

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 *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Way of the Mystic.

A SKETCH.

BY THE REV. CHARLES COURTENAY, M.A.,

Chaplain of Holy Trinity, Rome.

IT is usual to begin a paper on the subject of Mysticism with a definition. I steel myself against the temptation for several reasons. There are too many of them already. The very best definition is bound to leave some important element out, and is like the effort to put into a medicine-glass that which would take a gallon measure to hold it comfortably. No definition, either, succeeds in satisfying anybody else. All depends on the point of view, and, as the possible points of view are endless, it stands to reason that every definition is doomed to partial failure. We may explain Mysticism, but we had better not attempt to define it. As for the definitions which exist, study them as contributions towards a definition, and you will have a mass of facts which are of exceeding value.

Having refused a definition, let me go on to circumscribe the inquiry. For Mysticism is like a long, swift river, which, clear enough in itself, is continually invaded by tributaries, mostly muddy ones, which give it a bad name, and make it difficult to navigate. I propose to divert these embarrassing influxes for the sake of the real Mystic river.

Let us eliminate the *Pathological Mysticism* which consists of nervous hallucinations. Disordered nerves may see and hear anything, and will cherish delusions under the notion that they are Divine.

Let us reject, too, those many *Self-Revelations* which come through suggestion. Many a man has hypnotized himself, and dreamed dreams and seen visions, all manufactured at home. Home-made products are not always good.

Let us rule out, also, the *Trance and the Ecstasy* which,

although sometimes valid, are hardly necessary to the ordinary Mystic. A Theresa, a Catherine of Siena, a Behmen, may be engulfed by the trance, and see uplifting things which may be Divine. St. Paul, too, may be caught up into the third heaven and revel in unspeakable glory; but such experiences are the exception for the few only, and can never be the Mystic's daily bread.

Let us drop, likewise, the *Occult*, the black or white magic, which has been too largely associated with Mysticism, and always to her hurt. To the ignorant, Mysticism and magic are convertible terms. It is a gain to know better. Mysticism has no need of formulæ and charms. St. John is worth a thousand Paracelsuses.

Let us abandon, further, all the *Extravagances of Theosophy*, so prevalent in the East, and now being so largely transported to the West, and which, while containing some truth, manages to associate with itself much error. While not denying the Mystic element in Theosophy, we should be sorry to regard it as pure Mysticism, or as Mysticism's complete expression.

We will eliminate, also, the *Ultra-Spirituality of the Christian Scientist*, which, in the claims of spirit, would deny all matter, and which, in spite of its full Mystic flavour, does genuine Mysticism no honour by wearing its garb.

We will dissociate ourselves, too, from what is known as the *New Mysticism*, which, with some undoubted truth, denies many of our most precious Christian truths, and, pretending to new revelations, leaves much of the Christian revelation stranded high and dry.

The fact that a man can be a Mystic bereft of all these things, and that he may be all the better Mystic without some of them, justifies me in ruling them out from a sober consideration of Mysticism proper. I am anxious to keep to essentials. Besides, Mysticism needs detaching from what, in innumerable cases, has brought it into disrepute. We do well, I think, to shake its roots free from all unnecessary accretions.

Having thus cleared the way, we had better now plunge

into the depths of our subject, and deal with the *Great Mystic Purpose*—the Mystic goal.

This answers the first question which springs to the lips of most when Mysticism makes its bow. What is the good of it? What is it driving at? Where does it lead us? And if the Pragmatist be right, the fact that Mysticism is of advantage, and can justify its existence by its fruits, is of supreme importance.

As a matter of fact, some of the best men and women that the world has ever seen have been Mystics, and have ascribed their practical piety to their Mystical methods. Hailing from all lands, of both sexes, of all degrees of learning, of all Churches, they have appeared as stars in the religious firmament, and have left the best of silver trails behind them, evident to our own eyes, in our own day and generation.

But I need not dwell on a fact that nobody disputes.

Let us see *What they Claim to have Attained* through their Mystic faith.

They claim to have received a *First-Hand Knowledge of their Lord*, so clear and definite that all doubt and uncertainty vanished as in a flash under the spell of the revelation to their souls. As the fog vanishes under the stroke of the sunbeam, so all their inner mists disappeared under the power of their new insight.

They claim, also, to enjoy that *Blessed Intimacy with God* which is involved in His indwelling in the heart. Christ has been "formed" in them, and has taken up His abode within in a new and entrancing way. Their hearts have become literal temples of God, in the depths of which they offer worship, and hold communion, and exchange the most blessed of confidences. All is direct and close, and, overleaping the form, they succeed in getting at the very heart of things spiritual. They claim a veritable union with God.

They claim an *Inner Light* which is better than reason—a self-evidencing light which, like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, brightens the onward way. Only the pillar is within. It

is this inner light which, penetrating to the inside of truth, lays it bare to the spiritual apprehension. This is the "true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," but which is only absorbed by the Mystic believer.

They claim a *Spiritual Sensitiveness* which, while it is quick to detect the shadow of error and sin, is always alive to that inner Presence which is so dear a possession. It reflects the Divine movements as the smooth waters of a lake reflect the glories of cloud and sunshine; only its heaven is always within.

They claim, by its means, an *Inner Calm* which is unruffled by the happenings of the outer world, and which continues even under the blasts of temptation and difficulties, for they are ever hearing the calming voice which says to their inner being, "Peace, be still."

They claim a *New Vision of their Lord* ever opening upon them, drowning in its pure depths the false charms of a disturbing world, and rendering them independent of much that the world considers essential to well-being. It may not be always, or often, ecstatic vision, but it is real enough to assure them that their Lord is there, and that they feel and know Him.

They claim a *New View of the World around them*, glorifying nature as a real symbol of the Eternal, and regarding things visible as vestures of the Lord their God. Everything is transparent to a Mystic, and the Divine shines eternally through. In every blade of grass, in the song of the bird, in the waving of the corn, in the splash of the wave, in the balanced cloud, in the storm and in the calm, they learn to see their God. It is God's world, not the devil's. Nature to a Mystic is a mirror of its Maker. They find—

"Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Now, these are great and stupendous claims, and require a great deal of proving. Happily, however, proof is unnecessary in the face of the general acceptance, for Mystics have been too long before the world for any scepticism to touch the heart of

their position. The greatest names in Christendom are the names of Mystics, and the story of their lives is just a revelation of the existence of these very excellences which they claim.

I can imagine someone saying, "But is not all this what every Christian ought to claim and possess?" Precisely so, and it is well to see this. As a matter of fact, there are myriad souls who, without knowing it, are pure Mystics, for Mysticism, stripped of its peculiar phrases, is essential Christianity and true piety. What do you hear but a Mystic of the Mystics when St. Paul cries, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," when he prays that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"? And have you not the Mystic ecstasy when he is lifted to the third heaven, and hears unspeakable words? And who but an inspired Mystic wrote the epilogue of St. John's Gospel?

The inner life, the heart quiet, the first-hand dealing with God, the pressure of the Holy Ghost on mind and heart, the blessedness of the pure in heart who alone see God, the joy of union with Christ, the sweetness of communion, are they not all evangelical truisms dear to all our hearts, and instinct with the most blessed results? He to whom these facts are experiences, whether he knows it or not, is a Mystic, and is at home in the Mystical company.

No doubt there are some who deny this identity of Mysticism with Christianity in the interests of the former, as if it were likely to gain by such separation, and forgetting that Mysticism stands to lose more than it gains by its exclusion. If Mysticism *has* its differences, it had better shed them than stand proudly apart from the common faith. Mysticism, if etymologically a mystery, is not necessarily mysterious, and obscurity is never a recommendation to any truth. Having satisfied one inquiry, it is not long before another springs to its feet, and we are faced with a question which demands a full answer, namely, what are the *Peculiar Methods* which Mysticism uses to secure its undoubted results? And this we may deal with with some authority, for all Mystics enlarge on Mystical methods, although they have their differences like other folk.

To all, the road to God is as a *Mystical Ladder*, set up from earth to heaven, from imperfection to perfection. It behoves the aspiring soul to mount the ladder, and to press upwards in spite of its steepness and difficulty. No soul that is easily daunted will mount far, and the fearful is likely to come down, sooner or later, with a run.

The *first* stage of this Mystical ladder is generally known as the *Purgative One*. This is to us the better-known way of *Penitence*. Until a soul knows its vileness nothing can be done; all is at a standstill. And even when the soul's real condition is recognized, it will not avail unless confession be made to God, and the known sins are put away. The more thoroughly this stage of the ascent is achieved, the better the chance of climbing high. Here comes in that necessary *Detachment*, without which the soul cannot leave ground—the abandonment of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The *second* stage in the ascent is the *Illuminative Way*, which answers to what we call *Conversion*, when the light breaks in, dispersing ignorance, and revealing, for the first time, the heart of our Father in Christ. All bonds break, and the inner being feels a delightful sense of liberty. Clouds float away, and we see the vision of a love which forgives all sin, and refuses not to become the innermost life of the soul. It is not mere intellectual illumination perfecting a creed, but an illumination penetrating to the depths, and irradiating the whole inner man. It is a light which turns to life in the soul which perceives and absorbs it.

The third stage is the *Unitive or Contemplative*, in which the soul draws nighest of all, and not only touches God but becomes one with Him in the most intimate of unions. Then comes the blessed vision of the Eternal, which melts the heart into love, and brings all the perfections of the Godhead into the heart. Absorbed, and almost lost in God, the soul walks on the highest of high places, and lives a life almost on wings. Then comes the experience of that truth that "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Not that the union is so

complete that it requires no supplementing. It is complete in potentiality, but, in reality, it is the process of a life and needs an eternity to perfect it.

These are the stages, and it is easy enough to survey them, but positively to ascend is another matter. A student of Mysticism is not necessarily a Mystic; even an admirer of Mysticism may remain at the bottom of the ladder. More people look up at mountains than ascend them. The true Mystic is a celestial Alpinist. We must, therefore, look at the process practically, and see how the spiritual feat is to be accomplished according to the best Mystic teachers.

I rule out of practical politics some of the *Abnormal Methods* which at one time found favour, and which saner spirits have left far behind as utterly extraneous.

At one time the *Ascetic Method* was deemed a necessity, and the story of the Spanish Mystics is full of gruesome details of the horrible discipline to which they subjected themselves. We see, with a sort of admiring horror, *St. John of the Cross* kneeling on broken tiles, and using the discipline to such extent that soon he is seen kneeling in his own blood, with a circle of blood around his swooning body. We read of *Suso* wearing an undergarment with 150 brass nails, pointed and filed sharp, fitted into the leather bands affixed to it, and continually turned towards the flesh. In this he used to sleep. This and many other similar exercises he continued for sixteen years and all for the good of his soul. Such mortifications were the commonplaces of the early Mystic self-discipline, and they were deemed the very highway of holiness. But we have learned, learned better, that God has no pleasure in pain, and loves not to see His children create their own sufferings.

We rule out, too, the *Solitary Method*, which fancies that only by absolute physical separation from their fellows, from the world and its occupations, can holiness be attained. The method of the monk and the nun, who leave the world in the interests of their own souls, is not according to the Master's will. Better, surely, to live active, practical lives of benevolence,

and to walk through human highways, caring for others' souls as well as our own. Religious selfishness is not after the mind of the Master.

But in quite another category is that Mystic *Life of Self-denial* which is the Gospel method. For this self of ours needs curbing and biting like the untamed colt, and only by stringent methods can the true self emerge from that strange amalgam, which we call human nature. Modern thought may commend human nature as much as it will, but even the modern man takes care to keep it in its place, and to see that the human nature of others does not wander through *his* freehold. Human nature in society is a suspect, and is trusted no further than it is seen. How to deny self is what we are all learning, and blessed is the man who denies it wisely and rigidly, and succeeds in preventing it from breaking bounds. There must be a good deal of wise self-denial if we would mount the Mystic ladder.

Equally necessary is the *Life of Prayer*, which is the secret of all Mystic ascents. Every Mystic teacher enlarges on this condition, and most of us have learned much from their tuition on the subject. In fact, their books are largely treatises on the subject of prayer. Here the Mystic masters have excelled. Only their own hearts were their temple and oratory, in the midst of which their Lord was enshrined, not a God in the highest heavens, not a God without, but a God who dwelt within. There was no difference of opinion about this. It was the very centre of the Mystic faith. Christ was seated on the throne of their hearts, and they turned their desires and petitions thitherward. Their throne of grace was on the spot. A whisper could reach Him who sat thereon.

But there were *Degrees of Prayer* which the Mystics insisted on, and which marked out, as in gold, the spiritual progress. For prayer to the beginner and to the advanced and proficient are very different matters. There are those, to use St. Theresa's simile—taken, however, from others—who pray with all the strain of those who draw water by hand from a well; there are

others to whom prayer is as the drawing of water by windlass ; there is a third class who pray as the flowing of the river or the brook, free from all strain and stress ; but the best of all prayer is that which waters the soul with the ease and fulness of the showers of heaven. Clearly, the difference is in the presence or absence of the self-spirit in the praying heart, the open access to the God who visits it, and the welcome which the soul accords to Him.

In the earlier stage it is necessary to prepare the heart for prayer by *Meditation*, in which the mind broods on some truth which shall feed the soul and awaken the needful thirst and desire. Later on, the heart will start on its crusade of prayer without needing such stimulus.

At first, too, *Vocal Prayer* will be necessary to keep the heart within its proper boundaries, and to prevent it from straying. Later on, *Mental Prayer* will be found more easy without spoken petitions. Framed and shaped within the heart, there will be no need for them to come to the lips.

By-and-by the *Inner Silence* will deepen, and the full blessedness of silent petition will develop. Molinos puts the growth of silent prayer in this way :

“ There are three kinds of silences : the first is of words, the second of desires, and the third of thoughts. . . . By not speaking, by not desiring, and by not thinking, the true and perfect mystical silence is reached wherein God speaks to the soul.” And, again, he exhorts : “ Rest in this mystical silence, and open the door that so God may communicate Himself to thee, unite Himself with thee, and transform thee into Himself.”

The highest attainment in prayer is the prayer of *Contemplation*, in which the soul lies passively before God, and, abandoning itself to Him, waits for the voice, the revelation, the uplifting, the ennobling.

It is then that the soul is brought into full union with its Lord and enjoys communion, and responds in holy thought and deed. Then it reaches its earthly high-water mark of possible

attainment, and blossoms out into unutterable joy and the purest and most disinterested love to God and man. This is the Mystic perfection.

It must not be imagined that all is plain sailing to the Mystic. There are arid zones to traverse, where the soul must learn to trust without feeling, and live by faith alone. The will must be kept braced and steady, and there must be a constant practice of the presence of God. And the eye must be kept fixed on the blessed goal of union with God Himself in the innermost being, and without any necessary exterior help. All must be direct, immediate, and internal.

Of course, not all reach the final goal, many falling short of the full realization and the full abandonment. Some stop short at the end of the first stage; others succeed in getting no farther than the second. But it must be understood that to stay elsewhere than at the end is the fault of the seeker, not of the Lord.

It is time now that we turn our subject around once more, and consider another side of it. And we cannot do better than deal with *Mystic Dangers*, which lie in wait to trip up the devotee. For the Mystic way has its pitfalls and its precipices, and needs treading with caution.

There is, for instance, the very evident danger of *Illusion*. Divine voices *do* speak, but there are other voices not so reliable. Feelings are not to be made the foundations of things when they stand alone. And if we cannot safely trust our own impressions, still less can we trust the impressions of others. Inspiration is a glorious thing, but its counterfeits are too many and disastrous to be given too precipitate a hearing.

There is also the danger of *Undue Individualism*, for the Mystic is bound by his very creed to stand more or less alone. *His* experience is the deciding factor. *His* personal revelations are the decisive elements of his faith. It is not what God has said to the Church, but what God says to his own heart, which yields satisfaction to his soul. Christ in his own heart is the "last word" to him. He wants no other.

There is, moreover, the danger of *Over-Emphasizing the Less Essential*. The written Word, for instance, is apt to be crowded out in part as a revealer of truth, being treated, so to speak, as a second-hand teacher. The more ingenious Mystics are prone to over-refine on the deeper points of the unknown, and to leave the simple for the more complex. Reading the works of Dionysius the Areopagite is like wandering in a maze, and travelling over the incomprehensible. Behmen attempts to throw light on spaces which inspiration left untouched, and where one is obliged to follow blindfold. It takes a bigger amount of credulity than most reasonable men possess to swallow down many Mystical revelations.

There is no little danger also in the Mystical tendency to *Suffocate the Reason*. The man who learns solely by immediate vision is likely to look askance on the probing reason. Intuition is certainly a Divine method of insight, and, like the invisible rays at both ends of the spectrum, has undoubted heating and chemical powers, but it requires confirming in some rational way. Intuition may discover, but reason is necessary to prove. And right intuitions lend themselves to confirmation. This has been seen by many modern Mystics, who now insist on the province of reason being respected. They even call themselves "Rational Mystics." But not all are that; there are many irrational Mystics.

There is a danger, too—not at all a small one—of *Making Preposterous Claims*. "Union with God" is the goal of the Mystic, and not a few claim to have attained to this ecstatic union. And we can well believe it, seeing that this ought to be the normal experience of every well-taught and consecrated Christian, who is "in Christ." But when these Mystics proceed to claim *Deification*, and to be lost in the Deity, we find ourselves on strange ground. *Immanence* then becomes a heresy, and is pressed to alarming lengths which must react harmfully on the soul. "A man in Christ" does not lose his personality. Perhaps they do not mean what we think they do, but Eckhart's phrase, so often quoted—"The eye with which I see

God is the same as that with which He sees me"—needs some explaining to bring it into line with truth. It seems as if he believed in a fusion of personalities.

The danger of *Pantheism* is no imaginary one, although it may be overpressed, for loose language may easily involve all the heresies. In the Eastern Mystics we see it in full blossom. Whether our Western Mystics fell into Pantheism is an open question. They certainly skirted the edge of it. That God is in everything we freely admit, but that everything is God is another matter, which we deny. To identify God and His creation is not the Christian line of thought. Probably the new Mystical school which hails from America, and of which Emerson is the high-priest, is more heavily tarred than it knows with the Pantheistic spirit.

The fact is that when the heart is deeply stirred the speech is prone to become a little extravagant and wild, and if the Mystic in touch with God is overwhelmed with the glory of the vision, and the heart gushes spontaneously under the pressure of its great love to Him, we must not press words too far. There are many strange heresies in love-letters. Poetry is not to be weighed in the scales of drab and sober prose.

From dangers to *Safeguards* is an easy transition, and essential; for, with so many pitfalls besetting the Mystic way, it behoves us to fence and bank it well for the sake of security. So we shall do well to spend a few minutes in descanting on some necessary *Mystic Safeguards*.

The Mystic is not unlike the Marconi receiver. He raises his heart and spirit aloft to gather the Mystic messages from the distant and the unseen. But, inasmuch as alien messages may be gathered in, too, and recorded, he must somehow be "tuned" to reject all but the genuine and the true. And if it be possible to do this, he will be protected from mischievous intruders.

No doubt there are some ultra-credulous souls who want no safeguards, or, rather, will not welcome them. These are the **Mystical free-lances** who abandon themselves to every

impulse and fancy, and dub their flimsiest dream with the name of the Divine. It is such people as these who discredit any creed or system, and whose books float as scum on the Mystic seas.

Fortunately, the sane Mystic stands ever "on guard," and, challenging every "revelation," refuses to let them pass within the citadel until they can give the necessary password. There are, fortunately, several strong safeguards against illusion and delusion in this war of conflicting voices.

The *Bible* is one, and no destructive criticism can lay low its efficacy or weaken its defensive powers. He is a bold man, indeed, who dares to set up his vision, or his intuition, or his impressions, against definite and repeated revelation as set forth in The Book. It is God's dyke against the raging, beating, aggressive seas of error. It is the Divine *aqua fortis* which is to try and condemn all metal that is not precious and pure. "To the Law and to the Testimony. If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." To desert Bible ground in the interest of supposed truth is to wander into bogs and morasses where foothold is not, and where ruin is sure.

Another safeguard against delusion is to be found in the *General Christian Consciousness*. A newspaper may boast and make capital of "exclusive information." A quack may hug to his mean little soul his own patent remedy. But there are no such exclusions in Divine revelations. There are, no doubt, "inner circles," where truth is clearer and more potent, esoteric ones who abide hard by the fountain of revelation; but we must not think of these as special favourites of heaven, admitted where others are rejected. All may be initiated, and the doors of truth stand ever open to any who may choose to enter. Truth is a matter for the many, and jurisdiction on the question of truth and error is a right of all the instructed. Judge, then, the folly of this man or that, who alleges a discovery of truth all his own, although running counter to the Church's creeds! It is individualism run mad. No doubt it ministers to the pride

of our original discoverer to have alighted on some hitherto unknown land of truth; but when he produces it, and lays it alongside the Christian map, it will be found to be either old territory or a bank of fog. This is why the findings of the Church at large must be taken into account, and why it behoves the Mystic to bring his inner revelations to compare with the general Christian consciousness.

A third safeguard is to be found in the *Human Reason*. It is easy to discount the probing power of the human mind, and to deny its application, but if it exists, it must not be denied a hearing. It has done good work in the past in bursting dream-bubbles and dismissing visionary rubbish, and it is as necessary to-day as ever. Not that it is infallible, or universally applicable, for, as a matter of fact, the Divine is often above reason. For my part, I should be reluctant to accept any revelation which violated Christian common sense. But then, you cannot deal with a man who believes "because it is absurd." A vision which brings us into conflict with reason, which violates the first principles of common sense, which lands us into the ridiculous and grotesque, is hardly likely to have emanated from heaven. This is why it is wise and necessary to use reason as a safeguard against Mystic error.

Another safeguard is to be found in the *Practical Test of Tendency*. A revelation which leads nowhere, which vanishes in smoke, which fails to achieve anything, stands condemned. And when all that the Mystic has to show for his truth is thrills of ecstasy, we beg leave to doubt his "truth." There is something lacking in the fire which cannot generate steam, and something defective in the steam which cannot turn the wheels. A Mystic revelation must approve itself by its works. Sentiments and feelings are excellent things when they grow excellent fruit.

My last words shall be devoted to the consideration of *What we Owe to Mysticism*. It is possible that we do not realize how great is the debt of the Christian Church to the Mystic.

Thus, *What a Witness it has borne to Spiritual Truth* throughout the ages, shining brightly in the darkest of dark

times! The student of history, looking back over the centuries, sees much black, and at times it looks all black, save for little light-jets here and there tracing out the Church's path. Invariably, I believe, it is the Mystic lights which relieve the darkness and make it visible. The Mystic has saved the situation, and preserved the spiritual truth which was in such signal danger of being extinguished by the ignorance, superstition, worldliness, and materiality of the dead Church. Run over in mind the living names of the past, the names of the outstanding Christians whose torch burned brightly, and you will see that they were the men and women of Mystic faith, and the lights that you observe are the heart-lights of indwelt and consecrated souls. They ran like a spiritual Gulf Stream, warm and isolated, amidst the chilly seas of doubt and error.

Again, what a witness Mystics have borne to the *Reality of Spiritual Experience!* Buried under a mass of formalism and superstition, religion had lost all its virtue and sap, until the Mystic came to live the inner life of faith and love, and to show forth the possibilities of the Christ life. They alone escaped from the outer and formal into the inner and vital. It was at their peril oftentimes that they ventured to fill the empty shell with a spiritual content, for superficial men love not to see deviations from the normal, and if they be men in authority their hands fall heavily on the reformers. It is true that some of them, like St. Theresa, were canonized, but for long the hand which later signed the deed of canonization was held suspended, as if to consign to prison or stake. Molinos died in prison after being trusted by a Pope. Madame Guyon was a suspect to the end.

Moreover, it is to the Mystics that we owe the *Science of the Spiritual*. It was they who mapped out the chart of the spiritual life, and counted the rungs of the Mystic ladder. Perhaps they over-refined in their enumerations, and subdivided to excess, but we have a large debt to their contemplative findings. Most of us owe much to these masters of the spiritual art who trod the way they explained and proved in

their own experiences the validity of their claims. For it was only as they looked back and surveyed the road already traversed that they put pen to paper, telling of the spiritual wanderings which brought them to the Throne. They wrote in blood and tears, but with sunbeams making rainbows amidst it all, which were to gladden the eyes of all the future ages.

We are thankful, too, for the *Spiritual Independence* which the Mystics proclaim. There is nothing which so vitiates the Christian position as the interposition of persons and things between the soul and God. The Roman system has elaborated this mediation to a science, subjecting souls to the whims and fancies and errors of ignorant men. It was the Mystic who prepared the way for the Reformation. Luther was led on to make his stroke for spiritual freedom by his study of that old anonymous devotional book, the "Theologia Germanica." And it was this tendency, inherent in Mysticism, which brought the Roman hand down so heavily on the Mystics of the past. To disregard the priest was the deadliest of heresies. Divine absolution, with the priest left out, was intolerable. Direction by the Holy Ghost, apart from human direction, was to be stamped out by fire and sword. It is true that some of the Mystics, notably the Spanish ones, managed to hold to both the spiritual and ecclesiastical, but even so it is not difficult in reading such works as the autobiography of St. Theresa to see how lightly the bond of the earthly director sat on them, and how free they were in their comments on the inadequacy of much that goes by the name of direction. In the midst of outward submission we see the free spirit bounding along its own course guided by the Spirit of Christ.

It is to the Mystics, too, that we owe our *Highest Ideals of Christian Experiences* in the Church of God. It is true that they cannot out-distance the Divine and apostolic ideals and commands, but they show us in a vivid way how real and practical these possibilities are. In their humility they touch the deepest note. In their joy that seems to us almost extravagant, in their simple, expectant faith, they put most of us to

shame. In their ecstatic love they show us the heights to which the heart can ascend in the power of the Holy Ghost. We see them sparing no pains, and putting into their religion their whole being. What we talk of they seem to enjoy. And throughout it all they show a marvellous disinterestedness. It is this which makes their writings so inspiring. Take up a book by Fénelon, by Madame Guyon, by St. Bernard, by the Lady Julian; read a sermon by Tauler, by Eckhart, by Smith the Latinist; read the lives of St. Theresa, of St. John of the Cross, of Suso, of Madame Guyon—and you feel as if you had been bathing in spiritual seas or had acquired a pair of wings. For let the Mystic be of whatever persuasion ecclesiastically, we immediately feel at one with him in these deeper experiences which strike below all differences. We meet at the spiritual root of things. We breathe the same Divine air.

Looking back over my paper, I am conscious of whole stretches of Mysticism leaped over. I see how terrible has been the compression, even necessary points being subjected to this drastic treatment. But then, what could one do with such multitudinous material? I fear, too, that in my effort to run out of the many Mystic fog-banks I may have run down some blameless truth. One must, however, take risks even in a Mystical introduction. Still, ventilation is good even if the ventilator be defective. One thing I am assured of is that Mysticism is a pressing subject, and will have to be reckoned with by those who stand in the forefront as ministers of truth. The knowledge of it is a necessary part of a minister's equipment, for, under a Mystic guise many of the friends and foes of our faith are drawing nearer, and it is well that we should have the penetration to discern the one from the other. If, in addition, Mysticism be a true thing and the Mystic method a Divine thing, then to ignore it must be fatal, to embrace it right and becoming.

