

# Mysticism, Historical and Contemporary

## AN INTRODUCTION

By CARL-MARTIN EDSMAN

### 1. *Preliminary Definition*

An evident experience of God's presence is the basis for all religion. To establish a tentative and simple definition of the difference between mystics and other men, mystics might be said to experience the divine presence in a more tangible way.<sup>1</sup> In *Mystikens psykologi* (The Psychology of Mysticism), which appeared in 1926 and was reprinted photographically in 1968, Tor Andrae devotes the introductory chapter to a series of different definitions of mysticism. He sums up his systematically argued survey by saying that mysticism is considered to be "piety in so far as primary importance is attached to inner religious experience, to religion as occurring in the soul. Mysticism is pure religious introversion."<sup>2</sup>

This definition is up to a point in accord with the derivation of the original Greek *mystikós* (connected with the mysteries) from two verbs from the same stem. One means to shut one's eyes (to the impressions of the senses)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Wach, *Types of Religious Experience, Christian and Non-Christian*, London 1951, pp. 32 ff.; S. Radhakrishnan, *Idealistisk livssyn*, Stockholm 1950, pp. 78 ff. (English original: *An Idealist View of Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London 1937); J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness. A Psychological Study*, New York (1920) 1940, pp. 337 ff.; W. H. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion. An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behaviour*, New York 1958, p. 263; Idem, "Mysticism as a Basic Concept in Defining the Religious Self" (in: *Lumen Vitae Studies in Religious Psychology III: From Religious Experience to a Religious Attitude*, ed. by A. Godin, Brussels 1964); J. Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (Gifford Lectures [delivered in the Univ. of Edinburgh] 1961-62), London & Toronto 1961-62; G. St. Spinks, *Psychology and Religion. An Introduction to Contemporary Views*, London 1963, pp. 151 ff.; A. Vergote, *Psychologie religieuse*, Bruxelles 1966, pp. 29 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 77.

or to shut one's mouth (i.e. not to betray the secrets of the mysteries?). The other means to initiate into the mysteries.<sup>1</sup>

Nathan Söderblom's death prevented him from following up his Gifford Lectures of 1931 on *The Living God*, with the exposition of the history of Christian mysticism in particular which he had planned for the following year. He included within the subject the *ordo salutis* as interpreted by the Lutheran Church, and prayer: "The psychology of conversion, faith, justification, and adoption embraces the category of bliss as much as mysticism does, and with equal right"<sup>2</sup>. The evangelical theologian is right to speak of a *unio mystica*. "Mysticism implies the riches of inwardness, not an engulfing infinity, ... God is near"<sup>3</sup> In *Den kallande rösten* (The Calling Voice; Stockholm 1961) Elis Malmeström also points out that classical Lutheran dogmatics allow for a *vocatio extraordinaria*. This comes direct to humans, and is separate from the Scriptures, although in accordance with them.<sup>4</sup> But communion with God in faith and trust, "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) is nevertheless something distinct from the special experiences which are generally indicated by the word mysticism.

## 2. *The Evidence of Religious History*

Practically all religions provide a greater or lesser abundance of material for the history, phenomenology, and psychology of mysticism. It is precisely in their capacity of Church historians and historians of religion in general, that the Swedish scholars and bishops quoted above dealt with mysticism. For every particular branch of religion there is a comprehensive scholarly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* I-II, Oxford [1925-1940], s.vv. μύω and μύεω; Hj. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* I f., Heidelberg 1954 ff., s.vv.

<sup>2</sup> N. Söderblom, *The Living God*. Basal Forms of Personal Religion, London 1933, pp. 77 f. A new edition in paperback appeared in Boston 1962. The second German edition, *Der lebendige Gott im Zeugnis der Religionsgeschichte*, München/Basel 1966, has a recent biography of Söderblom by Fr. Heiler.

<sup>3</sup> N. Söderblom, *Religionsproblemet inom katolicism och protestantism* I-II, Stockholm 1910, p. 274; Idem, *The Living God*, p. 70. Cf. E. Ehnmark, *Religionsproblemet hos Nathan Söderblom*, Lund-Malmö 1949, pp. 121 f.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 7.

literature on different aspects of this subject, written by specialists. Primitive peoples, the ancient Near East, classical Antiquity and the Hellenistic world, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, together with the indigenous religions of the Far East, all provide their contributions.<sup>1</sup>

The specialist cannot, however, afford to ignore the general theories and classifications applied to mysticism. It is just as difficult to limit the subject chronologically or geographically as it is to divide off a purely linguistic or historical treatment from other methods of approach. There are, for example, obvious historical connections, which even occur despite the antagonism between different world religions. Thus the Islamic mystics were influenced

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<sup>1</sup> More or less succinct surveys and whole monographs respectively, with complementary bibliographies are easily accessible in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire* 2 (1937-1953), s.v. "Contemplation", 4 (1958-1961), s.vv. "Expérience spirituelle", "Extase"; *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3. Aufl. 4 (1960), s.v. "Mystik"; *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2. Aufl. 7 (1962), s.v. "Mystik"; *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), s.vv. "Mystical Marriage", "Mystical Phenomena", "Mysticism", "Mysticism in Literature", "Mystics, English". The most recent information is contained in the periodicals *Archiv für Religionspsychologie*, *Archives de sociologie des religions*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*. See also W. W. Meissner, *Annotated Bibliography in Religion and Psychology*, New York 1961, pp. 29 ff. ("Psychology of Mysticism": nos. 494-580). Among the innumerable anthologies of different size, contents and value may be mentioned *Textes mystiques d'Orient et d'Occident choisis et présentés par S. Lemaître I-III*, Paris 1955. A standard scholarly work on Christian Mysticism is A. Ravier (Ed.), *La Mystique et les Mystiques*, Paris 1965. A more popular, general historical survey with a very full bibliography of works in English is given by S. Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religion* (A Pelican Original, A 594), Harmondsworth 1963. To the classical works by R. A. Nicholson, Margaret Smith and A. J. Arberry on Islamic mysticism, add, for instance, H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden 1955; T. Andræ, *Islamische Mystiker* (Urbanbücher 46; Swedish original, Stockholm 1947), Stuttgart 1960; R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (Jordan Lectures 1959), London 1960; G.-C. Anawati, L. Gardet, *Mystique musulmane, aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques*, Paris 1961; G. C. Anawati, "Introduction à la mystique musulmane" (*Angelicum* 43, 1966, pp. 131-166); M. Molé, *Les mystiques musulmans* (Mythes et religions 54), Paris 1965. Among the important comparative studies of a recent date are Sh. Ueda, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus* (Studien zu Religion, Geschichte und Geisteswissenschaft, 3), Gütersloh 1965, and H. Dumoulin, *Östliche Meditation und christliche Mystik*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1966. A contribution to mysticism in primitive religion is *Studies in Shamanism*, ed. by C.-M. Edsman (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 1), Stockholm-Uppsala 1967.

by the Christian in several ways, and both were dependent upon the Platonic and Neoplatonic mystics.

On the other hand the psychologist and scholar of comparative religion runs the risk of linking phenomena similar in appearance only. In their original context these may, despite outer similarities, have an entirely different significance. In this field also it holds good that the exaggerations of the older associative type of comparative method can only be avoided and progress achieved by a careful awareness of the differences between the respective total contexts and between the details dependent on these. The psychologist of religion can, however, reckon with one unifying factor, and that is the great similarity in the psycho-physical make-up of human beings.

### 3. *The Phenomenology and Typology of Mysticism*

The special religious experience of mysticism, its epistemology and its ascetic ethics or technique, occur with startling likeness in widely different times and types of religion. This does not, however, exclude a multitude of variations and differences. The way of mysticism includes different stages, but the state which generally distinguishes mystical experience is ecstasy or rapture.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, often impossible to isolate this from the preparatory physical and spiritual training and even less from the revolutionary consequences for the whole life of the mystic. It can result in complete devotion to the service of one's neighbour, and the not infrequent accusation that the mystic gives himself up to a selfish and anti-social enjoyment of God is not entirely justified.<sup>2</sup>

What then are the distinctive characteristics of such an experience? According to very similarly worded pronouncements, both historical and contemporary, some of the consistent characteristics are that it is ineffable, filled with a particular feeling of happiness and love for all things. The whole world is

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<sup>1</sup> See the dictionaries quoted above, s.v., and Marghanita Laski, *Ecstasy. A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences*, London 1961; E. Arbman, *Ecstasy or Religious Trance in the Experience of the Ecstatics and from the Psychological Point of View* I ff., Stockholm-Uppsala 1963 ff.; Th. Spoerri (Ed.) *Beiträge zur Ekstase* (Bibliotheca Psychiatrica et Neurologica 134), Basel 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Pratt, pp. 384 ff., 430 ff.; *The Way of Mysticism. An Anthology* introduced and arranged by J. James, London 1950, pp. 188 ff.: "Work—A Prayer".

experienced as coherent and meaningful, the whole of existence stands out in a clear transcendental light, and the experience thus implies new knowledge. This is usually considered to be ultimately a gift from some non-human power. In the brief experience of the depths of existence the sense of time and space is suspended or rather expanded. The nature of self-consciousness is at the same time so changed, that the true or innermost ego is merged in an awareness of the unity of all things. The mystic also often receives a prophetic vocation to bear witness to the things that he has seen. He is at once an individualist and universalist, turned inwards and directed outwards, an advocate of stillness and listening, but at the same time a man of action.<sup>1</sup>

In the classification of different types of mysticism it is customary to use such pairs of opposites as practising or "acting" mystics, as opposed to spontaneous or "reacting" mystics. In the first case the mystic is training and exercising himself, in the second he is also an object of the divine activity or prophetic revelation.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between the two attitudes may lead to contradictory notions so that prophetic religion with its acceptance of life excludes mysticism with its asceticism.<sup>3</sup> Or mysticism of inwardness or "mysticism of personal life" is contrasted with nature mysticism or "mysticism of the infinite". Here the experience of God is contrasted with the experience of cosmic consciousness or of the divine nature of the universe.<sup>4</sup> If the soul's meeting with its heavenly Lord is described in the language of the emotions or of love, then the terms mysticism of love and union, spiritual betrothal or mystical marriage are employed. In those cases where the intellectual element is dominant, it is permissible to speak of the mysticism of knowledge,<sup>5</sup> etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the typology in F.C. Happold, *Mysticism. A study and An Anthology* (A Pelican Original, A 568), Harmondsworth (1963) 1967, pp. 45 ff., an excellent, readable introduction to all aspects of mysticism.

<sup>2</sup> Söderblom, *The Living God*, pp. 23, 79. Cf. Pratt, pp. 433 ff.; Happold, pp. 100 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Heiler, *Bönen*, Stockholm 1922, p. 164 (German original, München 1918, 5. Aufl. 1923; English transl. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London 1937).

<sup>4</sup> Söderblom, *The Living God*, p. XVIII. For references and the discussion of the not-so-easy subject of Söderblom's treatment of mysticism, see Ehnmark, pp. 181 ff.; Heiler in *Der lebendige Gott* 1966, pp. XXI ff.; B. Sundkler, *Nathan Söderblom. His Life and Work*, Lund-Uppsala 1968, pp. 66 ff. Cf. Happold, pp. 43 ff., 54 f.

<sup>5</sup> Happold, pp. 40 ff.; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Mystical Marriage".

If, for example, the mystic uses drugs to arrive at the desired condition, one can speak of chemical mysticism.<sup>1</sup> It is usually also necessary to distinguish between the descriptions of scholars and the terminology of the mystics themselves. The phenomena of light and fire, or photisms together with ecstasy is, for example, called by the fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church the Light from Mount Thabor (Matthew 17: 1-2) or the Uncreated Light.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Cf. a work as early as W. James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London 1903, pp. 387 ff., quoted in the invitation to a conference on drug experiences, arranged 3. 6. 1967 in Stockholm by the Swedish National Association against the Abuse of Alcohol together with the Cultural Institute of the Church of Sweden. Among the immense literature on the subject which is treated from many points of view by religious historians, cultural anthropologists, pharmacologists, psychologists, sociologists and criminologists, see Söderblom, *The Living God* pp. 3 ff. (originally part of a temperance lecture of 1906!); L. Lewin, *Phantastica. Narcotic and Stimulating Drugs, Their Use and Abuse* (German original 1924), London 1931, reprint 1964; K. Meuli, "Scythica" (*Hermes* 70, 1935, pp. 121-176); H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, Leipzig 1938, reprint 1966; R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, London 1957, reprint in Oxford Paperbacks 14, Oxford 1961; W. La Barre, "Twenty Years of Peyote Studies" (*Current Anthropology* 1, 1960, pp. 45-60); Idem, "The Narcotic Complex of the New World" (*Diogenes* 48, 1964, pp. 125-138); G. Ray Jordan, "LSD and Mystical Experiences" (*The Journal of Bible and Religion* 3, 1963, pp. 114-123); J. Havens, "Memo on the Religious Implications of the Consciousness-changing Drugs" (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3, 1964, pp. 216-226); R. Gelpke, *Vom Rausch im Orient und Okzident*, Stuttgart 1966; G. Siegmund, *Rausch und Religion*, Hamm/Westf. 1966; W. N. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism" (*International Journal of Parapsychology* 8, 1966, pp. 295-320); Idem, "The Psychedelic Mystical Encounter with Death" (*Harvard Theological Review* 62, 1969, pp. 1-20; with responses by a Physician and a Theologian); W. N. Pahnke, W. A. Richards, "Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism" *Journal of Religion and Health* 5, 1966, pp. 175-207; *Ethnopharmacologic Search for Psychoactive Drugs* (Proceedings of a Symposium held in San Francisco, California, Jan. 28-30, 1967) [by] D. H. Efron, B. Holmstedt, N. S. Kline, Washington 1967; R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* (Pantheon Books), Baltimore, Md. 1967; P. G. Stafford, B. H. Golightly, *LSD—the Problem-Solving Psychedelic* (Award Books, 221 SK), New York 1967. For some Swedish literature on the LSD-discussion, see C.-M. Edsman, *Mystiker i Vällingby*, Stockholm 1968, chap. 6: "Kernisk mystik", with notes.

<sup>2</sup> J. Tyciak, G. Wunderle, P. Werhun, *Der christliche Osten, Geist und Gestalt*, Regensburg 1939, p. 148; T. Ware, "The Transfiguration of the Body" (*Sobornost* 1962, pp. 420-434); W. Völker, *Scala Paradisi. Eine Studie zu Johannes Climacus und zugleich eine Vorstudie zu Symeon dem Neuen Theologen*, Wiesbaden 1968, pp. 323 ff. Cf. Idem, *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita*, Wiesbaden 1958; C.-M. Edsman, *Le baptême de feu* (Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, 9), Diss. Uppsala 1940, pp. 154 ff.; Idem, *Myt, saga, legend*, Stockholm 1968, pp. 139 ff.

provides a biblical and theological interpretation of the experience of light. Among the evaluative distinctions is that between genuine and pseudo-mysticism.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *The Explanations of Religious Psychology*

The religious psychologist is primarily concerned with describing changes in consciousness. It is part of his scholarly discipline that it should seek exclusively immanent and psychological explanations of these changes. As an example of the manner in which a religious psychologist argues we can take the fifty-year-old work *The Religious Consciousness*, much used as a university textbook, by the American philosopher of religion James Bissett Pratt. He distinguishes between the mild and the extreme types of mystics, the latter of whom have partially discredited mysticism by their excesses. Mysticism is based upon an experience which is both emotional and cognitive in nature. All mystics of the ecstatic type have a wide fringe region of their consciousness, which is pictured by Pratt as a series of concentric circles. This has a powerful influence on their mental life, which is in the moment of ecstasy reduced to a small point. The ascetic methods of the mystic are sometimes indirect ones conducive to mental concentration and sometimes direct ones consisting in meditation. In this, rational discursive thought gives way to emotional conviction. The constant flux of thought is thus halted, so that one single idea remains, and this causes a dissolution of the sense of time and space and the experience of an "eternal now".

The visions and auditory phenomena which occur are most commonly pseudo-hallucinations, i.e. the mystic himself is aware that they are sights and voices of a different kind from ordinary sense impressions. Sometimes they cannot be distinguished from ordinary dreams, half-waking conditions, hallucinations immediately before or after sleeping, or lively memories. The new knowledge of the mystic may be compared with that feeling of clarity that a dreamer has through the falling away of contradictions. The experience of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Lhermitte, *Mystiques et faux mystiques*, Paris 1952; Idem, *Vrais et faux possédés*, Paris 1956. The author is a French Roman Catholic neurologist. Cf. also P. de Félice, *L'enchantement des danses et la magie du verbe. Essai sur quelques formes inférieures de la mystique*, Paris 1957.

everything suddenly standing in a clearer light is nevertheless a common human one which the mystic has in an intensified form. Special phenomena such as levitation or floating in the air and loss of will are also associated with physiological and psychological conditions.

Pratt is clearly anxious to render mysticism respectable by cutting off its extreme forms and pointing to its relationship with ordinary piety and its practical value. Both the mystics and ordinary men concern themselves with systems of symbols, even if the systems are disparate. Pratt also emphasizes that scholarship does not deny spiritual truths, but the scholar must confine himself to facts that can be verified by all under similar conditions. Nevertheless the religious psychologist cannot give an adequate explanation of the mystical experience. Consequently it is tempting but unscholarly to resort to supplementary metaphysical explanations whether of a spiritual or materialistic kind.<sup>1</sup> A reader of Pratt is furthermore struck by the fact that he, like other psychologists, is himself dependent on a symbolic language for the illumination of the functioning of consciousness.

The same observation is also relevant to the following analysis. Richard Wolf, an assistant doctor at the nerve clinic in Frankfurt am Main, has produced a preliminary study for a larger work on "Die Klinische Bedeutung des Eingebungssyndrom"; in it he similarly investigates the psychology and phenomenology of ordinary experiences of ecstatic inspiration. The characteristic of this syndrome is a particular emotional state, which is often described as blessedness. In addition there are special changes in the experiencing of the ego, which lead to self-apotheosis or self-sacrifice. Finally there is an alteration in the experiencing of time and place. Wolf attempts a phenomenological description of moods and emotions, and tries to distinguish between an emotionally coloured ecstasy and one free from emotion. In this he bases himself on Philipp Lersch's definition of moods as pure states of feeling which are free from emotion and lack an object. Joy has an object, but cheerfulness has not. In the latter case feelings play changing melodies on the bass harmony of an established mood. Emotions are psychologically conditioned, moods reflect a psycho-somatic state.

Observation of the mentally ill supports these distinctions. An exhilara-

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, pp. 337 ff.



tion which is not open to influence is radically different from the happy excitement of somebody who has received good news. Similarly the gloom of endogenous depressions is not open to influence, whereas reactive depressions can be alleviated by good news and comforting conversation or deepened by bad news. In the former case a vital feeling has been dampened down. The disturbances have inner causes, unlike the emotions, even if there are numerous links between the two. The moods constitute the simplest and most basic way in which a human being achieves a certain coloured and evaluative awareness of himself.

There is a whole range of moods from cheerfulness to blessedness and rapture. These are not primitive states of feeling. The feeling of happiness, according to Max Scheler, is one of the spiritual capacities of the personality. It therefore implies some spiritual and emotional maturity. Similarly blessedness belongs to the sphere of the Intellect. These mental dispositions pervade the whole experience of life and themselves remain unqualified. They are utterly independent of the will and arise spontaneously from the innermost core of the personality. When attention is drawn to them they tend to disappear and conversely they grow stronger when they are not observed. Such a state arises all of a sudden so that the subject experiences it as an intrusion from outside. Objectively, however, such an impression is preceded by a particular conscious or unconscious attitude.

Against this background are developed the specific ecstatic phenomena which make ecstasy something special within the sphere of human religious experience. To it belongs a particular experiencing of the ego. The feeling of happiness on the one hand includes the whole experiencing of the personality but on the other thrusts the personal ego into the background. The ego expands, so that it merges with the whole of the cosmos. Some one who is miserable or depressed shuts himself off from human company and seeks loneliness, the density of his ego increases. Some one who is filled with happiness must communicate with others, his ego opens out increasingly towards the "spirit of the universe". Intoxicated with blessedness, or the feeling that William James called "cosmic emotion", he merges with the universe. The complete rapture leads to communion with all souls or to what pious people have called *communio sanctorum*.

Among these changes in the ego there also occurs the dissociation of

consciousness which Pierre Janet calls "double conscience", or the seeing of oneself. This is an extension of the everyday phenomenon of self-observation. It is even possible to create an inner third ego, thus subjecting both of the others to observation. The second ego is, however, somewhat shadowy in comparison with the ego anchored in everyday reality. It can nevertheless through the exclusion of the sense impressions of the otherwise real ego become denser and constrict the latter. The observing ego then begins to lead the experiencing ego. Actually there is here a division of two mental activities that normally follow close on one another. That of passively receiving impressions and that of actively paying attention to them.

If one distinguishes between the ego and consciousness it becomes easier to understand this dissociation of the ego. Wolf here ties in with Melchior Palágyis's investigations. The continual stream of sense impressions is captured by the consciousness in a series of punctuated actions. The consciousness lives, so to say, a life of pulsation. According to Wolf the ego is rendered real through this pulsation. When it occurs regularly, the subjective identity remains undisturbed. But if the different beats of the consciousness become isolated from one another there arises a dissociation of the ego. Another convenient metaphor for the constant experience of oneself is the even and quick revolving of a reel of film with its separate frames.

If a normally pleasurable mood is heightened to an overwhelming joy or rapture, then time moves more quickly or even becomes lost in the present, quite simply disappears.

Such a halting of time can only last for a few seconds, but the person who experiences this condition is clearly incapable of making any pronouncement about this. The ecstasy of happiness is linked with one single beat of the pulse of consciousness. Thus the time sequence is lost. It is equally impossible for a picture of the surroundings to come into existence, if only one rod cone in the retina is engaged in the act of sense perception. This might also explain the experiences of light, of seeing without an object.

Wolf himself tries to trace photisms back to changes in a consciousness cut off from sense impressions of the surrounding world and focused upon inner experiences. In ecstasy a rapturous mood of happiness or a feeling of blessedness predominates. But photisms are not always associated with such a state of feeling. The strength of the phenomena of light is most

probably the result of the disappearance of other contents in the consciousness. Clearly therefore this involves an experience of only one beat in the pulse of consciousness.

In the same way the merging of subject and object in the *unio mystica* is a result of the falling away of the object in the triad which is a part of every mental experience, viz. the ego, consciousness and the contents of consciousness. The last-mentioned through the act of consciousness gives rise to the formation of the ego. In ecstasy, on the contrary, this is conditioned by consciousness itself, which is without content.

When in connection with ecstasy there is talk of increased or more than waking consciousness, this is considered to be a contradiction, in that the consciousness, being directed towards one single content, is constricted. However, if we use the metaphor of the stage of consciousness, this is not diminished in the state of ecstasy. The whole stage is lit up by consciousness, but the stage is empty.

The mystics' objectionable sayings that they are God do not indicate an intensification of self-consciousness, but instead they indicate a personification of an experience of eternity. Self-apotheosis is an expression of the boundlessness of an experience of the self which is marked by freedom from time and place.<sup>1</sup>

Wolf, who is well read in German philosophy and in psychology and is at home in the history of Christian mysticism, quotes several times from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and gives a discriminating picture of the experience of ecstasy. This is not reduced to something pathological or belittled by negative evaluations. Wolf's metaphorical language for a description of consciousness is distinguished from Pratt's in roughly the same way as in atomic physics, particles and wave movements are employed complementarily in the description of the same phenomena. It should, moreover, be noted that the concept of complementarity introduced in 1927 by the Dane Niels Bohr already had a recognized place in philosophy, and was compared by Bohr himself amongst other things with the paired concepts of justice

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<sup>1</sup> R. Wolf, "Zur Phänomenologie und Psychologie ekstatischer Ausnahmezustände" (*Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie* 125, 1949, pp. 284-320). Cf. C. Albrecht, *Psychologie des mystischen Bewusstseins*, Bremen 1951.

and love in ethics.<sup>1</sup> The interesting thing for our purposes is that both the academic physicist and psychologist are forced to employ systems of symbols to describe what happens. Speaking as a psychologist of religion one might even say that a complementary relationship also exists between the supernatural interpretation of the mystics themselves and the natural point of view of the psychologist.

### 5. *The Question of Validity*

Thus it is impossible to avoid the dilemma which arises when the scholar in considering the subject-object relationship between man and God is confined to a consideration of human behaviour. For the religious man himself this behaviour is of course directed by God. But an immanent "explanation" is not allowed to take Him into account. A scholarly investigation of mysticism therefore easily results in the branding of religious interpretations as directly or indirectly illusory.

The situation is not made easier by the fact that the Christian mystics among others were themselves on their guard against deceptive or demonical visions and thus took to heart the exhortation to "Try the spirits" (I John 4:1; cf. I Cor. 12:10).<sup>2</sup>

The anguish of a religious psychologist of weak and vague faith in this situation is expressed by W. James in the following manner in a letter he wrote in 1904 to his atheist colleague James H. Leuba:

I have no living sense of commerce with a God. I envy those who have, for I know the addition of such a sense would help me immensely. The Divine, for my *active* life, is limited to abstract concepts which, as ideals, interest and determine me, but do so but faintly, in comparison with what a feeling of God might effect, if I had one. . . . Now, although I am so devoid of *Gottesbewusstsein* in the directer and stronger sense, yet there is *something in me* which *makes response* when I hear utterances made from that lead by others. I recognize the deeper voice. Something tells me, "thither lies truth" . . . . I have grown so out of Christianity that entanglement therewith on

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<sup>1</sup> J. Havens (Ed.), *Psychology and Religion. A Contemporary Dialogue* (Van Nostrand Insight Books, 42), Princeton 1968, p. 44. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3. Aufl. 3 (1959), s.v. "Komplementarität".

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3 (1954-1957), s.v. "Discernement des esprits"; Völker, *Scala Paradisi*, pp. 217 ff.

the part of a mystical utterance has to be abstracted from and overcome, before I can listen. Call this, if you like, my mystical *germ*. It is a very common germ. It creates the rank and file of believers. . . . Your only consistent position, it strikes me, would be a dogmatic atheistic naturalism; and, without any mystical germ in us, that, I believe, is where we all should *unhesitatingly* be today.<sup>1</sup>

A modern formulation of the same problem is given by another philosopher and psychologist, Charlie Dunbar Broad: "There is one thing which Speculative Philosophy must take into most serious consideration, and that is the religious and mystical experiences of mankind. These form a vast mass of facts which obviously deserve at least as careful attention as the sensations of mankind. They are of course less uniform than our sensations; many people, of whom I am one, are practically without these experiences. . . . It seems reasonable to suppose at the outset that the whole mass of mystical and religious experience brings us into contact with an aspect of reality which is not revealed in ordinary sense-perception, and that any system of Speculative Philosophy which ignores it will be extremely one-sided."<sup>2</sup>

While Broad has now turned to parapsychology,<sup>3</sup> James, for his part, tried to solve the problem by what he called his own overbelief that the subconscious is the link between the natural and supernatural worlds.<sup>4</sup> Another formulation from the period of causal thinking is that the transcendent slips into an assumed hole in the immanent chain of cause and effect. This way of looking at the matter was criticized by, among others, J. B. Pratt, who emphasized instead that "natural laws" are also to be considered divinely instituted, or that the religious and scholarly explanations should be conceived of as different aspects of the same thing, neither of which necessarily excludes the other.<sup>5</sup> This attitude is common in Protestantism and agrees with the theory of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of William James* ed. by his son Henry James, I-II, Boston, 1920, II, pp. 211 f. (17th April 1904).

<sup>2</sup> *Contemporary British Philosophy*. Personal Statements, ed. by J. H. Muirhead, I-III, London 1924-1956, I, pp. 80, 99 f., quoted by Baillie, pp. 82 f. Cf. *The Philosophy of C. D. Broad*, ed. by P. A. Schilpp (The Library of Living Philosophers, 10), New York 1959, pp. 189 ff.

<sup>3</sup> C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research*, London 1953; Idem, *Lectures on Psychical Research* incorporating the Perrott Lectures given in Cambridge University in 1959 and 1960, London 1962.

<sup>4</sup> W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London 1903, pp. 511 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Pratt, pp. 442 ff.

complementarity developed later. For the mystic this is an ancient point of view and can be compared with the wall of *coincidentia oppositorum* which according to Nicholas of Cusa encircles paradise. The gate is guarded by the proud spirit of reason, which must be overcome if man is to reach the self-contradictory truth.<sup>1</sup>

It is striking how much the interpretations of religious psychology fluctuate in accordance with the theories fashionable in general psychology. It is not difficult to play these hypotheses off against one another and let them destroy one another. Uncertainty is then inherent in the explanations of scholarship rather than in those of religion. It is thus possible for Joseph Maréchal, one of the foremost of contemporary specialists in mystical psychology, to argue in the following, at first perhaps surprising manner. The descriptions of the mystics are not made for a curious psychologist who not infrequently interprets everything in terms of his own limited experience—or rather lack of experience—and employs a series of technical terms which are hardly conducive to real understanding. After a longer discussion Maréchal comes to the following conclusion: the metaphysical point of view of the mystics themselves may be correct, while the scholar's merely deterministic and immanent interpretation is obviously incorrect.<sup>2</sup>

The most minutely differentiated account of the numerous phenomena belonging to mysticism is obviously provided by Thomism with its conception of reality as the sum of the natural and the supernatural.

The Roman Catholic view therefore reckons with a series of different factors both mundane and extramundane. According to this way of looking at things there is, for example, an improper ecstasy, which can be pathological (epilepsy, hysteria), mediumistic (suggestion, hypnosis), or physiological (a certain technique). The genuine ecstasy is either demonic or truly religious,

<sup>1</sup> *Visio Dei*, chapt. IX, quoted by Happold, p. 305. Latin original: Et ista est murus paradisi, in quo habitas; cuius portam custodit spiritus altissimus rationis, qui nisi vincatur non patebit ingressus. Ultra igitur coincidentiam contradictoriorum videri poteris et nequaquam citra. Si igitur impossibilitas est necessitas in visu tuo Domine nihil est, quod visus tuus non videat (Nicolaus von Kues, Philosophisch-theologische Schriften ... Studien- und Jubiläumsausgabe, lateinisch-deutsch, I–III, Wien 1964–1967, III, p. 132).

<sup>2</sup> J. Maréchal, *Études sur la Psychologie des mystiques* I<sup>2</sup>–II (Museum Lessianum, sect. philos. 2 and 19), Bruxelles–Paris 1938, 1937, I, pp. 32 ff. There is an English translation, dating from 1927, of the first edition of vol. I.

the latter of which can be either natural or supernatural. But it should be noted that the drawing of borderlines in this matter is considered to be a theological problem,<sup>1</sup> so that the difficulties are not disposed of.

### 6. *The Problem for Pastoral Psychology*

A clergyman in the Swedish Church or a minister in any of the free Churches also faces difficulties when a mystic wishes to speak with him about his experiences. It is not easy to distinguish between spirits. But if the man lives literally in the world of the Bible, receives visions and revelations, keeps company with angels, sees God's finger in events and has a prophetic calling, he must find it bitter to be met with doubt or distrust. Indignation may find the following outlet:

The religious experience is a very delicate one and for us who have had it contact with shepherds of souls, for example, is often a torment and tribulation. It is not often that we meet a priest who not only does not deny the existence of such experiences, but even acknowledges them. The common attitude is, I grant you, sometimes very friendly, but at the same time very supercilious and condescending—yes, these are very beautiful thoughts and feelings, but you are of course a little overwrought, which is not to be wondered at considering how hard a time you have had, but read your Bible methodically and regularly and go to church and be conscientious in the work which God has given you, *that* is the call, etc., etc.

Lutheran theology surely has its rather relentless dogmas. Don't "feel" and don't think too much for yourself. Read, listen to sermons, and obey. Do not oppose yourself to what seem far too categorical pronouncements. Do not speak out, if you do not have a 'position' within the Church, do not believe that you can grasp and be wise about some things even if you do not know what they are called in Greek and Hebrew, do not take part in discussion if you do not have an academic degree. God help us poor laymen!!... I certainly do not go about asking people indiscreet religious questions or spreading to left and right stories of "peculiar" happenings I have experienced, but when it can be done, when there is an appropriate opportunity, I must take advantage of my own spiritual experience to help other human beings, and this without first running to ask the permission of a priest or having the truth of what I say "verified" by a scholar of religion. Then God's seconds would flit by, and the chance of possibly helping a human being nearer to Christ would be lost. Caution

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<sup>1</sup> Th. Ohm, *Die Liebe zu Gott in den nicht-christlichen Religionen*, Krailing vor München 1950, pp. 402 f. Cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Mystical Phenomena".

is perhaps sometimes a virtue, but certainly not always, and seldom when it is a question of obeying a clear summons from God.<sup>1</sup>

This is written by a daughter of the Church. What then shall the priest say to Spiritualists, Theosophists, Anthroposophists and the whole of the motley crowd hidden behind the general appellation of modern occultists, or the title of the book *Horoskop und Talisman. Das Buch des heutigen Aberglaubens* by P. Bauer (Stuttgart 1963)? Even if from the point of view of the national Church and the free Churches these constitute pseudo-mysticism, the appearance of all these trends and phenomena bears witness to an unsatisfied spiritual need. One does not feel at home within the established or official religious tradition and instead goes one's own way like so many others in the course of history. On the other hand the adherents of these modern religious movements and others readily identify themselves with the mystics of the Church and the free Churches, which does not make it any easier to adopt a position regarding the latter.

### 7. *Mysticism in Urbanized Society*

The urbanized society of the atomic age may be thought to provide a poor breeding ground for mysticism, which is usually associated with contemplative isolation from contemporary strivings. But mystical experience can also be found in this environment, despite its being regarded by many as a mockery of all religion. This is true whether the experience occurs in connection with mental concentration or spontaneously. In his autobiographical work *Le Christ dans la matière, trois histoires comme Benson*, Teilhard de Chardin tells of the front line priest who meditated during the battle of Verdun in 1916 on the host in the silver-gilt capsule, the element in the Holy Communion which is enveloped in the whole universe:

Into the midst of human travail I can and should throw myself breathlessly. The more I take upon myself my share of it, the more I rest on the entire surface of Reality, the nearer I will also draw to Christ... God is the Heart of all things so that the 'vaste décor' of the universe can collapse, or wither away, or be torn from me by death, without diminishing my innermost joy... It is for this reason that even war itself is unable to disconcert me.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of January 11th, 1969, to the author from M.M.

<sup>2</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymne de l'Univers* (Livre de Vie 62/63), Paris 1961, pp. 91 f.



This meditation of course took place in stillness in a dug-out, when the front happened to be relatively quiet. But the same autumn Lieutenant F. C. Happold, later a headmaster and the writer of an outstanding book on mysticism, lay in a shell-torn sap with stinking corpses and waited for the signal to attack at dawn. He then suddenly had a sense of absolute, even physical safety, which had nothing to do with the normal fatalism of soldiers. Happold himself connects it among other things with the feeling of a Presence, which he had experienced three years before in his study at Peterhouse, Cambridge.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *Incognito* (Paris 1962), also based on autobiographical material, the Rumanian refugee author Petru Dumitriu describes how a tortured prisoner in a narrow and filthy prison cell comes to clarity:

The knowledge did not place me in an acceptable relation to the universe, it showed me the universe as something alien, indifferent, as a source of suffering. It would not have been at all difficult for me to have hated the world... suffering drove me to a way out which I would not otherwise have thought of, to an attempt to love the universe and forgive .... My love and forgiveness were nothing other than the love and forgiveness of the universe which were in this hard manner imprinted on me ... a gift ... which now only waited on my decision .... Everything was now simple, crystal clear, it stood revealed before my eyes as if *a flash of lightning had lit up the world from one end to the other*.

The destruction of the ego was experienced in humility as the greatest happiness and triumph. At the same time this same ego existed for the first time, but everywhere, in all creatures, times and dimensions, in the "Universe which had brought me into being. Which contained me. Which was in me. ... 'Thou' is his name, and one could add 'God' .... Worship burns up contradictions ... paradoxes are its support."<sup>2</sup>

When the author Artur Lundkvist experienced the earthquake in Agadir he wrote:

No, God did not exist there anywhere, we fell in the void .... Just as I fell down in the dark I knew that God existed, at the realization I was seized with awe and exultation. God made his presence known, showed his power over the world, showed that against God there is no help but God ... he set the depths trembling and all our

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 133 f.

<sup>2</sup> P. Dumitriu, *Incognito*, Stockholm 1963, pp. 326 ff. (French original, Paris 1962; English transl. by Norman Denny, London 1964).

security was shattered like straw, His will alone supported all that is, pervades all things, is more near than air or water.<sup>1</sup>

On one May evening in Stockholm in the 1950's the following happened:

It happened out of doors, in one of the largest squares in Stockholm, when I was on my way home from a visit to the cinema. Very few people were out so late in the evening, but one man who was by himself noticed the expression on my face.

(He came up afterwards and asked to be allowed to sketch my expression "with a few strokes", but it had already disappeared! Since, however, I was so weak and exhausted by powerful mental excitement that I could hardly stand on my legs, he helped me home to my door instead.)

It had happened quite suddenly! As in a fit of dizziness I had sunk down inside myself, down to my own foundations, which broke asunder. At the same moment I was pulled upwards; I found myself at the same instant high up, even while I was standing down there on the pavements of the great square.

It was as if a veil had been drawn aside and I saw, as it were, a doubly exposed picture of the square and the buildings around it.

I found myself suddenly in a timeless separation from the outer world. "Broken, time stood a-trembling."

A picture, a vision, appeared in the heavens above all the church spires; dark figures and figures of blinding light. The edges around my eyes glowed. A flash of lightning struck down from up there and hit my own heart.

The experience was extraordinarily solemn, deeply serious and moving. I have experienced what supernatural happiness and blessedness mean. Blessedness, that misused word, which most people no longer believe in.

I know that God exists. I know who God is. It is comforting and frightening.

This vision remained for a long time as it were etched fast on the retina.

It only went completely about a month later. And it was only about a month later that I "dared" tell my husband about the experience.<sup>2</sup>

The person who wrote that is quite familiar with the terminology of psycho-pathology. She denies that "God's own revelation" can be the result of schizophrenia. When the relatives around her doubt the genuineness of her experience, she refuses to call her suffering masochism. She compares her experience with a shock induced by LSD, and knows the attitude of psychologists towards God as the severe judge and cause of neurosis. She notes

<sup>1</sup> A. Lundkvist, *Agadir*, Stockholm 1961, pp. 81 ff. (French transl. Paris 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of January 28th, 1969, to the author from S.L.

that priests and ministers who speak of a loving and forgiving God nevertheless draw back from "the mire which can be a fertile soil for the growth of experience of God". She experiences the necessity to testify and she finds comfort in the words of the Bible which illuminate her own situation like a flash of light.

Mystical experience not infrequently has suffering as one of its conditions, just as it can lead to suffering. It is at home in a tormented world, at the same time as it lifts men up out of it. We are reminded also that the question of validity is not merely a problem in religious philosophy. It is a question of pressing urgency in the personal lives of human beings, who are not only blessed with grace but also afflicted with adversity.

### 8. *Concerning Listeners' Letters on the Programme "Mystic in Vällingby"*

In her book *Helgonens svar* (The Answer of the Saints) Gunnel Vallquist says apropos of a medieval Christian mystic, that mystical in this context does not mean 'peculiar' or 'fishy'.<sup>1</sup> It is the latter meaning that the word normally carries in modern Swedish. The letters from listeners to the radio programme "Mystic in Vällingby"<sup>2</sup> come neither from saints in the traditional sense nor from peculiar people. The people who wrote to the producer from Radio Sweden, to the remarkable woman who appeared in the programme, and to the commentator are from one point of view very ordinary people of all ages, social groups and professions, both men and woman,

<sup>1</sup> Gunnel Vallquist, *Helgonens svar*, Stockholm 1963, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Broadcast by Radio Sweden on January 11th 1968. Here an anonymous woman, called 'Mrs. Beata', told of her splendid cosmic vision during a ski tour. The present author commented on her experience, adducing, among others, quotations from the woman's letters to himself and R. C. Johnson, *The Imprisoned Splendour*, London (1953) 1958, pp. 305 ff., taken from W. L. Wilmshurst, *Contemplations*, London 1914, p. 142, and also quoted by Happold, pp. 136 ff. The title "Mystic in Vällingby" (a suburb of Stockholm), chosen by the producer of the programme, Dr Kerstin Anér, had a double point. First it concealed 'Mrs. Beata's' real place of abode, secondly it hinted at the fact that mysticism also belongs to our own modern time and technical environment. The programme was later published together with other radio lectures and articles on related subjects under the title *Mystiker i Vällingby*, Stockholm 1968, pp. 47 ff. The second radio programme with the listeners' reactions was broadcast on December 29th, 1968, and is reproduced here from the author's original manuscript, also printed in Swedish in *Vår Lösen* 60 (1969), pp. 156 ff.

learned and unlearned, members of extremely varied churches and religious bodies or entirely independent of religious organizations. Since the letters involved are private and of a more or less personal nature, the names of the senders and their precise places of residence will of course not be given in what follows. 'Mrs. Beata' in "Mystic in Vällingby" has also chosen to remain anonymous.

In one respect the letter-writers are nevertheless separated off from people in general. They are keenly aware of a communication which bears witness to a reality different from the one in which we all live. The actuality of this other world has been proclaimed by Christianity and by religions in general. Metaphysical philosophy ancient and modern, western as well as eastern, has also argued for its existence. The mystics, and most of the correspondents are mystics to varying degrees, claim to have experienced this reality themselves, whether we call it God's world, a divine existence, a new dimension to life, or the experience X.<sup>1</sup>

If our age is in many ways critical, uncomprehending, or indifferent to both traditional and new religions, this is even more true where their various solitaries, the mystics, are concerned. The latter, being equally untied to tradition and authority, present a challenge to criticism, misunderstanding and indifference. They cause uneasiness by claiming actually to have experienced the unseen world which their opposers deny, explain away, or dismiss as an illusion. Mystics are therefore lonely people.

The correspondents, in spite of all their differences, belong to this group. They were induced to write by the joyful recognition with which they heard 'Mrs. Beata's' account of what she calls her vision of creation. One man writes from a town in Värmland, and, like several others, expresses a certain sadness or disappointment at not having carried out the high mission to which he was called in an unforgettable and decisive moment. The everyday world has not lived up to it. We also meet with negatively supernatural and immanently psycho-pathological interpretations of the phenomenon:

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish author Sven Fagerberg uses this term for the mystical experience in his book *Dialog i det fria*, Stockholm 1968, pp. 182 ff., quoting E. Fromm, *You shall be as Gods, A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition*, New York 1966.

Twenty-five years ago, at the beginning of 1943, I had a vision. I had been called up as a military reserve. One morning a few days before I had to report, I was sitting and thinking how fine it was to have a chance of doing something for my country. Then something remarkable happened, which remained inexplicable to me. In a cloud of brightness under the roof where I was sitting, I saw a shining face (of a beauty and with a smile which I cannot describe) and I heard a voice in my ear which said, "You must do something for mankind!" At the same time I thought that the uniform and weapons with which I had already mentally provided myself were torn from me. For a few days afterwards I had the feeling of living in a higher world.

The experience was decisive for me. I rang a priest in the town and told him what had happened. The priest said, "God has spoken". I thus refused to take up arms, and was registered as a conscientious objector. My "revelation", if I can call it that, is described in my application...

In the years that have passed I have often thought of the words, "You must do something for mankind". What have I done so far?... Yes of course one can do something on a small scale, unnoticed, one can be an example .... A thought has grown in my mind:

Perhaps it is the intention, that we, who have had inexplicable experiences, should cooperate in producing a joint volume, *Miracles Still Happen To-day*. Many Christians say: "Nowadays no miracles and visions occur. It is only devils and evil spirits that play tricks on human beings, or else those who experience such things may be off their heads..."

If one could at least be spared hearing the latter about oneself! Many people have had visions and have witnessed miracles, but they do not dare to speak of them...<sup>1</sup>

The need to distinguish between genuine mysticism and strange or miraculous events is made clear in the following letter, also from Värmland. It opens with reference to I John 5:14 ff. and a plea for God's blessing:

It will be precisely one month tomorrow since I woke at five o'clock in the morning with an exhilarating sense that He, the Creator of the universe who guides innumerable stars in their paths, was also guiding my life. This filled me with a feeling of infinite gratitude and happiness.

On the same day there arrived through the post letters and *Röster i Radio* (Voices on the Air) No. 11 [where 'Mrs. Beata's' account was printed for the first time] ... I took it to be the kind of occult phenomenon, from which I dissociate myself.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of July 3rd, 1968, to the author from E.W.F. Cf. also "En syn, en röst, en man vägrar vapen" (A Vision a Voice: A Man Refuses to Take Up Arms) (*Fredsmissionären* 49:11, 1968).

... In the evening I read the article and felt it, as it were, describe my experience in the morning ...

[It] fully agreed with what I felt to be true and genuine...<sup>1</sup>

What has been variously called cosmic consciousness, nature mysticism, or the 'mysticism of the infinite'<sup>2</sup> is for the Christian an intense perception of God's wonderful creation, the first article of the Creed as experience instead of dogma. In these terms 'Mrs. Beata' may also be said to have understood in a Christian vision the significance of the second article of the Creed. A Swedish authoress who is honest enough to let her cool intellectual scepticism go so far as to question its own validity, speaks, when asked, of an unconventional experience of Christ:

It started with a dream. I dreamt that I was sitting in a school classroom together with a number of other pupils. Suddenly somebody came into the room and everybody rose from their seats. I don't know now how I happened not to see his face since he was coming from in front, but I only noticed that he had an ordinary tweed suit and a pointed beard. I already had dreams of being a writer and I immediately thought it must be a famous writer since everybody was showing such respect. He came down the row of desks until he reached mine. Just as he was passing me I realized that I had to see his face, that it was an absolute necessity, my whole weal or woe depended on my getting him to turn around and look at me. So I half got up and stretched out my hands towards him, stiff with anxiety lest he should escape me. At the same moment the dream stopped and I lay at home in my bed and believed that I was awake. But my arms stood straight out in front of me in the air, paralysed, as if locked by cramp, and I could not pull them down even though I tried. Then I saw Christ come up to the bed, looking as he does on reproductions, with long hair and a beard and a white robe. He came up to my bed and looked at me, then he took my hands and laid them down on the bed cover. It was then that the light came. I call it light because there is no other word, but it was rather a condition of unimaginable and supernatural clarity, a complete and absolute freedom, a kind of indefinable knowledge or insight which in totality can only be described as blessedness. As far as I could see it only lasted a couple of seconds, after which I woke up completely.

After this I can only think that the partition between this world and another is as fine as a hair, only a shadow or an unused brain cell.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of November 21st, 1968, to the pseudonymous 'fru Beata' from E.W.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 11, note 4.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of February 2nd, 1968, to the author from E.D.

Most Christian circles have been as carefully guarded as this authoress. Even so Nathan Söderblom once chose to use the term 'mysticism of personal life' for a Christian life in inner communion with God.<sup>1</sup> But Church authorities have generally remained on their guard against unusual experiences. The same is true of the free denominations. Something of this austerity and firm confidence springing from faith speaks through the following letter. It is written by a woman in a sparsely populated area of central Sweden, where she has not had such an easy time of it. Although in one way she belongs to the blessed who have not seen and yet believe, she has nevertheless seen or understood more than ordinary men have, and is also critical towards the present Christian bodies:

It was comforting to know that a mystic stands with both feet firmly on the ground. I have never dreamt of being a 'mystic' and yet my real life is there in the 'fifth world'. One can receive promptings towards everything there. Shops, clothes, yes all activities which belong to this life, but, and it's a big but — in one's heart of hearts one becomes quite isolated from other human beings. What must be avoided most carefully is speaking of one's experiences.... I have received so much help from above, always in a natural way, but nonetheless great miracles....

The sentimentality of the free Churches and the strictness of the Church are not in keeping with the other world. Have close friends in both camps but I cannot speak to them about my real life. Not to anybody. Am of course only a tiny member of that great army, but I am part of it. And now I am not alone, my visions are of course only chicken feed, I do not see with my eyes or hear with my ears, but even so something happens sometimes, but never when it's expected....<sup>2</sup>

An old man in a Stockholm suburb suspected a syncretist plot behind the January programme, but was sent a quieting reassurance that none existed:

I cannot find words to describe how the above-mentioned broadcast moved me. Completely spell-bound, fascinated, hypnotized. What was it exactly that exercised such an overpowering influence? What was it altogether? A host of questions which cut into my heart, my soul. And the commentator afterwards didn't make it any easier. On the contrary.

During the days and nights which have gone by since then I have been released from the spell or whatever it may have been. And I would like — perhaps a little one-sidedly — to offer certain rational reflections.

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<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 8, notes 2 and 3.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of January 12th, 1968, to the author from M.L.

Well then: the lady (the mystic) must clearly have been a highly educated and well read person. The manner in which she described with the utmost clarity what had happened to her, shows uncommon intellectual power and ability. Who could equal it? Not even Saint Bridget. Her confessors wrote down the divine revelations in order to pass them on to those who were interested.

The lady from Vällingby must be unique in her ability to start from minute details and make the realms revealed expand until at last they include the whole universe, time-space, many dimensions, infinity, eternity. So I come to the conclusion that in the search of humanity (most of them) for meaning in a meaningless life, we find in the above-mentioned mystery an exceptionally well constructed piece of PR work for a new world religion influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism (Zen), Islam, Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism, etc.

If there is the slightest justification for my speculations (and there is), then the whole thing was terrifically well done. Insidious. DANGEROUS. And it is not based on *one* man's mystical experiences. There must have been team-work on the production of this utterly fascinating story. You must take this which way you will. I am an old Christian man (eighty-two) and I am not entirely unfamiliar with mysteries and strange experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Even if this correspondent is wrong in his perhaps not very seriously held reconstruction of what he thinks happened, there is nevertheless some truth in his observations. In practice mysticism often results in a readiness to obliterate denominational and religious boundaries, it is, as has already been said, universalist. But even the prior religious experience, its theory of knowledge and its training, show great similarities in different religions and times. This has meant that 'Mrs. Beata', who is at home in evangelical Lutheran Christianity, by her description of her vision of creation evoked responses from very different spiritual environments. People with extremely different frames of reference, to use the language of social psychology, recognized themselves and their spiritual experience in her account. Among the correspondents there are some who have been directly or indirectly influenced by non-Christian religions such as Hinduism or Zen Buddhism. The influence of the former was exerted through the newer religious movements of the 1800's and the turn of the century, while the influence of Zen has come in since the Second World War. On the other hand nothing has been heard from spokesmen for the modern Hindu mystical practice of

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of March 3rd, 1968, to the author from G.W.



yoga. Spiritual practices are, however, represented by an authoress from a town in southern Sweden. She herself says of her account:

It is a fumbling attempt to describe an experience, akin to 'Mrs. Beata's', which I had last autumn. Unlike Mrs Beata I am encumbered with studies in Zen and Christian mysticism and my description may be coloured by their influence. Yet I can assure you that the experience itself was unprecedented and our everyday speech is far too inadequate to provide a description comprehensible to others.

By stifling and almost entirely killing out the ambitions I had had, I created a kind of vacuum inside myself, a platform of stillness, a readiness without any expectation. My attention was sharpened without being concentrated on any object. A kind of diffuse perception of my surroundings. Without involvement and yet conscious of this truce in the struggle for insight. Entirely open to new inner experiences.

I had the impression of being relaxed and silent, of being an empty mirror ready to reflect the pictures of experience. My awareness became more and more refined. Then I looked into myself, at my mental world with all its conceptions. Then I looked outwards towards the world and the outer universe, society and the cosmos. Then I directed the mirror downwards towards the ground and considered the undergrowth and the world of the insect. Then the mirror was turned upwards towards the heavens, the flying clouds and the flight of birds, towards the stars of the night sky, darkness, cold. Infinity in size, distance, and time.

My ability to perceive with my senses and mind the microcosm and macrocosm became still more refined. Downwards in the scale of diminution I experienced a dizzying vision of the world of cells, pulsating and colourful, where movement and form are one, and boundaries non-existent. The vision of a reality which scientists have tried to analyze. Simultaneously I perceived size outside in a universe without boundaries, where movement, form and time are one infinite whole. Into that One, Alone, All-inclusive, and Almighty, I was merged in a kind of vision which was not only a seeing but an apprehending, in which all the senses were engaged, — a kind of total sensation. While I seemed eliminated as a person, I was more gathered up into an inner unity-wholeness than I had ever been in meditation, as it were a firm concentration of power, a focus, a centre, a collected awareness of timeless, formless and infinite existence. The perception of a communion with the whole universe was as important as the feeling of immortality. My human senses were melted down to a total power of attention with the capacity to perceive and to take into itself the fullness of life. I experienced myself as the light of light, as the sound of sound, as rest in movement, as form in infinity. The Totality of the Totality.

In this total experience of reality beyond the limitations of the senses I experienced a security and a confidence which I had never previously known. What could happen to me either for good or ill in this all-one! The perils which are part of earthly existence lost all significance in this reality. The timeless, infinite, formless is not subject-

ed to the laws of the world of limitation. Genesis and growth, dissolution and annihilation are processes within process, conditions and events within the world of forms.

The experience brought neither joy nor sorrow, the subject seemed entirely eliminated. It was an experience of the stream of life within the pattern of eternity, ungraspable by thought or analysis.

There is left the awareness that we live a life of constantly fluctuating states right from what we call birth to what we call death, while the central core-substance of the individual lasts through life and death.<sup>1</sup>

The ability to express one's experiences has played a not insignificant role in the history of mysticism. The question which is usually put in this connection is that of the relationship between the experience and the literary form. On the other hand intellectual education is not a necessary prerequisite for one's own experience or the understanding of the experience of others. On the contrary it can sometimes be a hindrance. A woman from a town in the west of Sweden writes about this:

All human beings of course long more or less consciously for love and some kind of footing when this life is at its most chaotic. . . . Those whose attitude is most sceptical are, in my narrow experience, those who have studied a little and believe they know the answer to most things. To be able to study is of course an advantage, but, unfortunately, for many it brings with it the disappearance of that healthy particle of humility in the face of what is not understood which surely most have at the start. So it is a pleasure to me to hear this spoken of in my own language. Unfortunately I do not think intelligence is enough for the reception and understanding of what 'Beata' describes. Another ability may be even more necessary—to listen in the right way. Of course it can be grasped purely intellectually, but the deeper understanding, which enables one to live with this as a point of departure and which makes one bear suffering in a new way, that belongs to another realm. What this understanding is called I don't know, but I call it insight. . . . I have had glimpses of a knowledge, a Truth where time and space were suspended.

My glimpses have given a new dimension (this is really the best word) to my reading of philosophy. Sometimes certain things which I had read and which I thought I had fully understood, appear in a completely new light and have a significance whose quality is completely different in kind from that of my earlier understanding. Christianity, which was previously a dead religion for me, is now full of wisdom. Now I begin to see and understand it. In all religions I find truth. What were previously

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of January 11th, 1968, to the author from I.T.

contradictions now fit together like the pieces of an enormous jigsaw puzzle. It may also strangely happen that two things which are logically contradictory are nonetheless both true. What I have read of psychology and psychiatry contains no explanation of my glimpses. They are of a quite different quality, and this quality is for me of the greatest refinement and value.<sup>1</sup>

The above reflections contain a brief suggestion on the difficult question of 'faith and reason' in its present variant of 'mysticism and scholarship'. For a more exhaustive treatment of the topic I must refer the reader to several chapters in the book *Mystiker i Vällingby* summarized in section five above. Following on from the last letter, the matter might also be expressed as Harry Blomberg puts it in *Undret och de kloka* (The Miracle and the Clever):

Clever people do not like exaggeration.  
Clever people like to investigate the matter.  
Angels may sing for the stupid —  
faced with the clever they always stand dumb.  
The heavens may open perhaps for the mad —  
for the clever they stand eternally shut.  
What has the manger  
to offer the clever?

Only the wise were led by the star.  
Only for herdsmen the vision had power.  
Only to those who had most deeply seen,  
or most like children, was all announced.  
Do you wish to draw near to the wonderful,  
and yet not be counted as one of the wise —  
Brother, stand then  
among us, the naïve.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of February 20th, 1968, to the author from I.S.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by B. Wallberg, "Julvandring i diktens värld" (*Stridsropet*, julnr 1968, pp. 32 ff.). I have not been able to find this poem in the books published by the late poet. Mr. Wallberg, on his part, could not at the request of the present author give the source of his quotation. The poem is presumably written for a certain occasion.