

CHRISTIAN APOPHATIC AND KATAPHATIC MYSTICISMS

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ARNOLD TOYNBEE once predicted that "when the historian of a thousand years from now comes to write the history of our time, he will be preoccupied not with the Vietnam war, not with the struggle between capitalism and communism, not with racial strife, but with what happened when for the first time Christianity and Buddhism began to penetrate one another deeply."¹ Harvey Cox has underscored our Western "turning East" in general and writes trenchantly about the "promise and the peril of the new orientalism."²

The life and works of William Johnston, S.J., an Irish Jesuit who has lived in Japan for over twenty-five years, present a remarkable effort to delineate the similarities and dissimilarities between Zen and Christian mysticism.³ His ecumenical encounters have revealed to him, moreover, that religious experience, and not philosophy or theology, provides the best basis for mutual understanding.⁴

The German Jesuit Hugo Makibi Enomiya-Lasalle has lived in Japan since 1929. Perhaps his excellent written works⁵ on Zen, Yoga, and Christian mysticism are less significant than the Zen way of life he has adopted under the direction of a Zen master to experience at first hand the compatibility and/or incompatibility of Zen with Christianity.

In much the same fashion, the Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths has lived in India for the past twenty years as a *sannyasi*, the holy man of the fourth stage of life in classical Hinduism. One result of his deep immersion in Indian tradition, thought, and life is his recent remarkably nuanced book which attempts to stress the similarities in Eastern and Western thought, without denying definite differences.⁶

¹ William Johnston, S.J., *Christian Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 1.

² Harvey Cox, *Turning East: The Promise & Peril of the New Orientalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977).

³ William Johnston, S.J., *The Still Point* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); *Silent Music* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Desclée, 1967). See also *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973). His latest book, *The Inner Eye of Love: Religion and Mysticism*, will be published this fall by Harper & Row. See also n. 1 above.

⁴ Johnston, *The Still Point* xiii.

⁵ Hugo M. Enomiya-Lasalle, *Zen-Buddhismus* (Cologne: Bachem, 1972); *Zen Weg zur Erleuchtung* (Vienna: Herder, 1960).

⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1977).

VARIOUS VIEWS ON MYSTICISM

Just as the early Church's encounter with Greek culture immensely enriched her life, so too will Christianity be enriched by "turning East." On the other hand, it cannot be denied that on the popular level the "new orientalism" flows from the desire for religious experience, and experience of "transcendence without dogma."⁷ What for some time has been mainly an academic dogma concerning mystical experience, namely, that "not only in Christianity and Hinduism but everywhere else we find that the essence of the experience is that it is an *undifferentiated unity*. . . ,"⁸ has penetrated the search on the popular level for prayer, contemplation, and spirituality. The apophatic approach to mysticism, which stresses negation, self-emptying, elimination, and ecstasy, a mysticism of radical self-dissolution in a One without difference, continues to find favor with many today who write on or seek mystical experience.

To cite but one among many possible examples, Agehananda Bharati, a prolific writer of the Hindu Sannyasi Order, currently a "busy American professor" and a "mystic by profession," asserts that *the* mystical experience is a "zero experience," imageless, totally beyond symbol, devoid of all noetic and moral meaning, and best explained in terms of a monism.⁹ Any mystical tradition, moreover, which emphasizes an I-Thou experience, indwelling, or a union *with* differentiation and not a merging or numerical oneness with the Absolute is simply written off as mystical "by courtesy."¹⁰

Transcendental Meditation purports to be "the Science of Being and the Art of Living."¹¹ Its claims to render deeply satisfying vertical experience helpful for an integrated life and beneficial in the fields of education, mental health, and social welfare; its claims, moreover, to be non-sectarian, scientific, verifiable by personal experience, and not in conflict with any religion or faith, have all contributed to its success. By using a carefully selected mantra, a word chosen for the good vibrations it produces in the meditator, finer and more subtle forms of consciousness are reached, perhaps even "God realization." "For when he is lost, he is God; not even that he is God, but that God is God. Oneness of God consciousness, one eternal existence, oneness of eternal life, oneness of absolute Being; only the One remains."¹² All traces, therefore, of a

⁷ See "Neue religiöse Subkulturen in den USA," *Herder Korrespondenz* 25 (1971) 525.

⁸ Walter T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960) 21.

⁹ Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976) 25; see also 48-86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 27.

¹¹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Transcendental Meditation* (New York: Signet, 1963). The original title was *The Science of Being and the Art of Living*.

¹² *Ibid.* 283.

personal God must ultimately be eliminated; for "the realization of personal God has to be in the relative field of life . . . while dealing with the nature of the impersonal God, we have seen that it is absolute bliss consciousness of transcendental nature."¹³

For good reasons, many have opposed the monistic tendencies in many Eastern traditions. Teilhard de Chardin complained that the root evil of his day was men's despairing of God's personality.¹⁴ Teilhard knew that love dies if it is in contact only with the nameless and the impersonal. To seek, therefore, an impersonal "diffuse immensity" or a "shoreless ocean" leads only to the eventual dissolution of personality, an idea abhorrent to Christianity. Teilhard correctly stressed that a true union of love unites and also differentiates the lover and the beloved. True love means indwelling, union with differentiation, and not merging, absorption, and undifferentiated unity.

One of the most knowledgeable scholars of mysticism, Friedrich von Hügel, admired Christianity's tendency, even in mysticism, towards devotion and piety, because only in Christianity does the full revelation of personality and depth occur.¹⁵ Aware of the perversions in Greek monistic mysticism and its inclination towards quietism, its repugnance towards matter, the body, and history, von Hügel insisted that true mysticism must be inclusive, i.e., attain a unity which preserves the multiplicity of creation and unites history and reason in its transcendental thrust.¹⁶ Even the highly orthodox St. John of the Cross does not escape his criticism, because "here, again, along the line of argument absorbing the saint in this book, there is no fully logical ground left for the Incarnational, Historical Sacramental Scheme of the Infinite immanent in the finite, and of spirit stimulated in contact with matter. . . ." ¹⁷

For similar reasons, Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses serious reservations not only about mystical traditions which are more or less monistic, but also those which emphasize silent, imageless, apophatic prayer. Although he correctly emphasizes the incarnational, ecclesial, and "organic unity of Pneuma and institution" dimensions of Catholicism, he incorrectly maintains, as I shall show later, that "Christian meditation, therefore, cannot be 'transcendental.'" ¹⁸

¹³ Ibid. 273.

¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968) 167-76.

¹⁵ Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion 1* (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1961) 25.

¹⁶ Ibid. 2, 284.

¹⁷ Ibid. 2, 345. For a more nuanced critique of certain "Platonic" tendencies of John of the Cross, see Georges Morel, *Le sens de l'existence selon s. Jean de la Croix 1* (Paris: Aubier, 1960) 198-219.

¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Catholicism and the Religions," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 5 (1978) 14.

Finally, even the learned Ronald Knox reduces any attempt to pray without images and symbols to a "Platonism" and a "Quietism" which can only be antichurch, antimissionary, anti-intellectual, and antiliturgical.¹⁹

Be it from the mystic's seemingly lived denial of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*; be it from a Reformation repugnance to Catholic hagiography and the frequent Catholic overemphasis on secondary mystical phenomena such as stigmata, levitations, visions, etc.; be it an all too facile grouping of all mystics into a monistic or Plotinian tradition, it is still surprising to find among the great Protestant theologians of the twentieth century an astonishing, often ignorant, hostility towards mysticism. One will search in vain, for example, through the works of Karl Barth for anything resembling an understanding of what Christian mysticism truly is. For Barth, mysticism is a "blind alley" which is as opposed to the gospel as are law, religion, and morality.²⁰ It surpasses the evils even of Phariseism, because "it lies so near to the righteousness of God, and it too is *excluded*—at the last moment."²¹ This "esoteric atheism," which leaves religion perniciously "undisturbed," must be exposed.²²

Rudolf Bultmann denigrates mysticism because it keeps a person under the law and living out of himself instead of in Christ.²³ The mystic, for Bultmann, attempts to convert God's word "into his own human word, which he can hear in the depths of his own soul."²⁴ Mysticism tries to replace revelation and historical existence with immediate contact with God. Most serious of all, mysticism is a "work."²⁵

Emil Brunner reduces mysticism to a feeling, to an emotional experience which faith opposes "with a sharp, plain 'No.'"²⁶ It is the equivalent of duty, asceticism, works, piety, the hermit's cell—all of which are destroyed through justification by faith. How, asks Brunner, can anything which does not begin with divine grace ever be real faith?²⁷ These great Protestant theologians, therefore, are agreed that there ought not to be any Protestant mystics.²⁸

¹⁹ Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961) 579, 582.

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975) 59, 109, 211, 241, 316, 338, 423.

²¹ *Ibid.* 109.

²² Karl Barth, *Dogmatik 1/2* (4th ed.) 349–52.

²³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (6th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1968) 312, 328.

²⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 382, 404, 536, 541, 613.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 606, 614, 621.

²⁶ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (London: Lutterworth, 1957) 252–53.

²⁷ Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (London: Lutterworth, 1937) 309–10, 501.

²⁸ Anne Fremantle, *The Protestant Mystics* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964) vii.

The Catholic tradition, on the other hand, clearly accepts mysticism as the flowering and fulfilment of Christian life, and therefore fosters the mystical dimension of Christianity.²⁹ Although the Catholic tradition has not been blind to the dangers for religious and psychological equilibrium which spring from pseudomystical movements, it refuses to view genuine mysticism as hostile or alien to lived Christianity. Precisely because the Catholic tradition accepts mysticism as Christian life in its deepest form, one can understand the often strong reaction of Church authority to certain mystical currents. Although the exact relationship between sanctity, heroic virtue, and the highest forms of mystical prayer still remains a controversial subject, most, if not all, of those canonized, i.e., set up as models of Christian life to be imitated, have been mystics of the highest order.³⁰

The Catholic tradition is marked, moreover, by two different approaches to the mystical life. First, there is the *via negativa*, the apophatic way, which stresses that because God is the ever-greater God, so radically different from any creature, God is best known by negation, elimination, forgetting, unknowing, without images and symbols, and in darkness. God is "not this, not that." All images, thoughts, symbols, etc. must be eliminated, because, as St. John of the Cross points out, "all the being of creatures compared with the infinite being of God is nothing. . . . Nothing which could possibly be imagined or comprehended in this life can be a proximate means of union with God."³¹

Secondly, there is the *via affirmativa*, the kataphatic way, which underscores finding God in all things. It emphasizes a definite similarity between God and creatures, that God can be reached by creatures, images, and symbols, because He has manifested Himself in creation and salvation history. The incarnational dimension of Christianity, too, forces the mystic to take seriously God's self-revelation in history and in symbols. Because Christ is God's real symbol, the icon of God, God is really present in a positive way.

Despite the strong evidence for both the *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa* in the Christian mystical tradition, many contemporary authors and spiritual directors still insist on eliminating one of the ways. For example, Morton T. Kelsey provides a paradigm of contemporary spiritual writers devoted exclusively to the kataphatic approach to prayer, meditation, and spirituality. Very much in the Jungian tradition, Kelsey

²⁹ Morel, *Le sens de l'existence* 37-41.

³⁰ Joseph de Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953) 340-52; A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life* (Tournai: Desclée, 1940) 731-37; R. P. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (St. Louis: Herder, 1911) 522-28.

³¹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS, 1973) 79, 127.

values meditation via images for the removal of obstacles which separate rational activity from a person's depth.³² He opposes the contemporary apophatic bias because of its seemingly Plotinian basis, the practice of the early Church, and the quietistic dangers this practice poses.³³ He states that "imageless meditation shortchanges people; it unlocks the door but does not open it."³⁴ Christianity's contemplative strength, he maintains, comes from its use of images. Note well, however, that Kelsey is much more interested in "knowing the images that arise within us and meditating upon them"³⁵ than in meditation upon the traditional Christian mysteries as such. Kelsey wants to use Christianity's great mysteries and images to unlock the individual's imagination and to probe one's feelings with these mysteries so that *other* images result. Although he praises the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, he does criticize them because they "sometimes lost touch with the spontaneous images awakened within the individual."³⁶

Some Jesuits and those influenced by Jesuit spirituality often have little knowledge of or use for the *via negativa*. It is not an exaggeration that some trust little else than the practical, highly discursive, image-bound, somewhat mechanical approach to meditation taught by John Roothaan, S.J., a way of meditation erroneously labeled "Jesuit prayer."³⁷ Even today's charismatics would have great difficulty accepting the apophatic tradition of praying because of their interest in the biblical charismatic gifts.³⁸ The contrary position, however, is very much in vogue. Not a few insist that only apophatic mysticism is "pure" mysticism and view kataphatic mysticism as primarily discursive and a definite obstacle to the deepest levels of mystical prayer.³⁹

³² Morton T. Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 37.

³³ *Ibid.* 134-36, 104, 115, 155-56.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 126. John Dunne seems to have turned this into a theological method. He writes: "My own method, which I've never set out in great detail, is a process of eliciting images from feelings, attaining insight into those images, and converting insights into a guide for life" ("Spiritual Adventure: The Emergence of a New Theology," Interview by Kenneth Woodward, *Psychology Today*, January 1978, p. 50).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 138. This aspect of prayer, however, can be found in Ignatius. See Harvey Egan, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976) 81-82, 107-8.

³⁷ John Roothaan, *The Method of Meditation* (New York, 1855). An example of contemporary caricatures of the Ignatian method of prayer is Paul Sauve's *Petals of Prayer* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1974) 40-46.

³⁸ On the other hand, the mystical dimension of the charismatic gifts has been cogently shown by Karl Rahner, "Die enthusiastische und die gnadenhafte Erfahrung," *Schriften zur Theologie* 12 (Zürich: Benziger, 1975) 54-75.

³⁹ See, e.g., Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence* (New York: Harper, 1941) 94-97, 101-2. Cf. nn. 8, 9, and 11 above. Victorino Osende, *Pathways of Love* (St. Louis: Herder, 1958) 83-88, is more nuanced than Huxley, but still not insightful enough into the mystical dimension of the *Exercises* of Ignatius.

Although orthodox Christian mysticism may proceed either apophatically or kataphatically, I propose to show that any genuine Christian mysticism must contain apophatic as well as kataphatic elements. I shall show, therefore, the kataphatic basis of the *via negativa* and the apophatic basis of the *via affirmativa*. I shall point out, moreover, that Christian images are more than images. They are icons or symbols, real symbols, which contain and present the divine mystery. I shall do this by analyzing two classics of Christian mysticism, a paradigm of the apophatic way and a paradigm of the kataphatic way.

THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

The *Cloud of Unknowing* has been praised as an enduring mystical classic and is enjoying a remarkable renaissance in mystical studies, due in large part to the new edition and commentary by William Johnston, S.J.⁴⁰ I shall present the *Cloud* as a paradigm of the apophatic way, because its author, an unknown mystic of the fourteenth century, insists that “no one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with his knowledge,”⁴¹ and that God can be reached only through a dart of love which pierces the necessary cloud of unknowing between the contemplative and God.

This work was written not for “worldly gossips” nor the “merely curious,” but primarily for “those who feel the mysterious action of the Spirit in their innermost being stirring them to love.”⁴² This work presents in an unsystematic and compact form the classical purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages of the mystical ascent to those attracted, at least from time to time, to the inner eye of love in the core of their being.

Despite the author’s apophatic accent, he insists on the usefulness and necessity of meditations upon one’s sinfulness, the passion of Christ, and God’s attributes. Unless these kataphatic exercises are undertaken, the young contemplative “will most certainly go astray and fail in his purpose.”⁴³ “Sweet meditations” are absolutely indispensable for higher prayer. Discursive meditation sets up the necessary foundation for any higher prayer. As he says, the “door of devotion . . . is the safest entry to contemplation in this life.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the author does not minimize reason’s role, for “intelligence is a reflection of the divine intelligence.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Cloud*. Although the Johnston edition contains both the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Book of Privy Counselling*, I shall refer to this one volume as the *Cloud*, since the two works are easily understood together. *Counselling*, moreover, can almost be read as a more mature rewriting of the *Cloud*.

⁴¹ *Cloud* 50.

⁴² *Ibid.* 44.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 56. The author makes a sharp distinction between meditation and contemplation. The former he understands as the discursive, active prayer of beginners; the latter, as the dark, silent mysticism of love developed only in forgetting and unknowing.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 176.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 57.

The contemplative beginner, therefore, must read, think, and pray; for "God's word, written or spoken, is like a mirror. Reason is your spiritual eye, and conscience your spiritual reflection."⁴⁶ In fact, common sense, advice from the spiritual father, rational critique, and Scripture remain the solid anchors in all of man's activities, except those in which God alone is the principal agent.⁴⁷

An important section of the text reads: "If [your daily devotions] are filled with the memory of your own sinfulness, considerations of Christ's passion, or anything else pertaining to the ordinary Christian way of prayer . . . know that the spiritual insight accompanying and following upon this blind desire originates in your ordinary grace. And this is a sure sign that God is *not* stirring you . . . to a more intense life of grace as yet."⁴⁸ The author is describing the highest stage of acquired contemplation. The one praying begins to notice a blind desire and an accompanying spiritual insight. This can only mean a prayer of simple presence or a prayer of simple regard, in which the person can rest, to some extent, in one Gospel scene, one idea, or one emotion. He begins to notice a deeper presence, an eloquent silence, perhaps even the holistic meaning of the Christian mystery. Most important of all, the focal point of his awareness seems to be shifting to the "weight of love." Note, however, that because the "blind desire" arises *out of* (but does not prevent) daily devotions, it does not signal a deeper vocation.

On the other hand, if a person finds that he has a purified conscience, a habitual attraction to deeper, simpler prayer, a strong enthusiasm whenever he hears or reads about contemplation, the intrusion of a blind love which prevents his usual way of praying, an even more powerful desire for contemplation once the temporary absence of this desire has returned, these signs indicate a call to contemplation, to mysticism in the strict sense, to the "singular" way wherein he learns to "live now at the deep solitary core of [his] being."⁴⁹

The *Cloud* then proceeds to recommend a very simple technique for the contemplative tyro. He must place all creatures with no exception into a cloud of forgetting. He must forge a cloud of forgetting between himself and every created thing, even holy and the most sublime thoughts.⁵⁰ In this way, a cloud of unknowing arises between God and the contemplative. He now works only with his loving desire, his "secret love," his "naked intent" towards God; for only this blind desire can pierce the darkness created by the absence of knowledge.⁵¹

To facilitate the forgetting and the unknowing, the contemplative gathers all his desires together into one word which must be meaningful

⁴⁶ Ibid. 93, 174-75.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 179.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 181 (my emphasis).

⁴⁹ Ibid. 46, 143-46, 180-83.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 53-56, 60-61, 48, 149.

⁵¹ Ibid. 48, 61, 95.

to him, valued, however, not for its meaning (for he must not advert to its meaning) but for its simplicity. This one word helps his spirit to be poised at its fine point, to eliminate distractions, and to "beat the darkness above."⁵²

In view of the contemporary overemphasis on apophatic and "transcendental" experience, a number of remarks are in order at this point. First, the passage from discursive meditation to the simplicity of forgetting and unknowing is clearly a gift which cannot be taken on one's own. The author of the *Cloud* insists on certain signs being present before any transition can occur. For him, the gift is so God-given that "you will never desire to possess it until that which is ineffable and unknowable moves you to desire the ineffable and the unknowable."⁵³ This is not to say that contemporary spiritual writers and directors ought not to encourage many persons to enter less hesitantly into quieter, deeper prayer, but the *Cloud*, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross, to name but a few, clearly contradict Karl Rahner's statement that "psychologically mystical experiences are different from 'normal' daily events of consciousness only in the area of 'nature' and are insofar basically able to be learned."⁵⁴

Secondly, the *Cloud*, unlike Plotinian mysticism or Transcendental Meditation, proffers a mysticism of love. The clouds of forgetting and unknowing make sense only in the context of the tiny flame of love beginning to manifest itself in a powerful enough way to make normal prayer all but impossible. There is little in Plotinus or in Transcendental Meditation to indicate a motor force of anything more than nescience, and nescience alone.⁵⁵ The frequent warnings in the *Cloud* concerning pseudo contemplatives should force one to look beneath the superficial similarities between the *Cloud's* method and other methods.⁵⁶

The contemplative of the *Cloud* is called to nothing less than intimate, full union with God, which also indirectly restores the integrity lost through Adam's fall.⁵⁷ This journey towards union with God and a

⁵² Ibid. 56.

⁵³ Ibid. 91.

⁵⁴ Karl Rahner, "Mystische Erfahrung und mystische Theologie," *Schriften zur Theologie* 12 (Zürich: Benziger, 1975) 434. The *Cloud* (p. 179) says that the contemplative initiative belongs to God alone. St. John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2, 13 and the *Dark Night* 1, 9 concur. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, chap. 23 in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, tr. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS, 1976) gives clear psychological signs that the higher states of mysticism cannot be learned.

⁵⁵ William R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (New York: Scribner's, 1899) 97-100, seemingly attributes to Plotinus a type of intellectual fainting which has only superficial similarities to true love-ecstasy. I can find nothing in Transcendental Meditation to indicate a mysticism of love. In fact, the Maharishi's monistic commentary on the Bhagavad Gita is carried over into his teachings on Transcendental Meditation.

⁵⁶ *Cloud* 105-7, 114-17.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 157, 135, 186.

restoration of integrity will cause the contemplative incredible sufferings. The *Cloud* teaches the traditional "dark nights," albeit in a condensed way. First, the cloud of forgetting can be maintained only with much discipline, because it is no easy task to curb one's natural curiosity, learning, and piety. The contemplative must work incessantly to fight off *all* distractions, for even good and holy thoughts must be eliminated.⁵⁸ There will come a time when contemplative fervor recedes, and he will experience great storms, temptations, and panic; for he can neither advance nor turn back to his ordinary way of praying.⁵⁹ As the tiny flame begins to purify, heal, and transform the contemplative, his past sins will arise to torture him. Gradually he will experience the effects of no particular sin "but only the lump of sin itself,"⁶⁰ which indicates the healing of the very root and core of sin itself. The contemplative must also contend with external trials, the criticisms, calumnies, slanders, and reproaches of others.⁶¹

Eventually, however, the contemplative suffers the most from his inability to forget himself and his inability to love enough. "All else is easily forgotten in comparison with one's own self . . . every man has plenty of cause for sorrow but he alone understands the deep universal reason for sorrow who experiences that he is."⁶² To exist apart from God, not to be able to overcome the distance which separates him from God, undoubtedly causes him paradoxically the most suffering and the most healing.

The God-given blind stirring of love not only purifies the contemplative; it also illuminates him and ultimately unites him with the Source of Love. The way of love, therefore, is not all suffering, but one constantly nourished with joy, peace, repose, strengthenings, overwhelming revelations, ecstasies, and delights.⁶³

• The contemplative is driven by love to settle for nothing less than full union with God, for "God is your being."⁶⁴ This union is so profound that "just as God is one with His being because they are one in nature, so the spirit which sees and experiences Him is one with Him . . . because they have become one in grace."⁶⁵ The contemplative becomes bound to God, one with Him in grace, united to him in a true communion of love and desire. Needless to say, this is a union but not a merging, a union with differentiation, not one of undifferentiated unity; for "He is your being, but you are not His."⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Ibid. 155, 168, 85, 150, 55, 57, 83, 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 183-84.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 137.

⁶¹ Ibid. 72-74.

⁶² Ibid. 102-3, 173.

⁶³ Ibid. 138, 65-66, 136-37, 167, 109-10.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 171.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 186.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 150, 104, 172.

Despite the apophatic emphasis of the *Cloud*, its kataphatic basis and moments stand out in bold relief. Although the contemplative must forget everything, especially during the time of individual prayer, he remains solidly anchored in the devotional and liturgical life of his monastery. "The true contemplative has the highest esteem for the liturgy and is careful and exact in celebrating it. . . ." ⁶⁷ Nowhere does the *Cloud* teach a renunciation of the sacramental, liturgical, and scriptural life which keeps his apophatic thrust solidly rooted in a deeply Christian, kataphatic foundation. The contemplative lives, therefore, in a kataphatic atmosphere, an atmosphere permeated with Christian art, music, architecture, customs, and devotions. Just as Carl Jung felt an acute need for more family life and close friendships while undertaking his perilous descent into the psyche, the true contemplative must remain rooted in his own Christian community, be open with his spiritual director, and enjoy the company of others. ⁶⁸ The author takes an extremely dim view of those who cast aside the ecclesial dimension of their apophatic journey and does not hesitate to call them "pseudo contemplatives." ⁶⁹ Moreover, by frequently insisting on the authority of Scripture, an important constitutive element of the Church, and exemplifying his teachings through Scripture, the *Cloud* demonstrates that a very important kataphatic, ecclesial element cannot and should not be forgotten. ⁷⁰

Another kataphatic element frequently overlooked in the *Cloud* concerns visions. ⁷¹ Although the author insists that visions should not be

⁶⁷ Ibid. 95.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 111, 114, 145, 81. Cf. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Pantheon, 1963) 176-78.

⁶⁹ Cf. n. 56 above. Erich Neumann, "Mystical Man," in *The Mystic Vision, E-Jb 30* (1968) 386-87, stresses the essentially "anti-conventional," "anti-collective," and "anti-dogmatic" aspect of genuine mysticism. Any orthodox mysticism is simply written off as "low-level," "disguised," or a "redogmatization." On the other hand, C. W. Macleod, "Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa," *JTS* (1971) 362-79 (but especially 363), shows clearly the indissoluble link between experiences and doctrine. Joseph Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics* (Albany: Magi, 1964) 288, 323, also notes that the relationship between mysticism and dogma is not as simple as Neumann makes it to be.

⁷⁰ The *Cloud* emphasizes that a person see "himself as reflected by the Scriptures . . ." (p. 93), that certain points of his doctrine can be seen in the Scriptures (119, 135), that certain things be "governed by the light of Scripture" (179), and that one test oneself "against the rigorous criteria of Scripture" (186).

⁷¹ Ibid. 123-24. Stace, *Mystics* 11-12, appeals to the doctrine of John of the Cross to deny any mystical validity to visions. First of all, Stace incorrectly maintains that visions are always "sensuous experiences." John of the Cross explains many types of visions (visual, imaginary, and intellectual) and teaches that despite the God-giveness (mystical!) quality of some of them, they can safely be rejected, for God has already worked in the soul all that need be worked. The experiences of Teresa of Avila or Julian of Norwich, e.g., show that visions often form part of the main substance of the experience.

taken literally, teach in a symbolic way what can already be found in the Gospels, and would be unnecessary if the person could have grasped the truth in another way, he does call them extraordinary graces which underscore a spiritual truth. Moreover, because of the deeper meaning and understanding they bring, *all* aspects of the vision must be treated with respect.

Despite the author's trenchant remarks directed against the eccentric behavior of pseudo contemplatives, he definitely expects certain bodily gestures and spontaneous vocal prayer to flow from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁷² His apophatic mysticism, therefore, remains incarnational, for he expects the entire person to be moved by the tiny flame of love. Delights and external manifestations of love which well up from the interior bear the mark of authenticity; the contemplative, however, must be suspicious of sounds, delights, and consolations which come from an unidentifiable external source.⁷³ The blind stirring of love actually becomes a source for discerning which delights perceived by our natural faculties are good or evil.

The author teaches that grace is beyond the sensible, and sensible consolations are not essential to perfection in this life. On the other hand, he notes that the contemplative will be set on fire by God's love, experience "sweet emotions," "joyful enthusiasm," and "burning desires." The experience of God as He really is transcends "the most sublime pleasures possible on earth,"⁷⁴ yet the contemplative will receive a variety of mystical experiences, experiences which perhaps exteriorize the inner purification, illumination, and transformation of the contemplative's every dimension.⁷⁵ These experiences, moreover, may be nondiscursive, but they are specific, possess a certain modality, and can be described. For example, to experience the torture from the sins of one's past life is nonconceptual but very specific. The living flame of love has illuminated these sins so that they show up against a mystical horizon and are experienced with incredible sensitivity. To experience oneself as a "lump of sin" to the point of being wholly satiated with this experience also points out something commonly overlooked: not all mystical experiences are the same, and even supraconceptual ones vary in depth, quality, and modality.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid. 52, 113, 109-11.

⁷³ Ibid. 109-10. For a parallel distinction in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, cf. Egan, *Spiritual Exercises* 83, 59, 52.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 186.

⁷⁵ The *Cloud* respects the "three marvelous spiritual faculties, Mind, Reason, and Will and the two secondary faculties, Imagination and Feeling. There is nothing above you in nature except God Himself" (p. 129). Cf. also 130-31.

⁷⁶ St. Teresa, *Life* chap. 10, describes a "mystical theology experience"; chap. 29, her famous transverberation experience; chap. 32, her place in hell, etc. In short, many of her

Two significant kataphatic "moments" of apophatic mysticism revolve around the contemplative himself. First, the very fact that he wrote indicates the need for apophatic interiority and darkness to exteriorize itself, to manifest itself, i.e., to become kataphatic. The *Cloud* was written to invite others to participate in the silent, dark, purifying, illuminating, and transforming love the author experienced and to help them remove obstacles on their route to a union with loving Mystery. The mystical paradox is that there is a metadiscursive way to express and incarnate the ineffable. The mystic's words not only point beyond themselves into the silent, imageless love, but they help others to participate in this experience. Someone must incarnate, express, talk about, explain, and evoke what this way is all about.

Secondly, the contemplative becomes the living symbol and icon of the Love which transformed him and to which he is now united. He has become this Love "by participation." The true contemplative is he in whom Love expresses itself, incarnates itself, and unfolds itself in a visible, tangible way through all the dimensions of human life. For this reason, the true contemplative has no enemies; he is willing to sacrifice himself for the good of all; he possesses a universal affection, much practical goodness, and knows how to get along with everyone.⁷⁷ He is changed even physically. His whole personality is attractive and "exteriorly, your whole personality will radiate the beauty of his love . . . the outward expression of your love in relating to others."⁷⁸

Perhaps the kataphatic dimension of the *Cloud's* apophatic way reaches its climax in its discussion of Jesus Christ. The Christocentric dimension of its apophatic mysticism cannot be denied. In fact, the book was written for those "resolved to follow *Christ* . . . into the inmost depths of contemplation."⁷⁹ Because the grace of Christ supports all contemplation, the true contemplative must rely on Christ's help, love, and grace.⁸⁰ The contemplative must use as his model for the correct relationship between spirit and matter the way Jesus' humanity ascended to the Father.⁸¹ The goal of the contemplative life, moreover, is to be perfect as Christ was perfect, to be perfect by grace as Christ was by nature.⁸²

mystical experiences were not content-free but specific and particular, certainly not experiences of undifferentiated unity demanded by Stace, nor only the naked intent insisted upon by the *Cloud*. To deny, moreover, the mystical dimension of these experiences would be irresponsible.

⁷⁷ *Cloud* 80-81, 156-57, 117. Stace, *Mystics* 132, praises Christian mysticism for its "moral earnestness" and "the practical application of the principle of love on the plane of daily existence." Contrary to this extrinsicism, I maintain that an intrinsic dimension of mystical union is precisely an incarnational love for others. See the excellent remarks on "spiritual fecundity" by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Dutton, 1961) 416-43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 161.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 51, 163.

⁸² *Ibid.* 69, 170.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 43 (my emphasis).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 128.

The only safe way to advance into the dark, silent love which pierces the cloud of unknowing is through meditation, especially on Christ's passion. His humanity remains the correct passageway to the higher levels of apophatic contemplation, and so the contemplative must wait patiently at the door of Christ's humanity.⁸³ On the other hand, he may be called to pass through this door into the clouds of forgetting and unknowing. Meditations on Jesus' attributes, passion, etc. must then be abandoned, but notice that the contemplative must somehow turn to Jesus with loving desire to banish distractions.⁸⁴ By forsaking himself during the very difficult task of maintaining the clouds of forgetting and unknowing, he imitates Jesus' own taking up of the cross.⁸⁵

The *Cloud*, therefore, teaches neither that Christ is an obstacle to apophatic mysticism nor that He be placed into the cloud of forgetting. On occasion, moreover, the contemplative may be moved by the Spirit to cry out "Jesus, sweet Jesus."⁸⁶ The author values short prayers for their efficacy in piercing the cloud of unknowing. Although he specifically recommends one-syllable words such as "God," "love," and "sin," he does allow the contemplative to select one which is meaningful to him, provided that he does not ponder its meaning.⁸⁷ The contemplative, therefore, could use the word "Jesus" to aid his apophatic prayer, especially since there will be times when the Spirit Himself will force this word upon him.

Mary Magdalene represents the ideal contemplative, "because she became so enamored by the Lord's divinity that she scarcely noticed the beauty of his human presence as he sat there before her . . ." (Lk 10:38-42).⁸⁸ She forgot "our Lord's human bearing, the beauty of his mortal body, . . . the sweetness of his human voice and conversation . . . and was totally absorbed in the highest wisdom of God concealed in the obscurity of his humanity."⁸⁹ She exemplifies what Christ taught in Jn 16:7 concerning Jesus' ascension to his Father and the need to deprive the apostles of his bodily presence, because the time had come for "the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead."⁹⁰ Mary had ceased to cling to Jesus' humanity and is an example for the contemplative to give up discursive meditation. Because of this Christ defended Mary and the love between them was most special.⁹¹

The person of Jesus Christ, therefore, cannot be forgotten by the contemplative. Neither must his humanity be deliberately forgotten or treated as any other created thing to be placed in the cloud of forgetting.

⁸³ Ibid. 58, 175-78.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 55, 58.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 171-73.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 109.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 56, 94, 96-98.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 70.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 71.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 187.

⁹¹ Ibid. 77-78.

The humanity of Christ is the door to contemplation. One must, therefore, pass through it. It must not be cast aside or forgotten. Moreover, permeating the silent, dark, apophatic mysticism of the *Cloud* is a powerful Christocentrism and a very warm, intimate, personal love of Jesus Christ.

In summary, the *Cloud* provides an excellent illustration of orthodox Christian, apophatic mysticism. It urges forgetting and unknowing in the service of a blind, silent love beyond all images, thoughts, and feelings—a love which gradually purifies, illuminates, and unites the contemplative to the Source of this love. Discursive meditation, self-knowledge, study, Scripture, pious practices, etc. remain the indispensable kataphatic basis for future, deeper prayer. They build the launch pad from which the apophatic thrust is correctly aimed. Only if special signs are present, however, can the person move on to contemplation. The kataphatic dimension manifests itself in different ways thereafter. The contemplative remains anchored in, and at least implicitly guided by, the devotional, liturgical, and sacramental life of the Christian community. He must respect visions, undergo a variety of mystical experiences which cannot be categorized as strictly apophatic, and incarnate various aspects of the tiny flame of love. His writings, his person, and his activities all indicate that he has become an icon of agapic Love. Moreover, he never loses contact with the icon of agapic Love, Jesus Christ. Without these Christian kataphatic moments, the question can be raised as to which type of transcendence he has experienced and to what he has become united. Only one is holy. A mystic can get lost in the depths of the self or the beautiful “oneness” of nature without ever being united with the God of Love.⁹²

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola have enjoyed a privileged position in the spirituality of the Catholic Church for over four hundred years. Not a few recent commentators on the *Exercises* have claimed, however, that the way of St. Ignatius is not only ignorant of, but also an actual barrier to, higher mystical prayer.⁹³ Regardless of the ascetical, discursive, pragmatic tendencies which can certainly be found

⁹² Yves Raguin, *The Depth of God* (St. Meinrad: Abbey, 1975) 59, perceptively notes that “the problem is the passage from the ‘depth’ to the ‘ground.’” On p. 66 he says: “my depth is deeper than I am. . . . I may plunge into myself and never find anything more than myself.” Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 24, speaks of the “pre-biographical unity” of the person, the experience of which may be confused with the God experience. R. C. Zaehner’s “Standing on a Peak,” *Concordant Discord* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 302–22, is excellent. Cf. also Karl Rahner, “Mystik,” *LTK* 7, 743–45.

⁹³ Cf. n. 39 above. See also Jean Baruzi, *Saint Jean de la Croix et le problème de l’expérience mystique* (Paris: Alcan, 1931) 498.

in Jesuit history with respect to the way the *Exercises* were to be given, it must be emphasized that the *Exercises* flowed from the spirituality of a man who was repeatedly accused of being an Alumbrado, a member of a Spanish pseudomystical movement of the sixteenth century which claimed to act always under the immediate illumination of the Holy Spirit. These *Exercises*, too, led so many of Ignatius' early Jesuits into such depths of mystical prayer that the attraction to long, solitary hours of prayer threatened the apostolic orientation of Ignatian spirituality.⁹⁴

Ignatius expected, moreover, that God would communicate Himself to the exercitant and work immediately with him (*Sp. Ex.* 15).⁹⁵ Many commentators view the *Exercises* as a means by which God will reveal His specific will to the exercitant.⁹⁶ Note, too, that the first written attacks on the *Exercises* by such influential theologians as Melchior Cano were directed at their allegedly mystical subjectivism.⁹⁷ That some commentators have criticized the *Exercises* for being too mystical, others for being too ascetical and discursive, is one of the ironies of their history.

I shall present the *Exercises* as a paradigm of the *via affirmativa* which contains an apophatic dimension.⁹⁸ These *Exercises* can lead a person into the deepest levels of mystical prayer without the explicit call to forgetting and unknowing discussed above. The *Exercises* focus explicitly upon traditional Christian images, symbols, and mysteries to initiate a deep, silent mystical movement clearly surpassing discursive prayer. I shall also show that the truly incarnational, symbolic nature of Christianity does not allow using the terms "kataphatic" and "discursive" synonymously.

For St. Ignatius,

"Spiritual Exercises" embraces every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activity that will be mentioned later . . . spiritual exercises are methods of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself of all inordinate attachments, and

⁹⁴ Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964) 79 n. 18.

⁹⁵ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, tr. A. Mottola (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964); henceforth abbreviated as *Sp. Ex.*, followed by the standard marginal numbers.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Sp. Ex.* 175-87. See also Karl Rahner, "The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola," in *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) 84-170; Gaston Fessard, *La dialectique des Exercices spirituels de saint Ignace de Loyola* (Paris: Aubier, 1956); Leo Bakker, *Freiheit und Erfahrung* (Würzburg: Echter, 1970) esp. chap. 9.

⁹⁷ Cf. A. Astrain, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la Asistencia de España* 1 (Madrid, 1902) 369 ff. See also P. Dudon, *Saint Ignace de Loyola* (Paris, 1934) Appendix, "Critiques et apologistes des Exercices."

⁹⁸ For a detailed commentary on the *Exercises*, see Egan, *Spiritual Exercises*.

after accomplishing this, of seeking and discovering the divine will regarding the disposition of one's life . . . (*Sp. Ex.* 1).

In view of recent caricatures of the *Exercises*, their incredible versatility should be noted. They employ various methods. In fact, a simple study of the *Exercises* reveals at least fifteen different, specific ways of prayer.⁹⁹ Moreover, Ignatius urges that they "be adapted to the requirements of the persons who wish to make them . . . according to their age, their education, and their aptitudes" (*Sp. Ex.* 18).¹⁰⁰

The negative aspect of the *Exercises* centers on the removal of disordered loves and attachments. Ignatius was as well aware as the *Cloud* that our being is scattered. He realized that a scattered person cannot find God's will.

Ignatius makes the incredible claim that through the *Exercises* one can actually seek and find God's will for him. This is definitely something unique in the history of spirituality. Ignatius does not emphasize mystical experience for its own sake, therefore, but because it allows the exercitant to find God's will. Ignatius sought to convert the exercitant into a living, acting incarnation of the divine will. Ignatian mysticism, therefore, although radically a mysticism of love, is a "service mysticism," not a bridal mysticism.¹⁰¹

A look at the over-all structure and main dynamics of the *Exercises* is necessary, especially in view of even contemporary misinformation about them. They begin with the Principle and Foundation exercise (*Sp. Ex.* 23), which focuses sharply on God, all created things, and the exercitant. The exercitant must "use" or "rid himself" of "all other things on the face of the earth" insofar as they aid or prevent the praise, reverence, and service of God. This radical end/means schema gives the exercitant from the beginning a holistic view of reality and underscores his place in that totality.

The First Week of the *Exercises* deals with the integration of the mystery of evil. The exercitant meditates on the sin of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, the particular sin of one person who went to hell because of it, the sins of his own life, and on hell. The history and unity of sin is looked at, especially in the light of Christ crucified. Ignatius also

⁹⁹ Some of the Ignatian methods of prayer are Considerations, Examen of Conscience, Preparatory Prayers, Mental Image of the Place, What I Want and Desire, Three Powers of the Soul, Colloquies, Comparisons, Repetitions, Résumés, Application of the Senses, Meditations, Contemplations, First Method of Prayer, Second Method of Prayer, Third Method of Prayer, and The Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love.

¹⁰⁰ A fine presentation of how to give the *Exercises* according to the Nineteenth Annotation is Gilles Cusson, *Conduis moi sur le chemin d'éternité* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1973).

¹⁰¹ See de Guibert, *The Jesuits* 593–601.

gives "additional directions" (*Sp. Ex.* 73-90) to ensure that the particular exercises will be as fruitful as possible.

The Second Week provides material "to contemplate the life of the Eternal King" (*Sp. Ex.* 91). He must contemplate the Kingdom of Christ, the Incarnation, the Nativity, and various mysteries from Christ's childhood. The famous Ignatian Two Standards, Three Classes of Men, Three Modes of Humility, and Triple Colloquy are also made during this Week. A series of contemplations from the time Jesus left Nazareth until Palm Sunday is also made. These exercises are centered especially upon the Ignatian Election and demand that the exercitant "not be deaf to His call, but prompt and diligent to accomplish His most holy will" (*Sp. Ex.* 91).

During the Third Week the exercitant contemplates the Last Supper, the events of the Passion, and Jesus' crucifixion, death, and entombment. He asks for "sorrow, affliction, and confusion because the Lord is going to His passion on account of my sins" (*Sp. Ex.* 193).

During the Fourth Week the exercitant contemplates the mysteries of the risen Christ, to "feel intense joy and gladness for the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord" (*Sp. Ex.* 221). The retreat ends with the Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love, wherein the exercitant discovers how to serve God in all things.

The *Exercises* also explain different methods of prayer, give rules for the discernment of spirits, for the distribution of alms, for thinking with the Church, and notes concerning scruples.

The *Exercises*, therefore, are hardly a compendium of mystical and ascetical theology; they are a manual for the retreat director to guide those making them so that God's will can be found. Although the content may not strike one as novel, the structure and underlying dynamics are remarkable in their ability to purify, illuminate, and transform those making them, so that God's will can be discovered. Karl Rahner is correct when he calls them a subject for tomorrow's theology.¹⁰²

The *Exercises* integrate the exercitant around the great Christian mysteries in several ways which eventually enable him to indwell these mysteries. First, Ignatius insists that the exercitant's intellect be converted to God's saving truth. The one giving the *Exercises* must take special care to expose the "true essentials" of saving history as accurately as possible (*Sp. Ex.* 2). This intellectual grounding flows perhaps from Ignatius' own mystically acquired "architectonic" view of reality, his "dogmatic discretion," and his appreciation for the unity and interdependence of all Christian mysteries, given in his famous experience on the banks of the Cardoner River.¹⁰³ Ignatius implicitly knew that intel-

¹⁰² Rahner, *The Dynamic Element* 87.

¹⁰³ Egan, *Spiritual Exercises* 69-70.

lectual clarity issuing from the penetration of the truth of salvation history was necessary for an ordered affective-volitional life. Ignatian knowledge, however, is more than discursive-conceptual knowledge. "It is not an abundance of knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul but rather an interior understanding and savoring of things" (*Sp. Ex.* 2). The truths of salvation history, moreover, provide one of the stabilizing elements in his service mysticism, a mysticism of discreet love.

Ignatius also demands a centering of all of the exercitant's desires, so that the pure, unrestricted love demanded in the deepest levels of prayer may be released. Because the exercitant must ask at the beginning of every exercise for "the grace that all my intentions, actions, and works may be directed purely to the service and praise of His divine Majesty" (*Sp. Ex.* 46), Ignatius orients him in a general way. The second or third prelude, however, particularizes the general prelude by asking for a specific grace, the "what I want and desire" (*Sp. Ex.* 48), which varies with each particular exercise. God's a posteriori saving history, therefore, guides the "what I want and desire." By becoming connatural to the salvific mystery at hand, the exercitant's deepest desires and yearnings are evoked and directed, as I shall show later.

Any wholesome spirituality does not neglect to purify two unruly dimensions of the human person: the memory and the imagination. The exercitant must recall the history of the present mystery (*Sp. Ex.* 2, 50-52, 111, 137, etc.). He must recall the sins of his past life (*Sp. Ex.* 56). He should examine his conscience twice daily through a methodical memory method (*Sp. Ex.* 25-31). He must often recall, review, or repeat a previous exercise, to "dwell upon the points in which I have felt the greatest consolation or desolation, or the greatest spiritual relish" (*Sp. Ex.* 62, 118, 227, 254, etc.). The imagination is frequently made to dwell upon "a mental image of the place" (*Sp. Ex.* 47, 65, 91, etc.). He should see, hear, smell, taste, and touch in his imagination what is going on in the particular Christian mystery (*Sp. Ex.* 66-71, 92, 103, etc.).

A reading of Ignatius' *Autobiography* and *Spiritual Journal* reveals a man who knew the importance of religious emotion. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the *Exercises* that the exercitant must specifically ask for tears, shame, sorrow, confusion, horror, detestation, amazement, affectionate love, joy, gladness, peace, and tranquility. The needs he feels within himself often control the direction of his prayer (*Sp. Ex.* 109). His most spontaneous desires and feelings are given vent through the Ignatian colloquies (*Sp. Ex.* 53, 54, 63, 109, etc.). Emotional conversion is a key factor in the Ignatian *Exercises*.

Ignatius centers, therefore, all of the exercitant's faculties on the individual Christian mysteries to interiorize them and to render their depths transparent to the exercitant. The Ignatian meditations actively

set in motion all of the exercitant's faculties. Ignatius makes use of contemplations, which are deeper, simpler, more holistic ways of praying. The exercitant must linger on, stay with, and fully satisfy himself before moving on (*Sp. Ex.* 2, 76, 89, etc.). He insists upon frequent repetitions, exercises during which the exercitant returns to those points of greatest consolation or desolation (*Sp. Ex.* 62, 188, etc.). Résumés, in which "the intellect . . . is to recall and to review thoroughly the matters contemplated in the previous exercises" (*Sp. Ex.* 64), continue the Ignatian movement towards ever-greater interiorization and transparency of the Christian mystery at hand.

A very important Ignatian exercise in this movement is the application of the senses. Ignatius recommends that this exercise be made almost daily as the exercise before the evening meal. The exercitant must see, hear, taste, smell, and touch in imagination the essential aspects of the day's saving mysteries (*Sp. Ex.* 129, 133-34, 227). The application of the senses actually carries forward the contemplative movement begun in the preparatory prayers, the "what I want and desire," the meditations, the contemplations, the repetitions, and the résumés. The application of the senses may render the exercitant a mystical love-knowledge flowing from an awakening to grace of what the tradition calls the inner "spiritual senses."¹⁰⁴ The Christian mystery so permeates the exercitant's being that he indwells it or participates in it. The Christian mystery has become a symbol which renders transparent the Mystery actually present in its depths. This is in line with the mysticism of the third-century writer Origen, as when he says:

Christ is the source, and streams of living water flow out of him. He is bread and gives life. And thus he is also spikenard and gives forth fragrance, ointment which turns us into the anointed. He is something for each particular sense of the soul . . . and leaves no sense of the soul untouched by his grace.¹⁰⁵

I agree, therefore, with F. Marxer that the *Exercises* initiate a movement which begins by progressively interiorizing a Christian mystery, a movement which moves from the outside to the inside, but ends by initiating a movement of grace from the exercitant's deepest interiority to his exteriority, a movement from the inside to the outside.¹⁰⁶ Because of God's universal salvific will, which has reached its eschatological and irreversible highpoint in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

¹⁰⁴ See Fridolin Marxer, *Die inneren geistlichen Sinne* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963); Hugo Rahner, "The Application of the Senses," in *Ignatius the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 181-213; Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* 12 (Zürich: Benziger, 1975) 111-72.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted by Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius* 200.

¹⁰⁶ Marxer, *Sinne* 63, 117, 162.

it is theologically tenable to speak of man's supernaturally-elevated and Christ-anointed transcendence.¹⁰⁷ This means that every person experiences, as the a priori dynamism of his being, the "pressure" of God's love for him in Christ. Every person, therefore, lives a "seeking Christology"¹⁰⁸ and anticipates salvation history from the very core of his being. By bringing the exercitant into contact with the a posteriori mysteries of salvation history, Ignatius initiates a movement by which the a priori "light of faith" comes to itself and renders the Christian mystery ever more meaningful and mystically transparent. The Christian mystery, therefore, may be experienced as a totality through a mystical, quasi-intuitional love-knowledge which tastes the essence of the mystery without breaking it up into its various parts. It is as if the Christian mystery becomes the one meaningful word spoken of in the *Cloud*, a word whose mystical meaning and depths reverberate throughout the exercitant to impart that "interior understanding and savoring of things" (*Sp. Ex.* 2). Although the Christian mystery may become so transparent that it leads the exercitant into the Father's Mystery, Ignatius never counsels the exercitant to place any mystery into a cloud of forgetting or unknowing. Transparency is the kataphatic entrance into apophatic mystery.

Perhaps the most apophatic dimension of Ignatius' kataphatic mysticism is the "consolation without previous cause."¹⁰⁹ He writes:

It belongs to God alone to give consolation to the soul without previous cause; for it belongs to the Creator to enter into the soul, to leave it, and to act upon it, drawing it wholly to the love of His divine Majesty. I say without previous cause, that is, without any previous perception or knowledge of any object from which such consolation might come to the soul through its own acts of intellect and will (*Sp. Ex.* 330).

Ignatius emphasizes, therefore, a totally God-given consolation. God alone can console in this way. If God alone consoles, He does so in this precise way. This consolation provides the irrefutable evidence of His presence; for "there is no deception in it, since it proceeds from God our Lord . . ." (*Sp. Ex.* 336).

To understand this unusual consolation, the Ignatian "consolation *with* previous cause" (*Sp. Ex.* 331) must be noted. As mentioned above, the exercitant must direct all his faculties to a specific Christian mystery to obtain a specific grace, the "what I want and desire." This specific grace is the expected consolation with previous cause, for a consolation "might

¹⁰⁷ For the theological metaphysics, see Karl Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 123-39, 180-312.

¹⁰⁸ Rahner, *Grundkurs* 288-89.

¹⁰⁹ *Sp. Ex.* 330 and 336. A detailed analysis of this important Ignatian consolation is given in Egan, *Spiritual Exercises* 31-65.

come to the soul through its own acts of intellect and will." But if the specific mystery at hand becomes transparent to a greater or lesser degree, and if in and through this transparency the exercitant receives a grace which he has not prepared himself to receive, a grace which draws him "wholly to the love of His divine Majesty," he has received consolation without previous cause. God's entering, acting upon the soul, and leaving it outside of itself in His love characterize this consolation.

The kataphatic and Christological basis of this consolation must be underscored. First, this consolation arises in, out of, and beyond the meditations and contemplations on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These kataphatic and Christological exercises guide the exercitant into the very depths of this apophatic consolation without previous cause. Because the exercitant participates in these mysteries which eventually become transparent, he is led into the Father's Mystery, the Son's Truth, and the Spirit's Love. The most Christocentric consolation of the *Exercises* is Trinitarian.

The dynamism of this consolation also reveals a Christological dimension because of the Father-initiated "flight from self-love, self-will, and self-interest (*Sp. Ex.* 189) demanded during the *Exercises*. It crowns Ignatian "indifference" and results from an authentic experiential summary of those graces asked for in the Kingdom, the Two Standards, the Three Degrees of Humility, and the Triple Colloquy—the election of Christ poor, suffering, and humiliated. It is the Father-initiated total gift of self seen in the Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love. In short, what Christ is by nature, created self-transcendence perfectly surrendering to the Father's loving Mystery, man is by grace. From the very core of his being, the exercitant in this consolation imitates Christ's salvific death by ceasing to cling to anything particular and surrendering all to the Father's loving Mystery. By surrendering to the Mystery of God in Christ through the experience of consolation without previous cause, the exercitant also surrenders to the deepest dynamism of his being, his deepest meaning as man, surrender to Mystery. Man is insofar as he gives himself away. Sebastian Moore correctly notes the incarnational dimension of contemplative prayer, that Christ is the focus of this prayer, precisely because he is tasted as "God *being himself* in us."¹¹⁰

Man's supernaturally-elevated and Christ-anointed transcendence has Mystery for its whither; God's Truth illuminates it; God's Love draws it. This Trinitarian and Christ-affected transcendence always remains the horizon against which any particular saving mystery is experienced precisely as saving. This transcendental horizon is the a priori background against which all a posteriori saving mysteries are grasped.

¹¹⁰ Sebastian Moore, "Some Principles for an Adequate Theism," *Downside Review* 320 (1977) 210.

The *Exercises* tacitly presuppose, therefore, the metaphysical dynamics of the act of faith, wherein the *fides quae* is tasted and reveals its meaning because of the *fides qua* in whose light it is seen. Just as a person examining a psychological illustration of Figure/Ground perceives a changing Figure/Ground before his eyes, during the consolation without previous cause the specific Christian mystery becomes Ground or horizon through transparency, and what was previously Ground or horizon (supernaturally-elevated and Christ-anointed transcendence) becomes Figure by directly dominating consciousness in a quasi-intuitional felt-knowledge in which the exercitant becomes pure openness and receptivity to his homeward-tending love. The specific consolation with previous cause gives way to a love which wholly draws the exercitant into the Father's Love. Is this love similar to the "naked intent" of the *Cloud* or more like an integrated intent, integrating all dimensions of the person around his pure, unrestricted desire to love?

Ignatius actually employs a mystical, theological anthropology. Through progressive interiorization of the Christian mystery to the point of mystical experience in terms of the "spiritual senses" and Ignatius' insistence that the exercitant reflect upon himself,¹¹¹ the exercitant percolates the saving mystery through his being, is thrown back upon himself, and discovers his personal, subjective anticipation of the saving mystery. He experiences the transcendental as well as the historical dimension of God's self-communication.

The Christian mysteries are mystically experienced as the various facets of the one answer given to the one question which man is. Man is the living question which only God can answer and has answered in Christ. The exercitant discovers, therefore, the necessary in salvation, why he must turn to this history with his entire being for his fulfilment. When revelation illuminates graced human nature, it reveals why and how this graced nature anticipates saving history, why this history is experienced precisely as saving. The Christian mysteries are mystically experienced as the different keys which unlock the various levels and dimensions of the one person. The exercitant mystically experiences that somehow theology is Christology is anthropology.

CONCLUSION

I have presented one striking example from the apophatic and from the kataphatic Christian traditions to illustrate that both are authentic, orthodox ways in the mystical journey, despite current popular writing

¹¹¹ The exercitant must examine himself twice daily (*Sp. Ex.* 24-31, 43); he is to ask himself what he has done for Christ (53); he must review all the sins of his life (56-61); many of the contemplations must be made as if he were there and then he must reflect upon himself (114, 122-25, etc.).

which usually insists upon one to the exclusion of the other. I have also shown that each way contains certain elements of the other way. I would suggest, therefore, that since both ways can be authentically Christian, the actual way taken by an individual will depend upon circumstances, temperament, psychological disposition, and calling.¹¹² Both ways, moreover, have their strong and weak points.

The apophatic tradition proffers many strengths. It underscores in an unusually powerful way that the human heart is satisfied by nothing other than God. It points to the ever-greater God, a God greater than our hearts, the Ineffable, the Nameless, utter Mystery, who can be loved only because He has first loved us. Through dark, simple, nonconceptual loving surrender, this love mysticism tramples our rigid concepts of God, destroys our idols, and lets God be God. It offers a more Father-and-Spirit-centered spirituality to correct certain Christological imbalances. If "between the Creator and the creature no similarity can be expressed without including a greater dissimilarity,"¹¹³ the apophatic tradition stresses the central insight of this teaching from the Fourth Lateran Council. Perhaps, too, this tradition sheds light on Karl Rahner's cryptic statement that "there is a knowledge of God which is not adequately mediated through the encounter with Jesus Christ."¹¹⁴

The apophatic tradition implicitly uses Christ's salvific death as its controlling norm. By means of the clouds of forgetting and unknowing, the contemplative participates in the radical isolation and loneliness of Christ on the cross, His letting go of everything to die into the Father's loving embrace. The way of detachment, emptiness, darkness, and elimination, as Claudio Naranjo points out, "arises from an implicit acknowledgment that man's optimal state of consciousness is one of *total* detachment."¹¹⁵ Ironically, the more the contemplative lets go, the more deeply the "tiny flame" purifies, illuminates, heals, and transforms him, so that he becomes "God by participation" and "one" with himself. The *Cloud* proves that a marvelous psychosynthesis takes place. The contemplative lives the risen life promised through death.

The apophatic way corrects certain imbalances in an overly Jesus-centered spirituality. As shown above, although the *Cloud* does not treat the humanity of Jesus as it would other created things, it does insist that this humanity is the door to the divinity. The radical depths of Jesus, his identity as the Son of God, as God-with-us who leads us to God-above-us and gives us God-in-us, are mystically tasted and insisted upon. Precisely

¹¹² Morel, *Le sens de l'existence* 78-97, 228-30.

¹¹³ *DS* 156.

¹¹⁴ Rahner, *Grundkurs* 25.

¹¹⁵ Claudio Naranjo and Robert Ornstein, *On the Psychology of Meditation* (New York: Viking, 1971) 81-82; cf. also 75.

because Jesus Christ is the real symbol of God in the world, and a real symbol is one with its origin and yet distinct,¹¹⁶ the apophatic tradition highlights the "what is symbolized" by the symbol. Moreover, only in the light of the divinity does the full meaning of Jesus' humanity reveal itself.

The *Cloud's* insistence upon the contemplative's transformation, his gentleness, graciousness, openness to all persons, etc., indicates a profound grasp of the incarnational dimension of Christianity. Then, too, it insists that God be found in all things.¹¹⁷ At the end of the road the radical clouds of forgetting and unknowing become diaphanous.

There are, however, unacceptable tendencies. The vivid description of the pseudo contemplatives in the *Cloud* underscores this. There is a danger of overlooking or of minimizing the specific signs indicating an apophatic calling. If a person leaves the stabilizing foundation of the explicitly kataphatic Christian mysteries too quickly, the apophatic thrust will collapse. Facile iconoclasm, strain, or a degenerate passivity are seeming dangers in this tradition. To attempt to force oneself into the clouds may kill any flickering of the tiny flame. Then the contemplative is left with a nothing which is literally nothing. Even in mysticism, nothing is sometimes nothing.

The psychic debris loosened by this dark, silent vertical journey is not easily dealt with or integrated. The author of the *Cloud* had firsthand knowledge of mentally-ill would-be contemplatives who became so fixated with their goal that they experienced a vertigo reinforced by a world-denying attitude. I have dealt with people who have learned Transcendental Meditation, read the *Cloud*, drawn superficial analogies, lost sight of the deeply healing and unitive movement assumed in the *Cloud*, to settle for a mechanical technique which occasionally gives them a psychic high.

Less than satisfactory, too, is the *Cloud's* easy linking of Christ's humanity with meditation, and his divinity with contemplation. The author does not seem to know of any nondiscursive methods of prayer which are not via forgetting, unknowing, and darkness. Then, too, a deeper resurrection theology would have given his teaching a more universal appeal. The risen Christ sublates all of the mysteries of his life and death; to overlook this is to overlook salvation history. Although the *Cloud* says that "as man he [Christ] consciously mastered time,"¹¹⁸ this insight is not really developed. In fact, even for discursive meditation the *Cloud* emphasizes only Christ's passion, his attributes, and one's own sinfulness. I would not hesitate to say, however, that insofar as the contemplative is purified, illuminated, and transformed by the living

¹¹⁶ See Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 221-52.

¹¹⁷ *Cloud* 162-63.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 51.

flame of love, he is living the mysteries of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The *Cloud's* doctrine and exposition of his experience, however, is still somewhat deficient. I suspect, moreover, that St. Teresa of Avila gives better psychological advice when she mentions life's long road, its various trials, that different days demand different approaches to God, and how the apophatic way often leaves people "dry as sticks."¹¹⁹

The kataphatic tradition also has its strong points. Despite caricatures to the contrary, the kataphatic need not be a way of discursive, rationalistic, mechanical meditation. The underlying dynamic of the *Exercises* truly leads a person into the deepest depths of the Mystery of God in Christ and into his own deepest mystery as man. Ignatius' manifold methods guarantee the active-passive rhythm of the exercitant's prayer, which leads to ever-greater depth, simplicity, transparency, and unrestricted mystical felt-knowledge and felt-love.

Because God has communicated Himself in a history whose highpoint is the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection is the history of God Himself. The kataphatic tradition underscores that God Himself has had a history and that the way to Him is through that history. The great Christian mysteries, therefore, embody, incarnate, contain, and reveal the history of God Himself. More than images, they are the real symbols, the icons which contain what they symbolize. The kataphatic way stresses the incarnational dimension of mysticism, that Christian mysticism is inextricably bound to the Jesus of history and the very special events in his history.¹²⁰ Bede Griffiths says it unusually well:

In Jesus myth and history meet. Myth reveals the ultimate meaning and significance of life, but it has no hold on history and loses itself in the world of imagination. History of itself, as a mere succession of events, has no meaning. . . . When historical events are seen to reveal the ultimate significance of life, then myth and history meet.¹²¹

In Christ, therefore, all the mysteries of God and of man can be found. The kataphatic tradition offers a way of praying most in line with God's gradual self-revelation in salvation history. The Ineffable has expressed Himself in another, the history of Christ. To enter into that history, therefore, ensures the proper entry into transcendence, the experience of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and not some other experience of transcendence easily confused with the God experience.¹²² Once again the

¹¹⁹ St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, esp. chaps. 23-24.

¹²⁰ I have transposed to mysticism what Karl Rahner says in "Remarks on the Importance of the History of Jesus for Catholic Dogmatics," *Theological Investigations* 13 (New York: Seabury, 1975) 201, concerning "Catholic faith and its dogmatics."

¹²¹ Griffiths, *Return* 78.

¹²² Cf. n. 92 above.

kataphatic way provides the best launch pad for the thrust into the deepest realms of prayer.

Because Christ is not only the real symbol of God but also the real symbol of man, to participate in the great Christian mysteries is to open oneself at all levels, in every dimension, to one's own mystery as man. The history of Christ sublates all human history, all archetypal patterns, both collective and individual. His life, death, and resurrection provide the healing and integrating matrix to protect the individual in his vertical journey, especially from the psychic debris torn loose during the tides of consolation and desolation and the breakdowns during the dark nights which are necessary for a new integration and synthesis. Most important of all, his self-surrender to God's self-communication becomes more and more unrestricted. To love without restriction is to receive God perfectly. Unconditional, all-embracing love is the meaning of the Incarnation; it is also man's meaning.

The Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love crowns the rhythm established during the *Exercises* by enabling the exercitant "in all things [to] love and serve the divine Majesty" (*Sp. Ex.* 233). The *Exercises* offer a method for finding God's will; they also render His presence in all of creation diaphanous. Experiencing all as a theosphere of love, the exercitant too imitates God's universal love, because he is now this Love by participation.

There are, however, unacceptable tendencies. What should be a movement and rhythm towards ever-greater purification, illumination, and transformation may harden into an asceticism and recipe-book type of prayer. Thinking about Christ's life, death, and resurrection may be substituted for the genuine entrance into his rhythm, which is basically our own deepest rhythm. The mysteries must not become pious holy cards obscuring instead of rendering transparent the divine-human mystery and drama. Truncated piety and sentimentalism, a Jesus-centrism which is nothing more than the psychological projections of our needs and which hides the Trinitarian presence, may result if the person does not allow the symbols to carry him into their engendering experience. Superficial anthropomorphism or games in mythic space and time must never be encouraged in a mysticism genuinely incarnational.

By analyzing two paradigms of the Christian mystical tradition, I wished to bring out not only that there are two distinct, orthodox mystical ways, but also that each way contains "moments" of the other. The apophatic way is unusually appealing, because it comes right to the point: purifying, illuminating, transforming Love is what mysticism is all about. This Love demands with simplicity and starkness that the contemplative concentrate his entire being to become a magnifying lens through which this Love is focused. He forgets all to become Love by participation; he

sees, moreover, this Love secretly animating and transforming all creation. Although this way keeps the contemplative solidly anchored in the kataphatic mystery of God-with-us, it explicitly opens onto the ever-greater God whose light paradoxically blinds while purifying, illuminating, and transforming.

The Christian kataphatic tradition explicitly focuses upon God-with-us as the way to the ever-greater God and the Giver of God-in-us. Its incarnational foundation is its strength. It explicitly calls into play all dimensions and faculties of the contemplative to center upon God's progressive self-revelation in history. Salvation history becomes transparent and diaphanous and leads the contemplative into the light of the ever-greater God of Love.

In short, both ways have strengths and weaknesses, but both are deeply Christian mystical ways. Both plunge their followers into the mystery of God's love for us in Christ. Both paradigms, too, should challenge those seriously interested in a mysticism of purifying, illuminating, and transforming Love to examine more carefully what can be found in Christianity's own mystical tradition.