

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute
OR
Philosophical Society of Great Britain

VOL. LXXXI

1949



LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY
THE INSTITUTE, 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

879TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

HELD AT 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, LONDON, S.W.1, AT 5.30 P.M.
ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28TH, 1949.

KENNETH G. GRUBB, ESQ., C.M.G., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The following elections were announced:—F. J. D. Syer, Esq., M.B.E., B.A., Fellow; P. S. F. Rowden, Esq., Fellow; Roy E. Hamilton, Esq., Fellow; G. E. Barnes, Esq., Fellow; Rev. E. H. Steele, Fellow; J. B. Nicholson, Esq., Fellow; Rev. W. S. Ridgway, M.A., Fellow; Rev. Hugh C. C. McCullough, Fellow; M. H. Knott, Esq., Fellow; E. H. Trenchard, Esq., B.A., Fellow; B. C. Martin, Esq., A.C.I.I., Fellow; James Turnbull, Esq., Fellow; Pastor L. W. Boone, Fellow; Rev. Alwin R. de Alwis, Fellow; F/Lt. Rev. Alan Macleod, Fellow; F. F. Stunt, Esq., Ll.B., Fellow; Dr. Chas. L. Feinberg, M.A., Th.M., Th.D., Ph.D., Fellow; B. E. McCormick, Esq., Fellow; D. Geary, Esq., F.N.S., M.R.S.L., Fellow; V. D. K. Conway Ross, Esq., Fellow; C. E. A. Turner, Esq., M.Sc., Fellow; Miss Mary E. Waters, B.Sc., Fellow; H. G. Goddard, Esq., Fellow; C. Hartley, Esq., M.A., M.B., B.Chir., Member; Miss Betty L. Neel, Member; N. Forbes Palmer, Esq., Member; F. Foulkes, Esq., M.Sc., B.A., Member; D. Russell, Esq., Member; A. F. Forbat, Esq., M.B., B.S., Member; Rev. G. A. Scott, Member; H. R. Minn, Esq., M.A., B.D., Member; Rev. Graham R. Delbridge, A.C.T., Th.L., Member; C. J. F. Upton, Esq., Member; Miss Louie Bush, Member; Rev. Martin F. Argyle, M.A., Member; Rev. Robt. A. Cressy, A.B., B.D., Member; R. H. Kipping, Esq., M.B., Ch.B., Member; Mrs. Ellen J. Watkins, Member; Mrs. Dorothy Beach, Member; L. E. Buckley, Esq., A.O.S.M., Member; Jas. van Sommer, Esq., Member; D. J. Whitney, Esq., B.Sc., Member; D. C. Cameron, Esq., Member; P. H. Nielsen, Esq., Member; Rev. Alex. Barkley, B.A., Member; Rev. R. Strang Miller, Member; J. H. Wellington, Esq., M.A., Member; H. F. Maton, Esq., M.I.M.E., A.M.I.P.E., M.Inst.Metals, Member; Rev. G. H. Heaslett, B.A., Member; Rev. G. I. Francis, Member; D. I. Frost, Esq., B.Sc., Member; H. Owen, Esq., Member; J. M. Gage, Esq., M.A., Member; P. W. Petty, Esq., B.A., Member; Rev. D. MacLean, Member; E. C. Staddon, Esq., A.M.I.E.E., Member; Rev. E. W. L. May, M.A., Member; W. Bennet, Esq., M.A., Member; E. F. Witts, Esq., Member; Rev. H. F. MacEwen, B.D., B.A., Member; M. Williams, Esq., Associate; P. M. Tankard, Esq., Associate; K. H. Marr, Esq., Associate; K. W. Campbell, Esq., Associate; H. Butterley, Esq., Associate; N. Chynoweth, Esq., Associate; H. J. Edwards, Esq., Associate; H. Rogers, Esq., Associate; R. Weir, Esq., Associate; N. Bathgate, Esq., Associate; E. Buckle, Esq., Associate; R. Gibson, Esq., Associate; J. S. Elliot, Esq., Associate; D. G. McCraw, Esq., Associate; A. J. Gerlach, Esq., Associate; K. Grisdale, Esq., Associate; G. V. Prosser, Esq., Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Ernest H. Trenchard, Esq., B.A., A.C.P., to read his paper, entitled "Spanish Mysticism."

SPANISH MYSTICISM

By ERNEST H. TRENCHARD, B.A., A.C.P.

SYNOPSIS.

The word mysticism is used in two senses—for an appreciation of an invisible spiritual world and for a technique (often non-Christian) for effecting direct contact with the Infinite.

Mysticism in its second sense arose in Spain under Philip II. The works of the better-known Spanish mystics are described with special reference to Santa Teresa and St. John of the Cross. It is concluded that ascetic practices result in a wearing down of natural desires—in the “dark night of the spirit” (St. John of the Cross) there is death even to spiritual delights.

Contrary to the opinion of Allison Peers, it is impossible to justify mystical theology as a valid interpretation of New Testament teaching. Nevertheless, mystic writers have often fascinated Christians, and the reason for their appeal is examined.

A SATISFACTORY definition of “mysticism” is so hard to come by, that Dean Inge lists scores of them at the end of his standard work, “Christian Mysticism,” many of which are mutually contradictory. In its widest sense it is the appreciation of spiritual and eternal Reality—the Absolute of the philosopher—behind the screen of phenomena and temporality, the attempt to gaze “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” In this sense the spiritual content of Christianity itself is mystical. The spiritual Christian, however, is generally content to recognise the fact that his senses cannot give him ultimate reality, while he seeks to “invest” the temporal and phenomenal, in accordance with the Master’s directions, in order to “lay up treasure in Heaven.” The mystic, in the special sense of the word, feels himself to be imprisoned in the dimensions of space and time, and is not content to wait for the moment of Christian promise, when the *σῶμα ψυχικόν* will be raised a *σῶμα πνευματικόν*. He feels that life has no object unless he can tear down the enclosing walls, and he can find himself face to face with God, and absorbed in God. The search is both outward to the heart of the cosmos, and inward to find the “spark of the soul,” the remains of the original divine creation, which, he conceives, alone can be purified and refined so as again to unite with its like in the Nature of God. The process by which this is accomplished is curiously alike in all ages, in different races and cultures, and even in different religions; for it must be remembered that there are Indian and Moslem, as well as Christian, mystics. The first stage of the journey to Reality is the “Purgative Way” of discipline and self-denial, by which the pilgrim seeks to “wear down” the flesh, and to

annihilate the senses. Then he seeks to centre his thought by the action of the will on the realities within and without, by a process which is technically termed "recollection." In Christian mysticism the outward reality is Christ the "Beloved," whom the ardent and purified soul seeks after with the passion of a lover. The pilgrim is rewarded with glimpses of reality and of divine light, so that this stage is called the "Illuminative Way." Verbal forms of prayer, and the workings of the intellect, become less and less significant, and, as we shall see, St. John of the Cross speaks of even the "Dark Night of the Spirit," when the soul dies even to spiritual blessings, before she passes on to the final "Unitive Way," variously called the "Beatific Vision" or the "Spiritual Marriage." The motive power is Love; the guiding power is the Will; the atmosphere is sanctity. For Evelyn Underhill, the mystic who has attained these heights is a man of spiritual genius, "in whom the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness, and who has definitely surrendered himself to the embrace of reality . . . he lives at different levels of experience from other people, since the world as we know it is the product of specific scraps or aspects of reality acting upon a normal and untransfigured consciousness."¹

The mystics have been divided into different "schools"—speculative, psychological, symbolic, etc.—according to the different emphases placed on certain aspects of their teaching and practice; examples from all these schools can be found among the Spaniards of the "Golden Age" of Mysticism, which was also the "Golden Age" of literature.

The pure fountain of true Christian mysticism is found in St. Paul and St. John. This, with no advantage to itself, was soon mingled with the Judaic mysticism of Philo and his school, and with the neo-platonic variety of Plotinus, who is the pagan "father" of the technique of Christian mysticism, and whose teachings entered the Church through the Alexandrian theologians, and the Pseudo Dionysius. It was associated with scholasticism in such writers as Bonaventura and Gerson, who mapped out the Mystic Way as thoroughly as Aquinas tabulated the Universe. With Eckhart, whom Dean Inge considers to have been the greatest of the speculative mystics,² the stream

¹ *Mysticism*, p. 90.

² *Christian Mysticism*, p. 148.

passed to Germany, and was expounded with depth and power by Tauler and Ruysbroek.

Although ascetics abounded, as we would expect from the realism and stoicism of the Spanish character, we find no outburst of mysticism in Spain until the XVI century. In the early part of the century the reign in Spain of the Emperor Charles V had given the country a wide, European outlook, which led to the influx of Italian neo-platonism, and the spread of Erasmian ideas among enlightened ecclesiastics. The accession of Philip II determined a strong movement in exactly the opposite direction. The Renaissance failed to get a grip on Spain, and she became the champion of the Counter-Reformation. Angel Ganivet believed that the fierce energies which the Spaniards had directed against the alien Moors were, after the Reconquest, turned inward against herself in a new fanaticism, while mysticism was "as it were the sanctification of sensuality," a kind of sublimation of southern eroticism.¹

The stream of medieval mysticism entered Spain through three pious friars of the first half of the XVI century, Orozco, Laredo and Osuna. Osuna's *Tercer Abecedario espiritual* has the distinction of being the book which first guided Santa Teresa's feet along the Mystic Way. The work of these forerunners of Santa Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and their interpretation in Spain of the profound thought of the medieval—and especially the German—mystics, must be taken into account when any estimate is made of the "originality" of the great figures we are later to consider.

It is tempting to devote considerable space to the "quasi-mystics" of the great period 1550 to 1580, for their saner and less technical progress toward Reality makes them more attractive and more helpful to the evangelical student who has kept close to the text of the New Testament. We must be content to notice the general significance of two outstanding figures: Fray Luis de Granada and Fray Luis de León. Fray Luis de Granada (1504-88) was a voluminous writer and an eloquent preacher, whose works, in translation, became popular even in England, despite the strong anti-Spanish and Protestant tendencies of the later Elizabethan period. He was an ascetic who reached great heights of prayer, but seems to have taken little notice of the orthodox stages of the Mystic Way. He is,

¹ *Idearium Español* (Colección Austral), pp. 18, 19.

above all, a symbolic mystic. Far from wishing to annihilate sense, he rejoices to the end in God's great and wonderful gifts in Nature, and, like Blake, saw "all eternity in a grain of sand." Nature was the fringe of the garment of the glory of God, leading him to seek the face of God in prayer which was, at the same time, mystical and intelligent. I am indebted to Prof. Allison Peers for the following fine quotation: "Prayer is an uplifting of our hearts to God, whereby we become united and made one with Him. To pray is for the soul to rise above itself, and above all created things, and to be joined with God, and engulfed in that ocean of infinite sweetness and love. Prayer is the issuing of the soul to receive God, when He comes in His abundant grace. . . . Prayer is the standing of the soul in the presence of God, and of God in the presence of the soul. . . ." ¹ Granada was content to leave the final mystic union as a hope to be realised in Heaven.

Luis of Granada was popular, sentimental and eloquent to the point of being wordy and florid. His namesake and younger contemporary of León was restrained, balanced, scholarly; his work has a classical proportion and polish not at all common amid the exuberant thicket of Spanish literature. And yet there was more in common between the Andalusian preacher and the Salamancan professor than is at first sight apparent—more, perhaps, than the Luis of León would have cared to admit—for they both understood deeply that Nature pointed beyond herself to the glory of God, and they both rejoiced in the Person of Christ revealed in the Scriptures in which they were deeply versed. "Christ lives in the fields," exclaims Luis de León in a characteristic phrase. But if the country charmed him, still more so did the fields of heaven. He was steeped in Platonic philosophy as well as in the Scriptures, and the star-lit sky not only spoke to him in the clearest language of the glories of the Creator, but also stirred within him that deep desire to get to the heart of all things, to the innermost sphere, to the centre of life, which was characteristic of his philosophy. As he listened to the music of his blind friend Salinas, he seemed to pierce air and space, and to discern, in the highest sphere, imperishable and uncreated harmony. He condensed such thoughts into the compass of a brief, but intense, body of verse, which is one of

¹ *Libro de la Oración y Meditación*, Bk. I, Ch. 1. Quote and trans.: Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, Vol. I, p. 42.

the highest peaks of Spanish lyricism—surely that on which the reader can breathe the purest air, and find himself nearest Heaven.¹

Of Fray Luis's important prose works, we can only mention the justly celebrated *Los Nombres de Cristo*. This is one of the few works of Spanish Catholicism which belongs to the Church Catholic in the true sense and, despite obvious differences of setting and expression, the student of Scripture finds himself very much at home in these pages in which three monks, in a peaceful arbor of the monastery garden, near the flowing waters of the Tormes, discuss the significance of the prophetic names given to Christ in the Old Testament. The atmosphere is biblical rather than mystical in the narrow sense. His language approximates to that of his mystical contemporaries in the chapter on the "Bridegroom," but he is describing the work of grace in the heart which brings about a true union with Christ in every believing heart. There may follow further experiences, in which the soul enters more fully into the meaning of the union, and even moments of rapture, but Fray Luis does not go beyond revelation. Even in his beautiful prayer: "Thou art Life and Light, fulness of rest, Infinite Beauty, endless wealth of sweetness; grant Thou to me that I may be undone and transformed wholly into Thyself," he does not indicate a finality, but a deep desire to "apprehend that for which he had been apprehended"²—the unceasing movement of the derived finite on to and into the underived Infinite.

For most people with a nodding acquaintance with the subject, Santa Teresa, the little grey Carmelite nun of Castile, incarnates the spirit of Spanish mysticism, and no serious student would deny her a place apart, with St. John of the Cross, on the highest heights reached during the XVI century. Her originality is not that of thought, however, but of personality and expression. She is very Spanish, and very human, and, with Fray Luis of Granada, the most accessible of the mystics, combining in her own person depths of womanly tenderness with masculine determination and initiative. The saint of the many raptures and the celebrated "transverberation" was also the practical woman who exalted the role of Martha in the fine words: "Take note, my daughters, that the Lord walks even among the cooking vessels."

¹ *Oda a Francisco Salinas* in *Oxford Book of Spanish Verse*, 2nd Edit., p. 108.

² Allison Peers, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 338.

Teresa gives us a spiritual autobiography in her "Life," which must take high rank in the literature of "Confessions." It was not until 1562, when she had already been a nun for nearly thirty years, that she attempted the reform of the "Mitigated" Carmelite Order, and founded the first "Discalced" or Reformed Convent. The following years were full of journeys, foundations, struggles with the rival order and with worldly ecclesiastics. The years preceding and following, roughly when she was between forty and fifty years of age, also mark the period of the most numerous "favours" and the greatest progress along the Mystic Way. This time of life may have psychological, and even physiological implications which cannot detain us here.

The saint's own understanding of her spiritual experiences are conveyed mainly in the *Life* already mentioned; in the *Moradas* (*Mansions*), her main attempt at systematisation, and in the *Way of Perfection*. She makes no claims to specialised theological knowledge, and, like all the Spanish mystics of the period, was subject to her confessor and identified in spirit with the Counter Reformation. Systematising was not natural to her, and her literary merit consists precisely in the natural flow of racy Castilian, which is really a monologue, complete with digressions and self-corrections, transferred to paper. If everything else is forgotten, her illustrations, drawn from the background of the normal Spanish life of the period, are bound to remain in the memory: In the *Life* the stages of mystical blessing are compared with the different processes of watering a garden, passing from the laborious "rope and bucket" method to the final stage of receiving abundant rain direct from Heaven. In Book V of the *Moradas*, the way in which the soul gathers herself in, in the process of "recollection," until she dies to self and emerges as new life, is compared with the way a silk worm prepares its cocoon, dies itself, and emerges as a gladsome butterfly. The whole of *Moradas* is an allegory of the "pilgrim's progress" along the Mystic Way, under the similitude of a series of concentric mansions, of which the outer ones represent the initial stages of purgation, the middle ones the different stages of illumination, leading to the "Spiritual Betrothal," and the innermost ones the final "Union" or "Spiritual Marriage."

The subject of Teresa's many visions, locutions and ecstasies is a fascinating one, but would need a paper to itself, and far more knowledge of the history and data of such psychic

phenomena than I can lay claim to. Whatever account we give to ourselves of their nature, we cannot doubt their reality to Teresa, and her honesty in recounting them. She also recognised the dangers of deception, and adopted some rough and ready rules to "test" the visions and to guard against the machinations of the Devil. Neither she, nor any other major mystic, conceded any great importance to these "favours," which might be withdrawn at a higher level of spiritual experience.¹

A sketch of the life of St. John of the Cross would be a help to the understanding of his significance in Spanish mysticism, but we can only state that he was a scholar and a theologian, weak in body but saintly in life, who, as a younger colleague, collaborated with Santa Teresa in the reform of the Carmelite Order. He was persecuted, imprisoned and maltreated by ecclesiastics of the "mitigated" Order, and suffered in his later years through divisions in the Order he had done so much to reform. He died at the age of 49, weakened by his sufferings and the extremes of his ascetic practices.

Strangely enough, his mystical prose works are cast in the form of commentaries on three brief, but intense, poems. These are unsurpassed lyrics in the order of religious eroticism, and constitute John of the Cross as one of the greatest Spanish poets of all time. It is one of the strange paradoxes of his life that the man who wrote so drastically on the "Night of the Sense," and detachment from every natural object, was commenting on poems written by himself which give evident signs of acute æsthetic perception, and a supreme mastery, only to be acquired by careful study and practice, of a special poetical form—the "lira" of Garcilasso. The resulting prose works are: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, with *The Dark Night of the Soul*; *The Living Flame of Love* and *The Spiritual Canticle*. The first is mainly ascetic; and the associated *Dark Night of the Soul* expresses the doctrine of "detachment" more drastically than any other mystic work. The joy of illumination and union is the theme of the other two. The originality of John of the Cross is to be found in his great stress on the "dark night of the spirit." The pilgrim is considered to have purged his soul from all attachment to things of "the sense" by the "dark

¹ Discussed by Abbé Rodolphe Hoornaert in *Saint Thérèse, écrivain* chaps. 3 and 4, by Americo Castro; *Santa Teresa y otros ensayos* and many more.

night of the sense," and to have been illuminated. But all this is common to beginners. The proficient must press further on until the blinding light shows him all the spiritual weakness attached even to spiritual delights, and it is only when he has died to them also that he is ready for the "Mystic union." This night is dreadful to self, but blessed in its results, as is indicated in the following typical stanza from "Canciones del Alma":

¡ Oh noche, que guiaste,
 Oh noche amable mas que la alborada,
 Oh noche, que juntaste
 Amado con amada,
 Amada en Amado transformada !

O night that didst lead thus,
 O night more lovely than the dawn of light !
 O night that broughtest us,
 Lover to lover's sight,
 Lover with loved in marriage of delight !

(Trad., Allison Peers.)

It would give an unfair picture of St. John's teaching did we fail to note that the ecstatic joy of fulfilled spiritual love is as prominent a feature in it as is the dreadful process of complete "detachment." The figures which express it are drawn largely from the Song of Solomon, and sometimes amaze us by their boldness.

After centuries of neglect, St. John of the Cross has, in recent years, been read with keen interest, and a number of biographies and studies have resulted. In some cases, cold neglect has been followed by somewhat intemperate praise. Five years ago, Prof. Allison Peers, who has done such great work in bringing the wealth of Spanish mystical literature to the notice of English readers, attempted to interpret St. John of the Cross for the edification of the "genuine Christian" in his little volume, "Spirit of Flame."¹ He realises the difficulties of his own undertaking, and devotes two chapters at the end of the book to "Stumbling Blocks," which might hinder the English Christian from appreciating the saint's teaching, but repeatedly throws down the challenge to the reader to show that St. John's teaching is not in accordance with the Scriptures. The "Christian" he has in mind seems to be rather a formal one,

¹ *Spirit of Flame. A Study of St. John of the Cross.* S.C.M., 1943.

and might well benefit from the saint's teaching, but one wonders what would be the reaction of a devout and scholarly Christian, steeped in an exact textual and contextual knowledge of the Gospels and the Epistles. He would certainly find that St. John was a devout student of Scripture, and would meet with quotations from the Vulgate on most pages of his works, but, with his joy at perceiving gleams of truth, there would be mingled a great deal of uneasiness, issuing at times in distaste and horror. The jewels would be there, but in such a strange setting that they would lose their true value. Light would be there, but so refracted by the medium as to be, at times, as dangerous as a wrecker's beacon.

The first distortion is caused by the monastic setting. No one can claim that monasticism is contemporaneous with Apostolic Christianity. Our Lord's life among men was so normal that the calumny, "A Man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," was malicious without being ridiculous, while apostolic exhortations pre-suppose active, loving fellowship in the Christian family; normal and pure family relationships, and such contact with the "world" as should allow for clear, understanding and loving testimony, as well as for spiritual separateness. The intense activities of Santa Teresa and St. John are often pointed out as indicating that their mysticism was free from passivity and quietism, but it must be remembered that this activity had to do only with the affairs of their monastic order, and their ideal for the laity was to save souls by winning them to the sterile "death in life" of the convent or monastery. In these circumstances, the words of Scripture may be true, while their application may be entirely false.

Further distortion is produced by the blindness to fundamental doctrine caused by the Roman Catholic position. A man is a "Christian" if he has entered the Church by baptism, and continues to be one so long as he lives in obedience to her. The process initiated by the mystic's "new birth" is one of purification for the "élite." There is little appreciation of the glorious completeness of redemption by the atoning death and triumphant resurrection, in which all believers share in virtue of their living contact with Christ by faith. There is no understanding of an already complete sanctification, which believers are exhorted to appropriate and express in the power of the Holy Spirit. It follows, therefore, that the Mystic Way, with its stages of "Purgation," "Illumination" and "Union", cannot correspond

in fact to the Biblical Way of Sanctification taught in Romans vi to viii, Colossians iii, etc. Many of the quotations, then, are lifted bodily out of their context, and applied quite arbitrarily to mystical theology.

Another point which creates a necessary reserve, in the evangelical Christian at least, is the fact already noted that the technique of the Mystic Way is not peculiar to Christianity, but is also used with success by Indian and Moslem "saints." Are we to understand that the teaching of Christ and of the Apostles can be improved on, and that there is another "Way," other than Christ received by faith, which will lead us to God? In terms of psychology, the mystic is "tapping" reserves of subliminal powers in order to effect contacts with external spiritual reality, and thus he gets very near the enemy territory of magic and spiritism.

The great point of contact with the New Testament is the truth which the mystics proclaimed with almost strident accents—that time and sense are vanity, and that only the spiritual is real. It is this, with their claim to the hidden "γνώσις" which made them so attractive to Berdyaev in our own times. They also proclaim, with admirable sincerity and fervor, that, of all the links between God and man, the greatest is Love, although the application of love among men is distorted by the monastic background, and the principle of total "detachment." Spanish evangelicals are very attracted by the mystics' independence of external aids to devotion in a land where the opposite tendency has largely turned religion into a superstition—some have even gone to the length of claiming the mystics as "protestants"! John of the Cross considers that external aids are "lawful and even expedient for the beginner," but reminds his readers that our Lord, for His private prayers, used to choose "solitary places . . . places that lifted up the soul to God, such as mountains . . .," and quotes John iv, 23 to 24.¹

This individual freedom of contact with God, with no intermediaries, is so foreign to official Roman Catholicism that it explains the historic change in the attitude to mysticism. Worldly ecclesiastics looked askance at Teresa and John of the Cross in their day, and even persecuted them; but, at the height of the Counter Reformation period, the Church was in

¹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, III, xxxix. *The Works of St. John of the Cross*. (Trad. Allison Peers.)

very great need of spiritual power and of every possible auxiliary, so finally decided to adopt them and canonise them. Later, when the strength of both Reform and Counter Reform had been spent, and the positions were more or less stabilised, there was no need to be kind to those who sought to make their own spiritual contacts heavenward, so that Molinos was condemned, and Madame Guyon persecuted.

This freedom has been variously interpreted. Dean Inge thinks mysticism "appears as an independent active principle, the spirit of reformations and revivals."¹ Evelyn Underhill, on the other hand, points out that nearly all the mystics have unquestioningly accepted the symbols among which they were brought up, and have sought to express their experiences in the light of them.² The real position is that the mystic is ready to accept the symbols at hand, because, in the last analysis, they are supremely unimportant to him, for he claims to reach a region where communication with God is direct to the point of being independent even of speech.

For the rest, there are few of the Biblical quotations of John of the Cross which do not seem to be distorted in some degree or another because of the postulates and technique of mysticism. The "New Birth" is not the regeneration of John iii, but the moment in which the nominally "Christian" soul awakes to a desire to seek the goal of union. The Christian doctrine of "total depravity" teaches that all parts of the being of man are affected by the Fall, and that new life must be received from God by an act of faith. The mystic believes that there is a "ground," "apex" or "spark" of the soul which can be refined and purified by a given process and finally brought into union with God. It is granted that the power is thought to be that of the Holy Spirit in Christian mysticism, but the terms and the postulates are not those of the New Testament.

Prof. Allison Peers believes that the stern "detachment" teaching of St. John of the Cross is no more than the natural application of the exhortation to "seek those things which are above," and even such a sane writer as Jacques Maritain defends it by references to our Lord's words: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it," and quotes: "If any man cometh unto

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 5, 6.

² *Op. cit.*, 115.

me and hateth not his father, and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple," and maintains that the "relativity" of the Gospels is seen in John of the Cross also.¹ But is the fine balance of Scripture evident in the following advice to a girl who desired to become a discalced Carmelite nun? : "With regard to sins . . . it is well that . . . in order not to fall in them . . . you have the least possible to do with other people, and shun them, and never to say more than is necessary upon any subject. . . ." ² How different St. Paul—"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world" . . . "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos . . . or things present, or things to come . . ." "God hath given us richly all things to enjoy" !

And what of the mystics' goal, the Union with Deity, the spiritual marriage? The danger of an heretical "deification" is obvious, and this word has often been used by mystics, although John of the Cross, as a theologian, seeks to maintain the distinction of substances while using language which would well lend itself to the same error. We are not called upon to doubt the true devotion of the Spanish mystics, or the reality of their experience of meeting with the Beloved, but we do question the relevancy of the verses generally quoted. They are mainly from John xvii, and apply the words which teach the mystic union of Christ with His own, the Church, to the individual purified soul, who is now the "bride," against the usage of Scripture, which reserves the beautiful symbol to the Church Catholic, and, in a secondary sense, to the local church.³

The Spanish mystics are so well known, not because they have added anything to the theory of the Mystic Way, but because of the striking, strongly marked Castilian personalities through which the "Way" was expressed. Their abundant writings— attractively human and popular in Teresa and intense and complete in St. John—provide the most accessible means of studying this fascinating mystical psycho-religious experiment, but it is doubtful as to whether they can be of much help to the "genuine Christian" of to-day. If a soul has failed to find help in the divine clarity of the New Testament she is unlikely to perceive the path amid the ascetic misconceptions, the confused symbolism and the specialised technique of the writings

¹ *Saint Jean de la Croix* : P. Fr. Bruno. Préface, pp. 17-21.

² *The Works of St. John of the Cross*. (Allison Peers.) Vol. III, p. 277.

³ *Eph.* v, 22-33, *Rev.* xix, 7, *II Cor.* xi, 2.

of Santa Teresa and St. John of the Cross. But we may all heed their trumpet call which witnesses to the vanity of time and sense, and we may all seek for a purer and more selfless devotion to the "Beloved." All our hearts thrill to the great saying of Boehme: "I sought only for the heart of God in which to hide myself," and all our hearts assent to John of the Cross's searching reminder: "At eventide they will examine thee in love."

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (MR. KENNETH G. GRUBB) said: You would wish me, I am sure, to thank Mr. Trenchard for the range and content of his paper.

The subject is one that some time or other every serious Christian is compelled to give attention to.

The "Memorabilia" gives a moving account of the contact of Socrates with Diotima the prophetess; one of the most moving experiences of mysticism in pagan literature. The Bhagavad Gita is also a great expression of Indian mysticism, and some of us will have had contact with Sufi mysticism. Is, or is not, this a recurrent sense of a fulfilment, if only partial, of union with Him Who has come as the Light of the World?

To come to the paper, mysticism, and Spanish mysticism in particular, is a protest against formalism; against a petrification of the *credo*, and of vital belief. There may be also, but not necessarily, distortion.

The other great strain in the modern mystical outlook is the assertion of the individual against the society of his time: ecclesiastical, or political, or mixed systems both ecclesiastical and political, such as the Roman Catholic Church. There is a sense of frustration: the influence the individual can exercise on the order of society seems so small as to be insignificant. Mysticism thus appears as the assertion of the individual.

I propose to ask also: Is there a modern problem of mysticism? Is it widespread to-day? Is it in advance of the Gospel, or a retreat from evangelical Christianity? Can any church provide a home for mystical experience, or does the World so affect the church that it can no longer afford such a home?

Dr. E. WHITE said : We are much indebted to Mr. Trenchard for his very interesting paper.

There has been a considerable revival of interest in mysticism during the last few decades, due to the writings of such authors as Baron Von Hügel, Evelyn Underhill, and the book entitled *The Perennial Philosophy*, by Aldous Huxley. This last book contains a very good summary of the teachings of the mystics of various religions, Christian, Mohammedan, and Hindu.

The study of the lives and writings of the mystics shows that they are of two types. Firstly, the extravert, who translates his experiences into good works and saintly living in the service of his fellows. William James in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, lays stress on the practical value of this type of mystical experience. There is, however, at the opposite pole, the introvert type, where the mystic vision becomes an end in itself, an ego-centric quest of the soul after the Beatific Vision. It is worthy of note that in the visions recorded in the Scriptures, *e.g.*, the vision of Ezekiel, and of St. John in the Apocalypse, such visions were followed by commands to active service—to go, to prophesy, to write.

It occurs to me that there are three great dangers in mysticism which I think we should realise.

1. The danger lest mysticism should be merely a psychological phenomenon. The methods adopted open the conscious mind to the unconscious or sub-liminal forces. This may lead to visions productive of disintegrating effects on the ego.

2. Another danger is that mysticism may lead to a search for the God within, rather than to the transcendent God of revelation. As G. K. Chesterton said : “When Mr. Jones seeks to find the God within Mr. Jones, he ends by worshipping Mr. Jones.” We cannot find God by looking within.

3. A third danger is evident from the perusal of Aldous Huxley’s book, *The Perennial Philosophy*. Even Evelyn Underhill discovered the danger of this as she progressed in her experience. It is the danger that sinful man may believe that he can find God, and have direct communion with Him without any necessity for the atoning work of Christ. Our Lord stated emphatically that “no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”

We must not therefore condemn mysticism completely. As

James said: "We cannot dismiss the experiences of mystics as mere phantasies if we find that such experiences bring forth fruit in saintly living." This might be called the pragmatic test of the truth and value of all mystical experience. In the case of the Christian, it may be the road by which he enters into closer communion with God, and so obtains more power to lead the Christian life.

The paper has been submitted to DON ADOLFO ARAUJO, a well-known leader in evangelical circles in Spain, who kindly forwarded the following comments:

In general, I think that Mr. Trenchard is right in his appreciations, but we must make allowances for the extremely changed conditions of living prevailing in our days, with advantage or disadvantage to us.

In regard to the conventual background of Spanish mysticism, it is well to note that there were lay persons in the days of St. Teresa who were seeking to lead the mystic life in their homes, and who passed through the same "sequedades" (periods of spiritual barrenness), and were favoured with the same "consolations" as the nuns and the friars. In general, the Christian feeling of our mystics never suffers complete eclipse, though it does not always prevail.

I find, as many must have found before me, that the poems of St. John of the Cross are a most delicate and effectual way of expressing the ineffable. And the mystic experience is, *par essence*, unutterable. To be able to *suggest* is a great attainment, and this our mystic does admirably, rising the while to great heights of lyricism.

Where I think that John of the Cross has come nearest to the lyrical expression of "assurance of faith," even though mystical theology enters considerably into it, is in the poem beginning:—

Que bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre,
Aunque es de noche.

(How well I know the fount that springs and flows
Although 'tis night.)

Here all believers are mystics with John of the Cross. This blending of assurance with darkness carries us to such Biblical expressions as: "Who . . . walketh in darkness. . . ? Let him trust. . .," or St. Paul's: "We walk by faith, not by sight."

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

MR. A. CONSTANCE wrote : I am deeply indebted to Mr. Trenchard for his excellent paper, and especially for the way he combines penetrating wisdom with gentle tolerance in his treatment of this profoundly important subject. I have no criticism, but would like to submit two quotations which present the real problem which lies at the root of this question. My first is taken from Evelyn Underhill's preface to the twelfth edition (1930) of *Mysticism*, in which she says :

“ Were I, now, planning this book for the first time, its arguments would be differently stated. More emphasis would be given (a) to the concrete, richly living, yet unchanging character of the Reality over against the mystic, as the first term, cause and incentive of his experience ; (b) to that paradox of utter contrast yet profound relation between the Creator and the creature, God and the soul, which makes possible his development ; (c) to the predominant part played in that development by the free and prevenient action of the Supernatural—in theological language, by ‘ grace ’—as against all merely evolutionary or emergent theories of spiritual transcendence. I feel more and more that no psychological or evolutionary treatment of man's spiritual history can be adequate which ignores the element of ‘ given-ness ’ in all genuine mystical knowledge.”

My personal conviction is that this word “ given-ness ” is the key or clue to all mysticism, indicating the vital truth that there cannot be *two* volitional “ sides ” to it, but *one* only. It is “ all or nothing,” all of God and His grace, and so implying no “ search ” for Him or “ struggle towards Him,” but rather an entire elimination of searching and struggling, and so surrender and acceptance *only*. *He gives* the mystical experience, and so absolutely that it is scarcely legitimate even to concentrate on an acceptance of it in any egoistic sense. This thought seems essential in St. John of the Cross, and is continually stressed in all Spanish Mysticism. I find it in *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, in *The Secret Paths of Divine Love*, in *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, in *The Book of the Twelve Bequines*, and in fact in all mystical literature. Yet—and here is my second quotation—it is possible to conceive Mysticism as something

essentially different, indeed as something completely alien to this fundamental position! This is the amazing thing to me—that this “given-ness” can be violently rejected, as the absolute and unique essential of mystical experience. Yet note what Professor Bosanquet says in *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (p. 80):

“To say that reality is only to be found in the given and not in its extension and interpretation through thought is surely the vicious folly of naive realism. If thought had a point of departure foreign to existence, then it would be idle to speak of either generating the other. But the connection of thought and existence, whatever it may be, is not so simply disposed of as this.”

I can only express my firm adherence to the truth of the Evelyn Underhill quotation, as a believer in the personality of the Holy Spirit, and in His absolute power and wisdom in Christian experience. “Every thought of holiness is His alone.” Yet the conflict is there, expressed more or less clearly in all mystical literature. My view is that all that is of the intellect, of the spirit of man, in mystical experience, is pollution, adulteration, a clouding of the light of the soul. In so far as any of the mystics used their own wills, their own intellects, to “seek” God, to “interpret” Him, they lost Him. This is the basic error in asceticism. The flagellant, the torturer of the flesh, is all too conscious of himself, and so loses that absolute surrender, that selfless rest in God which is essential to receiving Him. The problems of mysticism are inseparable from the problems of human personality. They are dissolved rather than solved as the human personality dies in God; dies utterly, losing individuality, will, desire and viewpoint. In this death is eternal life, the Glory of the Infinite, the God-man Absolute in the man who surrenders to God.

AUTHOR'S REPLY.

It is most natural that Sr. Araujo, in common with all well-read Spanish Evangelicals, should be attracted by the mystics, who offer a spiritual oasis in the midst of the general barrenness of age-long formalism and bigotry. As is clear from the paper, I share Sr. Araujo's admiration for the exquisite poetry of St. John of the Cross, and fully recognise the reality of the spiritual experience behind it. At the same time, it is easy for the Evangelical Christian to read his

own spiritual experience into the poetry, whereas John of the Cross interprets it, at great length and detail, in relation to the technical "mystic way," which we have seen to be that of ascetic discipline, "recollection," the dark night of the soul, illumination, the dark night of the spirit, and "spiritual marriage," a process very different from the mysticism of St. John and St. Paul, as expressed in the New Testament.

Mysticism may certainly be considered as a protest against formalism, as Mr. Kenneth Grubb indicates, but it is unconscious and individual, not official and corporate, for, as we have seen, it is content to accept the current religious symbols of the place and time of its manifestation. It was successful in so far as it spread by "contagion," and many persons brought into contact with the mystics sought direct contact with God under their influence. It was unsuccessful because of its submission to official forms, and in its intense individualism. Individuals escaped from the prison of formalism by an intense and personal elevation of the spirit, but there was no *attack* on the imprisoning force, so that the strong shell of petrified religion remained intact.

In regard to the mysticism of St. Paul, we must again make the distinction between a general mystical attitude, which seeks for reality behind phenomena and temporality, which is the essence of the Christian faith, and the special technique, which was a psychological process by which subliminal powers were tapped. Did Paul go beyond the former?

There certainly seems to have been something of the typical mystical "rapture" when he was caught up to the third heaven, not knowing whether he was in or out of the body, and heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful for man to utter (2 Cor. xii, 1-4), but the general pattern of his life and practice seems to have been very different from that of the "special" mystic. They, for example, had little use for vocal prayer and petition, and engaged in orisons which were direct and ineffable. Paul, following his Master, repeatedly practised the intelligent expression of prayer, and exhorted to clear presentations of petitions. Characteristically he exclaims: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also." This provides (among many others) a limit and a check to what we may understand by St. Paul's mysticism.

Dr. White's reminders of the dangers in the recent revival of interest in mysticism are very timely. Emphases vary in the different "schools" of mysticism, but characteristically the mystic is both an extravert and an introvert. He seeks both the transcendental God without, and the immanent god within. The latter, with the idea of a pure "spark of the soul" which grows to the point of "deification," is definitely heretical in tendency, and, as we have seen, the doctrine of total depravity is by-passed.

As regards works, nearly all the great mystics, apart from the extreme quietists, have been active workers. But the work outwards, towards others, in Spanish mystics at least, is directed almost entirely to getting them out of the "world," *i.e.*, out of normal social life, and into the convent or monastery, where the mystic experience might be sought without distractions.

The dangers which Dr. White has indicated in the modern interest in mysticism are very real, and Evelyn Underhill has a considerable section in which she shows that the only differences between the technique of mysticism in its special sense, and of magic, is the motive that leads to the attempt at tapping subliminal forces.

In the mystical "recollection," complete detachment is sought from all external distractions, and the powers of the whole being are concentrated on one "point." The technique is that of self-hypnotism. The forces of the unconscious are released, and the subject is rendered particularly liable to external spiritual influences. Most mystical writers speak of penning their works under constraint, without the working of the intelligence, *i.e.*, automatic writing. We may suppose that if the conscious mind has fed revealed truth into the unconscious, and if the great desire of the soul is God-ward, the Holy Spirit may use this state for special manifestations of power. Perhaps we have something to learn here of power for witness in an increasingly alien world. But the constant exhortation of the New Testament to "try the spirits" shows that evil spiritual powers may use the hypnotic state for their own ends, with disastrous results. The interest in mysticism can only be healthy if it is accompanied by a genuine and complete adherence to the Word of God. We must always cry: "To the Law and to the Testimony." Mr. Constance's quotation from Evelyn Underhill, which emphasises her later and most mature thought, is valuable, and shows the

danger of a mere process by which the "inward spark" is developed.

We seem to be on debatable ground in the last few sentences of Mr. Constance's reply, and I am left in doubt as to whether they express his own view, or whether they represent his summing up of the mystical position. Surely the goal that Scripture points us to is that of *transformed personality*, not that of the utter death of personality. The death of the old nature is a very different matter.