense, nor by the outward eye, nor by the inward eye, nor by perception.....His veil (i.e. phenomenal existence) is (only) the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any quality..... There is no other and there is no existence to other, than He..... He whom thou thinkest to be other than God, he is not

other than God, but thou dost not know him and dost not understand that thou seest Him' (James 1950: 92-93).

To return to the West, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says the same, as does St. John of the Cross and so St. Thomas a Kempis, that all attachments must be cut away, every earthly tie broken; then one may enter that cloud of unknowing, the *nubes ignorantiae*; and this cannot be done by human reason. The anonymous author tells us that God cannot be done by human reason. The anonymous author tells us that God can only be known by the heart and not by the mind. All thoughts must be abandoned, even those of God, who must be loved, not thought.

If the great obstacles to enlightenment are logical reasoning and conceptual thinking and it is useless to try to understand by the intellect what is beyond the reach of the intellect then we can better appreciate certain mystical exercises which are the opposite of rationalist theology (as represented by Bonhoeffer and Tillich) and sometimes even appear to be prescriptions for derangement. So since the Zen Buddhists hold that the greatest obstacle to understanding the ultimate truth, that all is everything and everything is all, is the intellect, discursive, and divisive as it is, they set their students such conundrums (koans) as these: 'What was my face before my parents were born?'; 'On top of a flagpole a cow gives birth to a calf'; and 'The east mountain strides over the water.' A favourite koan is: 'When a Chinese Zen master of the T'ang era, Joshu, was asked by a monk whether dogs have the Buddha-nature he retorted "MU".' Zen students will meditate for years on such conundrums which to us may seem meaningless, and that is precisely what I suppose they are intended to be. What does MU mean? You and I might say that MU means just MU (nothing). If we did so, however, we would be missing, from the Zen point of view, the whole intention of the exercises, which is to eradicate any attempt at intellectual understanding.

Another example, and one nearer home, are the Cabbalistic exercises of Mediaeval Jewry. It is not merely that the Torah is interpreted in symbologic terms. The Jewish mystics go much further; and those who venture into this labyrinth will find that each word has a mystical and symbolic meaning, and one may even concentrate on each combination and permutation of letters in a word and even on a single letter or its numerical value (which letters have in Hebrew). Prof. Scholem in discussing Abraham Abulafia's *Hokhmah ha-Tseruf* (13th cent.) says that it was regarded even as an advantage if the letters being contemplated are meaningless, 'as in that case they are less likely to distract us.'¹⁰ (In the case of both the Zen and the Cabbalistic exercises – as also in some of the Yoga – there is nothing irrational, however strange they may appear to us, given the end aimed at, the elimination of all sensory and discursive distraction in the interest of total concentration. The same might be said of the Sufi repetition of the word 'Allah' till in the end it is meaningless; also in Hinduism and Buddhism the *mantrum* OM.

Perhaps I may here be allowed to change direction a bit and say that the mystic, especially the more monistically he is inclined, more or less ignores as illusions two problems which in the dogmatic theology of the West have proved difficult if not insoluble: the creation of the universe and the existence of evil. To say that creation must have a creator is mere

¹⁰ Scholem 1941: 133. See also Ernst Müller (1946: 76).

tautology; and I have never been able to understand how anyone could entertain the idea of a God who created the universe *ex nihilo*, as Christian and Muslim dogmas assert. He must have created it out of himself, if at all. And what was the point of creating it anyhow? For the monist however this problem does not arise, or if it does, it arises in quite a different form. For him the world is God, and since God has always existed the world also has always existed. Anyhow space and time are illusions – there is no here and no there, no beginning and no end.

The second problem is how to account for what are generally regarded as evil, pain, cruelty and all the seeming beastliness of the world. Eating of the forbidden fruit may indeed have appeared to have given us the gift of understanding but to the mystic the appearance is illusory for the understanding is of the opposites of good and evil, and opposition which has no reality, it is just the way we in our ignorance evaluate phenomena in relation to ourselves. To use the Vedanta word again, it is all *maya*, all a dream. So Mother Julian of Norwich tells us ‘Sin is no deed’, and so the Cabbalistic writers tell us ‘Evil has no existence in itself, but only so much as is given to it by the good’ (Müller 1946: 129). This does not mean that what we call evil has no reality but simply that we do not understand the nature of that reality, not realising that there is no diversity, are no opposites, and that there is only the One; and by realisation I do not mean intellectual recognition but illumination.

I think it should be said also here that this business of emptying oneself of the self is not so simple as it might at first sight appear, for in one way of looking at the matter it might be asked what could be more selfish than the aim of the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist monks, liberation (*moksa*) from the cycle of rebirths by burning away their own individual loads of past actions (*karma*); or the aim of the Christian monk, personal salvation? Jesus came to save the world, not himself, and the Buddha would not enter the *nirvana* he had won, because of all the world’s woe. So asceticism may be a form of hedonism, and mortification a form of self-love, the surrender of the self being more than ever a clinging to the self. It has also been said that mendicant monks are spongers, passing on provision of necessary things to others. The argument on the other side is that the ascetic sets an example to others, that if the mendicant had any personal possessions he might become attached to them and cling to them, and that you can’t save anyone till you can save yourself. However the mystics tell us that one need not enter a monastery to forsake the world. Says Abu Sa’id ibn l’Khayr ‘The true saint goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them and buys and sells in the market and marries and takes part in social intercourse and never forgets God for a single moment’ (Nicholson 1921: 55). One can, that is to say, live a busy worldly life and be other-worldly; but it is difficult.

By this time you must have gotten used to paradox upon paradox in mysticism, as it may appear to you and me, but I have yet to draw your attention to the greatest, and in a way most ironical, paradox of all. Our senses and our reason enable us to cope with the world in which we have to live and we would be lost without them, yet the mystics tell us we are more than ever lost with them in that it is sensory impressions and discursive thought, and indeed all that we call our environment and our culture, which blind us to a true knowledge of reality.

Now, commonsense tells us that the mystic’s quest is hopeless, and looked at from outside it seems pathetic that one should cut oneself off from the familiar world one has loved:

Unwatched the garden bough shall sway,
The tender blossom flutter down,
Unloved that beech will gather brown,
This maple burn itself away;

Unloved, the sun-flower, shining fair,
Ray round with flames her disk of seed,
And many a rose-carnation feed
With summer spice the humming air...

But if there sometimes seems to be a note of sadness in mystical writings it is a glad and confident sadness, the weary but happy sadness of the pilgrim who must ever follow a distant trail to a city that he can never find. So when the Sufis tell us that there is no road from man to God what I suppose we are to understand them to mean is that perception and intelligence can never reveal the mystery, only the Divine Light.

Here then is another paradox: there are many roads to God and likewise no road. So it is that we are told by the 13th century Bukhara Sufi 'Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi that according to the Sufis there can be no road for the traveller on the path of mystic philosophy because the nature of God is illimitable and infinite. Since all existence is God, how can there be a road to what is already there?

Then, if it be sensory impressions and discursive reasoning which prevent us from understanding the ultimate reality behind the phenomenal world illumination must be a matter of degree, for obviously even the most committed mystic cannot be totally indifferent to the senses and to reason. What the mystic means when he speaks of holy indifference is that one is indifferent because the mind is occupied with a higher and spiritual reality: then what the mediaeval philosophers called the 'spiritual forms' take the place of the 'natural forms' (the sensory impressions).

What, if I understand them rightly, all the mystics are trying to tell us in their different religious idioms is that they have incontrovertible knowledge of God, conceived of in one way or another, and that this knowledge is experiential and therefore verifiable; indeed St. Thomas Aquinas defines mysticism as *cognitio experimentalis*. The mystic does not believe, he knows. It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma.

I have tried to point to a few features common to mystical thought that I have noted in my little reading in that vast subject. You may indeed ask whether what the mystics tell us is true. Whatever the answer we might give we have to bear in mind that to the mystic who is convinced that he has achieved unitive knowledge of God the question is not only irrelevant but meaningless. For him there is no answer because there is no question. Truth and untruth are all the same. Also the issue for him is beyond discussion for he knows that he has experienced what is, and it avails little to ask whether what is is true. Furthermore, since his knowledge is not derived from perception or conception but from intuition, the heart, the Divine Light, the Inner Light of the Quakers, what Swedenborg calls 'wisdom' in contrast to

'knowledge' or 'intelligence', which can scarcely, or even at all, be defined, any sort of argument based on science or logic would miss the mark. Moreover the validity of mystical experience, both of the trust kind and of the rapture kind, cannot be questioned—it is too well attested. To ask how it should be interpreted, what it signifies, is to ask a different question, but likewise a useless one, for an experience which has little or no intellectual content cannot be intellectually described or defined.

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