

# The Inner Experience of the Holy Spirit:

## Its Relation to Mysticism

BY THE REV. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.

THIS article will be introspective. Introspection can be dangerous, but there are times when it is necessary. This is such a time. As Evangelical Christians we must be prepared to examine the nature of a valid Christian experience, for we have come to a point where, in response to certain movements of religious thought, we may be guilty either of resisting a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit or of being swept away into a wholly false position.

This movement affects not only the relations between one form of Christian thought and another, but the whole relationship between Christianity itself and other religions of the world. It may well be that Christianity will find itself outflanked by some of those very religions to which it believed itself to be superior.

### I

To be more explicit, there is serious need that we should define our attitude more clearly to the trends of modern mysticism. The point at issue is whether the mystic experience is the basis of union of all religions. One of the most frequently repeated assertions is that "All mystics speak the same language." The significance of this is that there is a basic similarity between the experiences of mystics of all creeds, even though the mystics commonly try to harmonise their experiences with the dogmas that they hold on other grounds. The corollary to this is that the dogma is purely secondary, and that, if this can be omitted, a strong basis of unity remains. Mystics themselves are commonly (though not always) gentle souls, with a desire to live in harmony with all God's creation. Dogma, on the other hand, divides. Therefore, it is said, let us abolish dogma and unite on the basis of a deep religious experience.

The writings of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard are a powerful plea for the primacy of the mystic experience. Huxley's book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, is an anthology of mystic writing, Christian and non-Christian, arranged under definite subjects and linked by a considerable commentary. The book is most fascinating, and has had a large sale. Mr. Huxley is a man of tremendous sincerity, and in his writings we have been able to follow his conversion from a sordid materialism to a highly mystical way of life.

But both Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard appear to be turning more and more to the Wisdom of the East for inspiration, that is to Higher Hinduism and Buddhism. This same Hindu and Buddhist influence is also entering through other writers. One of the most powerful of these is Paul Brunton, whose book *The Quest of the Overself* alone has run to 18,000 copies. Brunton is a balanced thinker who endeavours to make the teachings of Yoga available in a form that is easily followed by Western minds. He has a philosophic mind, and is desperately in earnest.

Amongst organised representatives of Eastern thought in this country one must reckon Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Those who have not met the latter movement will probably have heard the name of Rudolf Steiner, who was virtually its founder. He was no merely slavish follower of Eastern thought, but a genius in his own right.

On a more popular level there is a strong current of Eastern religious thought that is in part loosely attached to groups and brotherhoods, and in part probably centred in certain magazines and periodicals. Whilst there is a general similarity of idea in these magazines, the actual presentation differs. Thus *The Modern Mystic and Monthly Science Review* represents the highbrow element. On the other hand *Prediction* has the more direct popular appeal. There are also the various Spiritualist periodicals that contain articles and viewpoints that are relevant to our subject.

It is not easy to draw lines of division between much popular mysticism, occultism, and spiritualism, though in general one may say that mysticism is concerned with fellowship with the Absolute, occultism with the use of latent powers of the soul, and spiritualism with contact with the departed and other spiritual beings. A frequent link between the three, as they are expounded in popular writings, is a belief in reincarnation and in astrology. Both of these are tenets of Eastern wisdom.

These popular movements might not seem to be important, but they link on to other things that are happening in a different field, that is the field of Psychology. Here also one can detect a move towards the East. A recent book on *Hindu Psychology* by Swami Akhilananda contains a sympathetic preface by E. S. Brightman, Professor of Philosophy of Boston University, and author of *A Philosophy of Religion*, which is coming into use in this country. Dr. Brightman and others feel that the Hindu doctrine of man's nature must be given serious consideration by Western psychologists. This may well be true.

Some practising psycho-analysts have been attracted by Eastern ideas. One of the best known from his writings is Dr. E. Graham Howe, two of whose books, *The Triumphant Spirit* and *Invisible Anatomy* are strongly Eastern in their outlook. One gathers from the daily papers that Dr. Graham Howe is now an avowed Buddhist.

There is much in Dr. Graham Howe's starting point that reminds one of Jung, and although Jung himself cannot be labelled as belonging to any religion, he has certain affinities with Eastern thought, especially with a Taoist interpretation of man's nature. One might instance his joint work with Wilhelm, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

## II

In the light of these facts one can see the force of the remark at the beginning of this article that unless we examine carefully the essential nature of our Evangelical experience, we may be guilty either of resisting a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit or of being swept away into a wholly false position. In other words, when we have removed all the non-essentials and crudities of this modern mystic movement, we are obliged to ask, Is the movement a genuine work of

the Holy Spirit, intended to unite all Creeds, or is it an enemy to be resisted? Or is there some middle way of regarding it?

There are two recent books from the Christian standpoint, one from this country and one from the U.S.A., which rest the whole future of the Christian religion on mysticism. Dr. W. R. Inge in *Mysticism in Religion* finds his ultimate authority, not in the Bible or the Church, but in the inner light. He concludes his first chapter with a series of testimonies from both Christian and non-Christian mystics. If Dr. Inge represents a considerable body of opinion, it looks as though we shall henceforth have to make an addition to our three possible seats of authority. The infallible Book, the infallible Church, and the infallible Mind, must be succeeded by the infallible Unconscious! In practice many already accept this as a working proposition. Members of the Society of Friends, with their emphasis on the Inner Light, and of the Oxford Group with their direct guidance, clearly regard the Unconscious as the vehicle by which God makes His will known to mankind. Dr. Inge, however, like other sane thinkers, would not regard all guidance from the Inner Light as infallible. But it is clear from his book that the commands of the Inner Light possess a validity that commonly overrides those of other so-called authorities. For the moment we beg the question of whether the Inner Light is solely a manifestation of the Unconscious, or whether, as Dr. Inge believes, it is a manifestation of a higher spiritual principle in the sphere of the Unconscious.

Thus in England Dr. Inge welcomes mysticism of all schools of thought. From America there comes a book called *Behold the Spirit*, by Alan W. Watts, which is strongly recommended by the Bishop of Chicago. The author is apparently an ordained minister of the American Episcopal Church. This book is a stimulating appeal for a realisation of the mystical experience. Again some use is made of Eastern mysticism, but the author is more closely attached to a "Catholic" form of Christianity than is Dr. Inge.

These appeals cannot go unanswered if Christianity is to survive as a living force. Mere dogma will only repel, except with a certain type of mind. But it may well be that if we are not careful we shall be asked to pay too high a price in return for the inner experience that is offered to us. This accounts for the suspicion with which the Christian Church has always regarded the mystic. There is always the feeling that he is slipping over into a dangerous unorthodoxy.

There is no doubt that there is considerable reason for this feeling. Orthodoxy and mysticism start from different premises. Orthodoxy believes that Jesus Christ came to do for man on the Cross what was necessary for man's salvation, and to implant in man, through the new birth, a new nature that knows God, and that is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Mysticism believes that Jesus Christ, and other teachers, came to reveal in man his latent potentialities: that Pentecost was the realisation by a section of mankind of the divine capacity that man possesses by nature.

It is, therefore, extremely trying for an Evangelical Christian to find in the two books by Dr. Inge and Alan Watts, an attempt at a justification of the basis of mysticism in the New Testament. That

which is said there of Christians as temples of the Holy Spirit is used by them as though it referred to all mankind. Thus on page 33 Dr. Inge refers to St. Paul's "doctrine of the Spirit as immanent in the hearts of men". Alan Watts goes so far as to say that "Hell consists not in being deprived of union (*i.e.*, with God), but in wilful failure to appreciate it"; and again, "We have been given union with God whether we like it or not, want it or not, know it or not" (p. 80).

As against this idea the New Testament gives a constant and consistent testimony to the sharp line of cleavage between the Church and the world. It is those who receive Christ, through faith in Him, who are born again and receive the right to become the sons of God (John i. 12, 13; Galatians iii. 26). They thus pass from judgment and death into eternal life (John v. 24). The non-Christian is under the power of Satan and sin, and is not delivered until he is made alive in Christ (Ephesians ii. 1-6). The Holy Spirit is not received until after repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts ii. 38; Galatians iii. 21). These random texts can be paralleled again and again in the New Testament. Therefore in spite of the difference that the Incarnation has made, according to Alan Watts, it is clear that the first Christians did not believe that it brought all mankind automatically into union with God.

If this is so, the embracing of the mysticism advocated in these two books and in others, means that one is bound to hold that the New Testament writers took too narrow a view on such a fundamental point. It also raises the further issue of whether it was really necessary for Jesus Christ to be incarnate at all. Any theory that ultimately makes the Incarnation a demonstration of an already existing reality, comes in the end to make the Incarnation unnecessary.

In this connection it is significant that Jesus Christ was not born into the world as a Hindu or a Buddhist. We may presume that it was not by chance that He was born a Jew. He was born in that religion which could best understand Him, and which could most fully grasp the significance of His objective atoning death. If the true approach to God had been by the mystic way, then it is reasonable to believe that God would have sent His Son to be born into some other religion.

### III

Having said all this, we must now attempt some estimate of mysticism as a whole. There have, of course, been very many "explanations" of it by mystics themselves, by theologians, and by psychologists. One might mention the balanced psychological approach of J. B. Pratt in *The Religious Consciousness*, and the treatment of the subject by a Roman Catholic Professor of Psychology, Joseph Marechal, in *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*. But so far as I am aware, there has been no recent attempt by evangelical writers to assess mysticism in the widest sense in the light both of the Bible and of modern investigations of the latent powers of the Unconscious. In the volume in the St. Paul's Library, *The Inner Life*, W. F. P. Chadwick has touched on several of the more orthodox mystics, and has seen

the need for the vital experience to which they bear witness ; but a fuller work needs to be done. In what follows a line of approach is suggested that may be an approximation to the truth.

The first thing to note is that quite clearly the experience of the mystic is something that is very precious to him. It is a genuine experience of a reality that does not come through the normal sense channels. Even if the experience is recounted in terms of " seeing " and " hearing ", it is not the eyes or the ears that are the instruments. But visions are incidental to mysticism. They take their place with such physical incidentals as levitation, for which the evidence is extremely strong, as may be seen in Dr. E. J. Dingwall's book *Some Human Oddities*. The goal of the mystic experience is not things of this kind, but the realised oneness with the Divine. We use the term " Divine ", but a very similar realisation can come to those who do not themselves believe in God. A striking instance is that of Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart*. Since this is no isolated instance, some psychologists have preferred to speak of the mystic experience as " Cosmic Consciousness ".

This title is suggestive, and may give us a link with the New Testament. Although, as we have seen, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a specifically Christian experience, the New Testament also speaks of the immanence of God. This is stated by St. Paul at Athens in the form, " In Him we live, and move, and have our being " (Acts xvii. 28). This is further amplified in Colossians i. 17, " He (*i.e.*, Jesus Christ) is before all things, and in (or by) Him all things hold together ". Here we notice an interesting difference of emphasis between the New Testament and modern terminology, pointed out, I believe, by Archbishop Temple. While modern mystical writers tend to speak of the Holy Spirit as immanent in the world, the New Testament speaks of Christ, or the Logos. Thus again in Hebrews i. 3, it is the Son who upholds all things by the word of His power, and in John i. 4, it is the Logos of whom it is said, " In Him was life ; and the life was the light of men ".

What emerges from this is that there is a life force of God that runs through the whole of creation, manifesting itself according to the object with which it is united. In man it is the vital life force that was breathed into Adam at his creation making a living soul, or living creature (Genesis ii. 7). This life force is also manifested in the animal world, so that the death both of man and of animals is the withdrawal of this spirit or breath (Psalm civ. 29, 30 ; Ecclesiastes iii. 21 (R.V.), xii. 7.)

Experience shows that man is normally unconscious of this life. It sustains him and enables him to travel through his allotted span, but it belongs to the level of the Unconscious. Suppose, however, that man could turn inwards upon himself and obtain a glimpse of this life of God. He would become aware of a universal life stream, having the appearance of impersonality, and sweeping through the whole of creation. He would see himself as a living part, not only of God, but of all created beings.

This appears to be the essence of the general mystic experience. It is a real contact with God at a level where He is experienced as the

Universal Life. Thus it is that the non-Christian mystic speaks of his God as impersonal. Aldous Huxley in fact regards the belief in the personality of God as a hindrance, and holds that the "dark night of the soul," experienced by some Christian mystics, is due to the conflict between their preconceived ideas of God as personal and their actual experience of the impersonal Godhead.

This attempt to assess the mystic experience in the light of the Bible view of man shows how it is something that can come to Christian and non-Christian alike. Probably most of us have occasionally experienced this Cosmic Consciousness: it has come to us quite unthought, and for a flash we have been aware of our unity with all things. Undoubtedly also it can be cultivated by simple methods of Yoga, such as those advocated by Paul Brunton.

The danger of Yogi methods is probably that one may become sidetracked into the cultivation of experiences of God at a lower level than the best. This of course will be denied by the Yogi himself, but we shall have more to say about this later. Meanwhile one notices the real value that there is in the Hindu and Buddhist emphasis on the "quiet time". If Evangelical Christianity jettisons the quiet time, then it is lost.

There is a second danger, of which Paul Brunton is well aware. It is that some methods of Yoga release hidden powers of the soul that may be extremely devastating. Seemingly some Eastern adepts can handle these powers, but they may be dangerous to mental balance in ordinary people.

The ordinary man, who gives no thought to mysticism, may none the less receive intimations of the existence of the life force, if, as is probably true, it forms the "raw stuff" of the inspiration of poets, artists, musicians, and others. Anyone who responds to a work of inspiration in this sense knows that his response is not on the level of consciousness only. It is probably the completion of the circuit between the life-force in the original creator and the life force in the experiencer. This does not make God responsible for all works of art. The "raw stuff" of inspiration, which gives it its dynamic, is expressed through the medium of the agent's mind. In using the word "inspiration", we are not putting literary inspiration of this kind on a level with biblical inspiration; but to discuss the latter would take us beyond the scope of this article.

#### IV

Students of Jung will see ways in which this idea links on to the Collective Unconscious. One can also begin to see the relevance of the facts established by J. B. Rhine and others, set out by Rhine himself in his book *The Reach of the Mind*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue. In other words, mysticism takes its place with some branches of modern psychology and with aspects of psychical research as a discovery of a part of the hidden nature of man. The wisdom of the East is therefore of great relevance to the researches of the West.

But the point of real significance for the Christian is whether this contact with the life force of God is redemptive. In other words, does salvation, in the fullest sense, come through a developed contact

with this Life? According to the New Testament the answer must be a decided No. *Pneuma* and *Zoe* are of a different order from *Psyche* and *Bios*. To be born again by the Holy Spirit of God (John iii. 1-8), through the Word of God (1 Peter i. 23), is to receive a new order of life (2 Cor. v. 17) and to become *Pneumatikos*, spiritual, instead of merely *Psychikos*, natural (1 Cor. ii. 12-16). Although writers like Dr. Inge point out the difference between the "natural" and the "spiritual", the transition from the one to the other in their thought appears to be by enlightenment rather than through the crisis of the new birth in the New Testament sense.

But amongst all the gifts of God the highest is the adoption as children of our Father. Jesus Christ revealed God as Father. To judge by St. Paul's words in Romans viii. 15 and Galatians iv. 5-7, the great work of the Spirit is the establishing of the Father-Child relationship. This means that the basic emphasis of the Christian revelation is the Personality of God, and a knowledge of Him as Father, mediated by the Holy Spirit to the simplest Christians. In contrast to occasional revelations of the Cosmic Consciousness and to elaborate mystical ladders, the personal knowledge of God comes in direct response to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "For through Him we have our access in (or by) one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. ii. 18).

This means that for the truly converted man there should be both an inner and an outer awareness of God. Inwardly there should be the dynamic of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. iii. 16, 17), and outwardly the going out to the transcendent God and the realisation of His Presence with us.

In practice this is probably the experience of most Evangelicals if they are more than merely orthodox in doctrine. Evangelicalism stands for a direct and personal knowledge of God, and not merely for a knowledge about God. If one cares to apply the term "Mysticism" to this, in the sense that Mysticism is fundamentally an awareness of God, then the Evangelical is a genuine mystic. But his awareness of the personal God is grounded upon the revealed Word of God: he approaches through the New Testament gateway of Christ crucified for his sins, and Christ risen and ascended for his justification and for the experience of vital union.

But the knowledge of God is an ever growing experience, as relationship between persons must always be. Hence the Christian uses his Bible in order to learn more of the Divine-human relationship. He also seeks help from those Christian mystics who have apparently had the clearest apprehension of the personal God as revealed in Christ. He must be prepared to distinguish between those experiences which are closely associated with the emotional make-up of any individual mystic, and those which are fundamental to all Christian experience. He may also find a place for the cosmic life force in his thinking, and come to the appreciation of "God in everything", not in a pantheistic sense, but so that he can enjoy God in all creation. One is tempted to quote Thomas Traherne: "Your enjoyment of the world is never right till every morning you awake in Heaven, and see yourself in your Father's palace. You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and

crowned with the stars . . . Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you can never enjoy the world."

Now this may sound like nonsense, but we may presume that it would have made sense to St. Paul when, enumerating the things of the world, he said, "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 21-23).

To sum up: Mysticism, apart from the revelation of God in Christ, may end in a blind alley. It is infinitely better than materialism, and so like music, poetry and art, may be refuge for this modern materialistic age. But at its highest, even when it has brought man into a realised union with the life force of God, it has provided less than has the simple faith of a Christian who has come to the personal knowledge of the Father in Christ. But God is to be known not once, but continually; and in the means of grace, namely the Bible, prayer, and public worship, which includes the Sacraments, He reveals Himself more fully to the soul that seeks Him. Mysticism is right in asserting that the only hope for the present age is a vital experience of God. If the Evangelical message loses this experience, it will be bankrupt. But let us be sure, by keeping closely to what God has revealed of Himself in Scripture, that our experience is based upon God revealed in Christ, and not simply upon God manifested in ourselves. We may achieve the latter by several methods, but the former is the work of the Holy Spirit alone, and this work of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## The Holy Spirit and Christian Conduct

BY THE REV. R. E. HIGGINSON, M.A.

**S**PEAKING generally, *Romanism* neutralizes the operation of the Holy Spirit in Christian conduct. He is replaced by the Hierarchy of the Roman Church. In claiming to be "the Vicar of Christ" the Pope usurps the prerogative of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, who is the true deputy of Christ in the era of grace. As a consequence the Holy Spirit is virtually ruled out of the Roman conception of Christian conduct. "Remember," writes P. T. Forsyth, "that catholicism is the christianity of the *natural* man."<sup>1</sup>

*Sacramentalism* is concerned with the efficacy of the divine ordinances as the channels of grace to the soul. Christian conduct is guided by an elaborate system of moral theology, without much reference to the Holy Spirit as a personal guide and teacher.

*Moralism* is concerned with the good life. Its energies are directed to the study of right and wrong in human conduct. There is the firm belief that at the higher levels the will unfailingly chooses the right. "People need to be reminded," said Dr. Samuel Johnson, "more often than they need to be instructed."<sup>2</sup> This conviction eliminates the need in a large measure for the work of the Holy Spirit within the

<sup>1</sup> *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 110. P. T. Forsyth.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Behaviour*, p. 16. C. S. Lewis.