

THE EVANGELICAL ATTRACTION TO MYSTICISM

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Source: <http://www.diakrisis.org/evanmyst.htm> as of 2005

INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the European Reformation, there has been a *clear* gulf between the body of teaching represented by the Church of Rome and that which is represented by the Protestant churches. However, in recent times, as the process of ecumenism (which now includes interfaithism) has gathered apace in the Christian scene, it has become increasingly fashionable to claim that the situation has changed immeasurably and that there is now very little which should divide these two religious bodies. Many would say now that there is today no such 'clear gulf', and that explorations should take place as to how the "tragic" rift (their words) caused by the Reformation can be healed — indeed, the claim is that such a healing would be highly profitable from an evangelistic standpoint because then we would be seen to be a loving church, united in the faith.

And of course, certain passages of Scripture are invoked:

Psa.133: 'Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* For brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron...'

or Jn.13:34-35: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

or Jn.17:20-23: 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.'

So we have this gathering notion that the church of Rome is different today — far more evangelical, far more amenable to the teaching of the Word, and that we should be edging our way towards some kind of unifying relationship. As you will know, there are a number of well-known Evangelical personalities — especially from the U.S.A. — who are suggesting this.

Of course, this is nothing new. Even during the time of the Reformation, there were many such voices. The great Church of England puritan theologian, William Perkins, in his treatise, *A Reformed Catholicke* (1597), gives as his primary reason for writing it: '*To confute all such politickes as hold and maintain that our religion and that of the Roman church differ not in substance and consequently they may be reconciled.*'

It is interesting that Perkins should use the term 'politickes' to describe these people — a term which perfectly encapsulates all the carnal conniving and craftiness which needs to be applied in order to effect this 'reconciliation'. In fact, Perkins concludes his dedicatory epistle by saying: '*It would be the greatest height of unthankfulness if we were not to stand out against the present Church of Rome but instead yield ourselves to plots of reconciliation.*'

Politickes and Plots — that's the name of the game!

Although much of the movement towards this 'reconciliation' has taken place at the doctrinal level (all the tinkering with words such as 'justification', 'faith', 'grace', etc), there are also other means by which this 'reconciliation' is being effected.

One such means involves straightforward ecumenical activity, "Churches Working Together", leaving aside all doctrinal considerations, but just getting on with being matey. This ecumenical approach is mainly operational in the thousands of "good-works-without the-true-Gospel" type of churches which form a large base in the professing Christian scene today.

There is yet another means being used to effect this 'reconciliation' — a means which occurs not at the doctrinal level, nor at the 'matey good works' local church level, but at the level of shared, personal religious experience. Again, this could be broken down into various categories; but we shall deal with them under the one general heading of 'Mysticism'.

Through mysticism and mystical experiences, the *attempted* reunion and reconciliation of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is being effected — often at a very subtle level. I say 'subtle' because there is an increasing number of professing evangelicals involved who, under normal circumstances, would have nothing to do with the Church of Rome, but who, wittingly or unwittingly are caught up in mystical practices (or at least advocating such practices) which are either a direct legacy of Roman Catholic mysticism or are a deceptive derivative of it.

It would seem that there are many professing evangelicals today who fail to understand the difference between religious mysticism and biblical spirituality.

The mystically-influenced writings of teachers who profess to be evangelical, such as Richard Foster and Joyce Huggett, have had an enormous influence on neo-evangelicalism — especially through their books *Celebration of Discipline* and *Prayer* by Foster, and *Listening to God* by Huggett. And their teachings are then avidly propagated by such media as Alpha Magazine, which claims to be the most widely-read evangelical magazine in the U.K.

However, there are also many scholars who, although plainly bright enough to know the difference between religious mysticism and biblical spirituality, fail to alert their readers to it. For example, the well-known book *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* published by Moody Press has, as one of those great leaders, the Spanish Counter-Reformation mystic, Teresa of Avila. She is literally sandwiched between John Knox, Blaise Pascal and John Owen!

And when the book *The Serpent and the Cross*, which exposes the New Age today, was reviewed in the neo-evangelical newspaper, *Evangelicals Now*, the reviewer was most put out that '*mystical traditions within the church should be ejected on the basis of their roots in Gnosticism*', and he lamented the fact that the author dared to criticise those the reviewer termed as '*much-respected mystics such as Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, the Quakers and others*'. And the amazing thing is that this reviewer is a professor of apologetics in a Bible School!

Another example is provided in the New Dictionary of Theology (published by the Intervarsity Press). In the article on 'Mystical Theology', it just gives a scant amount of information, without any caveats whatsoever. The impression is one of complete acceptance of Catholic mysticism as if it is a perfectly acceptable way of life for an orthodox Christian.

Surely, the purpose of such a Dictionary — which claims on its dust-jacket to combine '*excellence in scholarship with a profound insight into current theological issues*' — is to acquaint people not only with the bare facts but also with any important controversies on the subject. But there is nothing. One would think that mysticism had never had any opponents.

This is a classic symptom of neo-evangelicalism, which always involves a denial of the negative aspects of Christianity – do not judge, do not forbid, but merely love. That is the name of the game.

And then there is the politically correct book *Daughters of the Church* by professors Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the U.S., published by Zondervan in 1987. There we have the mystic women of all eras presented without any real critical examination of their views and practices. An angel is said to thrust a spear through the nun Teresa of Avila's entrails in an ecstatic mystical trance vision. Fine. We'll just report it without any comment as if it was a perfectly valid experience for a Christian. Blood is said to flow from a stigmatic hole in Jacoba Bartolini's side. No problem. We'll just report it as one more remarkable aspect of this saint's life. That is the neo-evangelical response to medieval mysticism.

We could present countless further examples of the passive neo-evangelical acceptance of Catholic Mysticism; but it is not our purpose to trot out, one after the other, all the various peccadilloes in the evangelical scene relating to the advocacy and practice of Catholic mysticism. Instead, we need to engage in something far more revealing and instructive.

Let it be said that at one time, mysticism was rigorously opposed in orthodox Protestant circles as, at best, a highly suspect development, at worst, a highly dangerous one. The Zondervan *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (p.201) rightly says:

"Mysticism has had outspoken opponents – mostly from Protestant circles, who maintain that it was a derivative of ancient paganism and Gnosticism because it diverts attention away from the Gospel".¹

That is precisely our position in this paper.

The headings we hope to cover are as follows: **First**, we will begin by giving a Basic Introduction to Mysticism, involving an attempt to define it, plus the manifestation of mysticism in World Religion, and the workings of Mysticism in Roman Catholicism; **Second**, we will show How Mysticism has influenced Evangelical Protestantism in History – looking particularly at the 14th Century Dominican Mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Johann Tauler, the German 17th Century Pietist Movement, the Response of the Reformers to Mysticism, and the Mystical Legacy of John Wesley on Revivalism, the Holiness Movement and Early Pentecostalism; **Third**, we will expose the Links Between Catholic Mysticism and the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements; **Fourth**, we will offer Thirteen Reasons why Mysticism is not Compatible with Evangelical Christianity; **Fifth**, we will conclude by posing and answering the question: "*Why have so many Protestant Christians Become Attracted to Catholic Mysticism?*"

I. A BASIC INTRODUCTION TO MYSTICISM

1. DEFINING MYSTICISM

It has been well-said that mysticism '*begins with a mist and always ends in schism*'! There is more than a degree of truth in that witty aphorism. Chambers' Dictionary defines 'mysticism' as '*the habit or tendency of religious thought and feeling of those who seek direct [with the accent on this word 'direct'] communion with God or the divine*'² while a mystic is defined as '*one who seeks or attains direct intercourse with God in elevated religious feeling or ecstasy*'.³

Evelyn Underhill's defines Mysticism as 'the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in a greater or less degree, or who aims at it and believes in such attainment.'

Aldous Huxley wrote: The technique of mysticism may result in the direct intuition of, and union with, an ultimate spiritual reality that is perceived as simultaneously beyond the self and in some way within it.'

Professor Ferguson, Dean of the Open University and an ardent advocate of mysticism, lists five generalised points which one can identify in any manifestation of mysticism:

'First, mystics believe that there is an Ultimate Being, a dimension of existence beyond that experienced through the senses...[which] is often, though not invariably, conceived in personal terms and called God... Second, mystics claim that the Ultimate can in some sense be known or apprehended... Third, the soul perceives the Ultimate through inward sense... Fourthly, it would be widely held by mystics that there is an element in the soul akin to the Ultimate, a divine spark...a holy spirit within. In this way, to find God is to find one's true self... Fifth, mysticism has as its zenith the experience of union with the Ultimate... The mystic seeks to pass out of all that is merely phenomenal, out of all lower forms of reality, to become Being itself'.⁴

We can see from this description of mysticism, first, that God is reduced to a pantheistic '*dimension of existence*' beyond the normal senses, although this is sometimes called 'God' for convenience; second, that there is an element of this divinity, a divine spark, a '*holy spirit within*' all people (a foundational error); third, that it is possible to tap into this 'inwardly' so that one is absorbed into it, and can even become that 'Ultimate Being' oneself; fourth, the relegation of this present life to a '*lower form of reality*', something '*merely phenomenal*'. Finally, there is the idolatrous and even blasphemous assertion that '*to find God is to find one's true self*'.

There is very much more we could say, as there are as many definitions as there are people to make them. What we find is that the operation of mysticism, wherever it occurs, involves the utilisation of certain practices in order to bring about an altered state of consciousness so that a person can not only personally experience the Divine presence — however that may be perceived — but actually become unified with the Divine Essence, usually in a stupendous ecstatic experience.

And so we find that what mysticism is all about — as it has manifested throughout the world over the centuries, whether it is Eastern mysticism or so called Christian mysticism — can be reduced to two heads: **1)** The seeking out of a direct experience of God, without any mediator; **2)** The setting up of the individual's subjective experience as the sole arbiter of religious truth.

And the manifestation of these twin-tenets of mysticism in the Christian scene has been diverse: ranging from one extreme in the passive navel-gazing of the Quietists, to the opposite extreme in the enthusiastic fanaticism of the Holy Spirit Movements which have dogged orthodoxy throughout the Gospel Age. (The so-called 'Toronto Blessing', for example, is a classic manifestation of manipulated mysticism, as we shall come to appreciate).

These twin-tenets of mysticism have always played a vital part in the religions of the world. Some world religions are primarily mystical, e.g., Hinduism and Buddhism. Whereas other religions are primarily formalist but have their mystical wings, such as the Sufism of Islam and the Kabbalism of post-AD.70 Judaism. How Roman Catholicism came to be involved in mysticism is a complex story, with a number of seemingly disparate influences.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC MYSTICISM

Augustine of Hippo has often been claimed to be the Father of Roman Catholic mysticism, but there is no real evidence for this. As with all the Church Fathers, there is an ambiguity of language in certain areas which is open to misinterpretation, but he certainly never spoke of a direct, personal, essential union between a believer and God in this life. And he always stressed the role of the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator in the restoration of the image of God in man. We will come to see how an understanding of this is fundamental to our resistance of mysticism — that it is precisely in this area of the misunderstanding of the image of God in man which provides the seedbed for so-called Christian Mysticism.

The main origin in the development of Catholic mysticism occurs in the late fifth or early sixth century A.D., when a Syrian monk wrote a number of theological treatises to which he fraudulently affixed the name of 'Dionysius the Areopagite', who is mentioned briefly in the Book of Acts as a convert of the Apostle Paul (Acts 17:34).

These works represented an attempt to reconcile Christianity with the Neoplatonic thought which had pervaded Graeco-Roman culture. Neoplatonism was a Greek ascetic metaphysical system operating from about the end of the second century until the middle of the sixth. Its chief architect was a man named Plotinus (c.205-270), who "*advocated asceticism and the contemplative life*".⁵ The actual system of Neoplatonism originally arose as a hostile response to the claims of Christ, absorbing the earlier Platonic mystery school to become the syncretic religion of the age.

In spite of the fact that this Neoplatonism is said to have "*provided the philosophical basis for the pagan opposition to Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries*",⁶ its syncretistic co-mingling with a profession of Christian faith was carried out by Satan with great stealth, and provided the religious foundations for all 'Christian' mysticism – however much it may profess otherwise. William Inge, Dean of St. Paul's, London from 1911-1934, and a leading Anglican scholar who had a major role in re-arousing ecclesiastical interest in mysticism, frankly "*admitted that Christian mysticism owed a debt to the Greek Mysteries*".⁷

The dissemination of all these carriers of syncretistic mysticism was carried out through the offices of such men as Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) and his brother Basil of Caesarea (330-379).⁸ Gregory, in particular, specialised in the wildly allegorical approach to the Scriptures (a common feature of mystics); and by the time that pseudo-Dionysius appeared on the scene, the way had been paved for the compounding of a quasi-Christian mystical theology which would be mistaken by many for the heart of Christianity itself.

This Neoplatonist Syrian monk who took the name of the Pauline convert, Dionysius, for his own – presumably to guarantee his writings acceptance within Christian circles – was an advocate of what is known as the *via negativa* (the negative way), whereby through asceticism and certain meditation practices one gradually eliminates from the mind all that is not God in order to penetrate the mystery of His 'dark no-thingness'. The leading features of pseudo-Dionysius' written works are "*the exaltation of the via negativa above revealed theology*", coupled with "*the doctrine of the perfection by ecstasy*".⁹

In the 12th and 13th centuries, there was a massive arousal of interest in mysticism in the Roman church with many new orders of monks and nuns being formed. These were greatly influenced by the writings of this pseudo-Dionysius.

Then in the sixteenth century, we find mystics such as Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross developing a systematised mysticism in their writings, laying out the steps by which one may achieve personal union with the divine, as if it was an ascent up a ladder or mountain, or down into the labyrinthine depths of the soul.

These writings have been popularised throughout the Christian scene for many years, especially in Charismatic and neo-evangelical circles today where they are recommended as wholesome reading matter. For example, in *Power Evangelism* by John Wimber, we find that Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila are commended.

3. CATHOLIC MYSTICISM AND WORLD RELIGIONS

However, when we read these mystical works through an orthodox biblical Christian filter, we find that Catholic mysticism is actually nothing other than a 'Christianised' form of Eastern mysticism, however much their advocates may want to protest. Mysticism is mysticism – wherever it occurs – it simply adapts itself according to the religio-cultural situation in which it develops.

In his book *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (Collins/Fount, 1981, p.127), the Roman Catholic monk, William Johnston, states:

"In the mystical life one passes from one layer to the next in an inner or downward journey to the core of the personality where dwells the great mystery called God – God who cannot be known directly, cannot be seen (for no man has ever seen God) and who dwells in thick darkness. This is the never-ending journey which is **recognizable in the mysticism of all the great religions**. It is a journey towards union because the consciousness gradually expands and integrates data from the so-called unconscious while the whole personality is absorbed into the great mystery of God".¹⁰

Here we have one of the foundational errors of all mysticism: that '*at the core of the personality dwells the great mystery called God*' in all people. And Johnston's assertion that '*this is the never-ending journey which is recognizable in the mysticism of all the great religions*' is quite correct. Mysticism is mysticism, wherever it occurs; but it adapts itself according to the religio-cultural situation in which it develops.

In his book on mysticism (*Mysticism and Philosophy*, Collins, 1960, p.100), the philosopher W.T. Stace frankly admits that '*the Christian [mystical] experience is basically the same as that which is described in the Mandukya Upanishad [of the Hindus]*'.¹¹

Having read a great deal of both Eastern and Christian mysticism, both before coming to repentance and since, I am convinced that Christian mysticism, so-called, has been a major weapon of the devil, under the disguise of piety and godliness, which is being used in order to bring about a reunion of Protestantism and Romanism.

Ultimately, it will also lead to a closer relationship between Roman Catholicism and other world religions. As the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

"Enlightenment, as a natural experience of reality... possesses a spiritual value. The endeavours to introduce Oriental forms of meditation in Christian spirituality... deserve sympathetic attention and encouragement".¹²

And in a Catholic charismatic journal, a priest writes:

"Let us be able to recognise that Christian Yoga can be beneficial and conducive to greater growth in union with God".¹³

So we see that whenever mysticism takes a hold in a person's life the inevitable progression is in the direction of syncretism and increased tolerance of pagan religion.

II. HOW MYSTICISM HAS INFLUENCED EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM IN HISTORY

First, any consideration of how mysticism has influenced evangelical Protestantism in history must take into account:

1. THE 14TH CENTURY GERMAN DOMINICAN MYSTICS

i. Meister Eckhart

The first of these is: Meister Eckhart (1260-1327/8), a Dominican priest who taught that in every person there is a 'divine ground' or 'spark'. In one encyclopaedia, a writer says:

'One of the essential elements in Rhineland mysticism... is the emphasis laid on the divine element in humanity variously known as the 'spark' or 'ground' of the soul, the 'divine image' or 'holy self', the 'inner light' or the 'Christ within.'

This is very similar to the mystical teaching of the world's religions and of the Quakers and other 'Inner Light' movements. The founder of the Quakers, George Fox, devised a universalist doctrine of the 'Inner Light of the Living Christ' in all people, from the beginning of time; which, as we know, is complete nonsense.¹⁴ From whence did Fox receive such teaching? The answer probably lies in the fact that he believed that the truth is to be found not in Scripture or theology "but in God's voice speaking to the soul".¹⁵

In the recently published work *Biblical Theology* by John Owen (Soli Deo Gloria), there is contained a great treatise entitled *A Defense of Sacred Scripture Against Modern Fanaticism* which is specifically aimed at the mystical doctrine of the Inner Light made fashionable by the Quakers in Owen's time.

Returning to Eckhart, although it is now fashionable in some academic circles to say otherwise today, I can find no reason to alter the judgement that Eckhart was a classic pantheist. Consider these quotations from his works:

'The being and the nature of God are mine. Jesus enters the castle of the soul; the spark of the soul is beyond time and space; the soul's light is uncreated and cannot be created; it takes possession of God with no mediation; the core of the soul and the core of God are one.'

'If I were not, God would not be God'.

'God's ground and the soul's ground is one ground.'

'The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me.'

One writer on mysticism says:

'Equally distinctive is [Eckhart's] teaching about the birth of Christ in the soul. Eckhart is more interested in this than in the historic life of Jesus of Nazareth. For him what matters is that in us Christ is born, dies and rises again.'

This is a strange kind of 'incarnationalism' that we commonly find in Christian mysticism, teaching that Christ is fully incarnated in the soul of a person when he discovers that mystical union with the spark of God which dwells within.

So, to be born again in Eckhart's theology is to first detach oneself from all created things and then discover and be unified with the God within — at which point there is 'the birth of the Son in the Soul', the image of the Father. Small wonder that the Zen Buddhist, D.T. Suzuki, in his book *Mysticism: Christian & Buddhist* (Pelican), can make a straight comparison between Zen Buddhism and the teachings of Meister Eckhart.

Now you may say, well what does all this have to do with Catholic mysticism and Evangelicals. Evangelicals don't advocate Eckhart, do they? Well, no, evangelicals don't actually advocate Eckhart. They wouldn't dare because of the obvious heresy in Eckhart's writings. But they do very significantly advocate one of Eckhart's major disciples, Johann Tauler. And this is our next consideration when looking at how mysticism has influenced evangelical Protestantism.

ii. Johann Tauler

Johann Tauler (1300-1361) was also a Roman Catholic Dominican who was a disciple of Eckhart. This is why we gave the background to Eckhart. Presumably to avoid accusations of heresy Tauler moderated the language used by Eckhart; but this merely provided a cloak behind which he continued to teach many of the same essential principles as Eckhart.

An examination of his sermons shows that Tauler speaks of the three stages in the mystical life: 1) a life of spirituality and virtue, bringing us close to God's presence; 2) Spiritual poverty, when God withdraws

himself from the soul, leaving it anguished and denuded; 3) the transition into a divinised life, into what he describes as '*a union of our created spirit with God's uncreated one*' (Sermon on 1 Pet.3:8). That is unequivocal mystic language. Very similar to the three stages of the pseudo-Dionysius we spoke of earlier.

Many evangelicals seem to regard Tauler as a precursor to the Reformation. But I believe that this is a profound error. He was certainly not a great fan of the Roman Catholic church, but that was simply a trait which he held in common with all mystics, who eschew any kind of organisational church, which simply stands in the way of the mystic's spiritual quest of being 'oned with God'.

We find this notion of Tauler as a forerunner of the Reformation in, for example, *The Puritans: Their Origins and their Successors*, by Martin Lloyd Jones, in which the statement is made that:

There were certain movements of the Spirit within the body of the Roman Catholic Church even before the Protestant Reformation. A man like John Tauler in Germany was awakened by the Spirit in a new way and, I believe, filled with the Spirit. The effect it had on him was to turn him into a great preacher, a very popular preacher; and people crowded to hear his preaching.'

Elsewhere in the same book, Dr. Lloyd Jones says:

Before the Reformation there were those who were very interested in holiness and godliness and in coming to a knowledge of God. These were called mystics, and some of them were very "evangelical" mystics. There was, for instance, John Tauler in Germany who used to preach in a church where great crowds gathered, and there were many conversions. If you read his sermons you come to the conclusion that this man was almost an evangelical.'

I have read a translation of Tauler's sermons, which have been published by the Roman Catholic Paulist Press, and I am amazed that anyone could describe them as evangelical – in the true sense of the word. Here are three extracts from Tauler's sermons on the seasonal Masses:-

1) 'In this denuding of ourselves, we are reformed in the form of God, clothed with His divinity. It is the hidden darkness of which St. Dionysius (pseudo) spoke.'

2) 'Christ also said: "You shall be witnesses in Samaria." Samaria means "union with God". Surely the closest and most direct way of bearing witness is to be truly united with Him. In this way the soul takes flight away from itself and from all creatures, for in the simple unity of the Divine Godhead it sheds all multiplicity. It is now exalted above itself... In such a state a man can lose himself entirely in God... Beyond this he is led into another Heaven which is the divine Essence itself, where the human spirit loses itself so completely that no trace of the self remains... How could the mind grasp such a thing? Even the spirit of man cannot comprehend it, for so submerged is it now into the divine ground that it knows nothing, feels nothing, understands nothing but God alone in His simple, pure undisguised Unity.'

3) 'God commanded Abraham to go out of his land and leave his kin, so that He might show him all good. "All good" signifies the divine birth, which contains all good within itself.'¹⁶

Tauler is here claiming allegory in this story as symbolising a person leaving worldly things and pursuing good things so that 'the divine birth can be effected in us.' This is a Christmas sermon on the three aspects of God being born: a) the first birth is the Father begetting the Son; b) the second birth concerns maternal fruitfulness through virginal chastity and true purity; c) the third birth is effected when 'God is born within a just soul by grace and out of love'.

How could anyone be fooled by this mystical humbug? One insightful writer says on this (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Baker, 1984, pp.1070-1):

'The assumption that Tauler limited the mystical union to a conformity of divine and human wills by grace alone has made Protestant authors sympathetic to Tauler. But this interpretation... must be understood in the context of his assumption that an innate likeness to God within the human soul makes possible a union of essence or being, and also in view of his emphasis on human cooperation with divine grace in the path toward union.'

There is nothing whatsoever of the Atonement of Christ in Tauler. He does not preach an atoning Christ who has died as the substitute for the sins of His people, or who has brought reconciliation between a wrathful God and a repentant people, or who has served as the propitiation for our sins. Then we *would* know that he was indeed an evangelical. Instead, it is all Dominican mysticism, pietistic language without any genuine Bible theology and all wrapped up in the most extreme forms of allegorisation.

Tauler's desire was not to preach Christ crucified but, as Chambers Encyclopedia states, '*to spread the teaching of the mystics among the unlettered devout*'. **That** was the real basis of his preaching.

Essentially Tauler teaches that the human soul is a Divine spark which can be kindled through living the right kind of life and practising the right kind of works. This is standard Roman Catholic mystical redemption teaching.

It seems astonishing that these sermons are held up by knowledgeable people such as Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones as a kind of precursor to the Reformation! On the contrary, the Reformation was a gigantic NO! to this medieval mysticism.

At one stage in his life, Tauler had a mystical experience when he heard a voice in his head which made him fall into a trance and lose consciousness – a kind of 'slain in the spirit' experience. When he came round, he found that he was completely changed and all fired up with a new outlook on life. This is claimed by the second-blessing advocates to be evidence that Tauler received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, as can be seen in the book advocating the Charismatic 'slain in the spirit' experience *Overcome by the Spirit*, by the Roman Catholic Dominican priest, Francis McNutt (with a preface by the Church of England Bishop David Pytches).

It is this experience that fired up his preaching. In his book *The Sacred Anointing*, Tony Sargent mentions Dr. Lloyd-Jones's reference to Tauler when he writes:

'He reported the case of John Tauler, a German R.C. priest, who preached in one of the great cathedrals. God suddenly took hold of him, filled him with his Spirit, and as a result, his whole preaching was transformed.'

But that is not what had happened at all. What had really happened was that Tauler had a mystical experience when he heard a voice in his head and promptly lost all consciousness. Is that what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

What this mystical experience then made Tauler go out and preach fervently was not the atoning work of Christ on the cross but the importance of achieving a mystical experience of God. In one example, he preached to astounding results, as Francis McNutt reveals:

'When the sermon was over, Tauler went and offered Mass, but fully forty men stayed behind in the churchyard, lying as it were in a swoon... Then Tauler said to a man standing nearby: "Dear son, what do you think we should do with these men?" Then the man touched them but they moved very little and lay there almost as if they were dead.'

Does this remind you of the Charismatic mysticism of today? Remember, we've been told by Dr. Lloyd-Jones that "*John Tauler used to preach in a church where great crowds gathered, and there were many*

conversions.' Were these allegedly 'converted' men convicted of sin? Not at all. They had merely been profoundly affected by Tauler preaching the teaching of the mystics. They had gone into a rapture.

Last year, I attended a Bible Rally in what would be regarded as a highly orthodox church and heard a similarly highly orthodox and well-known Reformed preacher (who, incidentally, had spent his formative years at Westminster Chapel) suddenly start waxing lyrical about how John Tauler had preached to cathedrals-full of people and brought about many conversions. But he seemed to be completely unaware that the people were converted to Catholic mysticism rather than Bible Christianity.

Recently, I read an interview in the 'Jesus Army' magazine with John Arnott, Senior Pastor in the Airport church in Toronto. He was asked by Noel Stanton: "*Do you see [the Toronto Blessing] as breaking out into evangelism and mission?*" Arnott replied: "*Absolutely. Unbelievers are being converted just through going out under the power of the Spirit*". So evangelicals believe today that conversion is a mystical experience. (Incidentally, this is very much like the ancient pagan practice of 'Incubation', whereby one goes into a special sleep in a sacred place where the gods allegedly work on you while you're out for the count!).

As an illustration of the confusion about mysticism in evangelical circles, I was sent a fax by a well-known evangelical leader recently asking to be faxed back a copy of a leaflet I had written critiquing the Slain in the Spirit experience. It was duly sent and I received a very patronising reply advising me to study Church History and then to put out an amended second edition of the leaflet taking account of what I had learned about revival. He asked me: "Have you never read what the Doctor [Lloyd-Jones] wrote about John Tauler and other mystics?" To which I replied, firstly, that I was thankful that I didn't idolise the Doctor, and secondly, that having abandoned mysticism in favour of Christianity on becoming a believer, I was in no mood to apostatise.

So much for the 14th century German mystics. Our second topic in our examination of how mysticism has influenced evangelical protestantism in history involves

2. THE RESPONSE OF THE REFORMERS TO ALL FORMS OF MYSTICISM

The Catholic mystics of the Reformation period – people such as Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuits and, later, Francis de Sales, were decidedly anti-Reformation. Then there was John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila in Spain. Teresa believed herself and her nuns to be involved in a battle to overturn "*the mischief and ravages those Lutherans had wrought in France*".

In fact, we find that the whole issue of whether or not mysticism is a valid Christian pursuit comes into perspective at the time of the European Reformation with the vast number of individuals and groups which claimed some sort of mystical inspiration from the Spirit. These 'spiritualists' as they were known, who were mystical charismatics, simply abounded.

It is interesting that one so often finds that mysticism and mystical notions will come in like a flood when a society or civilisation is going through big changes. As Philip Schaff puts it:

'Protestantism had reached a very critical juncture. Reformation or revolution, the written Word or illusive inspirations, order or confusion. That was the question.'

There was the Roman Catholic Church with all its corruption. The Reformers appear on the scene. But there was competition. Two groups vied to be the one which would 'restore' the Visible Church. Both claimed that their desire was to restore it to its rightful condition. One group rested on Biblical authority, the other on mystical promptings of the Spirit through direct revelations.

All the while that the genuine Reformers were at work on this process of restoration, they were regularly plagued by various sects and characters who claimed they had received '*words from the Lord*' about this,

that and the other matter. Martin Luther called them *schwärmer*, (swarm is derivative), fanatics, enthusiasts. This continued right through into the Puritan period in the seventeenth century and beyond.

The essence of 'enthusiasm is the subjective Inner Light versus the objective external Word of God. This was one of the principal controversies at the time of the Reformation. And this is epitomized in Luther's dealings with the revolutionary Thomas Muntzer, who was instrumental in the Peasant's War in 1525. He believed that justification by faith alone was an invented doctrine, and he was violently opposed to the notion of *sola Scriptura*, saying, like any good enthusiast, that '*they poison the Holy Spirit with the Holy Scripture*'.

In his very interesting book *The Third Reformation*, which examines Luther's relationship to mystics and charismatics, Carter Lindberg of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, says:

'The key to Muntzer's theology is a mystical spiritualism... mystical theology of an experiential self-disclosure of God to the person.'

Luther's response to Muntzer was to declare that he would not listen to him "*even if he had swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all!*" Lindberg writes that it was significant for Luther that Johann Tauler was of catastrophic importance for Muntzer. Apparently Muntzer carried around with him Tauler's sermons, bound in a double volume.

Another of the confrontations between the Word and mystical inspirations involved three men who were friends of Muntzer, known as the Zwickau prophets. They claimed to be prophets from God and to have had intimate conversations with Him. They had no need of the Bible but relied on the promptings of the Spirit. Melancthon was utterly taken in by them. But Luther said:

'Those who are expert in spiritual things have gone through the valley of the shadow. When these men talk of sweetness and being transported to the third heaven, do not believe them. Divine Majesty does not speak directly to men. God is a consuming fire, and the dreams and visions of the saints are terrible.'

It is ironic that Luther in his younger days had an attraction to Tauler. But it seems that he liked to adapt Tauler's concept of God's grace being necessary to religious mystical experience to his own developing idea of Justification. Luther certainly rejected the teaching of the mystics (including Tauler) on union with the Divine. And so did Calvin. In a footnote to Calvin's use of the term *unio mystica*, 'mystical union' (an unfortunate adoption of a term used in Mystical Theology), in the Battles edition of the Institutes, it says:

'Niesel notes that Calvin nowhere teaches the absorption of the pious mystic into the sphere of the Divine Being.'

We find numerous references to the rejection of mystical notions in the Lutheran confessions. In Article 13 of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

'It is good to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise in opposition to the fanatics who dream that the Holy Spirit does not come through the Word but because of their own preparations. They sit in a dark corner doing and saying nothing, but only waiting for illumination.'

In his Smalcald Articles, Luther even reckoned that the Pope was an enthusiast:

'We must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one His Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts... The papacy, too, is nothing but enthusiasm, for the pope boasts that all the laws are in the shrine of his heart, and he claims that whatever he decides and commands in his churches is spirit and law, even when it is above and contrary to the Scriptures and the spoken Word. All this is the old devil and old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve.'

We say again that the Reformation was a gigantic NO! to Catholic mysticism. But that did not stop it working vigorously, as we know.

Thirdly, any consideration of how mysticism has influenced Protestantism in history must take into account:

3. THE PIETIST MOVEMENT

This was a seventeenth Century movement among German Lutheranism, which arose as a reaction against the prevalence of dogmatic theology in conjunction with spiritual deadness.

Pietism was the reaction of the spirit against the letter. It laid stress on the subjective rather than the objective aspect of faith. However, not all the Pietists are to be condemned. Many were well-meaning devout men. Philip Spener (1635-1705), for example, was clearly a godly man who had the best of intentions. However, as so often happens with reactive movements which are knee-jerking against some other extreme (or often what they imagine to be some other extreme), those who take up the baton from the founders pervert even the good morsels into a wholly extremist venture.

For example, Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714) started out as a Pietist, a disciple of Spener, but ended up as a fanatical mystic. And this often happened. Johann Arndt (1555-1621) is generally regarded as the Father of European Pietism. His work, *Four Books on True Christianity* took up many of the themes of the medieval mystics, and was very influential on German Pietism. Yet it is significant that the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church says of Arndt:

'In contrast to the prevalent forensic view of the Atonement, he dwelt on the work of Christ in the heart of man.'

In many ways, this exemplifies the central thrust of Pietism. We will be looking further at the way that mysticism does away with the forensic nature of the atonement; but we see here the essential contrast between the mystico-pietistic view of salvation and sanctification and the biblical evangelical understanding.

It is interesting to note that, according to Robert Clouse, Arndt "*helped prepare the way for the Enlightenment and for Pietism*". This is because a religion of the heart meant relativism, subjective experience, by which a person is no longer dependent on external authority. That would mean freedom from the authority of the Church and from the authority of Scripture. The development of hyper-individualism. Remember that mysticism not only involves seeking union with the Divine, it also involves making one's subjective experience the sole arbiter of religious truth.

It is highly significant that one of the principal reforms demanded by the German Pietists, according to Routledge's *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, was '*that the theological schools should be reformed by the abolition of all systematic theology, and that morals and not doctrine should form the staple of all preaching*'. And what would you suspect to be the result of that reform? In their eagerness to eschew systematic theology, the mystics and pietists embraced a systematised devotionism. Systematic theology devoid of heart religion is bad enough. But a heart religion which is devoid of systematic theology is a scourge.

Which is it easier to do? To melt a scholastic heart or to bring a mystic down to earth?

Pietism has been described as '*the last fruit of the heart religion which originated in the Franciscan Movement*'. And it is surely no coincidence that many Protestant critics of the time saw in the Pietist movement a retrograde tendency to Catholicism. It is interesting to read the largely sympathetic treatment of Protestant Pietism in the New Catholic Encyclopedia (Vol.11, p.355):

'The Pietist emphasis upon a quality of life rather than orthodoxy of beliefs tended to produce a softening of religious divisions. Contact with like-minded Roman Catholics developed late in the 18th Century.'

A Softening of religious divisions. Well that is admirable if there has been some unbiblical division of which the Lord would not approve. But it is tragic if this softening happens without any discernment. It is interesting to trace the influence of the Pietist movement on later developments in Protestantism: One of the more pronounced aspects of Pietism was '*An insistence upon a conscious crisis as necessary in the process of salvation*'. Here we have the roots of a number of later developments in the Christian scene: e.g., the crass sort of Revivalism which appears to have developed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Ultimately it prefigured the second-blessing theology which came to dominate Holiness Movements, Pentecostalism and, later, neo-evangelicalism.

Next in our consideration of how mysticism has influenced Protestantism in history, we examine

4. THE MYSTICAL LEGACY OF JOHN WESLEY

It is an interesting fact that Wesley's childhood was steeped in the Mystics. His parents were great fans of the mystical writers and Charles and John grew up in a home surrounded by their works.

Initially John was wholly accepting their teachings, and they made and left a deep impression on him during the formative years of his life. Eventually, he became involved in a protracted internal struggle with mysticism which never really abated. John Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel on 23rd Nov.1736: '*I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the Mystics*'. And in this connection he specifically names Johann Tauler and the Spanish Quietist, Miguel de Molinos.

In his Preface to the Collection of Hymns and Sacred Poems in 1739, John Wesley writes:

'Some verses, it may be observed, in the following Collection, were wrote upon the scheme of the Mystic Divines. And these, it is owned, we had once in great veneration, as the best explainers of the Gospel of Christ. But we are now convinced that we therein greatly erred, not knowing the Scriptures neither the power of God. And because this is an error which many serious minds are sooner or later exposed to, and which indeed most easily besets those who seek the Lord Jesus in sincerity, we believe ourselves indispensibly obliged, in the presence of God, and angels, and men, to declare wherein we apprehend those writers not to teach "the truth as it is in Jesus". And he then lays out the argument under four headings: They lay another foundation; their manner of building on it is the opposite of that prescribed by Christ (He commands us to build up one another. They advise: 'To the desert! To the desert! and God will build you up'); their superstructure has no correspondence with that laid down by the Apostle Paul; they teach another Gospel.

Again, in his diary on 5th June 1742, Wesley writes:

'I just made an end of Madam Guyon's "Short Method of Prayer". Ah, my brethren!... O that ye knew how much God is wider than man! Then you would drop the Quietists and Mystics together, and at all hazards keep to the plain, practical, written word of God'.

How many evangelicals today read Madame Guyon? Or, rather, how many will actually admit it? Well, listen even to John Wesley! He hopes you'll drop the quietists and mystics and keep to the plain, practical written word of God.

In Wesley's journal dated 5th February 1764 is written: 'I began reading Mr Hartley's ingenious *Defence of the Mystic Writers*. But it does not satisfy me. I must still object: 1) To their sentiments (most of them hold to justification by works); 2) To their spirit; 3) To their whole phraseology, which is both unscriptural and affectedly mysterious.'

However, in spite of all this insight and rejection of mystical teaching, Wesley was a complex character who never really shook off the foundations of the mystical teaching he had imbibed. As J. Brazier Green says in *John Wesley & John Law* (Epworth Press, 1945, p.179):

'Although Wesley uttered substantial indictments of the Mystics in 1739, 1756 and 1764, he was also publishing and commending their writings in his *Christian Library* (1749-55) and until the last years of his life'.

And it was the Mystic's doctrine of 'perfection' which laid the ground for Wesley's own teaching in this area. In an article on 'Perfectibilists' in Blunt's *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Thought* (Rivington's, 1874), the writer states:

'Many mystical divines have believed that a life of profound devotional contemplation leads on to such an union with God that all which is base and sinful in the Christian's soul becomes annihilated, and there ensues a superhuman degree of participation in the Divine perfection. Such a doctrine was held by the great mystic whose works pass under the name of Dionysius, and from him was handed down to the Quietist Hesychasts, the strict Franciscans, the Molinists, the Jansenists, and the German Mystics [Dominicans such as Eckhart and Tauler], from whom it passed on to the English Methodists, among whom it has always been a special tenet that sanctification may, and ought to, go on to perfection.'

Doesn't this show how dangerous it can be to be undiscerning in what one reads for spiritual nourishment? Naive believers imagine they can pick out the "good bits" and reject the "bad bits". But why involve yourself in such play when the result could be shipwreck, and when there are many genuinely devotional works to read, among the Puritans for example?

This is why Wesley was so confused through his entire Christian life. He rightly rejected certain aspects of mystical teaching, but never shook off others. One of his biographers, Robert G. Tuttle Jr. (*John Wesley: His Life and Theology*, Zondervan, 1978, p.341), says that for Wesley,

'the mystical disregard for the historical significance of the Incarnation became the greatest area of incompatibility – although Wesley continued to agree with the mystics that perfection was God's purpose for all men and that it involved total communion with God.'

In spite of his wise insights into certain Christian truths, the legacy of John Wesley's teaching on sanctification lived on to become a founding principle in Finneyite Revivalism, the Holiness Movement and Early Pentecostalism. As the first half of the 19th century progressed, the old-fashioned idea of revival had gradually turned into revivalism, in which man-centred emotional experience in conversion became the vogue. (See 'Revivals & Revivalism' by Iain Murray, Banner of Truth).

Revivalistic camp meetings reflecting this emphasis became widespread. And as one researcher of this period has put it:

'Those who attended such camp meetings...generally expected their religious experiences to be as vivid as the frontier life around them. Accustomed to braining bears and battling Indians, they received their religion with great colour and excitement'.

Often, these meetings would involve phenomena such as hysteria, falling, jerking, so-called 'Holy Laughter', barking like dogs, etc. This is mysticism at its crudest, with people seeking a direct experience of what they believe to be the Divine, and making their own subjective experience the yardstick by which religious truth and efficacy would be measured. Enthusiasm is just a very crude form of mysticism.

What we discover during this period is that in place of the biblical conversion process of seeking to be declared acceptable to God through faith in a righteousness which is **not** our own, the emphasis began to fall on finding God through a powerful emotional experience. This is mystical revivalism.

By the mid-nineteenth century there had been a huge resurgence of interest in Wesley's sanctification teaching. Wesley had referred to this experience as (and I quote) '*a still higher salvation...immensely greater than that wrought when he was justified*'. He and his followers urged people to seek this second blessing

experience, and as this experience infected other Protestant groups, the body which resulted came to be known as the 'Holiness Movement'.

John Wesley, who failed to discourage weird, gratuitous phenomena in his evangelistic meetings, unwittingly fathered the wayward Holy Spirit Movements of the nineteenth and 20th centuries. As even the Roman Catholic writer, Killian McDonnell rightly observed in an article in the Roman Catholic charismatic journal *New Covenant* (May 1st 1972):

'John Wesley was father to much of the 19th century American religious fervour; and one of his children was the Holiness Movement which gave rise to the Pentecostalism of the 20th century'.

People such as A.B. Simpson, R.A. Torrey (first principal of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago), and Andrew Murray were among some of the more famous names in this movement. Here in the U.K., it found its counterpart in the Keswick 'Higher Life' Movement. Now although there was clearly a 'devotional spirituality' in this movement, its main problem for the progress of the Church was that it emphasised subjective experience over objective truth. And when that happens, we fall straight into mysticism.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Holiness Movement gave birth to the Pentecostal Movement which emphasised not only the idea of a second blessing or Baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion, but also the evidence of speaking in tongues as proof of it.

Again, this is mysticism at its crudest. Ironically charismatic and pentecostal mysticism falls far short of classic historical mysticism because one finds in both Eastern and Christian mysticism that any manifestations of so-called tongues, visions, voices, and so on, are simply regarded as *incidentals* along the pathway to the real goal, which is the achievement of ecstatic oneness with the Divine Being. Whereas the crude evangelical mystics of today seem quite satisfied with the 'incidentals'.

Nevertheless, it is plain that the various Charismatic Movements in history have been crude manifestations of mystical experience. And at this juncture it would be profitable to examine this in more detail.

III. THE LINKS BETWEEN CATHOLIC MYSTICISM AND THE PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

There has been a very interesting parallel between the development of mysticism in the professing Christian Church and the flourishing of Holy Spirit Movements throughout Church History.

While it is true to say that there is not an *exact* parallel between classical mysticism and specifically charismatic movements – in the sense that all mystics have not *necessarily* exhibited the charismata – there are many startling congruences which are worthy of exposure.

Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movements are in so many ways a manifestation of the mysticism which has been developed in the Roman Catholic Church. This is why John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Fellowships had no problem recommending Teresa of Avila and Ignatius Loyola in his book *Power Evangelism*.

Catholic mystical theology has traditionally identified three stages in the process of a mystics pathways to 'deification': 1) The Purgative; 2) The Illuminative; 3) The Unitive.

We see this taught everywhere among the Catholic mystics in one form or another. We have seen it in Johann Tauler; and it has its origins in the *Mystical Theology* of pseudo-Dionysius. We also find that Roman Catholic charismatics today are teaching that their second-blessing experience of the Baptism in the Spirit fits in perfectly with this teaching.

The great task for Catholic Charismatics has been for them to square the widespread reemergence of the charismata in their scene with Roman Catholic dogma so that the hierarchy would accept it. So we find that Catholic charismatics place their Baptism in the Spirit in the third stage of the mystic ascent, the unitive stage, firmly grounding their experience in that of the Mystics. (See, e.g. Stephen Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit*, Paulist Press, 1969).

This is why the mystic monk Thomas Merton, who has done so much to develop the Interfaith Movement, could say — as reported in an article on renewal in the New Catholic Encyclopedia — '*Pentecostalism seems to sum up the spirituality most likely to work in the U.S. now*'. And in one of the Supplements to that same Encyclopedia, it is reported that there are three ways to Spiritual Perfection: **1) The Charismatic Way; 2) The Eastern Mystical Way; 3) The traditional Catholic Mystical Way** (e.g. *the Cloud of Unknowing*).

Do you find that astounding? We have always known that there is a clear linkage between the Charismatic Movement, Eastern Mysticism and so-called Christian mysticism. But to see it laid out unashamedly like that...!

Another work which shows the clear linkage between Pentecostalism and Catholic Mysticism is Edward O'Connor's book *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*. In a chapter entitled "Pentecost and Traditional Spirituality" (by which he means Mystical Spirituality), he looks first at the Spanish Carmelite, John of the Cross's mystical teachings, especially in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. After referring to the experiences involved in one particular stage in the mystical process, he writes:

'These experiences can serve as points of comparison for the "Baptism in the Spirit" that figures so prominently in the Pentecostal Movement.'

And later on in the same section, he writes:

'The wave of mysticism which arose in the 12th century and peaked in the 14th and 15th drew attention...to another aspect of the charismatic — the role of visions and revelations. In the post-Reformation era, the Catholic Church stoutly defended the genuineness of the charismatic and mystical in the face of the Reformers who looked upon them with scorn. In recent years, Lourdes, Fatima, Beauraing, Banneux, and countless other places where Mary has appeared to bring the grace of healing to pilgrims have maintained the role of the charismatic in another form.'

And it is most enlightening to learn from a leading Roman Catholic charismatic (New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol.17, p.106) that:

'The Charismatic Renewal Movement has been received by the Catholic hierarchy more favourably than by the leadership of any other denomination. Vatican II providentially affirmed the essential principles of the Charismatic Renewal even before it began (Lumen Gentium 4, 7, 12, 15, 34, etc).'

The standard view in Roman Catholic circles today is that Vatican II provided the prophetic impetus for charismatic renewal. The Pentecostals and charismatics have now also come to pay homage to Catholicism and Catholic Mysticism. The well-known Pentecostal, Charles Simpson claimed in 1972 that '*The Catholic Tradition tends to produce a few spiritual giants [by which he means the mystics], whereas the evangelical tradition produces a lot of spiritual babies*'. The Pentecostal teacher, Derek Prince, in the same year, wrote:

'The beginning of an awakening has happened, and we can rejoice in it... It is God's purpose to form bodies, local manifestations of the Body of Christ. When they have been formed he will send forth his Spirit again, and they will rise up a mighty army, covering the whole earth... One of the corroborations of my conviction that it is God's purpose to form bodies is the entry of so many Roman Catholics into the

charismatic renewal... They are way ahead of many Protestants in this regard; we Protestants are learning much from them.'

The Charismatic Movement is wholly in tune with the apostate development of Romanism on all levels. As Edward O'Connor admits:

'We have examined the four chief points on which Pentecostal spirituality might seem strange and unorthodox: its sense of the presence of God, its reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the large roles played in it by the charisms and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. On each of these points, close examination has shown that Pentecostal spirituality is in **deep accord** with the spiritual doctrine that has become traditional in the [Roman Catholic] Church's thought and life.'

The Second-Blessing 'spirit-baptism' experience, visions and inner voices, raptures and ecstasies, alleged prophesyings, falling under "the power", speaking in gibberish-style tongues. All these mainstays of the Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements are entirely in accord with Roman Catholic mysticism. Because Pentecostals and Charismatics now make up the bulk of those who profess to be evangelicals today, we see that Catholicism and neo-evangelicalism are unashamedly moving in the same compromised direction.

That brings us to our penultimate head:

IV. THIRTEEN REASONS WHY MYSTICISM IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH TRUE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

The first reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

1. IT CONFUSES THE IMAGO DEI (THE IMAGE OF GOD) WITH THE ESSENTIA DEI (ESSENCE OF GOD)

The claim of the Eastern mystic is that in every person there is a spark of divinity – that God indwells each soul, universally. The purpose of the mystic is to discover 'the God within' – the universal spirit, the Ultimate Reality – through techniques ranging from various forms of prayer or meditation to the use of fungi, cactuses and other chemical substances which alter consciousness

The so-called Christian mystic – under the influence of a speculative Neoplatonism which was itself a sycretic mixture of pagan mysticism and Greek philosophy – moderates the Eastern mystical teaching on the universal divine spark within so that it appears to come into conformity to orthodox Christian teaching.

So we find that the 'universal god within' of the Eastern mystic is redefined as the image of God in every man. That might seem like a nifty move, but there are major problems with this: For the image of God never was an actual spark of divinity, a portion of God in a person. The image of God in man is not the substance or essence of God. To believe so would be horribly at odds with Scripture.

It is true that the Apostle Peter used the phrase '*partakers of the divine nature*' (2 Pet.1:4); but this was addressed to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ rather than to the whole human race or a group of elite mystics who happen to have performed the right techniques.

As Thomas Watson points out in his *Body of Divinity*, this partaking in the divine nature '*is not by identity or union with the divine essence, but by a transformation into the divine likeness*'. Likewise, A.A. Hodge states that '*this union does not involve any mysterious confusion of the person of Christ with the persons of his people*'. Augustus Strong (1836-1921) asserts that the nature of the communion of the believer with Christ is not '*a union of essence, which destroys the distinct personality and subsistence of either Christ or the human spirit – as held by many of the mystics*'.

As Robert Dabney (1820-1898) has rightly pointed out, the Christian believer, after he or she has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is

'still a separate person, a responsible free agent, and a man, not a God. The idea of a personal or substantial union would imply the deification of man, which is profane and unmeaning'.

So the mystic's view of the image of God in man is fatally flawed.

The second reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

2. IT UNDERMINES THE NEED FOR A STRUCTURED LOCAL CHURCH

Mystics and enthusiasts are always dismissive of authority and the idea of the structured local church involving ministers of the Gospel, pastors and teachers, oversight in general, authority, the liturgy of worship services, etc. After all, they have a direct hotline to God, so why let these earthbound forces get in the way? Such things will seem like carnal things to the one who has visited the third heaven and he perceives that such things stand between him and God.

But the Bible plainly shows that a structured local church is at the heart of the development of the kingdom of God in the Gospel Age.

The third reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

3. IT INTRUDES INTO FORBIDDEN AREAS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

The word 'intrudes' is the key here. There are limits to what a believer is permitted to experience. There are things which are 'off limits'. Crossing over those limits was one of the key transgressions of our first parents: 'When the woman saw that it was a tree desirable to make *one* wise...'. She was attracted to an experience which lay beyond that with which she had already been endowed by nature.

Luther's observation, mentioned earlier, that Adam and Eve were enthusiasts is not at all wide of the mark. Intruding into forbidden areas of spiritual life is a central hallmark of enthusiasm.

One is reminded here of Paul's teaching in Col.2:18 about those who take delight "in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind...". Or as we are told in Deut.29:29: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever...".

The fourth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

4. IT CREATES A BREED OF 'CHRISTIAN' SUPERBEINGS

This is closely related to the previous reason and is a feature of both mysticism and its youngest child, enthusiasm.

You may say, well what about Paul's experience in the third heaven (2 Cor.12)? Was that not a mystical experience? Whatever it was that Paul experienced, we need to remember these three things: 1) Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ with a special commission, a special relationship with the Lord, uniquely a recipient of divine revelation. 2) There is no evidence that Paul ever sought the experience, whereas mystics make it their life's work to penetrate the third heaven. 3) The Lord hedged Paul about after his experience with a thorn in the flesh precisely to eradicate from his mind any notions that he was now above other lesser mortals. And surely, there was a distinct discouragement in this thorn from trying to repeat the experience. Whereas the mystic — whether Catholic or Eastern — makes it his life's work to repeatedly seek 'union with the divine'.

Furthermore, Catholic mystics have traditionally divided the church into those who they refer to as 'contemplatives' (those who enter the monastic life and are very mystical) and those who are 'actives'

(who remain in the world and are very practical). Mary and Martha are held up to be representatives of these two types. This immediately creates a sort of spiritual elite of Christian 'superbeings'. Contrary to this, the Scriptures teach that **all** true believers have equal access to God (Rom.5:1-2; Heb.4:16).

The fifth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

5. IT IS INTENSELY SYNERGISTIC

That is, whereas true salvation is dependent of God first working in the heart of a man, the mystic brings off his union with God (which is the salvation experience he seeks) on the basis of his own works and merit. This even applies to the Quietist mystic. As Lindberg puts it:

'Even in the subtle mystical form of passive resignation – a doing which is a doing nothing – this is still allied to that semi-Pelagian *facere quod in se est* (doing what is in you) which Luther overcame theologically in his first lectures on the Psalms...'

Even if Tauler did use language suggestive of the grace of God being necessary for the mystic experience, it still makes God dependent on the person's works so that there can be a 'birth of the Son in the soul.'

Actually, mysticism is in many ways the ultimate works righteousness.

The sixth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

6. IT RENDERS VOID THE NEED FOR FORENSIC JUSTIFICATION

What possible need would a person have to be made righteous at the bar of justice before God if they already have not merely got a direct hotline to Him thanks to their contemplations but are actually able to experience ecstatic essential union with Him (as they believe)?

This is why mystics and enthusiasts at best ignore the teaching on forensic justification, at worst berate it (like Muntzer). This is why mysticism is so devilish. It creates a false way over the wall into the sheepfold substituting an infused righteousness for that imputed righteousness reckoned only to those who have responded to the true Gospel in repentance. To imagine that you have become united to God essentially is a huge trick of the mind.

The seventh reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

7. IT DENIES THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

You will search endlessly through the writings of the mystics for any real reference to the Substitutionary Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It just has no place in the thinking of the mystic – which is most strange when you consider that this teaching is at the very heart of the Gospel – that the Substitutionary Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central event of history round which every other event revolves and on which it is dependent.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The mystic, however, regards sin to be the 'self' asserting itself as an individuated consciousness thus disunited from oneness with God. That 'sin' is thus removed by performing exercises to get yourself back into that state of oneness with God.

The mystical view of the Atonement is brought out by A.A. Hodge writes in his *Outlines of Theology*, in answer to the catachectical question, "*State generally the four theories under one or other of which all views ever entertained as to the nature of the reconciliation effected by Christ may be grouped*":

Ans: "The Mystical, which, although it has assumed various forms, may be generally stated thus: 'The reconciliation effected by Christ was brought about by the mysterious union of God and man accomplished by the incarnation, rather than by His sacrificial death.' This was entertained by some of the

Platonizing fathers, the disciples of Scotus Erigena [who translated pseudo-Dionysius into Latin] in the middle ages, by Osiander and Schwenkfeld at the Reformation, and by the school of Schleiermacher among the modern German theologians.

So mysticism, in common with liberalism, effectively denies the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Following on logically from this is the eighth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity:

8. IT UNDERMINES THE NEED FOR THE INCARNATION

What was the purpose of the Incarnation? The Lord Jesus Himself tells us: 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? **But for this cause came I unto this hour**" (Jn.12:27). The Lord Jesus is saying here that He came into this world, took on human flesh, came into incarnation **precisely** so that He could die on the Cross: "*And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.*" Why? "*For He shall save His people from their sins*".

In denying the reality of substitutionary atonement, mystics deny the Incarnation. For the Incarnation has no meaning at all outside of the context of His death.

1 Jn.3:8: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested [incarnated], that he might destroy the works of the devil.'

How did He do that? Through His atoning death and victorious resurrection. In effect, mysticism denies the need for the incarnation. Surely, this must come close to making mysticism the religion of antichrist (1 Jn.2:22; 4:2-3).

The ninth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

9. IT PRETENDS THAT IT IS SELFLESS BUT IT IS IN FACT AN EXAMPLE OF THE ULTIMATE IN SELF-CENTREDNESS

Mysticism inevitably leads to a lifetime of navel-gazing and introspection. It is a 'me' religion. Even the Roman Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton has enough insight to say:

'If I were to say that Christianity came into the world specially to destroy the doctrine of the Inner Light, that would be an exaggeration. But it would be very much nearer to the truth... Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Any one who knows any body knows how it would work; anyone who knows anyone from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones... Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognised an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners'.

What more needs to be said?

The tenth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

10. IT BASES ITS ASSURANCE ON EXTREME SUBJECTIVISM

It falsely equates religious emotionalism with Christian spirituality. Remember those twin tenets of all forms of mysticism: **1)** The seeking out of a direct experience of God, without any mediator; **2)** The setting up of the individual's subjective experience as the sole arbiter of religious truth. The mystic or enthusiast

devises his theology on the basis of his subjective religious experiences; whereas the personal spiritual experiences of the true believer arise out of the knowledge of God which he receives through the objective written Word of God.

Theology determines experience. Not the other way round. This is why Pietism paved the way for the so-called 'Enlightenment' in Europe.

The eleventh reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

11. IT INEVITABLY LEADS TO FALSE ECUMENISM

If we reduce Christian unity to the lowest common denominator of shared religious experience, and that form of religious experience bears no relation to any concept of Christian orthodoxy, then the scene is set for a form of unity which is a false church. Taken to its extreme, it will lead to a synagogue of Satan.

And this is what we have today in the ecumenical process, in which there is a welcome for everyone, heretic, infidel, anyone – unless you happen to be a Bible-believing disciple of Jesus Christ upholding the truth and authority of Scripture! Mysticism and enthusiasm inevitably lead to false ecumenism.

The twelfth reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

12. IT INEXORABLY MOVES TOWARDS INTERFAITHISM

The mystical experiences which unite Catholics and neo-evangelicals are the same experiences which undergird the spiritual life of so many of the world's religions. One is forced to wonder whether the next phase of mystical charismatic development is going to be a movement into a universalist doctrine of salvation?

If you think that such a thing is too absurd, then read the recently-published book by former Cliff College principal W.H. Davies entitled '*Spirit without Measure*' (DLT). This purports to be a definitive work of charismatic theology, yet it upholds the notion that a person of any religion, without any knowledge of Christ, can be saved if they are devotional enough and practise good works. This is the same New Age, universalist vision as that of the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, and demonstrates the direction in which mysticism always travels.

The thirteenth and final reason why mysticism is not compatible with true evangelical Christianity is that

13. IT IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE ORIGINAL SATANIC LIE AT THE BEGINNING OF HUMAN HISTORY

Two of the main elements which attracted Eve to Satan's teaching were that **a)** she could be like God and **b)** that she could have a wisdom far above and beyond that with which human creatures had first been endowed (Gen.3:1-6).

Surely the mysticism which is so prevalent in the world's religions and in the professing Christian scene is a religious outworking of those original lies? If this is the case, then mysticism is not merely based on an erroneous way of thinking or a misplaced religious philosophy – it is actually Satanic.

CONCLUSION

On that note we would do well, in closing, to ask the question: Why have so many Protestant Christians become attracted to Catholic Mysticism?

The first reason is that they have been hoodwinked by the "doctrine – vs – devotion" conflict. There has always been a great tension between what we can call 'Doctrinality' and what we can call 'Devotionality'. But surely this is a false "either/or" situation. Right doctrine naturally leads to right devotionality. There

is no point in attempting to compensate for perceived spiritual dryness by indulging in mystical practices. For mystically-induced religious experiences are at least as bad as spiritual deadness.

People would be far better off reading the spiritual masterpieces of the Puritans rather than the ramblings of the mystics.

Another reason Protestant Christians have been so attracted to mysticism is because they are overly-impressed by the verbal superlatives of mystical literature. Merely because someone waxes lyrically in a book about spiritual matters does not mean that the things being advocated are wholesome. One only has to be familiar with the ecstatic expressions of those involved with the so-called "Toronto Blessing" to see that they represent a case of emotional hyperbole rather than spiritual experience.

Another reason that so many Protestant Christians have been attracted to mysticism is because they have been so poorly taught. This is a result of low standards in both the pulpit and the press. We have already seen the acceptance of mysticism in purportedly evangelical books. The same is true of many evangelical newspapers and journals. For example, in a widely-read neo-evangelical newspaper recently there appeared a full-page article about the French mystical, ecumenical haven "Taizé" (which uses practices which border on interfaith religious experience), without any critical comment. People were simply left to "make up their own minds". But that is not what Christian teaching should be about – especially in relation to the training of the young, who are very susceptible to the ill effects of "fudge". What is needed today is clear, unambiguous exposition of Biblical principles.

Another reason Protestant Christians have been so attracted to mysticism is because they do not understand the nuances of Church history and the significance of the many wayward movements which have invaded the life of the Church during the last two thousand years. Believers shouldn't merely be reading theology and devotional works; they should be reading history too. One of the most interesting of all works in this field is Mosheim's two volume work "An Ecclesiastical History" (R.L. Dabney's favourite), which takes each century comparing developments in terms of prosperous and calamitous events, religious and philosophical movements, ministerial matters, forms of church government, doctrinal developments, rites and ceremonies, divisions and heresies. If believers were genned up on this sort of information they would be far less likely to fall foul of the subtleties of false teaching today.

Finally, there are two Scriptures which should be central to shaping our thinking on mystical experience. These are Psalm 131 and Colossians 2:18-23. The truly spiritual person does not intrude '*into those things which he hath not seen*'. The truly spiritual person does not '*exercise himself in things too high for him*'. For he knows that to do so would mean that he was '*vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind*'.

Instead the genuinely spiritual person '*holds to the Head, Christ*'. That is, he clings to Christ alone and all the nourishment and teaching which flow from Him. The spiritual man or woman does not delight in mystical experiences, but rather '*hopes in the Lord from henceforth and forever*'.

¹ G.A. Mather & Larry A. Nichols (eds.), *The Zondervan Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Zondervan, 1993), p.201.

² *Chambers English Dictionary* (Chambers/C.U.P., 1988), p.950.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and Mystery Religions* (Thames & Hudson, 1976), p.127.

⁵ Magnus Magnusson (ed.), *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Chambers, 1990), p.1172.

⁶ Walter J. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Marshall Pickering, 1984), p.257.

- ⁷ James Webb, *The Flight from Reason*, Vol.I of 'The Age of the Irrational' (Macdonald, 1971), p.179.
- ⁸ John Ferguson, *Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and Mystery Religions* (Thames & Hudson, 1976), pp.70-71.
- ⁹ *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, op. cit., Vol.IV, p.534.
- ¹⁰ William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (Collins/Fount, 1981), p.127.
- ¹¹ W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Collins, 1960), p.100.
- ¹² *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.XIV, p.1117.
- ¹³ *New Covenant*, March 1973.
- ¹⁴ See our article on this website, "Is there Salvation for Pagans without Christ?"
- ¹⁵ Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House, 1984), p.425.
- ¹⁶ Johannes Tauler, *Sermons* (trans. Maria Shradly), Paulist Press, 1985, pp.172, 77 & 38.