

FOURTEENTH CENTURY CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM
and
TWENTIETH CENTURY DRUG-INDUCED RELIGIOUS MYSTICISM

by
RONALD KEAST, B. A.

a Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

May, 1968

MASTER OF ARTS
(Religion)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Fourteenth Century Christian Mysticism and Twentieth Century
Drug-Induced Religious Mysticism

AUTHOR: Ronald Gordon Keast, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. A.E. Combs
Miss M.A.E. Hahn

NUMBER OF PAGES:

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is designed to investigate the similarities and differences between the mystical experiences of Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso and John Tauler, all Roman Catholic mystics of fourteenth century Germany, and the mystical experiences induced by psychedelic (or mind manifesting) drugs such as d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin and mescaline.

The thesis takes the position that the mystical experience valued by the psychedelic mystics comes in a brief ecstasy while under the influence of the drug, and that this ecstatic state, while much in evidence in the lives and times of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler, is not the mystical union which they valued so highly. Their union was a new life, lived in the midst of this world, in a union of love with God. Also, for these great Christian mystics, union comes when God comes. It is an act of grace. For the psychedelic mystics the drug is considered as a new and more efficient way to expand the mind and to find God within.

A serious problem facing the investigator is that "mystical" or "religious experience" is too broad and general a term; it lacks precise definition as to what exactly is meant. One cannot be sure that any two persons are talking about the same thing. However, when the phenomena are carefully defined, as they are by several commentators, the experience is immediately limited, and the investigator finds that he is comparing apples and oranges.

This thesis will consider some of the conflicting commentary on the natural mystical experience and then examine the drug induced experience

from various points of view including the medical and the religious. It will look at the work of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler, in particular, at areas which may be compared and/or contrasted with the mystical experiences induced by the psychedelic drugs. Finally, it will attempt to draw some conclusions regarding the similarities and differences between the drug induced experiences and the experiences of the above mentioned fourteenth century Christian mystics.

For the purpose of this thesis: (1) The theory of Pantheism will be understood as evolving from Zaehner's pan-en-henic experience, when God is seen as everything and everything is seen as God, or the nature-mysticism of Happold. (2) Monism will be understood in terms of the Atman-Brahman relationship as defined by Zaehner or the soul-mysticism of Happold where God is present, even though inexpressible, and also the first type of Happold's God-mysticism when the soul of man and God are thought of as never having been really distinct. (3) Theism will be understood as Zaehner defines it or as Happold's second type of God-mysticism. These definitions are presented in detail in Chapter I.

Chapter I

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Several well-known analysts of mystical experience have stated the proposition that there are certain fundamental characteristics of the experience itself which are universal and are not restricted to any particular religion or culture.

William James lists four common or universal characteristics of the mystical experience. These are: (1) Ineffability - The subject insists that the experience defies expression, that one cannot adequately report the content. (2) Noetic Quality - The subject feels that the mystical state was one of knowledge, that he gained insight into depths of truth beyond the attainment of his intellect. (3) Transiency- The subject does not remain in the ecstasy of the mystical state for long. Half an hour, or at the most an hour or two, seems to be the limit. (4) Passivity - Although there are ways to facilitate a mystical state, such as by fixing the attention or going through certain bodily performances, yet when the actual mystical state has set in, the subject feels as if his own will were inoperative, and sometimes as if he were freed by a higher power.¹ James concludes that

¹William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience. (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), p. 371.

the first two characteristics alone are enough to enable any state to be called mystical.

Richard Bucke collected cases from various times and cultures and arrived at the following universal criteria of "cosmic consciousness": (1) subjective light, (2) moral elevation, (3) intellectual illumination, (4) sense of immortality, (5) loss of the fear of death, (6) loss of the sense of sin, (7) sudden, instantaneous awakening, (8) added charm to the personality, (9) transfiguration of the subject of the change as seen by others when the cosmic sense is actually present. In addition to these eight criteria, he adds two other relevant points which have to be taken into consideration. These are: (10) the previous character of the man and (11) the fact that the illumination usually occurs between 30 and 40 years of age.²

Evelyn Underhill gives four rules or notes, in place of the four given by James, that she believed could be applied as tests to determine whether a given case was truly mystical. (1) True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. One does not merely have an opinion about it. Rather, it is an organic life process which the whole life does. (2) The mystical experience is wholly transcendental and spiritual. It does not add to, re-arrange, or improve anything in the visible universe. Though the mystic does not neglect his duty to the many, his heart is always set upon the changeless One. (3) For the mystic, the One is not merely the Reality of all that is, but also a living and personal object of love. (4) The termination of the mystical adventure is living union with this One. This is a form of enhanced life. This enhanced life is arrived at by an arduous psychological

²Richard Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness. (New York: University Books Inc., 1961), p. 66.

and spiritual process -- the so-called Mystic Way.³

Walter Stace agrees that there are a number of fundamental common characteristics in mystical experience. He says that the most important, the central characteristic in which all fully developed mystical experiences agree, and which in the last analysis is definitive of them and serves to mark them off from other kinds of experiences, is that they involve the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate.⁴

Stace goes on to distinguish two main types of mystical experience. He calls one extrovertive mystical experience, and the other introvertive mystical experience. He says that both are apprehensions of the One, but they reach it in different ways. The extrovertive way looks outward and through the physical senses into the external world and finds the One there. The introvertive way turns inward, introspectively, and finds the one at the bottom of the self, at the bottom of the human personality. Stace says that the introvertive way is the major strand in the history of mysticism.⁵

Not all writers agree, however, with his presumption that mystical experience has a universal core which is basically the same

³Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 81.

⁴Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of The Mystics. (New York: The New American Library, 1960), pp. 14-15.

⁵Ibid., p. 15.

but which is interpreted differently according to time, place, personality, and culture.

R.C. Zaehner clearly does not agree with Stace's argument for the universal core, and in Mysticism, Sacred and Profane argues against such a view.⁶ In his analysis of mystical experience Zaehner distinguishes three types which he insists are quite distinct. They are: (1) the pan-en-henic (all-in-one) experience found especially in nature mystics, (2) the Atman-Brahman union of the individual self with the Absolute (in this experience the phenomenal world is superceded), and (3) Christian theistic mystical union with God by love (in this experience the self remains a distinct entity).⁷

Zaehner implies that Christian theistic mysticism at its best is true supernatural union with God, whereas the Atman-Brahman experience reaches only self-isolation in rest and emptiness within the self. For him the pan-en-henic experience is definitely inferior to either of the other two, because to admit that nature mysticism is a form of union with God would be pantheism and would identify God with evil in nature.⁸

We saw that the "natural mystical experience" is a widely authenticated fact. It is frequently termed "pantheistic". This is a misnomer as will have appeared from the examples we have quoted in which there is no mention of God. It would, therefore,

⁶R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); The first part of the final chapter gives a clear statement of his position (pp. 198-199).

⁷Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁸Ibid., p. 200.

be more accurate to describe it as a "pan-en-henic" experience, an experience of Nature in all things or of all things as being one.⁹

Thus the confusion that is popularly made between nature mysticism and the mysticism of the Christian saints can only discredit the latter. By making the confusion one is forced into the position that God is simply another term for Nature; and it is an observable fact that in Nature there is neither morality nor charity nor even common decency. God, then, is reduced to the sum total of natural impulses in which the terms "good" and "evil" have no meaning.¹⁰

In his chapters on Monism and Theism Zaehner says:

We have seen that Sankara bases his whole philosophy on those Upanishadic passages which proclaim that the individual soul is identical with the Brahman, the Absolute, World Soul, or God.¹¹

(In Monism) there is only one reality. Brahman, who is identical with the individual soul.¹²

In Christian mysticism love is all important, and it must be so, since God Himself is defined as Love.(....) And in monism there is no love, - there is ecstasy and trance and deep peace, but there cannot be the ecstasy of union nor the loss of self in God which is the goal of Christian, Muslim, and all theistic mysticism.¹³

For the theistic mystics the end of man is not to participate in God in the mode of "an insensible object," or as an animal, but in the mode that is specific to the mystic as a human person, as "an individual

⁹Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 200.

¹¹Ibid., p. 153.

¹²Ibid., p. 155.

¹³Ibid., p. 172.

substance of rational nature," and as the image of God Himself. His "deification" means the realization of God's idea of him as he existed for all eternity in His mind.¹⁴

The pan-en-henic and Atman-Brahman types correspond to Stace's extrovertive and introvertive experiences of unity with the One, although Stace would maintain that the same One or Absolute was being experienced in both types.¹⁵ Also, Stace argues that the Atman-Brahman and Christian theistic types of mysticism represent the same basic experience and that culture and individual conditioning account for the apparent differences.¹⁶

F.C. Happold takes a more compromising position. In his book, Mysticism, he sets fourth three aspects of mysticism which are very similar to Zaehner's three distinct types. Happold says, however, that these aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive; that they may, and often do, intermix. The three aspects are: (1) Nature-Mysticism, which is characterized by a sense of the immanence of God or soul in nature. This is Zaehner's pan-en-henic experience of the All in the One and the One in the All. This type of mysticism may usually be labelled "pantheistic", according to Happold. (2) Soul-Mysticism, in which the idea of the existence of God is, in any expressible form, absent. The soul is in itself regarded as numinous and hidden. The uncreated soul or spirit strives to enter not into communion with nature or with God but into a state of complete isolation from everything that is other than itself. (3) God-Mysticism, which may be combined with soul-mysticism. (Happold says it is in the teaching of

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁵ Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of The Mystics (New York: The New American Library, 1960), p. 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

Meister Eckhart). The basic idea always found in God-mysticism is that of the return of the spirit to its immortal and infinite Ground, which is God. Happold says that this God-mysticism may itself take more than one form. In one type the uncreated spirit, the real self, is thought of as "absorbed" into the essence of God. The individual personality and the whole objective world are felt to be entirely obliterated. In another type, more characteristic of the west, the soul or spirit, created by God, is said to be "deified" so that, as it were, it "becomes" God, yet without losing its identity, by a process of "union" and "transformation" whereby it becomes a new creature.¹⁷

Friedrich von Hügel is emphatic in denying that there is a specifically distinct self-sufficing, purely mystical mode of apprehending reality. He says that all the errors of the exclusive mystics are the result of this belief that mysticism does constitute such a separate kind of human experience.¹⁸

Mysticism's true, full dignity consists precisely in being, not everything in any one soul, but something in every soul of man; and in presenting, at its fullest, the amplest development, among certain special natures with the help of certain special graces and heroisms, of what, in some degree and form, is present in every truly human soul, and in such a soul's every, at all genuine and complete, grace-stimulated religious act and state.¹⁹

This thesis will not provide a typology of "religious" or "mystical experience". Most of the preceding typologies do not adequately describe the Christian mystical experience of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler. The commentators who have proposed these typologies, with the exception of Evelyn

¹⁷F.C. Happold, Mysticism (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), pp.43-44

¹⁸Friedrich von Hügel, The Mystical Element of Religion, Vol. II, (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 283.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 284 .

Underhill, are limiting their definitions of mystical union to be unitive feelings of certain people during an experience of ecstasy. While Eckhart Suso and Tauler were certainly familiar with the ecstatic state, the mystical union which they desired was a new life in a union of love with God.

It will be seen that a strong argument may indeed be presented to support the theory that there is a common core experience in the ecstatic states. These states may be induced by various forms of external sensory deprivation, yoga exercises, psychedelic drugs or they may appear to occur naturally. The common experience of the ecstatic states seems to be, as Stace suggests, one of an undifferentiated unity, experienced either extrovertively or introvertively. However it is experienced, it is essentially different from the unitive life of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler.

Chapter II

PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS

Man is continually expressing, in a great variety of ways, a desire to rise above his everyday self and achieve some higher insight or at least some release from mundane concerns. Psychologists and other students of human perception, such as William James, Aldous Huxley, and more recently, Timothy Leary, have tried out on themselves certain experimental drugs in an effort to induce states that would lead to extraordinary lucidity and light to the mind's unconscious and creative processes.

Enemies of these drugs call them "mind distorting" to warn that their therapeutic values are unproven, that they may upset even a normal person and that they are already being abused for "kicks." Their proponents prefer to call them "consciousness-changing" or "consciousness-expanding" agents, and argue, sometimes conservatively but sometimes with evangelic fervour, that these drugs may widen for individuals their "window" on the world, but in particular, their "window" on themselves. Some proponents have become prophets of a new religious cult using one of the drugs in particular, LSD, as their sacrament. (The word "sacrament" is used to give the drug the same position in these new psychedelic religions that the wine has in Christianity).

Many techniques are available to accomplish some sort of consciousness alteration including the use of a wide variety of drugs.

In the West, we are most familiar with alcohol. In the Orient, opium, a narcotic, is favoured. Both are addicting and may culminate in serious social, economic and physical depletion. If an enhanced alertness or heightened contact with the environment is preferred, stimulants such as tea, coffee, benzedrine or cocaine may be taken. Dr. Sidney Cohen, Chief of Psychosomatic Medicine at the Veterans Administrative Hospital in Los Angeles says that almost any drug can produce a delirium providing enough of it is taken by someone sensitive to its effects. He defines delirium as a confusional state marked by disorientation, delusional thinking and hallucination.²⁰

However, the states of delirium, sedation, or stimulation are not quite the states with which we are concerned. Other, more interesting, dimensions of awareness are possible, ranging from the profoundest feelings of mystical union with the universe to terrifying convictions of madness, and from ecstasy to despair. Drugs which mediate these various phenomena have many names. They are called hallucinogens by some, or, together with the effects they produce, psychedelics by others. The word psychedelic is used more often and means "mind-manifesting."²¹ Dr. Cohen says that Illusinogen is an even more precise designation. He prefers this word because an illusion is an error in seeing based upon some sensory cue. Cohen uses the example of a crack on the wall which is identified as a snake. He believes that most of the LSD visual phenomena are illusions, the elaboration of something "out there" into a misperception.²²

²⁰Sidney Cohen, The Beyond Within (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 11.

²¹Ibid., p. 12.

²²Ibid., p. 12.

When these drugs came under scientific scrutiny after World War II, they were believed to cause a model psychosis, a madness in miniature. The hope was that a schizophrenia-producing drug might teach medical men how to cure psychiatry's greatest problem in the laboratory. Dr. Cohen says that the word Psychotomimetic, a mimicker of psychoses, is the word most often found in the scientific literature to describe LSD.²³ However, it is now generally agreed that the drugged state does not quite mimic the naturally occurring schizophrenias.

William Braden, in his comprehensive survey of the psychedelic movement, points out that there are literally scores of psychedelic substances, natural and synthetic, and LSD is only one of many agents capable of producing a full-fledged psychedelic experience. Braden says that identical effects can be obtained from Indian hemp and its derivatives, including hashish; from the peyote cactus and its extract, mescaline; from a Mexican mushroom and its laboratory counterpart, psilocybin. Hemp and peyote have been used as psychedelics for centuries, and mescaline was on the market before the turn of the century.²⁴ He goes on to explain that LSD's uniqueness lies in the fact that it is very easy to make and mega-potent. According to information acquired from the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, Braden says that a single gram of LSD can provide up to ten thousand doses, each of them capable of producing an experience lasting up to twelve hours or longer.²⁵

²³Ibid., p. 12.

²⁴William Braden, The Private Sea. (Chicago: Quadrangel Books, 1967), p. 27.

²⁵Ibid., p. 28.

LSD is a synthetic drug: d-lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate, compounded from a constituent of rye fungus known as ergot. Lysergic acid comes from the rye fungus, but lysergic acid itself is not hallucinogenic. Not until 1938 when Dr. Albert Hofmann, a biochemist at the Sandoz pharmaceutical firm in Basel, Switzerland, added a diethylamide group to the lysergic acid, did it acquire potent mind-transforming properties; but it was not until 1943 that this psychic effect was discovered. Dr. Hofmann accidentally inhaled or swallowed or otherwise absorbed a small amount of LSD and thus discovered the drug's curious properties. It produced uncanny distortions of space and time and hallucinations that were weird beyond his belief. It also produced a state of mind in which the objective world appeared to take on a new and different meaning. Dr. Cohen included the record of Dr. Hofmann's experience in his book The Beyond Within.

"Last Friday, the 16th of April I had to leave my work in the laboratory and go home because I felt strangely restless and dizzy. Once there, I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant delirium which was marked by an extreme degree of fantasy. In a sort of trance with closed eyes (I found the daylight unpleasantly glaring) fantastic visions of extraordinary vividness accompanied by a kaleidoscopic play of intense coloration continuously swirled around me. After two hours the condition subsided."²⁶

At a later date, in order to test this experience, Hofmann took 250 micrograms of LSD, a larger than average amount. This time his symptoms included:

²⁶ Sidney Cohen, The Beyond Within. (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 27.

"Dizziness, visual distortions; the faces of those present appeared like grotesque coloured masks; strong agitation alternating with paresis; the head, body and extremities sometimes cold and numb; a metallic taste on the tongue; throat dry and shriveled; a feeling of suffocation; confusion alternating with a clear appreciation of the situation; at times standing outside myself as a neutral observer and hearing myself muttering jargon or screaming half madly.(...) Everything seemed to undulate and their proportions were distorted like the reflections on a choppy water surface. Everything was changing with unpleasant, predominately poisonous green and blue colour tones. With closed eyes multihued metamorphizing fantastic images overwhelmed me. Especially noteworthy was the fact that sounds were transposed into visual sensations so that from each tone or noise a comparable coloured picture was evoked, changing in form and colour kaleidoscopically."²⁷

As a result of Dr. Hofmann's discovery, consciousness changing was made easy, and the substance to evoke the change made easily available.

Scientists seized upon the drug as a tool for research and literally thousands of technical papers have been devoted to it. Since LSD appeared to mimic some symptoms of psychosis, it appeared to offer possible insight into the suffering of mental patients, although, as has been stated, it is now not generally thought of as producing a "model psychosis." Preliminary research has indicated, however, that it may be useful in the treatment of alcoholism and neurosis, and it has served to ease the anguish of terminal patients. In small doses, in controlled situations, it sometimes appears to enhance creativity and productivity.

The public at large knew nothing of LSD until 1963 when two professors, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, lost their posts at

²⁷Ibid., p. 27.

Harvard University in the wake of charges that they had involved students in reckless experiments with the drug. Leary has gone on to become more or less titular leader of the drug movement, in which capacity he has run afoul of the law. The movement has spread to campuses and cities across the United States and Canada.

Timothy Leary was interviewed on the television program The Pierre Berton Show early in 1967. In his conversation with Berton he explained his reasons for taking LSD and for proselytizing its use. Leary said that he is a new prophet heralding in a new religion, a new way to find God within, through the use of LSD; that it was his ambition to be the holiest, wisest, most beneficial man today; that he wanted to change the world, to raise the spiritual level of Americans.²⁸ Leary was brought up a Roman Catholic but he has been greatly influenced by the religions of the East. His motto, and that of the group of disciples that has grown up around him is: turn on, tune in, drop out; turn on with LSD, tune in to the infinite wisdom in your own mind, drop out of the meaningless status activities. He explained to Berton in the same interview that he was addressing young people, creative artist, and alienated minority groups, just like every great prophet of the past. He said that it was his belief that within twenty years LSD would be institutionalized as a sacrament in the orthodox American churches and that a new sacrament, probably electronic brain stimulation, would be introduced by some other minority group. Leary stressed to Berton his belief that there are a thousand roads to

²⁸ Timothy Leary, The Pierre Berton Show. (The video tape recording of the program is available in the McMaster University video tape library).

God, that LSD was just one road, but if other people have a right to try their way he should have a right to try his.²⁹

In an article which appeared originally in The Psychedelic Review and later was reprinted in The Psychedelic Reader Leary presented his interpretation of the religious experience and referred to several studies which have been conducted in an attempt to establish that people do have true religious experiences after taking LSD. Commenting on his first experience with the "mind-expanding" drugs, he said:

Three years ago, on a sunny afternoon in the garden of a Cuernavaca villa, I ate seven of the so-called "sacred mushrooms" which had been given to me by a scientist from the University of Mexico. During the next five hours, I was whirled through an experience which could be described in many extravagant metaphors but which was above all and without question the deepest religious experience of my life.³⁰

Leary admitted to Berton, in their television conversation, that since his first experience, which occurred in August, 1960, he has done nothing but take LSD in an attempt to understand the revelatory potentialities of the human nervous system, and then to make these insights available to others. In his article in The Psychedelic Reader he said that he had collaborated with more than fifty scientists and scholars and that together they had arranged transcendental experiences for over one thousand persons from all walks of life, including sixty-nine full-time religious professionals, about half of whom professed the Christian or Jewish faith and about half of whom belonged to Eastern religions.³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Timothy Leary, "The Religious Experience: Its Production And Interpretation," The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 191.

³¹ Ibid., p. 192.

The interest generated by this research led to the formation of an informal group of ministers, theologians and religious psychologists who meet once per month. In addition to arranging for spiritually oriented psychedelic sessions and discussing prepared papers on a regular basis, this group provided the supervisory manpower for the "Good-Friday" study and was the original planning nucleus of the organization which assumed sponsorship of the research in consciousness-expansion: IF-IF (the International Federation for Internal Freedom).

The "Good-Friday" study just mentioned needs further elaboration. This study was the Ph.D. dissertation of Walter N. Pahnke, a graduate student in the philosophy of religion at Harvard University.³² Dr. Pahnke was both an M.D. and a Bachelor of Divinity. He set out to determine whether the transcendent experience reported during psychedelic sessions was similar to the mystical experience reported by saints and famous religious mystics.

Pahnke was struck by the fact that a number of researchers who had experimented with LSD or psilocybin had remarked upon the similarity between drug-induced and mystical experiences because frequently some of their subjects had used mystical and religious language to describe their experience. His thesis was an attempt to explore this claim in a systematic and scientific way.

He first set up a nine-category typology of the mystical state of consciousness as a basis for measurement of the phenomena of the

³²Walter N. Pahnke, Drugs and Mysticism (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1963).

psychedelic drug experience. This typology is quite similar to those of the commentators on the mystical experience quoted earlier in this thesis. Pahnke admits that he was greatly influenced by the works of W. T. Stace, in particular by his book Mysticism and Philosophy.³³ Stace's conclusion that in the mystical experience there are certain fundamental characteristics which are universal and which are not restricted to any particular religion or culture (although particular cultural, historical, or religious, conditions may influence both the interpretation and description of these basic phenomena) was taken as a presupposition by Pahnke. Pahnke decided that whether or not the mystical experience was taken as "religious" depended upon one's own definition of religion and so he did not address himself to this problem. He simply set out his own typology defining the universal phenomena of the mystical experience, whether considered "religious" or not, and then compared the mystical experiences of an experimental group which had taken psilocybin with this typology.

Briefly, the nine categories of his phenomenological typology were: (1) Unity: This, to his mind, was the most important characteristic of the mystical experience and, following in the footsteps of W. T. Stace, he said that it was divided into internal and external types which were the different ways of experiencing an undifferentiated unity. (2) Transcendence of Time and Space: This category referred to loss of the usual sense of time and space. (3) Deeply Felt Positive

³³Walter T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy. (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1960).

Mood: Pahnke felt the most universal elements to be joy, blessedness, and peace. (4) Sense of Sacredness: He defined sacredness broadly as that which a person feels to be of special value and capable of being profaned. (5) Objectivity and Reality: This category had two inter-related elements. The person received insightful knowledge or illumination on an intuitive, non-rational level; gained by direct experience. The experience was considered as truly real, in contrast to the feeling that the experience was a subjective delusion. (6) Paradoxicality: Accurate descriptions and even rational interpretations of the mystical experience tended to be logically contradictory when strictly analyzed. (7) Alleged Ineffability: Words failed to describe the experience adequately. (8) Transiency: This referred to duration and meant the temporariness of the mystical experience in contrast to the relative permanence of the level of usual experience. (9) Persisting Positive Change in Attitude and/or Behaviour.³⁴

The purpose of the experiment, called the "Good-Friday" study, or by the press, the Miracle of Marsh Chapel, in which psilocybin was administered in a religious context was to gather empirical data about the state of consciousness experienced. In a private Chapel on Good Friday twenty Christian theological students, ten of whom had been given psilocybin one-and-one-half-hours before, listened over loud speakers to a two-and-one-half-hour religious service which consisted of organ music, four solos, readings, prayers, and personal meditation.

In the weeks before the experiment each subject participated

³⁴Walter N. Pahnke, Drugs and Mysticism (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 46-81.

in five hours of various preparation and screening procedures. The twenty subjects were graduate-student volunteers, all of whom were from middle-class Protestant backgrounds. None of them had ever taken psilocybin or related substances before this experiment. The subjects were divided into five groups of four students each. Two leaders who knew from past experience the positive and negative aspects of psilocybin reaction met with each group. The study was triple-blind: neither the subjects, guides, nor experimenters knew who received psilocybin. Half of the subjects and one of the leaders in each group received the drug. The other half received a placebo.

Data was collected during the experiment and at various times up to six months afterwards. On the experimental day itself tape recordings were made both of individual reactions immediately after the religious service and of the group discussions which followed. Each subject wrote an account of his experience as soon after the experiment as was convenient. Within a week all subjects had completed a 147-item questionnaire which had been designed to measure phenomena of the typology on a qualitative, numerical scale. The results of this questionnaire were used as the basis for a one-and-one-half-hour tape recorded interview which immediately followed. Six months later each subject was interviewed again after completion of a follow-up questionnaire in three parts with a similar scale.

From these data Pahnke concluded that under the conditions of this experiment these subjects who received psilocybin experienced phenomena which were apparently indistinguishable from, if not identical

with, certain categories defined by the typology of mysticism. He concluded further that the results of this experiment gave support to the claims made by others who have used psilocybin or similar drugs such as LSD or mescaline to aid in the induction of experiences which are concluded to be not unlike those demonstrated by mystics. His final point was that such evidence also pointed to the possible importance of biochemical changes which might occur in so-called "non-artificial" mystical experience, especially the effects of ascetic practices.

Timothy Leary has concluded, on the basis of this and other studies, that:

If the expectation, preparation, and setting are spiritual, an intense mystical experience can be expected in from 40 to 90 per cent of subjects ingesting psychedelic drugs.³⁵

Leary suggested, in this same article, that we should cast a comparative glance at the work of other research groups in this field.

Oscar Janiger, a psychiatrist, and William McGlothlin, a psychologist, have reported the reactions of 194 psychedelic subjects; 73 of these took LSD as part of a psychotherapy program, and 121 were volunteers. The subjects answered a series of questions after they had had a psychedelic experience.

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
Increased interest in morals, ethics	35
Increased interest in universal concepts (meaning of life)	48
Change in sense of values	48

³⁵ Timothy Leary, "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation," The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 195.

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
LSD should be used for:	
becoming aware of oneself	75
getting new meaning to life	58
getting people to understand each other	42
This was an experience of lasting benefit	58. ³⁶

Two other similar studies reproduced in The Psychedelic Reader are worthy of note. Once again subjects were asked to answer certain questions following their experience with LSD. The clinical environment in the study headed by C. Savage was more religious (subjects are shown religious articles during the session, etc.) than in the study by K. S. Ditman.

	<u>DITMAN</u>	<u>SAVAGE</u>
	<u>Supportive</u>	<u>Supportive</u>
	<u>Environment</u>	<u>Environment</u>
		<u>Plus Some</u>
		<u>Religious</u>
		<u>Stimuli</u>
	74 Subjects	96 Subjects
	<u>Per Cent</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
Feel it (LSD) was the greatest thing that ever happened to me	49	85
A Religious experience	32	83
A greater awareness of God or a higher power or an ultimate reality	40	90. ³⁷

The "bible" of the LSD cult is a book called The Psychedelic Experience. This book is a manual or guidebook based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead to be used by those planning to take, and in the process of taking, a psychedelic "journey." It was compiled by the

³⁶Oscar Janiger, William McGlothlin, "The Subjective After Effects of Psychedelic Experiences," The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 194.

³⁷K.S. Ditman, M. Hayman, J.R.B. Whittlesey, "The Nature and Frequency of Claims Following LSD," and C. Savage, W. Harman, "A Follow up Note On The Psychedelic Experience", The Psychedelic Reader (N.Y.: Univ. Books Inc. 1965), p. 195.

"high priests" of the LSD cult, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert. The book states that:

The psychedelic experience is a journey to new realms of consciousness; that the scope and content of the experience is limitless, but that its characteristic features are the transcendence of verbal concepts, of time-space dimensions, and of the ego or identity. Such areas of enlarged consciousness can occur in a variety of ways: sensory deprivation, yoga exercises, disciplined meditation, religious or aesthetic ecstasies, or spontaneously. Most recently the possibility of enlarged consciousness has become available to anyone through the ingestion of psychedelic drugs such as LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, etc.³⁸

The manual admits that the drug does not produce the transcendental experience. It merely acts as a chemical key. It opens the mind and frees the nervous system of its ordinary patterns and structures. The book stresses that the nature of the experience depends almost entirely on set and setting.

Set denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time. Setting is physical - the weather, the room's atmosphere, the social feelings of persons present toward one another, and the prevailing cultural views as to what is real.³⁹

It is the purpose of the guidebook to enable a person who has taken a psychedelic drug to understand the new realities of the "expanded" consciousness, and to serve as road maps for the new interior territories which modern science has made accessible.

Ostensibly The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the experience that one may expect at the moment of death, during an intermediate phase

³⁸ Timothy Leary, R. Metzner, R. Alpert, The Psychedelic Experience (New York: University Books Inc., 1966), p. 11.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

lasting forty-nine days, and during rebirth into another body. The writers of this manual have given it another meaning. This is that the death and rebirth of the ego is being described, not the body.

The manual distinguishes three phases of the psychedelic experience. The first period is described as complete transcendence. This is beyond words, beyond space-time, beyond self. During this period there are no visions, no sense of self, no thoughts. There is only pure awareness and ecstatic freedom from all game involvements. (The manual defines "Games" as behavioural sequences defined by roles, rituals, goals, strategies, values, language, characteristic space-time locations and characteristic patterns of movement.) The second lengthy period involves self, or external game reality, in sharp exquisite clarity or in the form of hallucinations. The final period involves the return to routine game reality and the self.⁴⁰

The guidebook points out that there are several basic beliefs that a person must embrace before the reading of it will be of real value to him. He must be ready to accept the possibility that there is a limitless range of awareness for which he now has no words. He must believe that throughout human history millions have made this same voyage and that a few saints, mystics, or buddhas have made this experience endure and have communicated it to their fellow man.⁴¹ This belief, of course, elevates any man to the level of the Buddha, Jesus Christ, St. Paul, or any of the great religious prophets and mystics. It also assumes that the great religious leaders, the mystics and the saints, all had

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 13.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 14.

essentially the same ecstatic experience. A person must also believe that whether he experiences heaven or hell it is his own mind which creates them.⁴²

The most important use of this manual, according to the writers, is for preparatory reading. They say that having read the Tibetan Manual one can immediately recognize symptoms and experiences which might otherwise be terrifying, only because of lack of understanding as to what is happening.⁴³ In fact, the book tells the reader what he is going to experience, and since what one experiences depends almost entirely on the set and the setting, the book directs the experience as well as the interpretation of that experience.

LSD is a colourless, odorless, tasteless drug. It is taken orally for the most part; the precise nature of its action upon the brain and nervous system has not been determined. Dr. Sidney Cohen believes the drug acts to trigger a chain of metabolic processes which then proceed to exert an effect for many hours afterward.⁴⁴ In the hipsters' terminology the subject is "turned on" and the experience begins.

Serious students of the psychophysiology of LSD have found it to be a most frustrating task. This frustration is due to the enormous difference between the subjective sensation and the objective measurement or the verbal expression of the subjective sensation.

Dr. Cohen agrees in general with the time sequence for the reaction to a psychedelic drug explained in The Psychedelic Experience.

⁴²Ibid., p. 14.

⁴³Ibid., p. 97.

⁴⁴Sidney Cohen, The Beyond Within (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 102.

He says that when an average dose of LSD is administered (an average dose is about 100 micrograms or 1/10,000 of a gram) the onset may be noted within fifteen minutes in some individuals, while in others it may be delayed for an hour or more. Ordinarily, the intensity of the symptoms reaches a plateau after one-and-one-half hours. Four hours after consumption the effects start to recede and they terminate in six to twelve hours.⁴⁵

William Braden, himself drawing from various sources, constructs a typology of the central or core experiences under LSD. His description is in substantial agreement with descriptions given by Cohen, Leary, Metzner, Alpert, and Aldous Huxley. Braden says that under LSD the sense of self or personal ego is utterly lost. "I" and "me" are no more. Subject-object relationships dissolve, and the world no longer ends at the fingertips. The subject sees the world as simply an extension of the body, or the mind. It is fluid, shifting, and it shimmers, as if it were charged with a high-voltage current. The subject has the feeling that he could melt into walls, trees, other persons; he is keenly aware of the atomic substructure of reality; he can feel the spinning motion of the electrons in what he used to call his body. Braden emphasizes, however, that the subject feels that his identity is not really lost. On the contrary, he is convinced that it is found, that it is expanded to include all that is seen and all that is not seen.⁴⁶ Both Braden and Leary say that when a person has taken LSD he will look back on his pre-drug existence as some sort of make-believe

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁶William Braden, The Private Sea (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), p. 30.

in which he had assumed the reduced identity or smaller sense called "I".

Dr. Cohen says that changes in time perception is one of the notable features that intrigues most subjects who take LSD.

Slowdown in time is reminiscent of mental activity during certain moments of personal danger when a large series of memories is recalled within seconds.⁴⁷

For the psychedelic subject, time seems to stop, or in any case, ceases to be important. The subject is content to exist in the moment, in the here and now. In this mental state inconsistencies become consistent, ambiguous or incompatible concepts are tolerated and paradoxes cease to be paradoxes. Other features include: colour heightened to superlatives of intensity, luminescence, and saturation, and sound, music in particular, described with the same superlatives; words tend to lose all meaning (an object is perceived as a thing-in-itself and this is beyond language); a loss of dualities.⁴⁸

Sweet and sour, good and evil - these also are abstractions, inventions of the verbal mind, and they have no place in the ultimate reality of here and now. As a result, the world is just as it should be. It is perfect, beautiful. It is the same world that is seen without LSD, but it is seen in a different way. It is transfigured, and it requires no meaning beyond the astonishing fact of its own existence.⁴⁹

Braden says that the psychedelic would ask what the meaning of "meaning" is anyhow and then would answer that meaning is just one more abstraction, implying some future use or purpose; that it has no place

⁴⁷Cohen, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴⁸Braden, op. cit., pp. 32-34.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 34-35.

in the here and now of naked existence. According to Braden, the psychedelic subject feels he knows essentially everything there is to know. He knows ultimate truth. And he knows that he knows it. Of course, this sense of authority cannot be adequately verbalized.⁵⁰

In his experiments with the psychedelic drugs Dr. Cohen found that a subject's ego boundaries tended to dissolve and that separation between the individual self and the external world became tenuous and sometimes non-existent. He observed that the ego defences, which he describes as "the psychological barriers established to help cope with life stress and to defend the personality of the individual,"⁵¹ were breached. This permitted hitherto repressed material from the unconscious part of the mind to come forth. He concluded that from his test material it was evident that changes in ego identity were vast and that during the height of drug action a complete loss of self-identity was sometimes recorded.⁵² For some individuals these vast perceptual changes were welcomed. They relished the loss of their old selves. Others found the experience threatening and fought it.

At the beginning of his book The Beyond Within, Dr. Cohen gives two examples from the wide range of experiences possible under LSD. The first report was written by a psychology student who took the drug because he wanted to see the visual effects. Just a very small section of his letter is quoted here. The explanation of what he actually experienced may be debated for years, but the sincerity of his report, in the form

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 36.

⁵¹Cohen, op.cit., p. 43.

⁵²Ibid., p. 43.

of a letter written to his girl friend, comes through most clearly.

"My dearest darling Ruth:

The strangest thing happened on the way to me this day. I met myself and found that I'm really not me after all. Or perhaps I should say that I have found out what it is like to exist. For that's all there was left that instant, at that instant when feeling, thinking, being, all were caught up into one ebbing unity; a unity which was me, but not me, too. A me-not-me which stood there nakedly and pointed back at itself in a sorrowful joy, and asked "Why?" But then the "why" didn't matter and it just was! I have now the strangest feeling that I'm so alone and yet so crowded. Have you ever felt like all that existed was you, and that suddenly the reason for your "youness" was knocked out from underneath you? (.....)

I have just come back from seeing the world for the first time. A little over two hours ago by watch time I went out to eat dinner, and I'll be damned if life isn't beautiful. I sat in the restaurant just enjoying living. Everything seemed so clear and beautiful. It was like looking at the world for the very, very first time and thinking to yourself, how beautiful, how sensuous!! (...) As I was out walking I was, literally, experiencing the world as a child would, and I loved it and didn't give a damn about what anybody thought. I was almost drunk with rapture and I felt like bursting. I think that now I notice the physical boundaries of my body coming back and the same thing is happening to my mind. But does it have to be this way? Do we have to live alone? There must be something else than going back. I don't really want to "integrate" this thing into my ego and go back."⁵³

In contrast to the deep and moving experience of this student, Cohen quotes from the report of another student who had a very different experience.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 4-8.

"Over my right shoulder I could vaguely see what looked like a winged animal. It reminded me of a pterodactyl and it frightened me considerably. I was quite scared of it. We went on with the test though I still felt somewhat terrified of this thing. It seemed that instead of being in the room, it shifted outside as if I was too scared to have it inside with me and I put it outside. I felt often that it was beating its wings out there trying to get in. I could see through the window the flickering shadow of it. And once or twice I heard its wings. I was so terrified by this thing that I just couldn't move. Another peculiar reaction was that every time I heard this thing, the tester would turn a pale green color and his face would assume the consistency of cream cheese with his eyebrows and hair being very finely etched against his pale face. It was the most frightening experience I've ever had.⁵⁴

Psychiatrists interested in LSD and its effects are quick to stress that neither LSD nor any drug is necessary to induce profound states of "altered" awareness. The more traditional efforts to attain this altered awareness have been varied but only sporadically successful. Breathing exercises change the chemical composition of the blood and provide a focus for rhythmic fixation of attention. Fasting, self-flagellation and other forms of mortification have been practiced, not only to assuage guilt or prove devotion, but also to enhance mental awareness.

Dr. Cohen explains that body damage can cause a variety of secondary chemical changes; the circulation of toxic products, blood loss, oxygen deficits and other deviations from the state of health may induce either delirium or a lessening of a person's ability to sense reality. Deprivation of any essential process, sleep is a good example, can lead to a loss of contact with reality. Dr. Cohen is particularly

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 9.

interested in sensory deprivation experiments using isolation as the method. In this method there is an absence of the usual diversity of sensations along with the loss of human contact. Dr. Cohen says that if the flood of sensory data that sweeps in during the waking state can be stilled, the mind seems to lose its ability to orient realistically.⁵⁵

In general, the sensory deprivation experiments take one of two forms. In one the subject is fitted with a breathing apparatus and immersed in a tank of tepid water. In this situation he not only loses the usual sensory information but also the awareness of his position in space is seriously impaired. In the other experiment the subject lies in a sound proof cubicle wearing frosted goggles and cotton gloves.⁵⁶ The effects of a prolonged diminution of sense input are described in some detail by Dr. Cohen. Briefly, in a few days the subject is unable to think in an organized fashion. He loses his sense of time. Dream-like ruminations intervene in his thinking. He experiences hallucinations. Dr. Cohen finds the hallucinatory activity particularly interesting because it is very reminiscent of that induced by the psychedelic drugs.⁵⁷

Dr. Cohen's interest has centred around the state of sensory deprivation caused by a diminution of the usual external sensory stimuli. Two psychiatrists at the Clarke Institute in Toronto, Peter Brawley and Robert Pos, are interested in a state in internal sensory deprivation which may occur when there is little or no change in external stimuli.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

There is medical evidence that a variety of pathogenetic processes (metabolic, toxic, degenerative, genetic, life-experiential, etc.) may influence the sensory input regulating system in such a way that a state of internal sensory deprivation, or informational underload, ensues even in the presence of average external stimulus intensity.⁵⁸

Dr. Pos, who has done a great deal of research using the drug LSD, claims that this sensory deprivation poisons a nerve centre in the brain or nervous system which in turn causes the hallucinations and other wild experiences. He believes that LSD affects the identical area of the nervous system, thus causing essentially the same results.⁵⁹

Other scientists at the Clarke Institute are working in the same general area, trying to isolate the psychological and physical processes that occur when an altered state of consciousness is produced.

One group has concluded that:

All clinically and experimentally occurring hallucinatory syndromes have, in spite of their differences, a common neurophysiological pattern. For its normal functioning the brain depends on both stored information as well as continuously new extra cerebral input; if the extracerebral inflow of new information falls below a certain threshold, then the brain must rely mainly on stored information and is assumed to develop a "state of informational underload" which in due course may be characterized electrophysiologically. This pattern is thought to be at the basis of external behavioural manifestations of the sensory deprivation experiments.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Peter Brawley and Robert Pos, "The Informational Underload," The Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal, Volume 12, No.2, (April, 1967), p. 110.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 111.

⁶⁰R. Pos, E. Rzedki, J. McIlroy, F. Doyle, "Research Into the Informational Underload Hypothesis of Mental Illness," The Canadian Psychiatric Journal, Volume 12, No.2, (April, 1967), p. 143.

The medical doctors who have been quoted, and indeed even the writers of the psychedelic "bible", The Psychedelic Experience, all agree that the incredible visual display as well as any overwhelming transcendental experience that a person may have through using LSD or by removing sensory stimuli are caused by physical and biochemical changes in the body.

Dr. Sidney Cohen has summarized the LSD experience from a medical standpoint.

In sufficient amounts this drug has a disinhibiting or releasing action on learned patterns; particularly those related to reality testing, survival functioning, goal-directed behaviour and logical thinking. Instead, a primal thinking-feeling process supervenes, in which dream-like fantasies become prominent. The thin overlay of reason gives way to reverie, identity is submerged by oceanic feelings of unity, and seeing loses the conventional meaning imposed upon the object seen. Colour and patterns exist for themselves. Thoughts, creative, bizarre, or nonlogical, are unleashed to flood awareness. Because much is happening the internal clock seems to be standing still.⁶¹

⁶¹Cohen, op. cit., p. 43.

CHAPTER III

MYSTICISM IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

MEISTER ECKHART

INTRODUCTION

Hilda Graef calls the fourteenth century the mystical century par excellence.⁶² Rufus Jones explains that the fourteenth century is considered so unique in the history of mystical religion because of the extraordinary extent of the flowering of the human spirit. He says that no one rare beacon soul overtopped all the rest, but a whole garden full of beautiful souls came into bloom as though by a prearranged harmony.⁶³

This thesis considers just three of these extraordinary souls, but certainly the three most extraordinary, with the possible exception of Ruysbroeck, of this extraordinary century. They are Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso and John Tauler. They lived and worked in the Rhine Valley in Germany and all were loyal servants of the Roman Catholic Church.

R.A. Vaughn explains that these monks of the Rhineland were the first to break away from a long-cherished mode of thought and to substitute a new and more profound view of the relations subsisting between God and the universe. He says that their memorable step of progress consisted of substituting the idea of the Immanence of God in the world for the idea of the Emanations of the world from God.⁶⁴ Vaughn then proceeds to define these two terms.

⁶²Hilda Graef, The Story of Mysticism (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 185.

⁶³Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 9.

⁶⁴R.A. Vaughn, Hours With The Mystics, Vol. I (London: Strahan and Company Ltd., 1879), p. 278.

He says that the Emanation theory supposes a radiation from above; the theory of Immanence a self-development, or manifestation of God from within. He explains that a geometrician would declare the pyramid the symbol of the one, the sphere the symbol of the other. The theory of Immanence declares God everywhere present with all His power and that man will realize heaven or hell in the present moment, denies that God is nearer on the other side of the grave than this, equalizes all external states, breaks down all steps and partitions, will have man at once escape from all that is not God, and so find only God everywhere.⁶⁵

Evelyn Underhill also deals with these two very different ways of looking at the relationship between God and man. She explains that the theory of Emanations declares God's utter transcendence. God, or the Godhead, is conceived as removed by a vast distance from the world of sense. While our world was generated by the Godhead, the Godhead can never be discerned by man. She says that when this theory of the Absolute is accepted the movement of the soul to union must be a journey upward and outward through a long series of intermediate states or worlds. She goes on to explain that to the holders of the theory of Immanence the quest of the Absolute is no longer a journey, but a realization of something implicit in the self and in the universe. She uses the phrase "the Spirit of God is within you."

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 280.

The absolute dwells within the flux of things, awaiting discovery.⁶⁶ She goes on to point out that Meister Eckhart used language appropriate to both the theories of Emanations and of Immanence.⁶⁷

Rufus Jones calls Meister Eckhart the greatest figure in the fourteenth century mystical movement, and one of the greatest mystics of all Christian history.⁶⁸ He calls Eckhart a religious genius and then goes on to define genius as:

The exceptional person, the superior being, the abnormal individual, in the sense that he varies from the normal standard of life to such an extent that he seems like a "mutation."⁶⁹

Jones cautions, however, that Eckhart is not to be considered "abnormal" in the bad sense of the word. Quite the contrary, Jones considers him to have been a man of sanity, or moral health and vigour, and as having a penetrating humour, which is one of the very best signs of sanity and normality. Jones explains that Eckhart's life was an extremely busy one, that it included extensive travels, complicated tasks, and that in his work Eckhart acquired the art of reconciliation as well as the reputation of scholar. Jones states that throughout his active years of service, Eckhart was as distinguished for his practical work as for his persuasive preaching.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen And Co. Ltd., 1960), pp. 96-99.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁸ Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 61.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 61

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 63

Meister Eckhart was born about 1260 A.D., but neither date nor place is known for sure. He entered the Dominican friary at Erfurt as a novice, studied in Cologne and in Paris, and established a reputation as a teacher and a preacher in Cologne and Strassburg. He died around 1327-29. The last years of Meister Eckhart's life were darkened by his trial for heresy. The charges were brought against him by the Archbishop of Cologne. Of the 108 propositions of the Cologne act of accusation, 28 were finally embodied in the Bull *In Agro Dominico*, and condemned as either heretical or dangerous and suspect.⁷¹ The charge of heresy he strenuously denied and largely succeeded in rebutting while he lived.⁷² Hilda Graef says that Eckhart admitted that some of his statements might sound unorthodox if taken literally, but not if properly examined.⁷³ However, this was not a sufficient excuse for the court, since in a trial for heresy it was always the literal sense of the words that was considered, not the subjective sense, or the intention of the author.⁷⁴

Owing to his often obscure language Eckhart's mystical doctrine is not easy to explain, and there is a further problem of the authenticity of the texts. James Clark believes that British writers on Eckhart have

⁷¹James Clark, Meister Eckhart (Toronto: Thomas Nelson And Sons Ltd., 1957), p. 23.

⁷²C. de B. Evans, trans., Meister Eckhart, Vol. I (London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. XII.

⁷³Hilda Graef, The Story of Mysticism (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 186.

⁷⁴Clark, op. cit., p. 24.

based their conclusions, at least in part, on spurious and doubtful texts.⁷⁵
The result is confused opinions. Clark cites a warning that may well serve to caution over-optimistic interpreters of Eckhart.

If the leading authorities, such as von Hügel, W.R. Inge and Evelyn Underhill, have failed to discover the true Eckhart, how much greater are the aberrations of the lesser writers.⁷⁶

However, Clark himself summarizes Eckhart's mystical theology. God created man and dwells in his soul, but man is only dimly conscious of the Divine guest within. By ridding himself of all worldly thoughts and images, man can prepare his soul so that union with God may take place. This union is bestowed on man by grace and not by right. In union with the divine will man wills what God wills and becomes through adoption a son of God, as Christ was by nature.⁷⁷

The principal theme of Eckhart's mystical doctrine, and the very essence of his mystical union, is that of the birth or generation of the Word, or Son, in the soul. This phrase was not used by Suso or Tauler, or by other later mystics, probably because it figured prominently in the condemned propositions. The question is whether this was a union of wills only, thus putting him in the camp of the theistic mystics, or a union of essences, thus branding him a pantheist or a monist.

R.A. Vaughn says that Eckhart was a pantheist, irrespective of the fact that he lived a pure life, that he was not outwardly opposed to Christian doctrine or institute and that devout men like Suso and Tauler valued his

⁷⁵Ibid., p. VI.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. VI.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 82.

teaching so highly.⁷⁸ Hilda Graef points out that Eckhart said he was not unorthodox.⁷⁹ Yet she goes on to say that it is not surprising that Eckhart was accused of heresy, making the total identification between creature and Creator.⁸⁰ R.C. Zaehner, after a detailed explanation of the monist and the theist positions, says that even Christianity has not completely avoided the monistic extreme even though it makes nonsense of its basic doctrine that God is Love. He believes that Meister Eckhart at times adopted a fully monistic position.⁸¹ James Clark says that Eckhart believed that God created the universe out of nothing, that He called it into existence from the void, so to speak. Clark concludes that this conception is opposed to pantheism.⁸² W.R. Inge believes that while intellectually Eckhart is drawn towards a semi-pantheistic idealism, his heart makes him an evangelical Christian.⁸³ Inge believes that to a true pantheist all is equally divine, good or bad, and Eckhart would never have countenanced such a theory.⁸⁴ Rufus

⁷⁸R.A. Vaughn, Hours With The Mystics, Vol. I (London: Strahan and Company Ltd., 1879), p. 210.

⁷⁹Hilda Graef, The Story of Mysticism (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p.186.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 188.

⁸¹R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 205.

⁸²Clark, op.cit., p. 43.

⁸³W.R. Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1964), p. 150.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 164.

Jones says that there is no doubt that Meister Eckhart said many things in his sermons that would sound rash to a scribe who judged his words by prevailing standards of orthodoxy. However, it is Jones' belief that Eckhart was not a rebel, not an iconoclast, not a willful heretic but a loyal and faithful servant of his church and his order.⁸⁵

James Clark explains that Eckhart states the doctrine of God's immanence in a double form, in an antithesis. God is in man, in his innermost being, but man is also in God. Clark points out that this can be misunderstood and may be taken to mean that the barrier between man and God has been broken down, which would indeed be pure pantheism. However, Clark stresses, in fairness to Eckhart, one must take this doctrine together with the doctrine of God's transcendence.⁸⁶ Evelyn Underhill points out that Eckhart uses language appropriate both to God's immanence and His transcendence.⁸⁷ Friedrich von Hügel says the same thing.⁸⁸ F. C. Happold believes that Eckhart was uncertain whether the spark of the soul was a faculty or organ of the soul whereby the soul had communion with and knew God, and therefore created, or whether it was the very essence of the Being and Nature of God Himself, and therefore uncreated.⁸⁹

⁸⁵Jones, op. cit., p. 64.

⁸⁶Clark, op. cit., p. 36.

⁸⁷Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen And Co., Ltd., 1960), p. 101.

⁸⁸Friedrich von Hügel The Mystical Element of Religion, Vol. II (London: James Clark And Co. Ltd., 1961) p. 323.

⁸⁹F.C. Happold, Mysticism (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 49.

Works

Meister Eckhart draws a distinction between the Godhead and God. By the former, he understood the undifferentiated Deity which is the totally transcendent. By the latter, he means the Three Persons. However, as has been suggested, he is rather ambivalent in his pronouncements and one is unsure at times whether he is referring to the Godhead or to God. His ambivalence is clearly shown in the following quotations.

When we speak of the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost we are speaking of the Persons. When we speak of the Godhead we are speaking of their nature. Not that the Godhead is other than what they are themselves: they are the Godhead in their unity of Nature.⁹⁰

God and Godhead are as different as earth is from heaven.⁹¹

Such phrases as "desert", "wilderness", "darkness", and "nothing" apply to the Godhead rather than to the Three Persons. The Godhead is unknowable and yet Eckhart implies that he knows the Godhead by direct personal experience.

The soul that has gotten in her the Son, has in one perfect entity the entire promise of the Godhead.⁹²

God is in the soul with his nature, his essence and his Godhead.⁹³

As far as the soul follows God into the desert of his Godhead.⁹⁴

⁹⁰C. de B. Evans, translator, Meister Eckhart, Vol. I (London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. 283.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 142.

⁹²Ibid., p. 131.

⁹³Ibid., p. 143.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 145.

This Spark is opposed to creatures. It has no want but just God, God as he is in himself. Not enough for it the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost, nor even all three Persons, so far as they preserve their several properties. It wants to get into its simple ground, into the silent desert whereinto no distinct thing ever pryed, not Father, Son nor Holy Ghost.⁹⁵

How come this intangible solitary essence to be common to the soul, to be within the purview of the soul? (. . .) I can only say that his divinity consists in the communication of himself to whatever is receptive of his goodness, and did he not communicate himself he would not be God.⁹⁶

However, Eckhart's knowing cannot be taken to mean an understanding or a defining of the Godhead. He is very definite on this point.

Anything we know that we are able to impart or that we can define, that is not God.⁹⁷

Rufus Jones is convinced that for Eckhart the Godhead is the Utterly Beyond, the Central Mystery, the Wholly Other.⁹⁸

Meister Eckhart often quotes the saying of Jesus that the Kingdom of God is within you. He says that this Kingdom is God himself, revealed to us as the Three Persons. It is this revelation of the Kingdom within us that Eckhart calls the birth of the Son in the soul.⁹⁹ We receive this revelation through grace which emanates down to us from the Godhead.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

⁹⁸ Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 76.

⁹⁹ Evans, op. cit., p. 157.

Now God is higher than the soul, and hence there is a constant flow of God into the soul, which cannot miss her. The soul may well miss it, but as long as man keeps right under God he immediately catches the divine influence.¹⁰⁰

From essence in general emanates power and work. The three Persons are in this respect the storehouse of divinity, and the Three Persons descend into the essence of the soul by grace, and the Persons bring divine nature into the soul in their train, one nature coursing through the other.¹⁰¹

Eckhart's works are full of the absolute dependence of man upon grace.

From being power flows out into work. In this sense, the three Persons are the storehouse of divinity and the three Persons are poured forth into the essence of the soul as grace. (...) But what she (the soul) is she is by grace, and where she is she is by another's power.¹⁰²

Hence, we see that in the starry heavens, the revolving heavens, God is none other than the mover, the starter, the source of energy whence the heavens get their power and their spin. And so too in this life he is present in the soul as the mover of our free will towards himself and towards good works, he being the fount of grace, which from his godly heart, flows down into the soul.¹⁰³

Eckhart emphasizes in Sermon XII and elsewhere that God is other than man and that the best man can do to prepare for union is to kill his activities and still his faculties and wait patiently, with love, for grace.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 170.

The very best work that we can do is to prepare for union with the present God and wait for this with fixed attention. (...) No creature can do what is not in its power. Hence the soul cannot act above herself, not even with the bridal gift that God has given her in the shape of her most exalted faculty. -- This light, albeit divine, is still created. The creator is one and the light another -- So God comes to the soul in love, proposing that love shall raise her to a higher power, to a function superior to her own. -- As far as God finds his likeness in the soul, so far is God in operation. If her love is boundless, God acts in boundless love.¹⁰⁴

Eckhart believed that, in this life, God is present in the soul as the mover of our free will towards himself and towards good works.

I am as certain as I live that nothing is so close to me as God. (...) God is nearer to me than I am to my own self; my life depends upon God being near to me, present in me.¹⁰⁵

It is God's nature to give himself to every virtuous soul, and it is the soul's nature to receive God, and this we say referring to the soul in her loftiest capacity. (...) There the soul bears the image of God and is Godlike.¹⁰⁶

A quote from a German text of Dr. Faustus summarizes beautifully the interdependence of love and grace.

Der wirkliche Sucher liebt, was er zu finden hofft; und er findet, weil er liebt. (The true seeker loves what he hopes to find, and he finds because he loves.)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁰⁷ B.Q. Morgan and F.W. Strothmann, Shorter German Reading Grammar (Toronto: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1965), p. 120.

Thus, grace is all important for man to achieve union with God. Man must prepare himself for this revelation by detachment from worldly distractions and by looking inward. But the revelation itself is given. The revealed God (the Three Persons) has subjective reality only. This does not mean that He is unreal. This grace, or revelation, is available to every man, if man will but prepare himself for it. However, it is true to say, as Eckhart does, that God, the Three Persons, depends on man for existence, for a manifested or revealed God only exists if man exists for Him to be revealed to.

For that God is God he gets from creatures. When the soul became a creature she obtained a God.¹⁰⁸

God loves my soul so much that his very life and being depend upon his loving me, whether he would or not. To stop God loving me would be to rob him of his Godhood; for God is love.¹⁰⁹

One of the most significant aspects of Eckhart's mystical teaching is his conception of the human soul. He had a truly noble estimate of the human soul.

So like himself God made man's soul that nothing else in earth or heaven resembles God so closely as the human soul.¹¹⁰

Eckhart calls the deepest part of the soul the ground, or the spark, or the apex. The ground of man's soul is an eternal reality. It is beyond and above time.

¹⁰⁸Evans, op.cit., p. 274.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 289.

There is one, the loftiest, part of the soul which stands above time and knows nothing of time or of body. The happenings of a thousand years ago, days spent millenniums since, are in eternity no further off than is this moment I am passing now.¹¹¹

It is here, in the ground of man's soul, that God speaks his Word.

Here the Son is born, and the soul becomes God.

For it is in the perfect soul that God speaks his Word. (...) It is in the purest part of the soul, in the noblest, in her ground, aye in the very essence of the soul. (...) Here alone is rest and a habitation for this birth, this act wherein God the Father speaks his Word, for it is intrinsically receptive of naught save the divine essence. (...) Here God enters the Ground of the soul.¹¹²

Wouldst thou be the Son of God? Thou canst not, without having the same nature as the Son of God. But this is hidden from us here. Sundry things in our souls overlay this knowledge and conceal it from us. (...) The soul has something in her, a spark of intellect, that never dies: and in this spark, as at the apex of the mind, we place the paradigm of the soul. (...) When I succeed in rooting up and casting out everything in me, then I am free to pass into the naked being of the soul. Man is turned into God.¹¹³

Rufus Jones believes that Eckhart's mystical doctrine of the ground of the soul is the best approach for at least glimpsing his profound doctrine of the Godhead as the Ground, the Source, the Fount, of all that is meant by the Divine, by God as expressed or revealed. Eckhart believed that just as behind the self in us that is known, and revealed in the world of time, there must be a deeper foundational reality which is the permanent and essential ground of the expression of our life

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 32.

and character so there must be behind the God who is revealed here in the time-world, behind the God who is the Creator of this strangely mixed world, behind the Revealer of scripture and history, behind the Redeemer through love and truth, there must be the Eternal One who is the Source of all that comes forth.¹¹⁴

For yet I say a thing I never said before:
God and Godhead are as different as earth
is from heaven. Moreover I declare: the
outward and the inward man are as different
too, as earth and heaven.¹¹⁵

Meister Eckhart stresses contemplation as the method of preparing for the birth of the Son or the Word in the soul. This contemplation is a withdrawal of attention from the external world and an emptying of the mind of all but God. This is a necessary first step for union to occur.

Which is the best and highest virtue whereby
a man may knit himself most narrowly to God
and wherein he is most like to his example?
(.....)
I find it is none other than absolute detachment
from all creatures.¹¹⁶

"Paul rose from the ground wide-eyed, beholding
nothing." I cannot see what is one. He saw
nothing, to wit, God. God is naught and God is
one. (.....)
When St. Paul saw all nothing he saw God: when
he saw all things as nothing he saw God -- And
what God means to say is this: when things are
all reduced to naught in you then ye shall see
God.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴Rufus Jones, The Flowering Of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 75.

¹¹⁵Evans, op. cit., p. 142.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 340.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 62 and 111.

Eckhart holds that God cannot be found or known as He really is in His essential being in the finite things of time and space.

Three things prevent a man from knowing God at all. The first is time, the second body, and the third is multiplicity or number.¹¹⁸

Here, bound to human nature, I have to work above nature freely, in absolute idleness or motionless quiet, so as not to be hindered by myself and by my personal nature and by things which are conditioned by time and temporalities.¹¹⁹

As Rufus Jones points out:

Like the inward Ground of the soul, which is the subsoil and foundational reality underlying all the conscious power of our life, God must be in the Eternal quiet underneath all the activity and drive of the universe.¹²⁰

Therefore, in order to find God, the mind must not turn outward and be absorbed by the sense world of this and that. Rather it must turn in to that deepest part of the soul where God and man are always in essential contact.

However, this withdrawal that Eckhart talks about is not achieved by a total and absolute abandonment of the tasks and duties of this life.

Contemplation is the best, works are very profitable. Mary was praised for choosing the best but Martha's life was very useful serving Christ and his disciples.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 400.

¹²⁰ Jones, op. cit., p. 81.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 15.

A life of rest and peace in God is good;
a life of pain in patience is still better;
but to have peace in a life of pain is best
of all.¹²²

In the cases then of real necessity, to use
the works of the outward man for the relief
of one's own self or neighbour is better than
to settle down to the interior man's spiritual
idleness of mind and will.¹²³

For in contemplation thou servest thyself
alone, but the many in good works. (...)
Hereto Christ admonisheth us by his whole
life and the lives of all his saints.¹²⁴

Eckhart believed that the man who is to have a mind ready to receive
God must learn to find the solitude within wherever he may be.

If we are more conscious of God by being in a
quiet place, that comes of our own imperfection
and is not due to God, for God is the same in all
things and all places and just as ready to vouch-
safe himself so far as in him lies; and that man
knows God aright who ever finds him the same.¹²⁵

No one in this life can be without activities,
human ones and not a few at that, so man has to
learn to find his God in everything and not to
be disturbed by places or by acts.¹²⁶

As Rufus Jones points out, Eckhart lived most of his life in the busy
world. He soon discovered that the true test of the depth of inward
life is to be found in the outward expression of it, in the way the
experience of God gets translated into life and love through deed.¹²⁷

¹²² Ibid., p. 172.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 256.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 172.

¹²⁶ C. de. B. Evans, trans., Meister Eckhart, Vol. II (London: John
M. Watkins, 1956), p. 11.

¹²⁷ Jones, op. cit., p. 83.

Eckhart believed that after one had achieved a true state of union with God, which was a second birth, good works must inevitably follow; one had to imitate Christ.

As far as the soul follows God into the desert of his Godhead so far the body follows the bodily Christ into the desert of his willing poverty; as the soul is united with the deity so the body is atoned in Christ by the operation of true virtue.¹²⁸

As I have often said, if a man is in rapture, like St. Paul, and becomes aware of some sick person wanting of him just a sup of broth, it seems to me far better of thy charity to forgo thy rapture and serve the needy in a loftier love.¹²⁹

Not till after the disciples had received the Holy Ghost did they begin to do good works -- while Mary sat at the feet of our Lord and listened to his words, she was learning. But later on, when she had learnt her lesson and received the Holy Ghost, she began to serve. (...) Only when the saints are saints and not till then do they do meritorious works.¹³⁰

It is important also to understand that Eckhart believed that it was God working in us that is responsible for our good works. We deserve no personal credit since God is in us through His own grace.

Known then, the ideas of these acts are not thine own; they belong to the author of thy nature who has planted therein both their energy and form.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Evans, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 145.

¹²⁹ Evans, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 14.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

¹³¹ Evans, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 17.

Rufus Jones declares rightly that Meister Eckhart did not strain after ecstasies. He was not interested in psychopathic wonders. He was suspicious of emotional surges.¹³² Eckhart refers on two or three occasions only to experiences which might be ecstatic in character. In Tractate VI he describes an instance when Sister Katrei was talking to her confessor very eloquently about God.

She imparted to him so much concerning the immensity of God, the might of God and the providence of God, that he took leave of his outer senses and they had to carry him into a neighbouring cell where he lay for long ere coming to himself again.¹³³

In the Liber Positionum the question is asked of Eckhart:

Sir, when you speak of God's birth, of the Father begetting his Son in the soul, is this birth the same as the rapture of St. Paul and what happened at Pentecost to the disciples or are these different things?¹³⁴

Eckhart answered that "they are exactly the same."¹³⁵ In Sermon I he says:

If only thou couldst suddenly be altogether unaware of things, aye couldst thou but pass into the oblivion of thine own existance as St. Paul did when he said: "Whether in the body I know not or out of the body I know not, God knoweth." (...) Here the spirit had so entirely absorbed the faculties that it had forgotten the body: memory no longer functioned, nor understanding, nor the senses, nor even those powers whose duty it is to govern and grace the body. (...) Thus a man must abscond from his senses, invert his faculties and lapse into oblivion of things and of himself.¹³⁶

¹³²Jones, op. cit., p. 80.

¹³³Evans, op. cit., p. 333.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 459.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 459.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 6.

However, the above quotation must be seen in the light of an earlier quotation in which Eckhart interpreted Paul's experience of passing into the oblivion of his own existence as experiencing all things as nothing, and thus experiencing God.¹³⁷

These quotations indicate that Eckhart was certainly not unfamiliar with ecstasy and it is possible that he may have thought of it as a culminating experience to the contemplation and withdrawal that was a part of the mystical process leading to union. But, for Eckhart, the unitive state was not just the ecstatic state. His experience was far deeper and more profound than a transitory ecstatic experience. His whole life was a life in union with God.

The birth takes place, not once a year it happens, not yet once a month, nor once a day, but all the time, beyond time.¹³⁸

His whole concept of the soul following God into the desert of His Godhead while the body follows Christ suggests a lifetime union rather than a brief ecstatic state. Eckhart's unitive state was a lifetime of God working in him.

Here, bound to human nature, I have to work above nature freely, in absolute idleness or motionless quiet, so as not to be hindered by myself or by my personal nature and by things which are conditioned by time and temporalities.¹³⁹

Meister Eckhart is generally suspicious of penitential practices, hallucinations, or any traumatic type of religious experience, and, in fact, even good works.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 400.

All pious practices -- praying, reading, singing, watching, fasting, penance, or whatever discipline it be, were contrived to catch and keep us from things alien and ungodly. But given that a man has genuine experience of the interior life, then let him boldly drop all outward disciplines. ¹⁴⁰

Good, pious souls are hindered too from their proper object by lingering with holy joy over the human form of our Lord Jesus Christ; and by the same token over-reliance upon visions is a pitfall to some people; they see things pictured in the mind, it may be man or angel or the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and give credence to their ghostly messages. ¹⁴¹

The danger that Eckhart feared was that these pictures in the mind, induced sometimes by the penitential practices, would be interpreted as something real. He believed that all such experiences were the result of tricks of the mind.

The statement that our Lord from time to time holds converse with good people and that they hear words or become impressed with the sense of certain sayings, I say, should be accepted with reserve and judged upon their merits, for locutions of this kind are often due to a trick the soul has, when indulging in comfortable intrusions of divinity, of answering herself by a sort of reflex action. (...) Anything in her of which she has a rational perception is not said by God. ¹⁴²

Meister Eckhart favoured love over all the other practiced methods of his day to achieve union with God.

Penitential practices (...) were all invented because body and flesh stand ever opposed to spirit. (...) To succour the spirit in its distress and to impede the flesh somewhat in this strife lest it conquer the spirit, we put

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 447.

upon it the bridle of penitential practices to curb it, so that the spirit can control it. This is done to bring it to subjection; but to conquer and curb it a thousand times better, put thou upon it the bridle of love. With love thou overcomest it most surely, with love thou loadest it most heavily.¹⁴³

But even our love for God, which is above all things necessary to achieve union, is given through the grace of God. Eckhart says that "we love him with the love wherewith he loves himself. We love God with his own love, awareness of it deifies us."¹⁴⁴ Thus the point made earlier is here strengthened. Mystical union occurs only through the grace of God. It may be facilitated by freeing the mind from sense distractions but it comes when love comes, and this love comes when God comes, for, as Eckhart emphasizes, God is love.

If anyone should ask me what God is, I should answer: God is love, and so altogether lovely that creatures all with one accord essay to love his loveliness, whether they do so knowingly or unbeknownst, in joy or sorrow.¹⁴⁵

God loves my soul so much that his very life and being depend upon his loving me, whether he would or not. To stop God loving me would be to rob him of his Godhood; for God is love no less than he is truth; as he is good, so is he love as well.¹⁴⁶

However, Eckhart has a warning about the outward expression of love. This, in fact, illustrates his very real concern about over-reliance on emotionalism. He says that in love we must be concerned with two things, the love itself and the expression of the love. Eckhart recognized that the outcome and effect of love, which was clearly apparent to him in the

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

guise of spirituality, devotion, jubilation, was not always of the highest, and, in fact, did not always come from love but rather from nature, from the tasting of the sweets. He observed that the people most subject to such things were not always of the best, and that it was not unusual that within a short time there would be a falling off in this love.¹⁴⁷ However, he does admit that an ecstatic experience may be due, sometimes at least, to heavenly inspiration. Eckhart believed that in these instances God was using it as a lure.

Granting it does come from God, he gives it to the likes of these to whet their curiosity and to act as a lure as well as a deterrent from the company of other men.¹⁴⁸

Eckhart was very much aware of the great difficulty in determining whether or not a person actually had achieved true union. He comes to grips with this problem in Tractate VII. He first stresses the necessity of careful observation and close scrutiny to test any mystical experience. He then lists twenty four signs by which one may recognize what he calls the "really sane and genuine seers of God, whom nothing can deceive nor misinform."¹⁴⁹ These signs are: (1) The true disciples will love one another; love is of prime importance. (2) The second sign is selflessness. (3) They will have abandoned themselves to God. 4) If they find themselves they will leave themselves again for God. (5) They are free from all self-seeking. (6) They do God's will

¹⁴⁷C. de B. Evans, trans., Meister Eckhart, Vol. II (London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. 14.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁴⁹C. de B. Evans, trans., Meister Eckhart, Vol. I (London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. 334.

to their utmost ability. (7) They bend their will to God's will until the two wills are the same. (8) They are so closely bound to God in love that they do nothing without God nor He without them. (9) They consider all things as nothing and make use of God in everything. (10) Everything that comes to them, they know comes from God. (11) They are not insubordinate, but are steadfast for the truth. (13) They always consider the intrinsic merit of a thing, and so are not misled by any spurious light or by any creature's look. (14) They are armed with all virtue and are thus always victorious against vice. (15) They praise God without ceasing for giving them positive knowledge of the naked truth. (16) Although perfect and just, they hold themselves in poor esteem. (17) They are chary of words but extremely generous with good works. (18) They preach to the world by their good works. (19) They seek nothing but God's glory. (20) In any struggle they will accept no help but God. (21) They desire neither comfort nor possessions, and feel completely undeserving of anything. (22) They are absolutely humble and look upon themselves as the most unworthy of all mankind on earth.' (23) They follow the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as the perfect example for their lives and are always attempting to remove any unlikeness to this high ideal. (24) To outward appearance it may seem that they do little and because of this they must endure the disesteem of many people; however, they prefer this to vulgar approval.¹⁵⁰ It was by these signs that Eckhart believed one might recognize the twice born Christian, the one who had attained to union with God, and that "he who does not find them in himself may account his knowledge vain and

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 334-335.

so may other people."¹⁵¹

Although Eckhart does list these twenty-four signs which, he says, distinguish the really sane and genuine seers of God, he also stresses that one should never really judge one's neighbour, since God judges a man on the motives of his deeds and not on the deeds themselves, and it is impossible for a person to know the real motives behind someone else's actions. It is perhaps pertinent to add that it is sometimes equally impossible to understand the real motives behind one's own actions. Eckhart also stresses that people are not all called upon to follow the same road to God.

God does not look at the deeds themselves but only at the will, the motive, the feeling in the work.¹⁵²

It is for thee to see and to have noted whereto God admonishes thee most, for people are by no means all called upon to follow the same route to God, as St. Paul points out. (...) For one good never clashes with another, and by the same token people ought to realize that they do wrong to say, when they come across or hear about some admirable person, that because he does not use their way it is all labour lost: they dislike his method, so they decry as well his virtues and intentions. This is wrong. We ought to pay far more respect to other people's methods and despise no one's way.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁵²Evans, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 22.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 23.

Chapter IV

HENRY SUSO

Introduction

Henry Suso was born about 1295 or 1300 A.D. He entered the Dominican convent at Constance when he was thirteen years of age and after completing his course of studies there he went for further theological studies at Cologne. Nicholas Heller, in the Introduction to Volume I of The Exemplar, says that during this time at Cologne Suso studied under Eckhart, witnessed the persecution of the master which began in 1326 and was perhaps present at his death.¹⁵⁴ Certainly Suso was a disciple of Meister Eckhart and was one of the group of mystics in the Rhineland called the Friends of God. Heller says that Suso is generally acknowledged as the best known of the fourteenth-century mystics. He acknowledges the works of Meister Eckhart to be the cornerstone of German mysticism but he, like James Clark, points out that these works have been incompletely reconstructed and so it is impossible to form an accurate mental picture of the master. Suso, on the other hand, left behind a conclusive, personally revised publication of his principal writings and an autobiography which is a unique historical document of medieval German mysticism.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴Sister M. Ann Edward, trans., The Exemplar, Vol. I, (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1962), p. XXXIX.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. XV.

Suso was possessed by a resolution to be holy and so he determined to destroy the passions of his body by intense penitential practices. Undoubtedly he was sincere in his efforts to follow Christ, who was at this period, according to Rufus Jones, conceived of almost entirely in terms of his suffering.¹⁵⁶ Jones points out that Suso surpassed all the great mystics of this period in the excess of self-inflicted suffering and also in the frequency of his ecstasies. But, Jones adds that there might well be exaggeration in his descriptions of his ecstasies as there most certainly is in the descriptions of his sufferings.¹⁵⁷

In reading the works of Henry Suso one must take special cognizance of the very physical kind of mysticism in his Life as compared to the more quiet spiritual mysticism of his other works. Nicholas Heller believes that we must distinguish between Suso's actual experiences, what has been added, and what is imagination. He is of the opinion that the Life is the work of a pious biographer, and while it doubtless contains many actual occurrences, it is equally certain that fictitious legends were mingled so skillfully with historical truths that it is impossible to tell where fact ends and fiction begins.¹⁵⁸ Rufus Jones has arrived at a similar conclusion.

¹⁵⁶Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 50.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁵⁸Sister M. Ann Edward, op. cit., p. XVI.

I am convinced, along with many others, that Suso's Autobiography, dictated to his friend Elsbet Stagel, is the presentation of what ought to happen to an ideal Friend of God on his way to union with God rather than what in actual detail did happen in the flesh to this particular man.¹⁵⁹

Heller points out that while the great mystics like Suso and Eckhart placed much more value on inner rather than outer marvels, in the minds of the ordinary faithful a great saint was necessarily an exceptional being who was favoured by God with breath-taking proofs of His favour. Heller says that the picture of Suso presented in the Life is in complete accord with this popular fourteenth century idea, and this forces him to the conclusion that the Life is not the composition of Suso, Eckhart's disciple and author of the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and the Little Book of Truth, but of a warm-hearted biographer who venerated the master's features with a coating of his own mental attitude.¹⁶⁰

Suso followed the penitential path for more than twenty years, when finally, influenced by Meister Eckhart, he moved into a new and deeper way of life. He became an itinerant preacher and confessor and had many disciples and followers, especially in the convents for women. Rufus Jones says that his books quickly became the favourite spiritual guide-books of that and the following century, to be superseded only by The Imitation of Christ.¹⁶¹ Henry Suso died in 1365 or 1366 and was beatified by Pope Gregory XVI in 1831.

¹⁵⁹Jones, op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁶⁰Sister M. Ann Edward, op.cit., p. XXXI.

¹⁶¹Rufus Jones, op. cit., p. 154.

Works

Henry Suso's Life does tend to convince the modern reader that Suso was indeed completely pathological. If the Life is taken as a factual description, written by Suso himself, of his own personal experiences, then this conclusion is inevitable. It is a casebook of pathological experiences prompted by sensory deprivation of every sort. In Chapter II, on the feast of St. Agnes, it is reported that:

His soul was mysteriously transported either in the body or out of the body. Human words fail when it comes to describing what he saw and heard in this ecstasy; it was a vision without form or mode but containing in itself the form and mode of every pleasurable sensation. He did nothing but stare into the brilliant reflection, oblivious of himself and all creatures, forgetful of the passage of time. It was a sweet fortaste of heaven's unending bliss.¹⁶²

There are many supernatural experiences of this nature recorded in Suso's Life. In Chapter II there is the vision in which the Christ-child sang heavenly hymns to him in tones of supernatural joy while a young man gave him a basket of strawberries. Later there is the vision in which Our Lady accompanied by Jesus gave Suso a drink from a transparent pitcher; during the following night the heavenly Mother favoured him with a drink of the delicious nectar flowing from her heart.¹⁶³ A list of these and the many other similar experiences is provided by Nicholas Heller in the Introduction to Volume I of The Exemplar. However, in the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and the Little Book of Truth Suso stresses that the visions are not to be taken literally but figuratively.

¹⁶²Sister M. Ann Edward , op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 45.

The visions which will be related hereafter did not take place in physical form; they are merely similitudes.¹⁶⁴

In the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom Suso often repeats that it is necessary for men to perform penitential works in order to free themselves from the bondage of the senses. He believed that suffering was times purchase-money of eternity's enjoyment. However, he also emphasized the necessity of prudence, saying that these exercises were not an end in themselves but only the means for the attainment of perfection.

The performance of penitential practices, sometimes in a manner repugnant to our fastidiousness, was an essential element of the medieval spirit as it is of every conscientious imitation of Christ, not as an end in itself, but as a means to the end, the conquest of the body in order to obtain the soul's freedom. (...) Suso took to heart St. Augustine's phrase, "through Christ as man, to Christ as God"--the explanation of all medieval Christian mysticism--and lived up to it completely, not only by meditating on Christ's passion but by imitating him.¹⁶⁵

It is important to emphasize that for Suso, as indeed for Eckhart and Tauler, it was necessary that man imitate the earthly life of Jesus Christ as closely as possible. Suso emphasized the suffering of Jesus more than the other two great mystics, and even admitting that much of what is recounted in his Life may in fact be fiction in order to enhance his reputation, he undoubtedly practiced corporal asceticism. He refers continually throughout his works to the necessity and the glory of suffering in a spirit of love, with the remembrance of the infinitely greater suffering endured on our behalf by Jesus Christ.

¹⁶⁴ Sister M. Ann Edward, Trans., The Exemplar, Vol. II (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1962), p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Sister M. Ann Edward, op. cit., Vol. I., p. XXXII.

For a long time after the Servitor's conversion God had treated him as a child, pampering him with spiritual sweetness. Our Lord finally rebuked him, saying: "Knowest thou not that I am the door through which all true Friends of God must pass if they wish to arrive at eternal bliss? If thou wouldst truly arrive at my naked divinity thou must tread the thorny path of my suffering humanity." Having learned that true love for Christ Crucified demands imitation, he decided to conquer his ease-loving nature by chastising the flesh so that the soul might go free.¹⁶⁶

All who suffer, look at me and listen. We tainted members of Christ our worthy head should find consolation in the thought that God's lovable Son suffered before us and had not a day without hurt during his thirty three earthly years. (...) Therefore, as staunch followers of our fearless leader, let us glory in the cross. If suffering brought us no other gain than that by our griefs and pains we grow in likeness to Christ, our prototype, it would still be a priceless benefit.¹⁶⁷

The Servitor (as Suso is referred to in his Life) performed his torturous practices from his eighteenth to his fortieth year. Then he was told in a vision, to discontinue these penances which were, after all, only a good beginning to a taming of his restless temperament. He must now die to himself by complete detachment, give up depending on creatures, receive everything from God and live in undisturbed peace.¹⁶⁸ After he had lived a number of years in this strict solitude, God revealed to him that he should now devote himself to the spiritual welfare of his neighbour.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

In Part Two of his Life Suso engages in dialogue with a nun, Elsbeth Stigel, who had heard of Eckhart's doctrine of the naked God-head, the nullity of all creatures, the submersion of oneself into the Nothingness. She asked Suso to direct her on the right course, in the high ideals of Eckhart. But Suso counselled that she was not ready for this.

This doctrine, although good in itself, had proved to be a hindrance to her because lack of education and experience disqualified her for making the necessary distinctions between the sense and spirit.¹⁷⁰

Suso advised her not to hanker after mystical experiences because such longings might easily lead her into dangerous aberrations. He pointed out that true holiness does not consist in fair words but in good works.¹⁷¹

One reason for Suso's concern may well have been his desire to save Elsbeth Stigel from the dangers of unorthodox speculations. He spends all of chapter forty-seven showing how untutored speculative thinking leads into the error of pantheism.

Man arrives at the deep abyss of conceited reasonableness wherein many mortals have perished. (...) When the mental eye catches the first glimpse of the vast spiritual horizon lying before him and he tastes for the first time the pure delight which is hidden in the knowledge of truth, in the enjoyment of divine consolation, in a perception of the ever-present now of eternity, and other similar matters he is greatly impressed at the change which has taken place within himself. In the partial understanding of the eternal, uncreated reason in himself

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 96.

and in all creatures, he discovers that formerly he was like a poor blind beggar, athirst for God and far removed from his presence. But now it seems to him that he is full of God, and that there is nothing which is not God, and that God and all creatures are a single unity.¹⁷²

He grasps high matters too quickly in this immature way and so his mind bubbles like wine in the state of fermentation.¹⁷³

Suso then goes on to explain to Elsbeth Stigel the results of this error.

Next he applies himself wholeheartedly to these principles or to others like them which he has learned from someone who is as inexperienced as he himself and in whom he has placed absolute confidence. Believing that perfection consists in ignoring all creatures he now pays no attention to whether an object is good or evil, from heaven or hell, an angel or a devil -- they even despise Christ's suffering humanity -- because they want to contemplate God alone and are too dull to realize that although God is the first principle of all creation every creature is, nevertheless, a distinct entity.¹⁷⁴

This passage puts Suso right in the centre of the theistic camp and here directly opposed to the Brethren of the Free Spirit who were promoting the doctrine of pantheism. It seems hardly credible that Suso too should have been accused of heresy and compelled to appear before the order's tribunal to vindicate his teachings.

Suso is consistent in his support of theism.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 147.

Holiness advances side by side with the self-forgetfulness which naturally results from contemplative absorption in God, and so the ecstatic soul forgets everything created because God has become all in all. Although this soul sees everything in God, every creature, nevertheless, retains his own individual substance. There are some blind and inexperienced persons who either cannot or will not take note of this apt distinction.¹⁷⁵

For Suso, although he recognized the fact that while in ecstasy the individual may experience God as all in all, creature is separate from Creator.

After he has made these basic concessions to orthodoxy, which are meant for those untrained and unprepared for higher things as Elsbeth Stagel was in the beginning, he goes on to qualify this in the light of Meister Eckhart's teachings, and to encourage Elsbeth Stagel to go on in her spiritual quest.

After the devout daughter had been well-formed in all points of sanctity, interior and exterior (...) and had also made considerable progress in imitating Christ the true way, the Servitor wrote to her: "Dear daughter, the time is now right for you to advance higher and fly out of the beginner's nest of sensible consolation. Act like a spirited young eagle by spreading your well-developed wings, I mean your soul's higher faculties, into the contemplative heights of a blessed, perfect life."¹⁷⁶

However, a well-trying, judicious person who has freed himself at the cost of much self-denial from all sinful attachments, and now serves God fervently, can in a certain sense, get rid of God, that is, in the sense of a God to be feared by the sinner. (...) Also, after persevering a long time in this warfare

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

and finding that the flesh has become obedient to the spirit, man realizes his own powerlessness and turns away from his own self. He dies to himself, yields himself unreservedly to God's immensity, and in this prepossession his spirit arrives, I know not how, into a forgetting and losing of his own self, as St, Paul says: "It is now no longer I that live." Thus, man keeps the spirit as to its essence but frees himself of it in the sense of being subject to it.¹⁷⁷

Suso goes on to talk about this higher state in chapter fifty-two of his Life. Suso, like Eckhart, stressed the dependence of man upon the grace of God.

Mystic union is that point where the soul arrives at abandonment of self and all creatures in the naked Nothingness of the Godhead. This unfathomable abyss, the ground of God, is hidden to all except those with whom God wills to share his own life. After having sought him patiently and resignedly, those chosen ones will eventually know him with his knowledge.¹⁷⁸

The memory of Meister Eckhart and his Cologne lectures pervades the Little Book of Truth. One purpose of this book was to combat the errors of the Brethren of the Free Spirit. They had appropriated certain of Eckhart's paradoxical sentences and claimed to be his disciples. Suso denied them this right: He does not really attempt to vindicate Meister Eckhart, he just denies this group the right to take certain sections of Eckhart's works out of context while ignoring all his orthodox statements. In the Prologue to this book Suso again points out the dangers of speculative thinking but here he stresses that one should proceed non-the-less.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 174.

There was a man in Christ, who in his young days had exercised according to the outward man all the practices which beginners are wont to exercise. But inwardly he remained untrained in the highest abandonment. (...) He once heard someone addressing him: "You should know that interior abandonment leads men to the highest truth." He was warned that, beneath the brightness of this vision was hidden a deceptive abyss of inordinate liberty, and serious injury for holy Christianity. He was frightened by this and for a long time resisted the interior call within himself. (...) But one day he had an ecstasy which strengthened him. A ray from the divine truth shone within him and revealed to him that he should not permit himself to be distressed because of this, a condition which has ever been and would always be. Evil hides itself behind good, but we should not reject the good because of the evil.¹⁷⁹

In the Little Book of Truth Suso talks in great detail about the experience of ecstasy and about the Godhead. He calls the ecstatic experience a foretaste of heaven. As is illustrated in the above quotation, Suso thinks of a rapture of this sort as a supernatural ray that darts from heaven and provides man with the ecstasy of union with God, which is a foretaste of things to come for those who have lived the life of Christ. However, here also he explains that while man may experience a oneness with the world or the universe when he is actually in a state of ecstasy and feel that he is one with God, this experience or feeling is not true. Man always remains creature and God remains God.

The soul always remains a creature. However, when it is lost in the Nothing it does not consider at all in what way it is then a creature, or what the Nothing is, or whether it is a creature or not, or whether it is united or not.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹Sister M. Ann Edward, trans., The Exemplar, Vol. II, (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1962), p. 131.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 149.

All this is to be understood only according to human comprehension, according to which man does not consider this or that in the transcendent vision of the Godhead. It is not to be considered according to the essence, in which every being remains what it is.¹⁸¹

Later in this same book Suso becomes very specific in his defense of theism against the pantheistic challenge of the Brethren of the Free Spirit. They are represented in this book by the character called The Wildman.

Man is never so completely annihilated in this Nothing but that his intellect remembers the distinction of his origin, and his reason retains its free will.¹⁸²

He emphasizes the point that God is always other than man by answering a statement from the Wildman that Master Eckhart denied all distinctions. (This was one of Eckhart's condemned propositions.)

Enough has been said already to show that it is to be understood of our comprehension, not of our essence.¹⁸³

The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom is a book of practical mysticism written later than the Little Book of Truth. In it Suso states his central beliefs much more clearly than before. The prologue points out that the visions related by Suso did not take place in physical form, but were merely similitudes. It is also pointed out that the instruction is in dialogue form, not because he actually spoke or heard himself addressed, but in order to make the doctrine more attractive. The stress in this book is on love and suffering which, taken together, really

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 101.

summarize Suso's own life.

If you desire to gaze upon my uncreated divinity, you must first learn to know and love me in my suffering humanity, because that is the quickest way to eternal happiness.¹⁸⁴

No one can arrive at divine heights or taste mystical sweetness without passing through my human bitterness. (...) The best proof anyone can give me that he appreciates my passion is to endure it with me by the evidence of works. (...) Although tears are pleasing to me, it was not to be wept over, but to be imitated, that I endured such a cruel death.¹⁸⁵

In chapter twelve, Suso has Eternal Wisdom explain why it is not possible for man to remain in the ecstatic state. The Servitor has been given just a glimpse of heaven while lost in the ecstatic experience and he has asked to remain.

The time to remain here has not yet come. You must first fight many a dangerous battle. This glimpse has been granted to you so that you can cast a swift retrospective glance at it in all your sufferings and forget your pains.¹⁸⁶

In this book, as in the others, Suso clearly states that whether or not a man attains to this re-birth, which is true union with God, depends ultimately on the grace of God.

Every man carries within himself the seeds of divinity and of mischief: which will develop depends on whether he is submissive or rebellious to grace.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 10 and 13.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁸⁷ Sister M. Ann Edward, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 155.

However, man has a responsibility as well.

This is my conviction, whoever craves immense reward and eternal salvation, sublime knowledge and profound wisdom, equality in joy and sorrow, full security from all evil, and a draught of your bitter passion and extraordinary sweetness, must constantly hold you, Jesus Crucified, before the eyes of his heart.¹⁸⁸

In chapter twenty-two Suso summarizes more fully the truth that will lead man to true union with God.

The truest, the most necessary, the swiftest doctrine which you can find in any book which will instruct you in a few words concerning all truth, and lead you to the summit of a pure life is this: (1) Keep yourself detached from all men. (2) Keep yourself disengaged from all images introduced from outside. (3) Free yourself from everything which could bring disturbance, attachment and trouble. (4) Elevate your mind constantly to a secret divine contemplation in which you keep me Jesus Crucified as a fixed object before your eyes, and from which they never wander.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸Sister M. Ann Edward, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 59.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 92.

Chapter V

JOHN TAULER

Introduction

John Tauler was born at Strassburg about 1300 A.D. He entered a Dominican convent in 1315 and after studying at Cologne and Paris he returned to Strassburg to officiate as a Dominican priest. Rufus Jones says that Tauler was a loyal son of the Church, but for him the heart of religion was always to be found in personal fellowship with God in the fathomless deeps of the inner life.¹⁹⁰

Tauler became a member of the like-minded group called the Friends of God. This was a revivalist society, according to W.R. Inge,¹⁹¹ the members of which got their wisdom "not by superior scholarship, not by ordination, but by inward Light and by closer correspondence with the will of God."¹⁹²

Jones characterizes Tauler as a very different type from Meister Eckhart. He says that Tauler was not a genius, not a learned schoolman and not an original pathbreaker. Rather, he was much closer to the common human level and he spoke in simple, affectionate tones.¹⁹³

Susannah Winkworth says that the most striking characteristic of Tauler's sermons is his tremendous sympathy with the spirit of

¹⁹⁰Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), p. 97.

¹⁹¹W. R. Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1964), p. 180.

¹⁹²Jones, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁹³Ibid., pp. 97-98.

Christ's life, and especially with Christ's infinite sorrow over the sins of others. She says that this is indeed a characteristic of the Friends of God in general, but she believes that it is expressed with greater force and beauty in Tauler's sermons than in the other writers of this same period.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Susannah Winkworth, trans., Tauler's Life And Sermons (London: Allenson and Co., Ltd.), p. 143.

Works

It is evident in the sermons of John Tauler that this great Friend of God stressed many of the same points that are stressed in the works of Eckhart and Suso: that we must follow Christ in his suffering humanity if we are to be with him in his divinity; that only through grace do we receive the love by which we love God; that it is through this love, given by grace, that we achieve inward union with God; that outward works naturally flow from this inward union; that God is to receive the credit for all good works.

Tauler stresses that man must turn inwards to escape the distractions of the senses and to find God.

Now there are two sorts of men who follow after the word of Christ. The one sort hear it with joy, and follow after it as far as they are able with their reason to perceive its truth, and take it in just in the same way as their reason takes in what is concerned with the world of sense. (...) But the other sort turn their thoughts inward, and remain resting on the inmost foundation of their souls simply looking to see the hand of God with the eyes of their enlightened reason, and await from within their summons and their call to go whither God would have them. And this they received from God without any means. (...) For those who perceive God's gifts and leading from within whether by the help of means or without means, do receive them from their fountain-head, and carry them back again unto their fountain-head in the Divine goodness.¹⁹⁵

This is precisely what Eckhart was saying. Our knowledge wherewith we know God is given by God in the ground of our soul. Tauler goes on to paraphrase Eckhart.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 204.

How can we come to perceive this direct leading of God? By a careful looking at home, and abiding within the gates of thine own soul.¹⁹⁶

There is a notation with Tauler's Sermon II, for the Second Sunday in Advent, that it is believed to be by Meister Eckhart.¹⁹⁷ If it was not actually given by Eckhart then it was certainly given by Tauler while under his direct influence. In this sermon the need to free the mind from all things is stressed.

I have a power in my soul which enables me to perceive God: I am as certain as that I live that nothing is so near to me as God. He is nearer to me than I am to myself. (...) If the soul is to know God she must forget herself and lose herself, for while she is looking at and thinking about herself, she is not looking at and thinking about God; but when she loses herself in God, and lets go of all things, then she finds herself again in God.¹⁹⁸

While Tauler believed that man may achieve union with God only through God's grace he emphasized that man has a freedom and a responsibility to prepare himself for this union. Man must make ready his own soul.

In all this world God covets and requires but one thing only, and that He desires so exceeding greatly that He gives His whole might and energy thereto. This one thing is, that He may find that good ground which He has laid in the noble mind of man made fit and ready for Him to exercise His divine agency thereon.¹⁹⁹

This freedom to prepare or not to prepare is mentioned by Eckhart and Suso as well. Man prepares this ground by cutting his attachment to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

the things of the senses and turning inward. When man has done this, when he sees everything as nothing, God enters the ground of his soul and he is born again.

In Sermon III, for the Third Sunday in Advent, Tauler uses the terms to "come out" or to "go out" to describe what a man must do to be born again.

The first way is to come out from the world, that is, from the craving after worldly advantages, and to despise them. (...) The second kind of coming out is to loose thy hold on outward things, to cease from thy vain anxieties, thy selfish wishing and planning, and to turn thy thoughts inward, that thou mayest learn to know thyself. (...) The third kind of going is to give up thine own ease and thine own way, and to devote thyself, so far as thou art able, to thy neighbour. (...) For this is the commandment of the Lord, "That ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (...) The fourth kind of going out is to forsake everything but God, so that our love towards God should be the strongest love we have.²⁰⁰

John Tauler suggests that there are twenty-four tokens by which one may identify the proper, truly reasonable, enlightened, contemplative man.²⁰¹

These tokens are very similar to the list quoted earlier from the works of Meister Eckhart so there is no need to include them here. It is significant that both Eckhart and Tauler begin their lists with the adjunct to love one another.

John Tauler was a practical working Christian. When he taught the people that they must forsake the creature and cleave to God alone,

²⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 213-215.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 44-47.

it was no shutting up of oneself within the confines of one's own consciousness that he was preaching. He was continually admonishing to works of love, while stressing that the value of the works is measured not by the nature of the act but by the obedience and love involved in its performance. Eckhart, Suso and Tauler believed that man loves God with the love by which God loves Himself. This love is given to man by God and it is by this love that man loves his neighbour. Good works naturally flow from this love, since God is working in and through man. And Tauler practiced what he preached. When the Black Death came to Strassburg, he devoted himself to administering the sacraments and carrying consolation to the sick and dying.

Tauler believed that a Christian, to be "born again", must follow Jesus Christ in his suffering humanity and contemplate on the unspeakable suffering of his Lord, a suffering which was infinitely greater than his own in that it was for all of mankind. In chapter seven of Tauler's Life and History his spiritual advisor, a layman called simply "the man," says to him:

For know that you must needs walk in that path of which our Lord spoke to that young man;-- you must take up your cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ as His example. (...) And what time is left, you shall set before you the sufferings of your Lord, and contemplate your life in the mirror of his. (...) And then, when our Lord sees that the time is come, He will make of you a new man so that you shall be born again of God.²⁰²

And later in this same chapter "the man" answers a question from the Master and says:

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Yet you begged me to show you the shortest way to the highest perfectness. Now I know no shorter nor surer way than to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁰³

Chapter ten of the History and Life consists of a sermon in which Tauler refers to Christ as the true Bridegroom of the soul. He tells how the soul is to follow Christ in true shamefaced, humble, and patient resignation, and how Christ tries the soul beforehand in various ways, and finally accepts her lovingly.

He who desires to receive with the Son of God a man's reward, must suffer from and with the wicked of this world.²⁰⁴

"Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." What shorter, easier, more intelligible lesson could be set us? But we must give our minds with willing industry to read it over and over again attentively, and practice it in our life, ever looking to the admirable model of the divine humanity of Christ.²⁰⁵

The last quotation was taken from Tauler's Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany and began with the words of Jesus taken from Mathew XI, 29. The next quotation is taken from his Sermon for Ash Wednesday and begins with the words of St. Paul taken from Galatians II, 19.

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. (...) The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." In these words we have a wholesome admonition to strive after such a life as that Christ may be glorified in us, and His bitter grief and cross may be manifested in our mortal body, to the bettering of our neighbour and ourselves.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 255.

²⁰⁶ Susannah Winkworth, trans., Tauler's Life And Sermons (London: Allenson and Co., Ltd.), p. 272.

He concludes this sermon with the wish:

That we may be nailed with Christ to the cross of his humanity,--that we may be admitted to the eternal beholding of the brightness of His Godhead, may the Almighty Trinity grant and help us.²⁰⁷

The point is well made, that we must follow Christ if we are to achieve mystical union.

Tauler spoke out plainly against the pantheism of the Brethren of the Free Spirit.

From these two errors proceedeth the third, which is the worst of all; the persons who are entangled therein call themselves beholders of God, and they may be known by the carnal peace which they have through their emptiness. They think that they are free from sins, and are united to God without any means whatsoever, and that they have got above all subjection to the Holy Church, and above the commandments of God, and above all works of virtue; for they think this emptiness to be so noble a thing that it may not be hindered by aught else, whatsoever it be. These people are, in many points, like unto the true men; but in this are they false, that they hold everything whereunto they are inwardly impelled, whether good or bad, to proceed from the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit worketh never unprofitable things in a man, such as be contrary to the life of Christ or Holy Scripture, and therefore are they deceived. (...) Behold all such errors are messengers of Antichrist, preparing the way before him unto unbelief and damnation.²⁰⁸

In his sermons Tauler talked in some detail about the experience of union itself. He equated this with the "born again" experience of the disciples at Pentecost. However, he made quite a significant distinction between the types of experiences possible when this union occurs.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 281.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 159 and 161.

When the Holy Spirit was given to St. John, then was the door of heaven opened unto him. This happens to some with a convulsion of the mind, to others calmly and gradually.²⁰⁹

Here Tauler is in agreement with Eckhart and Suso. Some experiences of union may in fact be ecstatic. But the ecstasy is not an essential ingredient. The experience may be, instead, a gradual welling up inside of the love of God.

Tauler himself had an ecstatic experience. After severe corporal asceticism to control the outward man:

In that same hour I was deprived of all my natural reason; but the time seemed all too short to me. And when I was left to myself again I saw a supernatural mighty wonder and sign. (...) Now know, dear sir, that in that self-same short hour I received more truth and more illumination in my understanding than all the teachers could ever teach me from now till the Judgement Day by word of mouth, and with all their natural learning and science.²¹⁰

However traumatic the experience may have been Tauler realized that the ecstasy itself was not what was important. What was important was the infusion of God into his soul. This was possible only through God's grace. Undoubtedly, Tauler would have recognized that ecstasy may occur in many circumstances where there is no accompanying union at all.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 318.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

One of Timothy Leary's strong arguments for the use of LSD is that it allows one to explore the hidden depths of one's own consciousness. He stresses that for three thousand years our greatest prophets and philosophers have been telling us to look within.²¹¹ This is certainly true of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler. They stress that the Kingdom of God is within and that one must close his mind to outward distractions and turn inward to find God.

For these fourteenth century mystics God cannot be found or known as He really is in His essential Being (Godhead) in the finite things of time and space. In order to truly find God, the mind must not turn outward and be absorbed by the world of this and that. Rather it must turn inward to the deepest part of the soul and kill all attachments to outward things of the senses. In this deepest part of the soul the transcendent God comes into contact and union with the individual. The essential contact is made by God. Man achieves union because of God's grace. Man cannot, by his own efforts, ever reach or discover God.

Psychedelic drugs are said to be mind expanding or mind manifesting. After taking the drug one sees more of one's own mind. The Psychedelic Experience says that the drug induced experience is

²¹¹ Timothy Leary, "The Psychedelic Experience: Its Production and Interpretation", The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 208.

a journey to new realms of consciousness.²¹² Timothy Leary goes a step further than this and says that the experience is a new way to find God within.²¹³ The emphasis here is on the searching and finding. The psychedelic drug is simply a more modern research tool.

The Psychedelic Experience tells its readers that whatever a person experiences under the influence of the drug, whether it be heaven or hell, it is his own mind which creates it.²¹⁴ All the drug is said to do is to take its takers on a journey to new realms within their own consciousness. This journey has been facilitated by a variety of ways in the past. All were arduous. The psychedelic drugs just make the journey accessible to more people.²¹⁵ There is no talk in this book about union with something other than the individual; there is no talk about love, and there is no talk about grace.

The interdependence of love and grace is central to the Christian concept of mystical union as expressed by Eckhart, Suso and Tauler. For them union cannot occur without these two ingredients. Man may prepare for union by killing the distractions of his senses, by following as closely as possible in a spirit of love the earthly life of Christ, and by keeping the image of Christ crucified before the eyes of his soul. The rest depends of God.

Here then is a fundamental difference in approach between the fourteenth century Christian mystic and the psychedelic mystic. The latter

²¹²T. Leary, R. Metzner, R. Alpert, The Psychedelic Experience (New York: University Books Inc., 1966), p. 11.

²¹³T. Leary, The Pierre Berton Show.

²¹⁴T. Leary, R. Metzner, R. Alpert, op. cit., p. 14.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 11.

is using the drug to explore, to search, to find. Eckhart, Suso and Tauler might not deny him the right to explore his own mind. They would deny the possibility of him finding God. For these Christians, man does not find God, God finds man.

God is thought of by these Christian mystics as being, in His essence, somehow absolutely separate from man. It is through His grace that He comes to man in union. But this is a union of love only. Creature and Creator remain essentially separate. As has been indicated, this concept is not as clearly presented in the recorded works of Meister Eckhart as it is in the works of Suso and Tauler.

The writers on the subject of the psychedelic experience talk about a feeling of unity with the world or the universe. This is sometimes thought of as a union with God. They perceive the world as moving, pulsating, and themselves as pulsating with it.²¹⁶ They are aware of the world and themselves as energy, and they feel that they could melt into their environment.²¹⁷

The psychedelic experience, whether interpreted in religious terms or not, is a brief period of altered consciousness. Eckhart, Suso and Tauler are consistent in their warning that one must be careful not to mistake elation or ecstasy for true mystical union. They are highly suspicious of any ecstatic experience and of any

²¹⁶ Alan Watts, "The Individual as Man/World", The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 47.

²¹⁷ William Braden, The Private Sea (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), p. 30.

"truth" which might be attained during the experience. For them mystical union is a new life in a union of love with God. God now dwells within the individual and works through him. The individual now truly sees all things as nothing, but he does still see all things.

An essential difference between the two ideas of mystical union is seen here. The psychedelic mystic, in a few hours of altered consciousness, feels that he is one with his environment, or one with the universe. He sometimes interprets this as mystical union with God. The Christian mystic strives to prepare himself for union with a Being who is essentially other than himself. It is not a realization that one is made of the same atoms and molecules as the rest of the universe that is the great experience for the Christian mystics, but rather the realization that something has been added to one's own soul. This addition is God.

R.C. Zaehner says that elation and exaltation is a state of mind common to saints and sinners alike, and that this state can be produced by alcohol or drugs. One must never mistake this state with the grace that comes from God.²¹⁸ W.R. Inge points out that the Christian mystics care nothing about the states of consciousness; and if they thought that their revelations had no reality outside their own minds, they would conclude that they had been grievously deceived.²¹⁹

While highly suspicious of any insights gained in the ecstatic state, and while distinguishing clearly between the ecstatic state and

²¹⁸R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism: Sacred and Profane (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 25.

²¹⁹W.R. Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1964), p.VII.

the unitive life, the Christian mystics did not entirely discount it as a part of their mystical experience. Tauler believed that mystical union, or re-birth, may occur in some people all of a sudden in an ecstatic experience, while in others it may occur slowly and gradually. Eckhart believed that, in the main, the hallucinations and other psychological phenomena brought on by penitential practices were merely tricks of the mind. However, he does admit that sometimes the state of ecstasy may come from God. He says that God uses the state as a lure to attract certain people.²²⁰ Suso says somewhat the same thing. He calls the state a divine ray, a foretaste of heaven.²²¹ However, as valuable as this transitory experience might be, true mystical union for Eckhart, Suso and Tauler was a lifetime union.

In Sermon XC, Eckhart says that three things prevent a man from knowing God. The first is time, the second body, the third multiplicity or number.²²² It is stated in the Psychedelic Experience that the characteristic features of the drug experience are the transcendence of verbal concepts, of time-space dimensions, and of ego or identity.²²³ Is it possible to speculate, as Aldous Huxley does, that the psychedelic drugs may be a means to grace? Timothy Leary says that the ecstatic states that used to be induced by harsh penitential practices can now be induced by drugs. There is much evidence to support this statement. Because the drug accomplishes this end Timothy Leary considers that the

²²⁰C. de B. Evans, trans., Meister Eckhart, Vol. II (London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. 14.

²²¹Sister M. Ann Edward, trans., The Exemplar, Vol. II (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1962), p. 131.

²²²Evans, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 227.

²²³T. Leary, R. Metzner, R. Alpert, The Psychedelic Experience (New York: University Books Inc., 1966), p. 71.

drug serves the same purpose as the harsh disciplines of former times. This might be true if Christian mystical union was the feeling of oneness experienced in the ecstasy. But it is not. Therefore, it cannot rightly be claimed that the drugs are a means to grace in the same sense as the penitential practices.

The penitential practices served at least two purposes. One reason for engaging in this self inflicted suffering and discipline was to force oneself to follow more and more closely the earthly life of Christ. The mystics believed that they had to follow Christ in his suffering humanity if they were to be with him in his divinity. Therefore, the suffering itself had an important purpose. Secondly, they believed that by these practices they could better control their passions and the distractions of their senses. With these distractions controlled their minds could turn inward and they would be ready to receive the grace of God. This latter belief is questionable. Eckhart himself says that love is a far more useful and effective method than these practices.

It is clear that the taking of drugs does not fulfill the first purpose of the penitential practices. And, from all reports, the psychedelic drugs do not lessen sensory distractions. Rather, they heighten them. Colour, sound, taste are appreciated more under LSD. Sexual pleasures may be greatly heightened. These are some of the distractions that the Christian mystics were working to limit or destroy.

The psychedelic drugs do help the mind to concentrate. Dr. Sidney Cohen says that under the drug the ability to exclude the clutter of random distractions becomes possible. The complete focus is on the object; extraneous time-space considerations cease to impinge.²²⁴ The

²²⁴ Sidney Cohen, The Beyond Within (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 43.

problem is that in order to achieve this state of concentration the person is cut off from all normal involvement in the world. Eckhart points out that the man who is to have a mind ready to receive God must learn to find the solitude within wherever he may be. He does not drop out of life or cut himself off from outward contacts. His solitude is a state of mind which does not at all interfere with his ability to function in the world.

The great Christian mystics of the fourteenth century did not drop out of their social contacts and responsibilities in order to achieve mystical union nor did they drop out after it had come to them. They went out into the world to work, and to live the life of Christ. For them, good works were the natural outcome of true mystical union. Their mystical experience was a unitive life, with God working in and through them.

Aldous Huxley says that while the psychedelic drugs open up the contemplative way of Mary, they shut the door on the practical way of Martha. He says that the drug does give access to contemplation, but to a contemplation that is incompatible with action.²²⁵ If this were true, judged against the Christian mysticism of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler, the drugs could only be considered as a snare and a delusion. However, this is not completely true. It is possible that a Christian who takes a psychedelic drug may, because of his experience, feel a closer union with his God and may be prompted to work in the imitation of Christ.

²²⁵ Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 35.

Gerald Heard writes in The Psychedelic Reader that these insights gained while under the influence of the drug can be remembered, and, if the person wishes, can be incorporated into his everyday living.²²⁶ Timothy Leary, writing in the same book, refers to the psychedelic experience as the deepest religious experience of his life.²²⁷ In his television interview with Pierre Berton, Leary called the psychedelic experience "life-changing".²²⁸ Huston Smith points out that people who have taken LSD do claim to experience revelations into the basic questions and do attribute life-changes to their visions.²²⁹

In his thesis Walter Pahnke says that after the interviews had been concluded with his test group (in the Good Friday study) he was left with the overwhelming impression that the experience had made a profound impact (especially in terms of religious feeling and thinking) on the lives of eight out of ten of the subjects who had been given the drug. The subjects felt that this experience had motivated them to appreciate more deeply the meaning of their lives, to gain more depth and authenticity in ordinary living, and to rethink their philosophies of life and values. Pahnke points out that the fact that the experience took place in the context of a worship service with the use of symbols which were familiar and meaningful to the participants appeared to provide

²²⁶Gerald Heard, "Can This Drug Enlarge Man's Mind", The Psychedelic Reader (New York: University Books Inc., 1965), p. 3.

²²⁷Timothy Leary, op. cit., p. 191.

²²⁸Timothy Leary, The Pierre Berton Show (The video tape recording of this program is available in the McMaster University video tape library).

²²⁹Huston Smith, "Do Drugs Have Religious Import", The Journal of Philosophy, Volume LXI, No. 18 (October 1, 1964), p. 520.

a useful framework within which to derive meaning and integration from the experience, both at the time and later.²³⁰

The great mystics were all aware of the great difficulty in determining whether or not a person actually had achieved true union with God. Eckhart lists twenty-four signs by which one may identify a genuine seer of God. Tauler lists twenty-four tokens for the same purpose. However, both Eckhart and Tauler stress that one should not judge by the deeds alone since God judges on the motive behind the deeds. Tauler says that the nature of the act is not important, but rather the obedience and love involved in its performance.

However, since we cannot know the motive behind a deed, if we are going to place any criterion on the claim of the psychedelic mystics to have experienced mystical union with God through the ingestion of a drug, and on the claim that this mystical union is the same as the union of the great Christian mystics, it must be one of works. They are going to have to prove their claim by lives overflowing with love translated into good works.

R.C. Zaehner says it would appear that we can never be absolutely certain what the source of any overwhelming ecstatic religious experience really is: the mere fact that it is overwhelmingly strong does not in itself prove that it is from God. He says that the mystic who is genuinely inspired by God will show this to the world by the holiness of his life and by his abiding humility in recognition that God is now working in and through him.²³¹

²³⁰Walter N. Pahnke, *Drugs and Mysticism* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 237.

²³¹R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 192.

In summary, this writer has serious reservations about the possibility of any real similarity existing between the lifetime mystical union of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler and the feeling of mystical union experienced while in the ecstasy of the psychedelic drug state. It would seem that the most that may be claimed for the drug-induced experience of some people (usually in a supportive religious environment) is that it may be a "foretaste of heaven". If their experience is to be considered as anything more, then, judged by the standards of Eckhart, Suso and Tauler, they must show to the world that God is working in them.

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