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THE INFLUENCE OF THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS  
ON CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS EXEMPLIFIED IN  
REPRESENTATIVE MYSTICAL WRITERS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE INFLUENCE OF THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS  
ON CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS EXEMPLIFIED IN  
REPRESENTATIVE MYSTICAL WRITERS.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Purpose of the Thesis Stated.

The purpose of this thesis is to discover to what extent the writings of Saint John have influenced the thought of Christian mysticism.

B. The Method Pursued in the Treatment of Sources.

The method of procedure followed in carrying out this purpose shall be, first, to discover from the mystical writers what appears to be the characteristic doctrines of their system of thought, and then, to ascertain to what extent the writings of Saint John have influenced the development of these characteristic doctrines.

In the study of the mystical writers, citations are taken from various authors who make direct use of the Johannine writings. Passages are also cited from these same writings which show a reflection of the thought of Saint John, even though no direct quotations from his writings are made. An effort is made in the latter instance to quote a sufficient amount of the text to show the context of the passage as well as to give the bare thought. In this connection it should be noted that often the influence of Saint John will appear not in a direct reference to his writings but rather in the manner in which the thought is expressed, the vocabulary used or in what might be described as the "spirit" of the passage.

For this reason more direct quotations are employed than would otherwise be used in a thesis of this type. It is difficult to paraphrase some of the mystical descriptions without losing the "touch" or impression desired to be conveyed to the reader. The aim of this thesis, as stated above, is to discover the Johannine influence and no attempt is made to develop any doctrine of this system of thought beyond the scope of Saint John's influence.

Again, citations have been chosen from those writers who seem to have had a definite influence in the formation of the theology of Christian mysticism. In other words, writers have been selected as representative of various periods of the history of the church and of the various nationalities. For instance, among others, the influence of Saint John is traced in the works of Thomas a Kempis, whose *Imitation of Christ* has been a hand-book of devotion for pious minds for centuries; in the works of Meister Eckhart, whose teachings did much to shape the Christian thinking of his time, and who has been described as the "father of German mystics"<sup>1</sup>; in the works of Saint Juan of the Cross, who established various monasteries in Spain and left to his followers a well defined system of theology; in the works of Saint Teresa, who was the author of many writings and a co-worker with Saint Juan of the Cross; in the works of William Law, Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard, Julian of Norwich, Pascal, Jonathan Edwards and others whose positions as representative writers as well as influential ones are recognized. Among more recent writers citations are made from the writings of W. R. Inge and Evelyn Unterhill of

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1. Cf. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. XI

England and of Rufus Jones in America. The works of these modern writers have been influential in renewing an interest in Christian mysticism; and they also give the Johannine writings an influential place in the system as will be noted later.

Only those doctrines which are peculiar to mysticism are studied, and then, only those which occupy a prominent place in the system and are representative in their scope. Thus, this thesis does not purpose to list all of the influences which Saint John wrought to mystical theology nor does it purpose to list all of the doctrines which may be regarded as peculiar to this system of thought. As stated above, doctrines which are representative of the system as a whole are chosen from representative writers.

The following Johannine writings are included in the scope of this thesis:- The Gospel of Saint John, the First, the Second, and the Third Epistles. The traditional attitude in accepting the Johannine authorship of these writings is assumed in this thesis. The mystical writers make a rather extensive use of the Book of the Revelation, but inasmuch as there is no general agreement as to its interpretation, it is not included in this thesis.

#### G. The Significance of the Subject

If it is found that Saint John has had a distinct influence upon these representative writers in the development of their peculiar system of doctrine, then, it follows that the Apostle has had a vital influence on the centuries which have elapsed since his death. For no one, even though he be hostile to the mystical type of religion, will deny that the

system has played an important part in the history of the church. The very names of the writers quoted in this thesis demand respect for, if not agreement with, the thought expressed. A study of the influence of the mystic thinker in the shaping of church history is a most interesting one but it lies without the scope of this thesis.

William Law, for instance, finds the influence of the mystic in all ages of the history of the Church. He declares that inasmuch as they did not strive for worldly preferment or contribute to that type of learning use to scholastic controversial writers, they were not known to the public and their teachings were lost to the great mass of believers. Yet, Law continues, the inward life of the Church has always been nourished by the thought and testimony of the true mystic. For this reason they are always prominent at times of spiritual awakening - the life of the Church. And for this cause also they have been persecuted and despised."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. Liberal and Mystical Writings, p. 57. In summing up this influence of the mystics, Law thus writes: "They were deeply learned in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, not through the use of lexicons, or meditating upon critics, but because they had passed from death unto life. They highly reverence and excellently direct the true use of every thing that is outward in religion; but, like the Psalmist's King's daughter, they are all glorious within. They are truly sons of thunder, and sons of consolation; they break open the whited sepulchres; they awaken the heart and show it its filth and rottenness of death; but they leave it not till the Kingdom of Heaven is raised up within it. If a man has no desire but to be of the spirit of the gospel, to obtain all that renovation of life and spirit which alone can make him to be in Christ a new creature, it is a great unhappiness to him to be unacquainted with these writers, or to pass a day without reading something of what they wrote."

CHAPTER II

THE DEFINITION OF MYSTICISM



## Chapter II

### THE DEFINITION OF MYSTICISM

#### A. The Derivation and Application of the Term.

The term, mysticism, is derived from the Greek, *μυστικός*, and denotes one who has been initiated into mysteries or hidden things. It is thought by some scholars that the word was taken over from the Neo-Platonist.<sup>1</sup> The term has been in rather general use since the ninth century. It was especially common during the Middle Ages.

Moreover, the term has been applied to such varied and at times divergent conceptions of religious experience - covering practically every phase of man's religious experience from its crudest form of emotional ecstasy to the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit - that for many minds mysticism has come to have a repellent sense. However, Christian mysticism, as defined by its best expositors, appears to be a comparatively well-defined system of thought and is probably as amenable to definition as are the systems of theology which are opposed to it. It is not left as a matter of "private interpretation", as has been humorously suggested, but rather do its adherents claim for it the historical authority of Scripture and of tradition.

Mystics point out that the belief that man may attain to an immediate knowledge of God is of an ancient origin: That in the Old Testament we are told that Enoch walked with God; the patriarchs,

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1. Cf. New International Encyclopedia - Article on Mysticism.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, although their lives on many occasions were marred by human failings, yet are represented as often in direct communion with God. The greatest of the prophets were men who lived in the abiding realization of the presence of Jehovah. Isaiah heard the voice of God giving to him his commission to preach; Jeremiah, amid the falling walls of Jerusalem, was strengthened by his consciousness of the nearness of God. According to the mystic, these are experiences possible to all men. Such experiences reach their culmination in Christ. For Christ was always conscious of the Divine, and through a constant communion with God, he was able to abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine. In this perfect abiding or union "Christ became for all future time the pattern of the mystical life, while his personality, deeds, and words have formed ever since the chief subject matter wherein the genuine mystical mind has been nourished."<sup>1</sup>

In attempting to get a definition of mysticism one is apt to be impressed with the fact that few writers will give a definition of the system without identifying themselves rather vigorously as either for or against it. Dean W. R. Inge in his book, *Christian Mysticism*, offers an explanation of this fact by tracing its cause to a fundamental difference in the mode of thinking. There is what he terms a mystical type of thinker, and there is that type which has the legal trend. In many respects the two types are the antithesis of each other. This difference will be noted in the definitions given below. These definitions are taken from those writers who are unsympathetic towards mysticism in their thinking and are chosen as being fairly representative of a large group.

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1. *Encyclopedia Americana* - Article on *Mysticism*.

### B. Mysticism Defined by its Opponents.

In his article on Mysticism in the New International Encyclopedia, the writer describes it as a system of theology which would exclude the reasoning power of the intellect and trust entirely to the passive states of the mind, such as visions, ecstasy, etc. To this author it is an "experience which assumes to give immediate knowledge of an external Power, without the mediation of history or reason". It finds its basis, he continues, "in the exaltation of the automatic and passive states and the diminution of the active and the individual".

In his book, Degeneration, Nordau, places the source of mysticism in the morbid mind. He thus considers the whole system to be abnormal. It is, he writes, the state of mind, "in which the subject imagines that he perceives or divines unknown or inexplicable relations among phenomena, discerns in things hints at mysteries, and regards them as symbols by which a dark power seeks to unveil or at least to indicate, all sorts of marvels --- it is always connected with strong emotional excitement."<sup>1</sup>

Harnack defines mysticism as "rationalism applied to a sphere above reason". Hermann, the disciple of Harnack, finds that it is not common to the natural religious life, but rather is it a "piety, which feels that which is historical in the positive religion to be burdensome and so rejects it".<sup>2</sup>

Victor Cousin doubts the sincerity of the mystic and feels that the system is a "pretention to know God without intermediary, and, so to speak, face to face. For Mysticism, whatever is between God and us, hides him from us. Mysticism consists in substituting direct inspiration for indirect, ecstasy for reason, rapture for philosophy."<sup>3</sup>

1. Inge, Christian Mysticism - Appendix

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

In his *Hours with the Mystics*, R. A. Vaughan represents mysticism as due to the ignorance of its adherents. He defines it as that "form of error which mistakes for a divine manifestation the operation of a merely human faculty".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley, in his youth, was greatly influenced by the writings of Thomas a Kempis and William Law. Later in life, however, he turned against mysticism on account of what he termed its devitalizing, passive doctrines. In a letter to his brother he writes that it was the "rock" upon which his faith came nearest to being shipwrecked. Against this passive attitude towards life and the means of grace, he writes at length. His description of the system, as he sees it, is clear and logical and is representative of a large group of writers. He declares that its doctrines when put into practice produce a state where "men utterly divested of free will, of self-love and self-activity are entered into the passive state, and enjoy such a contemplation as is not only above faith, but above sight - such as is entirely free from images, thoughts and discourse, and never interpreted by sins of infirmity or voluntary distractions. They have absolutely renounced their reason and understanding, else they could not be guided by a divine light. They seek no clear or particular knowledge of anything, but only an obscure, general knowledge which is much better.

"Having thus attained the end, the means must cease. Hope is swallowed up in love. Sight, or something more than sight, takes the place of faith. All particular virtues they possess in the essence, and therefore need not the direct exercise of them.

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1. Vaughan, R.A., *Hours with the Mystics*, p. 20

"Sensible devotion in any prayer they despise; it being a great hindrance to perfection. The Scripture they need not read, for it is only His letter, with whom they converse face to face. Neither do they need the Lord's Supper, for they never cease to remember Christ in the most acceptable manner."<sup>1</sup>

These definitions are quoted at length as they appear to be fairly typical of many such criticisms, adverse to mysticism. It may be noted that they are directed largely against an excess of the emotional side of life at the expense of the intellectual; that they feel that the system is largely characterized by the exaltation of the automatic or passive phases of experience which is often expressed in morbid piety or ecstasy. They regard such experiences as contrary to the ideals of religion and pernicious in their effects upon the spiritual, mental and physical welfare of man. For such a system no appeal to the Apostle John could be made. His writings would be antagonistic to such doctrines. This type of mysticism is excluded from the scope of this thesis.

### C. Mysticism Defined by its Adherents.

The best representatives of the mystical theology do not deny that there have been grave abuses and extravagant claims made by some of its adherents. They do not attempt to defend such abuses, as they do not feel that they are inherent to the system; rather do they regard such extremes as the aberrations in the judgment of the individual holding them.<sup>2</sup> It has been noted that it is against such excrescences that

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1. Fitchett - Wesley and His Century, p. 79

2. Cf. Underhill - Mystics of the Church, p. 31

most of the above criticisms are directed. Wesley, himself, is careful to include in his definition only those teachings which slight any of the means of grace. Saint John of the Cross, in the prologue to his works would also exclude them for he writes, "I trust neither to experience nor to knowledge, for both may mislead me; but solely to the Holy Scriptures, under the teachings of which I cannot err, because he who speaks therein is the Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> Similarly do Thomas a Kempis, St. Theresa, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, Edwards, and other writers emphasize the need of making use of the means of grace, such as scripture reading, prayer, the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper, etc.

When we turn to those writers who are more friendly to the "mystical trend of thought", we find that they set forth several definite doctrines which they feel are characteristic of the system. They also claim for it a reasonableness which appeals to the judgment of the normal man.

To W. R. Inge, mysticism is an attempt "to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature --- in thought and feeling";<sup>2</sup> to Fleming it is "an experience in the sense that Saint John uses it when he declared that we speak that we do know, we testify to that we have seen;"<sup>3</sup> to Rufus Jones, it is "the type of religion which puts the emphasis on the immediate awareness of the relation to God, on the direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence;"<sup>4</sup> "it only means", he writes, "that the soul of man has dealings with realities of a different order from that with which senses deal ----. The mystic merely pushes his claim still farther and insists that his

1. St. John of the Cross, Works. Vol. I., p. 3

2. Christian Mysticism, p. 5.

3. Mysticism in Christianity, p. 8

4. Studies in Mystical Religion, p. 15

experience reveals the fact that the inner self has a spiritual environment in which it lives and moves and has its being";<sup>1</sup> according to Canon Overton, "That we bear the image of God is the starting point, one might also say the postulate, of all mysticism. The complete union of the soul is its goal".<sup>2</sup> Miss Underhill feels that the mystic has a "first-hand personal knowledge" of God which is received by a direct intuition of Him. It is a life based on "a conscious communion with God."<sup>3</sup>

Baron von Hugel claims for mysticism the right to be regarded as a rational system of theology. In its reasonableness, he states that it compares favorably with the system known as natural or dogmatic theology. Mysticism with institutionalism and intellectualism, he states, makes up the three elements of the religious life.<sup>4</sup>

From these writers, who are typical of a large group, we find several characteristics of mystical theology emphasized. First of all they emphasize the statement that man bears the image of God in his soul. This supernatural gift makes possible all spiritual growth. It gives to him the power to know God directly. This gift should not be considered as something abnormal or strange, but rather, is it involved in the very nature of the relation between God and man. The goal of life is complete communion or unity with God.

#### D. General Statement of Characteristic Mystical Doctrines.

From the study of the works of these recent representatives

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1. New Studies in Mystical Religion, p. 25.
  2. Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 5
  3. The Mystics of the Church, p. 9
  4. Cf. Mystical Elements of Religion, Vol. I, p. 72

of mysticism; and also of the works of earlier writers the following doctrines are found to be characteristic of the system. We shall list them here and give the basis for their selection later when the particular doctrine is studied. These principles are as follows:

(1) Man is made in the image of God. That is, God is the source of man's life.

(2) This life within man, which is different from the natural life of man's soul, gives to man the capacity to know God directly. It is, in reality, a divine "spark" in man and makes him a partaker of the nature of God.

(3) The goal of life is union with God. No cost is too great in order to attain this goal. It is the greatest good of life.

(4) The attainment of this goal is reached by a definite "Way".

With mysticism thus defined we shall now turn to some of these doctrines as found in the writings of their adherents and attempt to discover to what extent the influence of Saint John can be detected.



CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTIC DOCTRINES OF MYSTICISM

IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

### Chapter III

#### CHARACTERISTIC DOCTRINES OF MYSTICISM IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

##### A. The Mystical Longing for God.

Dean Inge asserts that John's doctrine of the Logos is the basis of mystical theology. To the mystic this divine, pre-existent Word is indeed the fountain source of all the good which he ever hopes to receive. It is the Source of his life. It is the Light of men.<sup>1</sup>

In the contemplation of this source of life the mystic finds a never failing source of inspiration. He can repeat with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God". Thus we find that to Thomas a Kempis, God is the fountain source of all life. "O my God", he exclaims, "I come unto Thee putting my confidence in thy mercy and thy bounty; I sigh and come unto my Saviour; I, hungry and thirsty, unto the fountain of life."<sup>2</sup> Again he declares that all things are to be referred to God as the "last end", that is, the final source. In developing this thought he uses the thought of Saint John, "Consider all things as welling from the highest and most sovereign good; and therefore they are to be reduced to me as to their original beginning. Of me, little and great, poor and rich, draw quick water as from the well of life: and they that serve me willingly shall receive grace for grace."<sup>3</sup> It is only in God that his soul

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1. Cf. Christian Mysticism, p. 58  
2. Imitation of Christ, p. 236  
3. Ibid. p. 115

can find rest and no gift from God other than himself can ever satisfy. For, he continues, "It is little and insufficient whatever thou givest me beside thyself or revealest or promisest of thyself, Thee not seen or gotten fully; for my heart may not verily rest nor be fully and wholly content, if it rest not in Thee and ever pass thy gifts and every creature."<sup>1</sup>

Saint John of the Cross sees in the solicitude with which Mary Magdalen sought to find Christ in the garden an allegory of the soul seeking God. The loved one seeks God and is never satisfied until he finds Him. So we read that "it is with the soul as it was with Mary Magdalen, when in her burning love she looked for Him in the garden. She, thinking Him to be the gardener, spoke to him without further reflection, saying: 'If thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away'. (John 20:15). The soul is under the influence of a like anxiety to find Him in all things, and not finding Him immediately, as it desires ----- has no pleasure in them (other things)".<sup>2</sup> This is the case because "God is the supernatural light of the soul and without which it abides in darkness."<sup>3</sup> The longing for this light is with Saint John of the Cross, as with Thomas a Kempis, a "living thirst".<sup>4</sup>

Saint John of the Cross explains this longing of the soul for God by the fact that man is made in the image of God and so partakes of the divine essence- "My beauty shall be thine, thine shall be mine, and

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1. Ibid. p. 142

2. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 51

3. Ibid. p. 53

4. Ibid. Vol. I., p. 357

I shall be thou in it, and thou myself in thine own beauty; for thy beauty will be my beauty, and so we shall see, each the other, in thy beauty. This is the adoption of the sons of God, who may truly say what the Son Himself says to the Eternal Father: All my things are thine, and thine are mine."<sup>1</sup> (John 17:10)

For this reason the purified soul can, in a sense, be said to be God and no secret of God is held from it. In proof of this St. John of the Cross again appeals to our Apostle, "This vision (i.e. of union with God) is the cause of the soul's perfect likeness unto God. 'We know,' said St. John, that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is. (II. 3:2) And thus, whatever the soul may be, it will be like unto God, and so is called, and is, by participation, God. ---- Nothing remains secret from the soul, by reason of its perfect likeness. And, therefore, our Saviour saith, In that day ye shall not ask me anything. (John 16:23)."<sup>2</sup>

The contemplation of God as the divine source of life draws Meister Eckhart into a profound experience of eternal life. It helps to bring his soul into harmony and union with God and for the time blots out his consciousness of temporal things and gives to him a true sense of the Reality. "The Spring of the Divine Love", he writes, "flows out of the soul, and draws her out of herself into the nameless Being, into her origin, which is God alone."<sup>3</sup>

Saint Augustine longs for union with God for it is in that

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1. Ibid. Vol. II. p. 187  
 2. Works, Lewis, Vol. I., p. 440  
 3. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 153

alone that there can be any peace or rest for his soul. In God alone are all things which are good for his soul - even every moment of time is in Him. We read, "Thou awaketh us to delight in Thy praise, for Thou madest us for Thyself and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."<sup>1</sup> Again in the same book he writes, "For Thou art nothing else than supreme Being, supreme Life. For thou art the highest and changest not, nor does To-day run out its hours in Thee; and yet in Thee its hours run out, for in Thee is every moment of time."<sup>2</sup> Or to sum up God is to him the "Supreme Being and Supreme Life".

Not only does the soul receive all that it hath from God but the very universe itself is an expression of the beauty of the Divine Word. To Erigena, the world is "the poem of the Word to the glory of the Father; in it, and by means of it, He displays in time all the riches which God has eternally put within Him."<sup>3</sup> God clothed the universe, writes St. John of the Cross, "with beauty in the face of His Son, communicating to them a supernatural being when He made man, and exalted him to the beauty of God, and, by consequence, all creatures in him, because He united Himself to the nature of them all in man. For this cause the Son of God Himself said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself' (John 12:32) and thus in this exaltation of the incarnation of His Son, and the glory of His resurrection according to the flesh, the Father not only made all things beautiful in part, but also, we may well say, clothed them with beauty and

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1. Confessions, Book I, Ch. I., Sec. I.  
 2. Ibid. Ch. 6.  
 3. Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 47

dignity."<sup>1</sup> Meister Eckhart expresses a similar thought, and also regards this Word as the sustaining power of the world, for, "if God stopped saying His Word, but for an instant even, heaven and earth would disappear."<sup>2</sup>

#### B. The Mystical Doctrine of the "Divine Spark"

To the mystic, the incarnation of the Word is the supreme fact in human history and has an analogy in the experience of every believer. The Word, incarnated in the soul of man, makes him also divine and gives to him a direct experience or knowledge of God. This "spark" or "light" makes possible the union of man's soul with God and so enables him to grow spiritually. It is an essential part of man's soul and yet it is above his soul. It is that life-giving principle which enables man to live more and more unto God and gives to him the power to resist the temptations of the flesh. While all have this potential likeness to God within them, it is only in those who allow the light of God to shine within their souls that the Spark develops into a vivifying spiritual "fire".

In one of his sermons, Meister Eckhart identifies the Light of the soul with this life of God. Thus we read, "There is in the soul something which is above the soul, Divine, simple, a pure nothing; rather nameless than named, rather unconscious than known. Sometimes I have called it a power, sometimes an uncreated light, and sometimes a divine spark. It is absolute and free from all names and all forms, just as God is free and absolute in Himself. It is higher than love,

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1. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 38

2. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 77

higher than grace. For in these there is still distinction. In this power God doth blossom and flourish with all his Godhead, and the Spirit flourisheth in God. In this power the Father bringeth forth his only begotten Son, as essentially as himself; and in this light ariseth the Holy Ghost. This Spark rejecteth all creatures, and will have only God, simply as He is in Himself."<sup>1</sup>

Again in another sermon, Meister Eckhart describes this Spark as the Word born within the soul of man. Thus in essence, it is of the nature of God and so makes possible a direct knowledge of God, for spirit can know spirit or the image can know its Maker of whom it partakes. "I would have you know", he writes, "that the eternal word is being born within the soul, its very self, no less, unceasingly. I tell you, the soul knows the eternal Word better than all doctors can expound it --- it is sent there by God and is his light striking down from above, the reflection or image of his divine nature and ever opposed to anything ungodly."<sup>2</sup>

In his Confessions, Saint Augustine dwells upon the mysterious faculty of memory and discovers in memory that power which makes possible most of man's knowledge. Yet, when he comes to explain the presence of the knowledge of God in the soul of man, he finds that memory cannot furnish any adequate explanation. Hence, he reasons that the knowledge of God comes from some innate faculty of the soul. He thus sums up his argument, "Where then did I find Thee, that I might learn Thee? For in memory Thou wert not, before I learned Thee. Where

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1. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 57

2. Ibid., p. 88

then did I find Thee, that I might learn Thee, but in Thee above me? --- And behold, Thou wert within, and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee --- thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in an intimate description of his own emotions, he describes this inward light and in this description we recognize the words and thoughts of St. John, "I entered even into my inward self, Thou being my Guide: and able I was, for Thou wert become my Helper. And I entered and beheld with the eye of my soul, (such as it was) above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the light unchangeable. Not this ordinary light, which all flesh may look upon, not as it were a greater of the same kind, as though the brightness of this should be manifold brighter, and with its greatness take up all space. Not such was this light, but other, yea far other from all these. Nor was it above my soul, as oil is above water, nor yet as heaven is above earth; but above to my soul, because it made me; and I below it, because I was made by it. He that knows the Truth, knows what that Light is, and he that knows it knows eternity."<sup>2</sup> It is to this light also that Augustine attributes his spiritual growth and understanding, "Distinct from the soul is that light itself, whereby it is so enlightened, that it may behold all things, whether in itself or in Him, understanding them truly. For that Light is God Himself; but the soul although rational and intellectual, is a creature made after His image, and when it endeavors to behold that Light, quivers through weakness and is unable. Yet still thence is derived whatever it understands, as it is able. When then it

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1. Confessions, Book 10, Sec., 37-38.

2. Ibid., Ch. 17, Sec., 17



is borne away thither, and withdrawn from the bodily senses, it is placed more expressly in the presence of that Vision, then, not in local space, but in a way of its own, it sees even above itself That whereby being aided it sees also whatever, by understanding, it does see in itself."<sup>1</sup>

St. John of the Cross also finds the essential light of the soul to be a light from God and appeals directly to John for proof texts. In writing of this life of the soul he states that, "The soul has its radical and essential life in God, like all created things --- Saint John also says that all that was made was life in God: that which was made in Him was life."<sup>2</sup>

Again St. John of the Cross attributes to this Spark the growth and happiness of the soul: For it, "is a movement of the Word in the depth of the soul of such grandeur, authority and glory, and of such profound sweetness that all the balsams, all the aromatic herbs and flowers of the world seem to be mingled and shaken together for the production of that sweetness: that all the kingdoms and dominions of the world, all the powers and virtues of heaven seem to be moved; this is not the whole, all the virtues, substance, perfections and graces of all created things, shine forth and make the same movement in unison together. For as St. John saith, What was made in Him was life:"<sup>3</sup> (IJ,1:3) And it is through the medium of this light that God speaks directly to the soul, for again writes St. John of the Cross,

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1. Confessions, Ch. 17, Sec. 17  
 2. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 46  
 3. Ibid. p. 297

"This is the meaning of those words of our Lord, 'He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him! (John 14:21). These words refer to this knowledge and these touches of which I am speaking, and which God manifests to the soul that truly loves Him."<sup>1</sup>

To Saint Teresa, the co-laborer with Saint John of the Cross, this innate Light is ever a source of wonder and of inspiration. In her Way of Perfection, she too, finds God within it - "We are not", she writes, "forced to take wings to find our Lord, but have only to seek solitude and to look within ourselves. You need not be overwhelmed with confusion before so kind a guest, but, with humility, talk to Him as your father. --- Within this palace dwells the mighty King who has deigned to become your Father and who is seated on a throne of priceless value- by which I mean your heart."<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Boehme describes this Spark as a thing of great beauty and declares that it surpasses any other beauty on earth. It is also possessed by many who are not conscious of the fact. To him it is a gift directly sent by God and which gave to him that experience of God within his soul.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Works, Lewis, Vol. I., p. 179.

2. St. Teresa, Balfe, p. 89,92.

3. Cf. Underhill, Mystic Way, p. 166. In Boehme's description of this Spark we recognize the thought of Saint John's doctrine of the Logos in the first chapter of his Gospel. In his description of his conversion Boehme wrote that, "Whilst I was wrestling and battling, being aided by God, a wonderful light arose in my soul. It was a Light entirely foreign to my unruly nature; but in it I recognized the true nature of God and man, and the relation existing between them, a thing which heretofore I had never understood, and for which I would never have sought."

We find this theme to be a favorite one with William Law who translated Boehme's works into English. He describes this Spark as the source of the blessings which come into the life of the soul. With him it is a gift of God and makes possible an immediate knowledge of God and the attainment of perfect union. In his Liberal and Mystical Writings, Law describes the Spark as a form of divine life which is found in every man. That no man is without this witness in himself, he takes as a self-evident truth. Moreover, all of the spiritual graces to which man attains are the direct results of this divine seed.<sup>1</sup> This Spark also has a tendency to draw man to God and gives to him an irresistible longing for God which is only satisfied in perfect union. This divine nature within man has a "natural, strong, and almost infinite tendency or reaching after the eternal Light and Spirit of God from whence it came forth."

Therefore, as sure as the heavenly soul will to all eternity increase in new openings and enlargements of divine union, enjoyment

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1. Liberal and Mystical Writings, p. 164. This doctrine occupies a central place in Law's theology and he gives a great deal of space to its development. In his description of this Spark the influence of Saint John is evident both in the thought expressed and the words used. In the following description he makes a partial summary of this teaching. "Now that this form of a divine Spark in every man, that no man is without this witness of God in himself, is a truth as evident as anything that can be affirmed of human nature. And as it is a certain truth that no fruit, flowers, or virtues can be or can come forth in any vegetable but what was first in its seed or root, so no divine glory, perfection, or power can ever come forth in any creature in heaven, but what arises from the seed of the Deity sown into it at its creation."

and perfection in God, so sure is it that in the center, or inmost birth of the soul's life, lie the riches of the divine nature as a Seed, nr Root of glory, given to it by its first creative image or likeness to God. Everything that is endless and numberless in the essence of the Soul: what seeing is, what hearing, feeling, etc. are in their boundless variety and ever increasing newness of delight in eternity, these, with all their wonders, are the innate birthright and sure inheritance of every immortal godly Soul.

In his Journal, George Fox describes the joy which came into his life when God's Light shined into his soul and revealed this divine Spark of Life. It came after a period of "purgation" and the experience was so vivid that it seemed to be a voice from heaven. Thus he writes, "I cannot declare the great misery I was in, it was so great and heavy upon me, so neither can I set forth the mercies of God unto me in all my misery. --- When all my hope in them and in all men was gone so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then O! Then I heard a voice which said: 'There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy --- though I read the Scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I knew Him not but by revelation."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Underhill, Mystic Way, p. 165.

Jonathan Edwards recognizes this light within the soul but limits it to those who have become "children" of God. (John 1:11) In fact, he declares, this to be the distinguishing characteristic between the saint and the ungodly. So we read, "We are abundantly taught that the saints differ from the ungodly in this, that they have the knowledge of God, and a sight of God, and of Jesus Christ. I shall mention but few texts of many - I John 3:5, III John, 11, John 14:19 and 17:3. This knowledge, or sight of God and Christ, cannot be a mere speculative knowledge, because it is spoken of as a seeing and knowing, wherein they differ from the ungodly."<sup>1</sup> And again, "This light and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion.--- It is a communication of something of God's own beauty and excellency. A partaking of Christ's fullness. (John 1:16)"<sup>2</sup> Finally he declares this light to be "that immortal seed which insures to the possessor eternal life, - and this above all things, tends to their own comfort; from hence arises that 'peace which passeth all understanding, and that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And this is that which will certainly issue in the eternal salvation of those that have it. It is impossible that the soul wherein it is should sink and perish.' It is an immortal seed - it is eternal life begun; and therefore they that have it can never die."<sup>3</sup>

In the study of the Johannine writings, it appears to be no difficult task to discover the influence of Saint John in the development

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1. Works, Vol. IV, p. 444
  2. Ibid, p. 449
  3. Ibid, p. 472

of these two characteristic doctrines of the mystical theology; namely, God the Divine Source of life and the Spark or the Divine Essence in man. Such quotations concerning these two doctrines are representative of many others. Saint John's influence can be noted, first, in the many direct quotations made from his writings and directly attributed to him; secondly, the use by these writers, at times most probably unconsciously, of the thought of Saint John even to the extent of employing his words and peculiar phraseology. A study of the following table will make this fact clear.

Life was in the Word:

John 1:4; 5:26, 40; 6:35, 48; 8:12; 10:7-10; 11:25; 14:6;

I John 1:5, 12; 5:11, 12, 20.

This Life brings life to man:

John 5:24-26, 29, 6:33, 53; 11:25.

The Word typified by:

Well of water - 4:14.

Meat which endureth - 6:27

Bread of life - 6:33, 35, 48, 51, 58.

Life-giving blood - 6:53, 54.

Life-giving water - 7:37.

Life of Life - 8:12

Life-giving Vine - 15:1-5

Life-giving words - 6:63.

Life-giving commandment - 12:50

This Life is imparted to believers:

John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:39, 40, 47; 20:31; I John 5:13.

The Word, a source of Life:

John 1:16; 14:19; 17:2, 22, 26; I John 5:13.

### C. The Mystical Way or the "Ladder of Ascent".

He who would attain to union with God must do it by making use of certain means of grace. The mystic represents such a life as a journey or way and he who travels this way ascends, as it were, a ladder. The lowest rung on this ladder, according to St. John of the Cross and others, is renunciation or Purgation. The second rung is that of Illumination which is reached by means of faith. The third and last rung is Union or Unity of the soul with God.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Doctrine of Purgation and the Johannine Writings.

##### a. The Teachings of the Mystics.

The first step of this Way is that of Purgation. Here through the practice of self-discipline, repentance, prayer, etc. the soul must be alienated from carnal things. He who walks in this way must take up his cross. He must show by his conduct a spirit of contrition and a readiness to make amends for any wrong committed. Since he is a child of God it is not possible for him to harbor in his heart anything that is selfish or sensual, for these qualities are antagonistic to the character to which he hopes to attain. In short, he must renounce self and the world.

Thus we find Thomas a Kempis welcoming adversity, for through it the soul may be strengthened. "Wherefore", he prays, "visit me Lord oftimes and inform me with holy discipline. Deliver me from mine evil passions, heal my heart from all inordinate affections; that I, inwardly healed and well purged, may be apt to love, mighty to suffer, stable to persevere."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he writes, "He hath a great and wholesome purgatory that patiently receiveth wrongs, that sorroweth more for

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1. Cf. St. John of the Cross, Works, Lewis, Vol. I., p. 9

2. Imitation of Christ, p. 104.

other men's malice than for his own wrongs, that gladly prayeth for his adversaries and heartily forgiveth his trespassers.-- that more easily forgiveth than is wroth, that doeth violence to himself, that laboreth in all wise to hold his flesh under the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Also without purgation, Thomas a Kempis continues, no progress can be made in the spiritual life: For renunciation of self is more meritorious than penance or prayer, - "Know for certain that thou must lead a dying life; and the more that a man dieth to himself, the more he beginneth to live to God. --- I will that thou learn perfect abnegation of thyself to My will without contradiction and complaining. Follow me: I am the way, truth and life. (John 14:6) Without a way men go not, without truth men know not, without life men live not."<sup>2</sup> -- If a man give all his substance, it is as naught, and if he do great penance yet it is but little:--- but one thing is sovereignly necessary to him--- that all things forsaken, he forsake himself and go wholly out of himself and retain nothing of self-love."<sup>3</sup>

Again a Kempis describes Purgation as the royal road to union. Through it alone can the riches of union with God be obtained. The cross is its fitting symbol. For, "in the Cross doth all consist, and all lieth on our dying thereon; and there is none other way to life and very inward peace but the Way of the Holy Cross and daily dying--- Walk where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt; and thou shalt find no higher way above, no surer way below than the Way of the Holy Cross--- and turn to the heights, turn to the deeps, turn within, turn without: everywhere thou shalt find the Cross".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Imitation of Christ, p. 50
  2. Ibid., p. 219
  3. Ibid. p. 86
  4. Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 138



In describing those men who have attained to union with God, Tauler recounts, in a sermon on The Holy Cross, the purgation through which believers pass. He writes, "These men have a most consuming thirst for suffering. They desire that it may come to them in the most ignominious and painful manner in which it can be borne. They thirst for the cross--- The holy martyrs have attained to this inheritance by their great love. They think that they are only beginning life: They feel like men who are beginning to grow--- We must be born again through the Cross into the true nobility--- In the truest death of all created things, the sweetest and most natural life lies hidden".<sup>1</sup> In writing of this same state, St. Teresa declares that, "it is impossible to describe the sufferings of the soul in this state."

To Eckhart, such purgation is a great achievement. We read that, "There is no greater valor nor no sterner fight than that of self-effacement, self-oblivion--- To die the death in love and knowledge, that is more noble and more worth than all the works put together that holy Christendom has done in love and knowledge from its beginning until now or ever shall do until the judgment day. These do but serve to bring this death about, this death wherein springs life eternal."<sup>2</sup>

We read from St. John of the Cross that progress in spiritual things is impossible without purgation- "There is no progress but in the imitation of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. 'I am the way, saith He, and the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me'. (John 14:6). And again, 'I am the door.

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1. Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, p. 137

2. Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 421

By me if any man enter in he shall be saved.' (John 10:9). That spirituality, therefore, which would travel in sweetness at its ease, shunning the imitation of Christ, is in my opinion, nothing worth."<sup>1</sup> Again the soul must of necessity- if we would attain to the Divine union of God- "pass through the obscure night of mortification of the desires, and self-denial in all things.--- Light hath no fellowship with darkness, for as St. John saith, The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. Two contrary qualities--- cannot co-exist in the same subject."<sup>2</sup>

Pascal describes this purgation as painful to the soul because of the evil in it, yet in the end it will bring happiness to the soul. The suffering is only "in proportion as the evil, which is natural to us, resists the supernatural agency of grace."<sup>3</sup>

William Law would make the forsaking of worldliness the first requirement of the Christian life. For until the believer is purged of the "spirit of the world", the light of God cannot abide in him. This difference between the children of the light and the children of the world will always exist. He thus defines the world in the terms of St. John- "All that is in the world the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, etc. (I John 2:16). This is an exact and full description of the world."<sup>4</sup> He who professes to be a child of God professes to live contrary to every thing that is peculiar to the world. Thus again he writes that, "St. John expresses this opposition to the world in this manner: 'They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world and the world heareth them. We are of God.' (I J. 4:5-6).

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1. Works, Lewis, Vol. I, p. 78

2. Ibid. p. 13

3. Pascal, Thoughts, p. 346.

4. Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, p. 228

This is a description of the followers of Christ; and it is proof enough that no people are to be reckoned Christians in reality, who in their hearts and tempers belong to the world. 'We know', saith the same Apostle, 'that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in darkness'. (I J. 5:19)--- Our blessed Lord himself fully determined this point in these words: 'They are not of this world, as I am not of this world.' (John 17:16)"<sup>1</sup> The world hateth the one who renounces it because it hated Christ, "Had you lived with our Saviour as His true disciple, you had then been hated as he was; and if you now live in His spirit, the world will be the same enemy to you now, that it was to Him then. (John 15:18-19)"<sup>2</sup>

Edwards draws an even more distinct contrast between the world and the Light, and a consequent necessity for the children of Light to renounce the world. He declares that the "natural" man is destitute of any of the qualities of Light.- "The heart of a natural man is as destitute of love to God, as a dead, stiff, cold corpse is of vital heat. 'I know you that you have not the love of God in you.' (John 5:43)"<sup>3</sup> The reason that the natural man does not come to Christ is "because they will not come" (John 5:40)"<sup>4</sup>. This emity is eternal; unless a "mighty work" of Christ changes the heart: "They are greater enemies to God than they are to the devil. Yea they treat the devil as their friend and master and join with him against God. (John 8:44)."<sup>5</sup> He who travels through such a world as this must undergo temptation, hardships and every kind of trial, but the result will be a purified character."<sup>6</sup>

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1. Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, p. 222

2. Ibid., p. 226

3. Works, Vol. IV, p. 40

4. Ibid. p. 57

5. Ibid. p. 42

6. Cf. Ibid. p. 622, 575.

The necessity of purity of life is stressed as a part of purgation. For without holiness no one can see God. Says St. Bernard, "It is holiness, not disputation, that comprehendeth God"<sup>1</sup>; "O my God and my life", similarly writes St. John of the Cross, "they shall know Thee (John 14:17) and behold Thee when Thou touchest them, who, making themselves strangers upon earth, shall purify themselves, because purity corresponds with purity."<sup>2</sup> Says Eckhart, "I never ask God to give himself to me: I beg of him to purify, to empty me-- How to be pure? By steadfast longing for the good one, God to wit. How to acquire this longing? By self-denial and dislike to creatures etc." Again he writes, "To be the heavenly Father's Son, we must be strangers to the world, remote from self, pure-hearted, inward minded."<sup>3</sup> For Thomas a Kempis, the follower of Christ "must be bare and bear to God a pure heart if thou wilt taste and see how sweet God is-- wherefore visit me Lord oftentimes and inform me with holy discipline."<sup>4</sup> The way that leads to heaven is the "way of holiness" writes Edwards.<sup>5</sup>

Not only must the person who travels in this Way make use of self-denial, penance, prayer, etc., but he is also enjoined to practice charity towards his fellow-man. His life must be thrown actively into the cause of righteousness. Such service promotes holiness.

This phase of Christian duty is emphasized by many of the mystics. Thus we find Eckhart writing, "The mystic never withdraws himself willfully from the business of life, no, not even from the smallest business."<sup>6</sup> Similarly we read from Juliana of Norwich, who,

1. St. Bernard, Williams, p. 63
2. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 242
3. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 420-2
4. Imitation of Christ, p. 76, 104.
5. Works, Vol. IV, p. 575
6. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 425.

in writing of her spiritual experiences, relates that, "In all this I was greatly stirred in charity to my fellow-Christians that they might see and know the same that I saw."<sup>1</sup>

"Who loves not his brethren", writes St. Teresa, "loves not thee, my Lord, for thy blood, shed for us, bears witness to thy boundless love for the sons of Adam." For the perfect life, she declares again the "combination of Martha and Mary is necessary".<sup>2</sup>

Thomas a Kempis sees in this service a means of spiritual growth and exclaims, "O the acceptable and jocund service of God whereby a man is verily made free and holy--- without charity the outward work availeth naught: but whatever is done of charity, be it never so simple or so little all is fruitful."<sup>3</sup>

To St. Bernard, the practice of charity is of the very nature of the Christian faith, "How doth he live unto Him (i.e., God)", he asks, "who so neglecteth them whom he loveth".<sup>4</sup> William Law expresses this same thought and feels that there is no other natural or reasonable use of our riches than to employ them for the betterment of our needy brethren.<sup>5</sup>

To Pascal, charity is the key to the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. He writes, "Charity is not only the end of Holy Scriptures but the entrance to them."<sup>6</sup>

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1. Juliana of Norwich, Warrack, p. 18
  2. St. Teresa, Thoughts, Balfe, p. 21
  3. Imitation of Christ, p. 119, 25
  4. St. Bernard, Williams, p. 25
  5. Serious Call to a Devout Life, p. 127
  6. Thoughts, p. 357.

b. The Teachings of Saint John.

We have listed above ~~some~~ eleven instances in which the mystical writers have made direct use of Saint John's writings in the development of their doctrine of Purgation. Now turning to the writings of Saint John we find his larger influence in the following teachings:

The necessity of renunciation of self and the world.

John 3:6, 7, 30; 4:33; 5:30, 34, 41; 6:63; 7:7; 8:23;

12:24-25; 13:14; 16:2, 20, 33; 17:16; 18:36;

I John 1:15; 3:3, 16; 4:4, 5, 19, 44.

Christ, an example of charity - John 10:32.

Charity for fellow-men: John 5:17; 13:29; 15:13; 19:26, 27;

20:21; 21:15-17; I John 2:9-11; 3:10, 11, 17, 18, 23;

4:7-12, 19, 21; 5:1, 2; II John 5, 6.

Christ's example of this renunciation: John 1:29, 36; 3:14;

6:51; 10:15; 11:50; 12:32; 19:18.

Necessity of purity of life: John 5:14; 8:11, 34, 46;

I John 1:6; 2:3-6, 9, 13; 3:3, 5, 6, 7, 9; 5:18, 19, 21.

Without charity one cannot be a true disciple: I John 3:14, 15.

2. The Doctrine of Illumination and the Johannine Writings.

a. The Teachings of the Mystics.

The second stage in this Ladder of Ascent is the Illuminative. This stage of spiritual growth represents a higher one than the Purgative, for there the aspirant, through the practice of self-denial, prayer, fasting, etc., gained the ascendancy over the flesh. Here the soul must learn to choose the good for its own sake and not for any

self-interest. The ideal of a purified love for God now becomes the motive for living.<sup>1</sup> "It is the time of aridity, weariness, temptation, desolation and darkness. It is the eye of the mind turned on itself, before it has received the full illumination of the light within. It is the time when the heart is weary with the phenomenal, when the joy of earth has become arid, and there is the strong yearning for the full joy of heaven."<sup>2</sup> But to the soul in this stage there will come a momentary flash of light that will illumine his soul and reveal to him the possibilities of the desired union with God, the goal of his Way. It might be illustrated by the journey of a traveler to some high mountain peak. At intervals he reaches the top of some lesser peak and from this viewpoint he may catch a glimpse of the snow-clad peak afar off and to which he is journeying. But in order to reach it he must pass again into the separating valley to another mountain top and from here he sees again his goal. So, after many such lesser peaks and glimpses from afar, many hardships and many sufferings, he arrives at last at his goal. Just so the traveler on the Mystic Way finally reaches his goal through successively higher levels of faith and belief.

To St. John of the Cross, this stage is "darker" than either of the other two for the reason that it has faith alone as a guide. Thus the study of illumination is largely the study of the nature and working of faith. It is that knowledge gained through experience of God.

This faith is to be regarded not so much as a matter of the intellect, nor the keeping of any special commandment, nor as primarily

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1. Cf. St. John of the Cross, Works, Vol. I, p. 29, 54.

2. Nicoll, The Garden of Nuts, p. 43.

a condition prerequisite to the receiving of divine blessings; but rather is it an intuitive insight made possible by the work of the Spirit. It is the result of a venture upon belief, which ends in a certain knowledge obtained through experience. It illumines the soul in a process of time.

Thus, St. John of the Cross describes faith as "obscure" because it appeals neither to the senses or the intellect, "It is a habit of the soul, certain and obscure. The reason why it is an obscure habit is that it makes us believe the truths which God Himself has revealed - truths surpassing the light of reason and beyond the reach of all human understanding."<sup>1</sup> Again, "Faith is not knowledge that entereth in by any of the senses, but only the assent of the soul to that which cometh by hearing."<sup>2</sup> And again he sees in St. John a ground for this faith, "In this way the soul draws nearer to the Divine union, in darkness, by the way of faith which, though it be also obscure, yet sends forth a marvelous light. Certainly if the soul will see, it thereby becomes instantly more blind than he who should attempt to gaze upon the sun shining in its strength. On this road, therefore, to have our own faculties in darkness is to see the light, according to the words of our Lord: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not may see, and they who see may become blind (John 9:39)."<sup>3</sup> Again, this faith is described, by St. John of the Cross as a direct gift of God and not as a result of miracles. In this he cites as proof texts John 20:2, 20:15, 20:29 and 4:48.<sup>4</sup> Also this faith is the only means

1. Works, Lewis, p. 58

2. Ibid. p. 59

3. Works, Vol. I, p. 65

4. Cf. Ibid. p. 289



for the attainment of union with God, John 4:14.<sup>1</sup> And finally, he points out this faith will reveal God's will to him who exercises it by use, John 14:26, 12:16.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, we read from Pascal's "Thoughts", "There are truths that are felt, and there are truths that are proved, for we know truth not only by reason, but by the intuitive conviction which may be called the heart. The primary truths are not demonstrable, and yet our knowledge of them is not less certain. Truths may be above reason and yet not contrary to reason."<sup>3</sup>

And again a similar conception of faith we get from the *Theologia Germanica*, which was published by Luther and which had a wide influence during the time of the Reformation. It declares that, "he who would know before he believeth cometh never to true knowledge--- I speak of a certain truth which it is possible to know by experience, else you will never come to know it."<sup>4</sup>

Meister Eckhart describes this faith as a direct gift of God and "the chief power of the soul". For, "no natural light or intellect is adequate for this, for no natural light affords a likeness of it", he writes, in describing the power of the soul to understand spiritual things through faith.<sup>5</sup>

This faith, according to William Law has been essential to religion in all ages. "It matters not in what age or under what dispensation of God we live, the necessity, the nature, and the power of

1. Cf. Works, Vol. II, p. 62, 256

2. Cf. Ibid, Vol. I, p. 144

3. Thoughts, p. 340

4. Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 50

5. Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 95.

faith is always the same; that simple, illiterate, unreasoning faith that helped Abraham to righteousness, life and union with God is the one faith that alone can be justification, life and salvation to Christians. For faith is nothing else than so much of the Nature and Spirit of Christ born and living in us."<sup>1</sup>

Edward's definition of faith is very similar to the above. He states that, "It is that by which the soul, that before was separate and alienated from Christ, unites itself to Him, or ceases to be any longer in that state of alienation, and comes into that fore-mentioned union or relation to him, or, to use the Scripture phrase, that it is that by which the soul comes to thirst-- This is evident by the Scripture using these very expressions to signify faith. John 6:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40; 5:38, 39, 40; 5:43, 44; 1:12."<sup>2</sup> This faith, he continues, makes Christ and the believer one. For it is by faith that we have the Son of God, by whom life is. I J. 5:12; John 3:35.<sup>3</sup> And again this faith is a direct gift from God and for that reason it is a "saving faith". John 6:40; 17:6, 7, 8; 12:44, 45, 46.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards uses over seven hundred direct quotations from the writings of John and his development of the doctrine of faith is full. Especially is this so in his well known mystical sermon on the Reality of Spiritual Light. Among some of the other characteristics of faith which he deduces from John are: Faith produces spiritual fruit (Vol. III, p. 189); faith gives power of spiritual sight (IV 446); faith brings peace (IV 434); faith makes believers partake of God (IV 200).

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1. Liberal and Mystical Writings, p. 162
  2. Works, Vol. IV, p. 71
  3. Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 72
  4. Ibid. p. 445

In contrast to faith, there may also be traced in the mystical writings and in St. John a corresponding growth of unbelief on the part of those who reject the light. For just as faith moves forward to a greater realization of union with God, so here there is a gradual diminution of any initial belief and, as exemplified in the lives of the rulers at Jerusalem, there gradually arose an aversion to, and finally an open hostility to Christ. Von Hugel, in his study of the life of Saint Catherine of Genoa, has shown how she was fond of representing these truths under the figure of Fire. The Fire or Spark within the soul, if fed with the proper fuel, will increase in amount and intensity until it burns up all of the dross and will only leave that which is pure and which can withstand the test. On the other hand, if not fed with the proper fuel, this Fire will become less and less intense until, finally, it dies away entirely and only leaves the burnt embers. Just so does faith either raise the soul to heights where it can commune with its Maker, or else through unbelief, the soul loses even that with which it was at the first endowed.

#### b. The Teachings of Saint John

This conception of faith, it seems to us, can be traced to the writings of St. John. For we find him representing faith as not dependent upon knowledge entirely, but at times it precedes knowledge (7:17). This knowledge, or illumination, which comes through faith, is not attained at any one time; but rather is it the result of a series of steps upwards. As the believer develops in his Christian life, his experience is enriched by each successive act of faith. For instance at

the Jordan river, at the beginning of Christ's ministry, Andrew and Nathanael express their faith in Christ and declare him to be the Son of God. (1:49); a few days later at Cana his disciples are said to have believed on him after the working of a miracle; again at Capernaum Peter, as spokesman for the Twelve, declares their belief in Christ as the Holy one of God; at the last supper Christ exhorts the disciples to believe, and in order to strengthen their belief, he tells them what was shortly to come to pass. So that when it did come to pass they might believe and their faith fail them not. (13:19, 14:29). Again, after the resurrection, when the disciple whom Jesus loved saw the empty tomb, he believed (20:8). We thus have at each of these steps an apparent completeness of faith, but each in reality merely prepares the way for another illumination which lifts the believer into successively higher planes of faith. So then, this faith comes, not by miracles nor by any outward signs, but rather as the result of an inward conviction. On account of its very nature this faith is its own evidence and there is no appeal from it. The man born blind could state, "This one thing I know". Or again, as John expresses it, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness of himself" (I J 5:10). The word "know" is used some twenty-five times in the first epistle of John alone, and is represented as the result of faith. We find the same thought expressed also in the Gospel in Peter's declaration of his belief in Christ, (6:69) and in the words of Christ himself in chapter 17:3.

The following summary of John's development of the doctrine of faith will show the amount of space which he gives to this subject and also reveals the extent to which the mystical writers are indebted to John for their doctrine of faith.

Faith gives a vivid knowledge of God: John 1:12, 3:33, 35, 35, 36; 4:42, 5:40, 6:69, 7:17, 37, 38; 8:12, 8:19, 24; 11:22, 40; 12:40; 12:44; 14:7, 9, 10, 11; 16:27, 30; 17:3, 7, 8, 21, 25, 26; 19:35; 20:27, 29, 31.

I John 2:3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 20; 2:21, 29; 3:1, 2, 5, 14, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 8, 13, 16; 5:1, 2, 4, 5; 5:10, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20.

Faith unites the soul to God: John 1:12, 3:33, 36; 6:29; 6:35, 36, 37, 40, 44, 45, 47, 65; 8:47, 10:3, 5, 14, 26, 27, 38; 11:22-27; 14:17, 20; 15:15; 18:37.

Faith, an intuitive insight given by God: John 1:33, 34; 8:28; 20:8, 16, 18.

Faith is progressive: John 1:50; 2:11, 22, 23; 4:39, 41, 38, 50, 53; 5:47; 6:28; 7:31, 48; 8:24, 30, 46; 9:35-38; 10:38, 42; 11:15, 42, 45, 48; 12:11, 42; 13:19; 14:1, 10, 11, 12, 29; 16:9, 27, 30, 31; 17:8, 21; 19:35; 20:8, 25; 20:29, 31.

Faith exemplified in experience: 9:38.

### 3. The Doctrine of Union and the Johannine Writings.

#### a. The Teachings of the Mystics.

Saint John emphasizes the necessity or privilege on the part of the believer of abiding in Christ. This injunction is a congenial one to mystical thinking. The constant emphasis which such writers lay upon this abiding in Christ and God have called forth statements which show an overemphasis on John's teachings, yet they do show how the apostle has influenced Christian Mysticism.

To Angelus Silenus God is the element in which his soul lives: "God is in me the Fire, and I in Him the light: are we not in most intimate communion one with the other-- I am as rich as God: there can be no grain of dust that I, believe me, man, have not in common with Him. God loves me above himself, if I love him above myself, I so give him as much as he gives me from himself."<sup>1</sup>

To Tauler this union with God must be preceded by a denial of self and the world. If man is in reality to become one with God, then all of his energies and powers, even of the inner man must die and become silent. He must escape from all his senses and come into a forgetting of all things and of himself.<sup>2</sup>

Eckhart is content with nothing less than a complete union with God. He writes, "All that God ever made or shall yet make, all this (I say) if God should give it to my soul without Himself, he staying, so to speak a hair's breadth off, would not content my soul or make me happy. I am happy when all things are in me and God, and where I am God is, and where God is I am".<sup>3</sup>

To St. Teresa this union brings rests from sin and temptations. It brings the long desired spiritual freedom of the soul, "Freewill! Enslaved by thy liberty, unless established in the fear and love of thy Creator, when will that blessed day arrive in which, absorbed in the infinite ocean of Supreme truth, thou wilt no longer possess the power nor the wish to sin, being freed from all misery, and united to the life of thy God-- O my Bridegroom, My Master, at last the longed-for hour has

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1. Steiner, *Mystics of the Renaissance*, p. 259.

2. Cf. *Ibid*, p. 95.

3. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 27

come! Now it is time for us to see one another."<sup>1</sup>

This union, to St. Bernard, is the partaking of the spirit of God: God is in us in such a way that he is imparted and shared, thus a man need not fear to say that God is, as it were, one spirit with us. Again he describes this union as a fusion of all of the affections of the soul into the will of God. Thus he writes that, "as a bar of iron, heated red-hot, becomes like fire itself, or as the air radiant with sunbeams seems not so much to be illuminated as to be Light itself; so in the saints all human affections melt away, by some unspeakable transmutation, into the Will of God."<sup>2</sup>

Suso finds the basis of his doctrine of union in the lives of the saints of the Scripture. They were stripped of earthly glory and sought the glory of God. By thus uniting themselves to God they partook of the Divine Light and power. Thus we read that "The true renunciation and veritable abandonment of a man to the Divine Will in the temporal world is an imitation and reduction of that self-abandonment of the blessed of which Scripture speaks: and this imitation approaches its model more or less, according as men are more or less united to God. Remark well that which is said of the blessed. They are stripped of their personal initiative and changed into another form, another glory, another power. What then is this form if it be not the Divine Light and the Divine Being whereunto they pour themselves, and which pours itself into them and becomes one thing with them?"<sup>3</sup>

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1. St. Teresa, Thoughts, Balfe, pp. 28, 127.
  2. St. Bernard, Thoughts, Williams, p. 113
  3. Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 324

Similarly writes Ruysbroeck, "All that we have, He takes-- All that He is, He gives."<sup>1</sup>

With St. John of the Cross, this union is the culmination of life's blessings. He appeals directly to Saint John as his authority. By it the "beauty of God" is imparted to the human soul. (John 17:10)<sup>2</sup> It reveals the "eternal mysteries of His incarnation" (John 17:3).<sup>3</sup> No one will ever be disappointed in the blessings of this union (John 1:3,4).<sup>4</sup> The more complete the union the richer is the soul (John 1:16).<sup>5</sup> There is no limit to the blessings derived from this union even as there is no limit to God (John 14:23).<sup>6</sup> God will always hear those who abide in this union (John 15:17).<sup>7</sup> He who is in perfect union shall be "like unto the Son, and so is called, and is, by participation, God (I John 3:2; John 16:23).<sup>8</sup>

Writing of her own experience Juliana of Norwich looked forward to her union: "And then shall we all come into our Lord, ourself clearly knowing, and God fully having; and we shall endlessly be all had in God, him verily seeing, and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing, and Him delectably in-breathing (smelling), and of him sweetly drinking."<sup>9</sup>

Thomas a Kempis brings as his greatest gift to God a soul well purged and so prepared for union: "And when my soul shall be perfectly united with him, then shall my inward parts rejoice and then my Lord will say unto me, 'If thou wilt be with me I will be with thee, and I shall

1. Underhill, The Mystic Way, p. 144

2. St. Bernard, Thoughts, Balfe, p.115

3. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 187

4. Ibid. p. 191

5. Ibid. p. 76

6. Ibid. pp. 172, 176

7. Ibid. p. 218

8. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 440

9. Juliana of Norwich, Warrach, p. 38



answer him, 'Blessed Lord, I beseech thee dwell with me, for all the desire of my heart is to be with thee inseparable without departing.'"<sup>1</sup>

Edwards declares that the children of Light partake of the blessings of God through Christ in this union. He quotes John 17:23,26,27,13. Furthermore, "this was the design of Christ to bring it to pass, that he, and his Father, and his people might all be united in one. (John 17:21,22,23)"<sup>2</sup>

#### b. The Teachings of Saint John.

Such quotations could be greatly multiplied, for this phase of mystical life has had a full treatment at the hands of various writers. In addition to the citations made directly from John and quoted above, a study of the following summary of John's teaching on abiding and union with God will reveal his influence in the mystical formulation of this outstanding doctrine.

Perfect union makes the believer like God: John 10:16; 16:23;

I John 3:2.

Believers partake of union: John 6:56, 57; 17:23, 26

No limit to the blessings of union: John 1:3, 4; 14:3, 17, 23;

15:9, 10; 17:22, 23; I John 2:5.

Union brings obedience: John 14:20; I John 2:24; 3:6, 24.

Christ brought union: John 10:16; 17:21, 22, 23.

God manifested in union: John 1:16, 18; 14:20, 21; I John 2:28; 5:20.

Union assures answered prayer: John 15:7

Union produces spiritual fruit: John 15:4, 5.

Union brings salvation: John 10:28; 14:3.

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1. Imitation of Christ, p. 272

2. Works, Vol. IV, p. 200, 201.

CHAPTER IV

REPRESENTATIVE EMPHASES OF THE  
MYSTICS IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

## Chapter IV

### REPRESENTATIVE EMPHASES OF THE MYSTICS IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

#### A. The Mystical Doctrine of Love

As was pointed out above, faith is the means to union with God. In the mystical theology, faith is also closely associated with love. Love is the inspiration which makes faith possible.

Even a casual reading of the mystical literature will impress one with the emphasis laid upon love. Lady Julian of Norwich, in explaining the meaning of one of her visions exemplifies this emphasis: "And from that time that it was shewed, I desired oftymes to learn what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen years after and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: 'Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well! Love was His meaning. Who showed it thee? Love. What showed he thee? Love. Wherefore showed it He? For love. Hold thee therein, and thou shalt learn, and know more in the same. But thou shalt never know nor learn therein any other thing without end. Thus did I learn that love was our Lord's meaning.'"<sup>1</sup>

"In love", says Thomas Aquinas, "the whole spiritual life of man consists." To Saint Augustine it is "the weight of the soul that draws it to God." Ruysbroeck declares that the will of man "is transformed by eternal Love as fire by fire." St. Catherine of Genoa describes love as

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1. All Shall be Well, p. 7

a cleansing fire which prepares the soul for the Divine Light. She writes in her treatment on Purgatory, "This holy soul, yet in the flesh, found herself placed in the purgatory of God's burning love, which consumed and purified her from whatever she had to purify, in order that, after passing out of this life, she might enter at once into the immediate presence of God, her Love."<sup>1</sup>

Writing from the richness of his own spiritual life, William Law says that, "There is nothing that so much exalts our souls, as this heavenly love; it cleanses and purifies like a holy fire, and all ill tempers fall away before it. It makes room for all virtues, and carries them to their greatest height. Everything that is good and holy grows out of it, and it becomes a continual source of all holy desires and pious practices."<sup>2</sup>

Meister Eckhart identifies God with love. In one of his sermons, he declares that, "He who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him. Suppose I am in God, then where He is I am; and if God is in me, then, unless the Scriptures lie, where I am God is." And again, "Now you must know, God loves the soul so mightily, he who should rob God of loving would rob him of his very life and being."<sup>3</sup>

To St. Bernard love is born of the Spirit and is stronger than death: "It is love, not patience, nor hope, that is strong as death. Love is set afire of the Spirit. Love doth not say: It is fitting, or it is expedient to do such and such a thing; it saith rather: I will, I desire, I vehemently long so to do. Ye see how sublime, how fearless, how delightful is love."<sup>4</sup>

1. Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, p. 324
2. *Serious Call to a Devout Life*, p. 283
3. Meister Eckhart, p. 27, 113.
4. St. Bernard, *Thoughts*, Williams, p. 146

Thomas a Kempis represents love as the greatest spiritual asset: "There is nothing sweeter than love, nothing higher, nothing broader, nothing more jocund, nothing fuller, nothing better in heaven and in earth; for love is born of God nor it may not rest but in God above all creatures."<sup>1</sup>

St. John of the Cross sums up his teachings on love as follows: "That soul, therefore, has greater communion with God which is most advanced in love- that is, whose will is now conformable to the will of God. --- For God never grants the mystical wisdom without love, it being love itself that influences it into the soul."

Saint John of the Cross points out that the soul is not always conscious of this love because of its darkness in sin. However, after this soul has been purified by the "fires" of Love in purgation then the meaning of love dawns upon it.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Imitation of Christ, p. 105

2. Cf. Works, Lewis, Vol. I. p. 46. Saint John of the Cross delights to dwell upon the darkness of the "Night" of purgation and to contrast this darkness of the soul with its brightness and joy in the Divine Love of union with God. This note is dominant in his numerous poems. The following stanzas are typical of this emphasis in his writings:

"O burn that burns to heal!  
 O more than pleasant wound!  
 And O soft hand, O touch most delicate,  
 Thou dost new life reveal,  
 That dost in grace abound,  
 And, slaying, dost from life to death translate.

"O lamps of fire that shined  
 With so intense a light  
 That those deep caverns where the senses live,  
 Which were obscure and blind,  
 Now with strange glories bright  
 Both heat and light to his beloved give."

Saint John, so often called the Apostle of Love, furnishes to the mystical writers a rich field as a basis for their emphasis on love. While the above writers have not made so many direct quotations from Saint John, yet, in their emphasis upon and description of love we recognize the thought of the Beloved Disciple.

For instance, John declares that God is love (I J. 4:16). Because of this love He gave His Son that all through Him might have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus loved "his own" to the very end (13:1). He made known the truths of God unto those whom he loved; and this was done in order that they might share with him the love that he shared with the Father (17:26). He tells them that if they love him that they will keep his commandments (14:15). This keeping of his commandments also necessitated their love one for another. Saint John lays stress upon this phase of the believer's life in its relation to his fellow-man and in this, as we pointed out under Purgation, he has been followed closely by the mystical writers. In the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel this obligation is represented as a new commandment given to his disciples; and this new commandment would be a standard of judgment by which true discipleship could be known. Again this new commandment is repeated by Christ during the last night of his earthly life. (15:12). In I J. 3:14 love is made a condition of spiritual life. It is the light of the world and by its light the way to God is revealed. (8:12).

The following is a summary of Saint John's teachings about love.  
 God's love for man: John 3:16; 5:42; 10:13, 14, 15; 8:42; 11:4;  
 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21, 23; 15:9, 12, 13; 16:27; 17:23, 26;  
 19:26; 21:20; I John 2:5, 15; 3:1; 3:16, 17; 4:7-12, 16, 19.

Christ exemplifies love: John 14:21

Love for fellow-man necessary: I John 3:14, 15.

Man's love for God: John 3:19; 14:15, 21, 23, 24, 28; 21:15;

I John 4:20, 21.

Love for fellow-men: John 5:17; 13:29; 15:13; 19:26, 27; 20:21;

21:15; 21:16, 17; I John 2:9-11; 3:10, 11, 17, 18, 23;

4:7-12, 19, 21; 5:1, 2; II John 5, 6.

#### B. The Mystical Doctrine of Obedience.

Love makes obedience necessary. No one can attain to unity who does not obey. A surrendered will implies an obedient will. To the mystics this is a cardinal virtue.

Thus Thomas a Kempis makes obedience a requisite for the understanding of the words of Christ;<sup>1</sup> the failure to obey cuts off the soul from all blessings from God;<sup>2</sup> for, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them he it is that loveth me and I shall love him and show myself to him and shall make him an heir in the kingdom of my father. (John 14:21)"<sup>3</sup>

To St. John of the Cross, obedience is better than any penance or works.<sup>4</sup> To Edwards, it is necessary to any spiritual growth: For, he writes, "Christ hath promised, that he will manifest himself to his disciples, but, it is upon the condition, that they keep his commandments (John 14:21)."<sup>5</sup> Again Edwards declares that Christ himself is the great example to men of perfect obedience to his Father's will.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Imitation of Christ, p. 1
  2. Ibid., p. 124
  3. Ibid., p. 220
  4. Cf. Works, Lewis, Vol. I, p. 34
  5. Cf. Works, Vol. IV, p. 527
  6. Cf. Ibid. 187

This emphasis upon obedience is a major one in the mystical writings and such quotations as the above could be extended at length. These three writers are cited as representative in thought and emphasis. Their direct quotations from Saint John reveal the Apostle's influence upon their thought.

Saint John's teachings upon obedience may be summed up as follows:

Christ exemplifies obedience: John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28, 29, 8:42, 55; 10:18; 11:9; 12:27, 28, 49, 50; 14:31; 17:4; 18:11; 19:30.

Obedience gives knowledge: John 8:32; 17:6.

Obedience tests discipleship: John 8:32

Obedience, a proof of love: John 14:15, 21, 23; 14:24;

I John 5:2, 3; II John 1:6.

Obedience gives eternal life: John 3:36; 8:52; 10:26, 27;

12:47, 48; I John 2, 17.

Obedience results in union: John 14:20; I John 2:24; 3:6, 24;

II John 1, 9.

Obedience gives happiness: John 9:31; 13:17; 15:10.

Obedience necessary to spiritual growth: John 15:10; 8:32.

### C. The Mystical Doctrine of Peace

Through the working of faith, love and obedience the believer finds peace. Peace gives to the soul a sense of security and safety. The believer's arrival at the stage of peace is likened to a ship, long tossed upon a troublous ocean, but which at last reaches the harbor and safety.



Thomas a Kempis, employing the words of John, thus describes his peace as a gift of Christ to those who love Him: "Son, I said, I leave peace to you, I give my peace to you; not as the world giveth so give I. All men desire but all men love not those things that long (belong) to true peace. My peace is with meek men and mild of heart: thy peace shall be in much patience. If thou hear me and follow my voice thou shalt live in great peace."<sup>1</sup>

Again, a Kempis represents this peace as synonymous with union with Jesus. With such a possession of peace there can come no harm to the believer. Thus we read: "Shut thy door upon thee and call unto thee Jesus thy Love. Dwell with him in thy cell, for thou shalt not find elsewhere so great peace--- When Jesus is nigh all goodness is nigh, and nothing seemeth hard; but when Jesu is not nigh, all things are hard."<sup>2</sup>

Saint John of the Cross finds this peace in following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ in the heart: He writes, "He who, when the doors were shut, entered bodily in among his disciples, and said, 'Peace be unto you' (John 20:19), in an unexpected and inconceivable way, will enter spiritually into the soul without its knowledge or cooperation, when the doors of Memory, Intellect and Will are shut, and will fill it with His peace."<sup>3</sup>

Eckhart represents this peace as the result of a spirit-filled life. The carnal has been purged from the heart and it enjoys that

1. Imitation of Christ, p. 151.

2. Ibid. p. 20, 130.

3. Works, Lewis, Vol. I. p. 100, 215.

peace which is as the evening of a perfect day. He writes: "So the evening is warm. There is perfect day in the soul when all the soul is full of divine light. But it is evening in the soul, as I have said before, when the light of this world fades and the soul goes in to rest."<sup>1</sup>

To Edwards, this peace is the natural result of a life which rests in complete union with God. It is in reality of the same nature as heaven: "It is as being united to Christ, and living by a participation of his life, as a branch lives by the life of the vine. It is as partaking of the same love of God. (John 17:26)"<sup>2</sup> Again, "The peace which Christ gives his true disciples is the light of life, something of the tranquility of heaven, the peace of the celestial paradise, that has the glory of God to lighten it."<sup>3</sup> It is the same peace which God and Christ possess. (John 14:27 etc.)<sup>4</sup>

Again this mystical emphasis can be traced to Saint John who describes this peace under the following headings:

Peace received through faith: John 6:35; 6:68; 7:38.

God's peace given to believers: John 14:27; 16:33.

Peace, a gift from Christ: John 4:14; 14:1, 27; 20:19, 21, 26.

Union brings peace: John 16:33; 17:26.

#### D. The Mystical Doctrine of Salvation.

In the mystical theology, salvation is regarded as more than a judicial act by which the believer is freed from certain original sin.

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1. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 103.  
 2. Works, Vol. IV. p. 434.  
 3. Ibid. p. 435.  
 4. Ibid. p. 429

The emphasis is laid, rather, upon the fact of a spiritual rebirth. It is the entrance into a new life in which a new nature is given to man, or rather does he become conscious of a new life within. This new consciousness of life so changes his desires that he is no longer content with the old life. Joy in this salvation becomes a predominant element in his life.

Juliana of Norwich thus emphasizes this idea of joy: "It is the will of God", she writes, "that we have true enjoyment with Him in our salvation, and therein He willeth that we be mightily comforted, and strengthened."<sup>1</sup>

To Thomas a Kempis this new life is as an "unquenchable fire" within the heart of its possessor.<sup>2</sup>

In a sermon on John 15:16, Meister Eckhart emphasizes the joy of those who live in the light of Truth and admonishes them to bring forth fruit worthy of the children of God.<sup>3</sup>

Saint John of the Cross represented the thoroughly purged soul as filled with this new life: "The joy of the soul is now so abundant, that it is like the sea, which is not diminished by the waters that flow out of it, nor increased by those that empty themselves into it; for the soul now contains that fountain of which our Lord said, that it is 'springing up into life everlasting (John 4:14)."<sup>4</sup> Again in this new life the soul finds all that it has ever desired and so in joy, "it begins to sing the praises of the Beloved, celebrating the magnificence which it feels and enjoys in that union."<sup>5</sup> Also this new life is eternal; and ever a

1. All Shall Be Well, p. 28

2. Imitation of Christ, p. 224.

3. Cf. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 232

4. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 114

5. Ibid. p. 251, 256

source of wonder: "O wonder! The soul is now overflowing with the Divine waters, which run from it as from an abundant fountain into everlasting life (John IV:14). It is very true that this communication is light and fire of the lamps of God, yet the fire is here so sweet, that though an infinite fire, it is as the waters of life which satisfy the soul."<sup>1</sup>

To William Law, the secret of this joy in salvation is the ever increasing indwelling of Christ in the believer. He feels that it "is the language of Scripture that Christ in us is our hope of glory; that Christ formed in us - living, growing and raising his own life and Spirit in us - is our only salvation--- must not our redemption be equally inward, an inward essential death to this state of our soul, and an inward growth of a contrary life within us? Consider the treasure thou hast within thee; The Saviour of the world, the eternal Word of God, lies hid in thee, as a spark of divine nature which is to overcome sin, and death and hell within thee, and germinate the life of heaven again in thy soul. Turn to thy heart and thy heart will find its Saviour, its God, within itself."<sup>2</sup>

To Edwards the joy in this new life is great because it means the banishment of death and all of the consequences which death implies: "These are without doubt, he writes, "implied in that passing from death to life, which Christ speaks of as the fruit of faith, and which he opposes to condemnation. (John 5:24, 6:4, 9:50, 51)."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 251, 256.  
 2. Liberal and Mystical Writings, p. 12, 13.  
 3. Works, Vol. IV, p. 675, 432.

This special emphasis upon the joy to be found in a rebirth in Christ can be readily traced to the Apostle John. He represents salvation as follows:

Salvation makes full the joy of the believer: John 3:29; 8:56;

15:11; 16:24; 17:13; 20:20; I John 1:4, II John 1:12

Salvation is a new life for the old: John 3:21; 4:14; 7:38.

Salvation is a spiritual rebirth - or a new birth: John 1:12, 13;

3:3-8; 4:14; 5:51; 8:31-32; 9:41; 10:9, 27; 13:10, 35;

14:23; 15:3, 4, 14, 19; 17:14, 16, 25.

Salvation brings eternal life and joy: John 3:15-17, 36; 4:14, 36;

5:24; 6:27, 40, 47, 51, 54, 58, 63; 8:51; 10:29; 17:2, 24.

In salvation the believer overcomes the world: John 16:33.

#### E. The Mystical Doctrine of Freedom

Union with God gives to man real freedom. He is not free by nature, but rather freedom is the goal to which he aspires. The nearer he approaches to perfect union with God the greater becomes his freedom. Real freedom is spiritual freedom. Meister Eckhart so describes this freedom. In it man can will as God wills: "God does not compel the will, rather he sets the will free, so that it wills not otherwise than what God himself wills; and the spirit desires not to will otherwise than what God himself wills: and that is not unfreedom, it is true freedom and real freedom. For freedom is that we are not bound, but free and pure and unmixed, as we were in our first out-pouring, as we were set free in the Holy Ghost.

"Holy Scripture cries aloud for freedom from self. Self-free

is self-controlled and self-controlled is self-possessed and self-possession is God possession and possession of everything God ever made. I tell thee as true as God is God and man is man, wert thou quite free from self, free from the highest angel, then were the highest angel thine as well as thine own self. This method gives self-mastery."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in perfect union does Thomas a Kempis discover freedom: "For the free oblation of thyself into the hands of Almighty God ought to go before all thy works, if thou wouldst obtain liberty and grace."<sup>2</sup>

Union with God does not violate the freedom of the soul, writes St. John of the Cross, for, "all the movements of the soul are divine, and though of God, still they are the soul's, because God effects them within it, with itself willing them and assenting to them."<sup>3</sup>

Instances of St. John's conception of this spiritual freedom have been listed under the topics of Union and Obedience and so are not repeated here.

#### F. The Contrast of Material and Spiritual

In the mystical writings we find a sharp contrast drawn between the spiritual and the material; between the things of heaven and the things of earth. The spiritual values are the permanent ones; they abide because they are of God, while the others pass away.

Thus, Thomas a Kempis advises all to avoid striving after temporal things: "All things deem as vain comfort that come from any

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1. Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 418  
 2. Imitation of Christ, p. 255  
 3. Works, Lewis, Vol. II, p. 224

creature - the soul that loveth God, let her despise all things but God alone."<sup>1</sup> And again he points out the temporary quality of all honor, wealth, learning and advises that they be forsaken.<sup>2</sup>

In the perfect state of union in Christ, St. John of the Cross sees the spiritual as the common factor in the soul and, in the final triumph, it entirely effaces the material.<sup>3</sup>

Edwards describes the man of the world as the natural man, and between him and the light there is an enmity. (John 5:43). His ideals are material, and for this reason, he hates the spiritual. (John 5:40)<sup>4</sup>

Instances in Saint John of this mystical emphasis are rather numerous. For instance:

The spiritual contrasted with the material: John 3:6, 12, 31, 36;  
4:21, 23; 4:34, 35; 6:27, 32, 58, 63; 8:23; 9:40, 41;  
14:27; 17:16, 25; 18:36; 20:27, 28; I John 1:5; 2:16; 5:9, 19.

Things temporal and things eternal: John 1:30; 3:16; 4:13, 14;  
6:49-51, 58; 8:35, 58; 12:25; 14:19; 17:2, 11; I John 2:17.

The material at enmity with the spiritual: John 1:5, 11; 2:14-16;  
3:19-20; 5:44; 6:42; 15:18, 19, 24; 16:1-3, 20, 33; 17:14;  
I John 1:5-8; 2:16; 3:13; 4:4-6; 5:4.

#### G. The Symbolism of the Mystics with Special Reference to the Lord's Supper.

The symbolism of St. John has had a distinct influence on Mysticism. His symbols of Christ as the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the true Vine, we find are echoed

1. Imitation of Christ, p. 70

2. Ibid. p. 7, 8.

3. Cf. Works, Lewis, Vol. IV, p. 436, 447.

4. Cf. Works, Vol. IV, p. 40, 57.

again and again in the writings of a Kempis, Bernard, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Lady Juliana of Norwich, William Law and St. Augustine and others. Possibly that symbol of St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and others, by which the way to unity is represented as "night" or "dark night of the soul", has its origin in John's representation of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, or Judas going out into the night after the Supper.

Of special interest is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Baron von Hugel, in his scholarly work on the life and works of St. Catherine of Genoa, points out how she was influenced by John in her conception of this sacrament. According to von Hugel, St. Catherine does not associate this sacrament with the final passover supper of Christ, and so with his suffering and death; but on the contrary this sacrament carries with it the atmosphere of joy and triumph in a conquering Christ. Von Hugel points that that setting of this sacrament, according to St. Catherine, is the sixth chapter of John. Here Christ celebrates a Passover away from Jerusalem and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. By the multiplication of the loaves, he feeds the multitude; is hailed as a conqueror, and there arises a popular demand for him as king. The discourse in this chapter is taken to represent a great love-feast, in which Christ offers himself as the spiritual and living bread to all those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This to her, was the real eucharist, and through it, Christ can be found as the life-giving Spirit; this is the most appropriate symbol of that spiritual union of the soul with God- the end of all illumination. In it the believer communes directly with the Divine; and from such a communion, there comes to the true worshipper that inward experience, which makes him independent of external evidence. Like the man born



blind the seeker after God now knows that he "sees".

However, this conception of this sacrament is not held by all the mystical writers. St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and Thomas a Kempis, for instance, dwell at length upon the suffering and death of Christ as symbolized in the Supper. And through his passion they find union with God made possible.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to discover to what extent the Johannine writings have been influential in the development of the doctrinal system of certain representative mystical writers. If the teachings of these representative writers have been influenced in their essential doctrines by Saint John, then it follows that he has had a decisive influence on the mystical theology of the Christian Church. It is the purpose of this concluding chapter to sum up this influence of St. John upon these representative writers which have been cited above.

Miss Evelyn Underhill, who has given so much study to mysticism and who is a recognized authority upon this subject, considers the influence of Saint John as the dominating one in the development of the whole system. In describing this influence she says: "Thirty or forty years after his death, (i.e. the death of Saint Paul), when the Synoptic gospels, with their influence on the local eschatological side of the vision of Jesus, were already in circulation, a book appeared in which the deepest and richest experience of the Christian mystic found once for all their supreme literary expression, and established themselves as the central facts of the Christian 'revelation'. That book is the Fourth Gospel of the New Testament canon, ascribed traditionally to the Apostle St. John; and depending from it, and completing its doctrine, is the short letter called his 'First Epistle'--- Hardly a mystic who comes after him has escaped the influence of his mighty spirit--- The Fourth Gospel is, then, the poetic description by a great mystic, who was also a great

artist, of that new life, that new outbirth of Reality, which Jesus of Nazareth made available for the race."<sup>1</sup>

So strongly does Dean Inge feel the vital influence of St. John upon the writers, that he declared the Fourth Gospel to be the charter of Christian mysticism. In summing up John's influence he says: "The Gospel of St. John - the 'Spiritual Gospel', as Clement already calls it - is the charter of Christian Mysticism. Indeed Christian Mysticism, as I understand it, might almost be called Johannine Christianity; if it were not better to say that a Johannine Christianity is the ideal which a Christian mystic sets before himself. For we cannot but feel that there are deeper truths in this wonderful Gospel than have yet become part of the religious consciousness of mankind. Perhaps, as Origin says, no one can fully understand it who has not, like its author, lain upon the breast of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

In accord with these judgments, it has been discovered in this thesis that Saint John's influence upon the mystics has been a positive one. His doctrine of the Logos has been the source of much inspiration. This Divine Light, coming into the heart of man, makes him a partaker of the nature of God. Thus it also enables man to know God without any intermediate agent. This Light within man is often likened by the mystic to a "seed" or a "spark". This "seed", having within itself the essential nature of God, makes man a partaker of God and through its growth enables him to grow more and more like God until he attains unto unity with God. The contemplation of this Divine Seed within the soul leads the believer

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1. The Mystic Way - p. 216, 223, 257.  
2. Christian Mysticism, p. 44-45.

oftimes to make statements as to his unity with God that seem immoderate to many minds. Such claims, however, do show the influence of Saint John, even though they are at times excessive. This consciousness of the Inner Light also gives to the mystic an intense longing after God and a restlessness in life which is never fully satisfied until he has that inner experience of unity with God by which he "sees" God. This influence of Saint John has been found to pervade the works of such writers as Thomas a Kempis, Meister Eckhart, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Augustine, Saint Teresa, William Law, George Fox, Jonathan Edwards and others.

In this study it has been found that these representative writers agree upon what is the goal of life. This goal, the summum bonum of all life, is union with God. The attainment to this union represents the fulfillment of all desires to such writers as Angelus Silemus, Tauler, Meister Eckhart, Saint Bernard, Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Thomas a Kempis, William Law, Jonathan Edwards and others.

Saint John's influence upon his goal of mysticism has been found to pervade the very center of its thinking. To abide in Christ as the branch abides in the vine; to be one with him as he is one with the Father, is the ideal of the followers of the Way. Not only have Johannine phrases and terms been freely employed but many direct quotations from the Gospel are made.

Again it has been found that the means by which this goal is attained is dwelt upon by the mystic. This life to him is a journey or a road that leads to a greatly to be desired haven - union with God. The

time that he is in this world is but a sojourn at its best. This journey is marked by certain characteristics: First there is the negative ideal of self-denial, self-abnegation, self-devotion, self-annihilation, by which the spiritual element in man is promoted at the expense of the material. But, secondly, the great means of attainment to union is faith. This faith is an intuitive insight, made possible by the Spirit, which enables the soul to venture forward towards higher things. As a result of this venture comes that enrichment of the soul through experience of God. This is a common characteristic, with different emphases, of the representative writers treated in this thesis. It has been pointed out, under Illumination, how Saint John's conception of faith has so largely entered into this doctrine.

In addition to his influence upon these mystical writers in what may be considered as their characteristic doctrines, it has also been discovered that Saint John has had a decided influence upon certain doctrines not peculiar to these writers but emphasized by them in common. Of such doctrines, this thesis has treated that of Love, Obedience, Peace, Salvation, Real Freedom, etc. It was discovered that these representative writers appealed to Saint John as an authority for these teachings.

It has also been discovered that Saint John has furnished to the mystics a rich store of symbols which they have freely used. The figures of the Well of Water, Bread of Life, the Vine, the Many Mansions, etc., have added much to the richness of their imagery.

From the above it is evident that Saint John has had a decided influence in the formulating of the characteristic doctrines of these

representative mystical writers. That he has also been equally influential in the formulation of other doctrines emphasized in their theology, is also evident. Then, it follows that Saint John has had a vital influence on Christian Mysticism and through this influence his writings have been a powerful leaven within the Church throughout the centuries.

CHAPTER VI

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## Chapter VI.

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