

Christian Mystical Experience and Theology

Throughout Church History

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According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, mysticism is defined as follows:

"1. The experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics;
2: the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience [as intuition or insight]."

A] Establish a biblical base for this definition and practice.

B] Explore the history of Christian Mysticism, significant individuals considered Christian mystics, and the approaches they used. Document your research appropriately.

C] Relate what you learn to your experience of direct spiritual encounter with God through the Holy Spirit and what the Bible teaches.

Introduction

In this paper Christian Mysticism will be explored within three contexts. Firstly, a definition will be sought within the context of a biblical base for a definition, and then for its practice or application to the Christian life. Secondly, there will be an exploration of the history of Christian Mysticism since its inception within Western and Eastern Church history. It is impossible to do justice to all the individuals who have taken this journey; hence a categorisation of significant schools of thought will be attempted within the context of an applied theology of practice; with key proponents being

explored within their context. Thirdly, arising from this exploration I will seek to demonstrate how this relates to my experience of direct spiritual encounter with God by the agency of the “Spirit of Jesus”¹.

Moreover, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines mysticism:

“1: The experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics; 2: The belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience [as intuition or insight].”²

It must be said that in the first place “Webster’s” does not seek to define the Christian view of mysticism and the relationship between the “subjective” and the “Objective”. Both aspects are crucial to define further as a working base to further discuss Christian Mysticism. A dictionary not specifically related to a Christian ethos cannot be definitive by its very nature. Hence the first section of this essay will seek to define Christian Mysticism in the light of its’ author the Christ of Mysticism.

Christology and Mysticism

In the case of the first [above] observation it is important to seek a Christian definition. It may be said that this in itself is no easy task as there are as many definitions as there are denominations. Hence it is possible to spend pages, if not the whole length of this paper just discussing the vast body

¹ Acts 16:8 - 10

² From Communion with God Course Instructor REN 503

of literature. Another approach would be to seek a synthesis from the New Testament. Indeed this is the approach which seems to be most suited to this paper. The Apostle Peter indicates in his first Epistle that Christ is the example all Christians should follow³. Hence any workable definition of Christian Mysticism has to start with Christology.

Probably the gospel of John does the most in relation to this task. John is recognised as the disciple of intimacy – the one who leaned on Jesus breast during the last supper, and was referred to as the one Jesus “loved”.⁴ Indeed it is interesting how the intimacy of John is comparative to his description of the position of Jesus as having been in the “bosom” of the Father ;⁵ to John this is his starting point for writing his so called [by one church father] more “spiritual gospel”. John knows something of the intimacy of having been in the bosom of Jesus – particularly he may consider this as a metaphor of his intimacy with Jesus by the indwelling Paraklete.⁶ Jesus is the only one to have ever seen God.⁷ He is described as the “word” made “flesh”.⁸ “Word” in Johannine thought relates to Jesus being God the eternal. He refers to himself as “I am”⁹ when speaking to the Jews. As the example for all men to model he can do “nothing” without his Father enabling him to do so.¹⁰ Hence Jesus our example lives a life emptied of all his divine powers whilst on earth living a life based on following and trusting his Father for his deeds and words.¹¹ The great declaration of the mysticism of Jesus is:

³ 1 Peter 2:21

⁴ John 13:23

⁵ John 1:18

⁶ John 14:18

⁷ John 1:18

⁸ John 1:1,14

⁹ John 8:58

¹⁰ John 5:19

¹¹ John 8:38 & Philippians 2:7

“Απεκρίνατο ουν ο Ιησους και ελεγεν αυτοις, Αμην αμην λεγω υμιν, ου δυναται ο υιος ποιειν αφ εαυτου ουδεν εαν μη τι Βλεπη τον πατερα ποιουντα; α γαρ αν εκεινο σ ποιη, ταυτα και ο υιος ομοιωσ ποιει.”¹²

This translates literally as:

“Answered therefore Jesus and he said to them, ‘Amen amen I am saying to you, not in any sense is the Son able to do from himself nothing but only as he should see the Father doing; for what he sees that One doing, these things even the Son likewise is doing.’”

The Greek text demonstrates some important subtleties to the hermeneutical pursuit of understanding Jesus heart. Firstly, the double use of the words “Amen amen” are to be understood to mean “with utter solemnity”.¹³ In the context of what Jesus is saying the text may run: “With utter solemnity am I telling you this thing”.¹⁴ He really wishes to emphasize the complete importance of what he is about to say. This is central to who he is in relationship to the Father as the God-man. The relationship with Jesus is that he does things as he continues to see the Father “doing” them. The whole sense of the Greek is to express the contingent nature of Jesus power to act and to speak. He cannot do any thing without it being shown to him by his Father, or spoken to him by the Father, or acted out through him by the Father in the context of his total being. He only does what he sees his Father doing. Hence the complete inner intimacy of Jesus heart is revealed. His Father speaks to his inner heart through his inner spiritual eyes and ears. Hence the first part of “Webster’s” conception of mysticism is further

¹² United Bible Societies [Third Edition] The Greek New Testament, UBS, West Germany, 1975- John 5:19

¹³ Moulton H.K. The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised, Zondervan, USA, P. 18 – Moulton Comments on Αμην Αμην.

¹⁴ The double use of Αμην Αμην is used to emphasize something of great importance.

defined. The “ultimate reality” which communicates with and works through Jesus is the “Father”, who in the broader Johannine schema is to be taken as the one and only true God of the universe. This is not to deny the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all eternal God, but rather this is to emphasize the proto-typical nature of Jesus the God-man. In him Christians are to take their paradigm for all life in the Spirit. He is the one who sets the trend in action in both example and living reality. People are to follow his example. “Webster’s” statement that “direct knowledge of God” is to come via “subjective experience” is better defined in the light of Jesus relationship as a “derivative experience” because the Johannine view in no way demonstrates a subjective Jesus whose relationship to God is to be viewed just as anyone would like to personally define it. Jesus does not do just as he thinks or feels subjectively, but he speaks and acts only on the basis of the derivative objectivity of the inner living Father within him.

So secondly, the relationship between subjective and objective needs definition. Jesus relationship with the Father comes about because of his pure special relationship with the Father as his one and only Son.¹⁵ He does not relate to the Father on the basis of legalism – rules set down in Moses, but by freedom of access through his special anointed relationship through the Spirit,¹⁶ and by the truth of a relational link and knowledge of the Father’s real heart¹⁷ for He wishes to make his home in his people through his Son:

¹⁵ John 7:1-5 – is Jesus own description his special relationship to the Father.

¹⁶ John 1:17 states the law was given through Moses but a new way of grace and truth has been opened p by Jesus. This new way is based on relationship. Jesus was dependant o his Father in a relationship for all he did just as we should. He is therefore our example to follow. Just as we need the Holy Spirit to give us intimate connection with God through our new hearts so did Jesus as our example. Hence we have the record of the Baptist’s words when he says: “But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” John 1:33 RSV.

¹⁷ John 5:19, 20.

“Jesus answered him, ‘If any man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’”¹⁸

Nothing could be clearer. In the context of John chapters 13 – 17 Jesus reveals why he has come. It is to restore intimacy with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These chapters set out the way in which it is the desire of the family of God that we become part of the intimate family – that they make their “home” within us. This comes about by the “comforter” the Holy Spirit coming to live in hearts and minds.¹⁹ Christian men and women are not to experience the relationship they have with God as deep inner emptiness but as a “home” coming in which the complete “Trinity” come and make their home within their hearts.

As Mark Virkler so aptly describes it we come to live out of “flow”.²⁰ John 7:38 and 39 do put it in a nutshell – so to speak:

“He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” [RSV].

It must be noted that the Holy Spirit given after Jesus great atoning death on the cross has come to live in a new heart which Jesus has given to each Christian who has submitted their life to him in trust. Hence the hermeneutical line is completed. Jesus lived out of a relationship in which Father God completely communicated with him in his heart, and this is delivered to each Christian who submits to

¹⁸ John 14:23.

¹⁹ John 14:16.

²⁰ Mark & Patti Virkler, *How to Hear God’s Voice*, Destiny Image Publishers Inc., USA, 2005, p. 57.

following Jesus.²¹ Jesus continues to speak through his Spirit within Christian hearts and minds. This comes as a “flow” of much more than words to spiritual ears, and visions to spiritual eyes, it comes as living, purifying, energising power and relational communion with Father God.

Hence “Webster’s” definition of “Mysticism” may be termed inadequate without defining it in relationship to the great paradigm of life viz-a-viz how Jesus the mystic modelled the life of the intimacy of the Spirit. No part of his being was without the presence of Father God in it; not just his spiritual eyes and ears were completely filled with a direct intimate, relational, communicative relationship with God. God is fully at home in the Son, The Son is fully at home in the Father, and the Spirit is fully at home in Jesus and the Father. The great circuit of openness and intimacy is one of complete flow in the Trinity of God in love, trust and reliance.²² This is also to be the Christian experience as life is lived out of connection to the vine with the recognition that “apart” from Jesus the Christian man or woman can do “nothing”.²³

“Webster’s” concept that mysticism may exist as “subjectivity” or “intuition” is only true for the Christian Mystic to the extent that this “subjectivism” is tested against the objective realities of the blue print of the Word of God. Otherwise “subjectivity” will lead to self delusion. Jesus pointed to his relationship with the Father through the Spirit as the standard by which all “intuitive” experience must be tested. Looking at his words, and his life, gives the Christian Mystic the key to making sure that what he or she is receiving in heart by the Spirit is indeed in line with the paradigm of Jesus example.

²¹ John 14:21

²² John 15:1-11 – the teaching about abiding in the vine talks of an abiding relationship which is to exist between Jesus and his followers, and they with him, and with the sap of the vine [the Holy Spirit], and with the Father. There is a sense of the flow of life sap going through and around in a special circuit of reciprocating relationships which start with the Godhead, and continue back with the Godhead, and then flow out again ad infinitum.

²³ John 15:5

Probably the greatest test of “Subjectivity” is to be derived from the following:

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”²⁴

The woman at the well had just had the deepest secrets of her heart looked into. She had been tested. She must be honest. Jesus informs the real mystical approach when he identifies that Christians must approach God with a complete willingness to be honest and open. The woman calls all the Samaritans in her village to come to see the man who told her everything that needed to change in her heart and life. Indeed Jesus told her “everything she ever did”;²⁵ he summed up her life and its prime motivation of heart. The great test of Christian Spirit directed intuition is that real change comes by focussing on Jesus, and the fruit will be that people will change in areas they never had in their past. “By their fruit” will we know whether Jesus is really speaking or another voice. The life of the Christian is to be wholly changed by Christ.²⁶ We are not to “conform” but be “transformed” into the likeness of Christ the paradigmatic example.²⁷ The whole of the Christians’ being is to have the life of Christ come into it.

This leads to a multi-faceted definition of mysticism in my view:

²⁴ John 4:23,24

²⁵ John 4:29

²⁶ Romans 12:1, 2.

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:21

“Christian Mysticism may be defined as the Spirit of Christ dwelling in the depths of man’s new heart.²⁸ The Christian mind focuses on the new nature which Christ has implanted within him; this new nature exists so that man may have Christ exercise his presence in every aspect of his being as man opens every inner door to His presence.²⁹ This presence means that Christ relates to our inner eyes and ears and total beings from deep within - experienced as a sense of flow of his very life giving his presence to every aspect of the being of man. The sense of intuition or the spontaneous flow of words, visions or energy arise from the indwelling Spirit of Jesus. This is a connection of man’s spirit with Christ’s Spirit³⁰ meaning that there is dialogue and true two-way relational intimacy between the real man and the real Jesus.³¹

“Webster’s” definition may be considered to be far too limited. It can just as easily be related to New Age Mysticism as it could be to Islamic Sufi experience, or Buddhist nihilism. The aim of the connection of the Christian with Christ is not for the “I” to become consumed by the greater “Thou”; as is demonstrated in the far eastern nihilisms. When Isaiah falls as dead at the vision of God in the temple – he is not left dead, but he is rather purified of his sin so that he might live in communion with God in a real two-way intimacy with God in the Spirit.³² God wants the Christian Mystic to be an individual who keeps on choosing to live in intimacy with Him, relying on His [God’s] power and presence to flow through him as there is a sense of cooperation between God and man. God does not desire the annihilation of man’s self, but rather a joining together in intimacy with Christ and the I in a cooperative relationship of willing intimacy based on complete trust on the part of both parties - one toward the other. Each person as a son or daughter of God is an expression of relationship arising from the inner dwelling of the living Spirit of Christ the one and only true Son of God.³³ God always remains God in this relationship that we may completely trust to follow and obey because his love

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:16

²⁹ Revelation 3:20

³⁰ Romans 8:14 - 16

³¹ John 14:21

³² Isaiah 6

³³ Romans 8:14 - 16

pours through each being. God loves to give through Christ, Christ loves to give through the Spirit, the Spirit loves to give through the Christian, and the Christian living by the flow of this love gives praise back to God, and gives in love to others, and others give praise to God and the circuit continues forever and ever guided by living in the intimacy of God's family – with him making his home in each heart. Thus it may be said that the great circuit of beneficence is completed. The image and Spirit of God in man means that we have the mind of Christ.³⁴ We are guided by that mind. We become real responsible sons and daughters of God as we come to live our lives guided by who God is as much as by what he is transforming us into within our new hearts. Jesus the God-man gives the ultimate example of trust as he completely submits to his Father. It may also be noted that he knows the heart of the Father so well that he chooses to live out of his mind responsibly living in relationship with men on the basis of God's self giving love. He defines all actions as needing to be guided by this love on the basis of an understanding of how the Father's heart works. God desires our mind and hearts to work together. Our heads come to understand how God wants to treat all with Grace and forgiveness through Christ; hence man lives intelligently following this principle responsibly. Man will always need to sacrifice his desire to live out of himself – rather living out of God's guiding love and intimacy with the God who speaks.³⁵

So the working definition of Christian Mysticism in this essay is the one given above. "Webster's" definition only scratches the surface of the New Testament conception.

The Lukan Mystical View of the "Spirit of Jesus" in the Mission of the church

If there is a good applied theology of the Mystical experience of the believer in the mission of the church then Luke-Acts supplies it. The gospel of Luke again and again demonstrates that the Holy

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:16

³⁵ Galatians 2:20; 3:1-4

Spirit was intimately involved in Jesus' ministry.³⁶ The purpose of Luke is to demonstrate to his Christian readers that the Spirit was central to Jesus' life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection and mission.³⁷ Mystical experience through the Spirit is to be for all believers after the ascension of Christ [note].

Luke begins Acts in his inimitable style writing:

“Τον μεν πρωτον λογον εποιησαμην περι παντων, ω Θεοφιλε, ων ηπξατο ο
Ιησους ποιειν τε και διδασκειν.”³⁸

This may be translated:

“In the first word I made known concerning all things, O Theophilus, Being begun by Jesus
[which] he did and taught.” [My translation].

Theophilus is reminded of the “word”, or former gospel, which Luke sent to him. He is reminded that in that gospel all that Jesus “did and taught” were “being begun”. The sense of the Greek is that the recorded ministry of Jesus is only the beginning of his on going mission. The words and works of

³⁶ See on Luke 1:35, 41, 80; 2:9, 25, 27; 3:16, 22; 4:1,14 etc etc.

³⁷ Morris Leon, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke, IVP, USA, 1995, p. 48. Morris demonstrates his understanding of one of Luke's purposes for writing as follows: “13. The Holy Spirit. God's purpose does not stop at the cross. It continues in the work of the Holy Spirit which meant so much in the church of Luke's day. But Luke's interest in the Spirit does not start at Pentecost; it goes back to early days. The Spirit is prominent in this Gospel from the beginning.”

³⁸ Op Cit Greek NT, Acts 1:1.

Jesus are to continue through his disciples by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells his disciples just before his ascension:

“Αλλα λημψεσθε δυναμιν επελθοντος του αγιου πνευματος εφ υμας,
και εσεσθε μου μαρτυρες εν τε Ιερουσαλημ και εν παση τη Ιουδαια
και Σαμαρεια και εως εσχατου τνσ γησ.”³⁹

This may be translated:

“But you shall of a certainty receive power when has come upon you the Holy Spirit, and you shall certainly be my witnesses in both Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even until the last parts of the earth.” [My translation].

The primary purposes for giving the Spirit to the disciples is so that they may witness concerning the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The effect of the Spirit coming upon them is to fill them with power to do two things:

[1] To continue the teaching of Jesus. To teach his words. To point to him as the Lord and Saviour. So the mission is to preach the continuing words of Jesus. These words are far more than remembered or quoted words, but they are the very fabric of the believers' being. Jesus words are in their very hearts, and the book of Acts demonstrates how the Spirit of Jesus continues to speak to his followers in their hearts using their inner eyes and ears. Luke records:

³⁹ Ibid Acts 1:8.

“Διηλθον δε την Φρυγιαν και Γαλατικην χωραν, κωλυθεντες υπο του αγιου
πνευματος λαλησαι τον λογον εν τη Ασια; ελθοντες δε κατα την Μυσιαν επειπαζον
εις την Βιθυνιαν πορευθηναι, και ουκ ειασεν αυτους το πνευμα Ιησου;
παρελθοντες δε την Μυσιαν κατεβησαν εις Τρωδα. Και οραμα δια της νυκτος τω
Παυλω ωφθη,”⁴⁰

This may be translated:

“They came to the Phrygian and Galatian region, being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak at all the word in the Asian region; but coming against Mysia they attempted to go into Bithynia, and it was not permitted to them by the Spirit of Jesus; but coming past Mysia they went down into Troas. And a vision [a sight] through the night to Paul appeared,” [My translation].

Hence we learn that both Paul’s inner ears and inner spiritual eyes receive guidance from the “Spirit of Jesus”. The sense of the Greek for “vision” is “a sight” which appears to Paul at “night”. The mystical nature of the way God communicates with his Apostle is clearly seen. This is because Paul already has intimacy with his Saviour, and his heart is open to receive spontaneous flow and guidance from him. Further this intimacy is driven by God’s love and desire that all may come to know the gospel. So Christian Mystical experience is not driven by a selfish desire to keep God to itself, but it is driven by God’s love and desire to give saving life and intimate relationship to all people who will but

⁴⁰ Ibid Acts 16:8-9a

accept him. Therefore, Christian Mysticism is “Mission-ally” driven. This is vital for Jesus informs his disciples on his last night in the flesh among them the great end of God’s desire for all to be part of his family of intimate love. This self giving love is to be the fruit of all mysticism and mission.

Jesus says:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁴¹

[2] This is the second point. The mysticism of the New Covenant goes in a specific direction. It is so that individual people in the family of God may love one another in intimacy arising from intimacy with the family of God abiding in their hearts. This is no selfish navel gazing intimacy where lovers lock themselves away from the world, or locate themselves in caves such as the dessert fathers did. This is a sharing community love – where all family members may have trust, love, openness and intimacy with each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God. People will be magnetically attracted to the people of God because of this real care, this real intimacy which is derived from it being lived out of the flow of our hearts towards each other exercised in gift love. The mission of the church is that all may be filled with the “Spirit of Jesus” who’s Spirit makes us cry “Abba”, “Daddy”. It is his Spirit which makes us all agree together that each of us is his son and his daughter.⁴²

In Acts all men and women are to be able to have mystical eyes and ears which connect to the Father through Jesus by the Spirit. The Apostle Peter preaches:

⁴¹ John 13:34

⁴² Romans 8:14-16

“Και εσται εν ταισ εσχαταισ ημεραισ, λεψει ο θεοσ, εκχεω απο του
πνευματοσ μου επι πασαν σαρκα, και προφητευσουσιν οι υιοι υμων
και αι θυγατερεσ υμων, και οι νεανισκοι υμων ορασεισ οψονται, και οι
πρεσβυτεροι υμων ενυπνιοισ ενυπνιασθησονται;”⁴³

This may be translated:

“And it shall be in the last days, says God, I shall with a certainty pour out my Spirit upon all
flesh, and they shall prophecy with a certainty the sons of you and the daughters of you, and
the young men of you shall see visions with a certainty, and the elders of you shall dream
dreams without a doubt.” [My translation].

The last days began with the coming of the Spirit,⁴⁴ and the world is still living in them. This
prophecy from Joel is now the property of every believer – the Christian believer can claim his or her
property from the lost property locker if any have not as yet started receiving words and visions from
God in the eyes and ears of their hearts. This is all to the purpose of building the family of God in
communion with him and with one another. Luke-Acts demonstrates that Christian Mysticism is
pragmatic as well as relational. It is “mission ally” driven by the God who loves to share the intimacy
of his love.

⁴³ Op Cit Greek NT Acts :17

⁴⁴ Hebrews 1:1-3

“Webster’s” definition of the subjective nature of Mysticism lends itself to an inner pursuit after God without an outer objective flow of his love and intimacy being shared with others “mission ally”. Christian Mysticism is not to keep us locked into our hearts, but it is to flow out to other hearts who all can love to share intimacy together as well. John chapters 13 – 17 are not a call for Christian men and women to become so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. Rather they picture Jesus real definition of Mystical intimacy that all God’s people are to live out of flow toward God and toward each other, both giving and receiving, and receiving and giving.⁴⁵ “Webster’s” dictionary does not even get close to Christian “Mission-al” Mysticism. Jesus informs his disciples that they will do even greater works than he has done among them in his ministry,⁴⁶ this is because he will continue to do them among them by virtue of their intimate union with the “Spirit of Jesus”⁴⁷ as he “mission ally” reaches out to others so they too may become part of his family.

Hence these two sections have explored Jesus the Mystic and “Mission-al” Mysticism. It has been demonstrated that Mysticism to the Christian always flows away from self and out to others in grace and gift love.⁴⁸ It is this sense of living in flow which completes the circuit of beneficence. We receive in our hearts so that we may give. We look out for others and let God’s love flow to them. They live out of flow and God’s love flows toward God, us and others. It all comes from God in flow, and flows back to him in gratitude. What a great picture of community, mission, union, intimacy, sharing, loving and giving. You are God alone. Thank you Father, thank you Jesus, thank you Spirit. Amen!

⁴⁵ John 13:34,35

⁴⁶ John 14:12

⁴⁷ Acts 1:6-9a

⁴⁸ John 15:13 – 17 – a real understanding of friendship is ultimately seen as given up even life for friends, Jesus is the ultimate example of this, and his disciples are to model this type of love toward each other.

John the Revelator – Worship and Charismata

Further to the foregoing it seems important to discuss the Apostle John as a charismatic and mystic. The Apostolic age saw a supernatural explosion of God's miraculous presence. It was the inauguration of the age of the "Spirit of Jesus".⁴⁹

Luke writes in Acts 1:1:

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt

with all that Jesus began to do and teach." [RSV]

It has already been noted that Luke starts the Acts by referring to his other significant work the gospel by his name. His gospel can be basically summarised as following a structure which records Jesus' "doings and teachings". Or put another way his "Words and Works". It was noted that Luke informs Theophilus that these "Words and Works" were "began"⁵⁰ by Jesus, as his gospel records, but the book of Acts demonstrates that they are to continue in the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the disciples and Apostles of Jesus once the Lord had returned to heaven.

⁴⁹ Green Michael, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Hodder & Stoughton, UK, 1988, pages 47 – 67.

⁵⁰ Acts 1:1

It is the Apostles and disciples who receive the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ It is by their hands that Jesus continues his miraculous deeds,⁵² and reinforces his teaching. It is the “Spirit of Jesus”⁵³ who guides the apostle Paul. Indeed it is he who works Signs, wonders, healings, miracles, prophecies, new tongues and portents of incredible magnitude and undeniable veracity as of divine origin.⁵⁴ The church was and always will be authenticated by the miraculous presence of God working through his servants.

Acts 2:16 - 21 gives the good news to every Christian that the Holy Spirit is poured out on “all flesh”. In the Old covenant age, kings, priests and prophets were the major recipients. In the new covenant age all believers are to receive the Holy Spirit on some simple conditions:

“Repent, and be baptised every one of you in

The name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of

your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Acts 2:1-4

⁵² Acts 3

⁵³ Acts 16:8

⁵⁴ Acts 2:43,44

⁵⁵ Acts 2:38 RSV

The Spirit is a gift of God; Just like Salvation is a gift of grace.⁵⁶ It cannot be earned, it cannot be bought, it can simply be sought and received. Paul says as much in Galatians 3:1 - 5:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly

portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only

this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of

the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you

so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit,

are you now ending with the flesh? Did

you experience so many things in vain?

If it really is in vain. Does he who supplies

the Spirit to you and works miracles among

you do so by works of the law, or by hearing

With faith?” [RSV].

⁵⁶ Ephesians 2:8

It can be seen from this excerpt that Paul considered it to be a natural phenomenon for the Christian to experience the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit. We can also observe that the Holy Spirit is received as a gift of grace; not by something we produce by our own power or piety.⁵⁷ A Christian, in order to be a true Trinitarian believer, must be switched on in the Holy Spirit. He must let the Spirit work in him, rather than trying to make Christianity work for him according to his own agenda. Perhaps this is the great problem facing Christians today. Perhaps we do not want to accept that we are saved by grace alone. That we cannot do anything of ourselves, that we are helpless; and that we need to be led by God, rather than ourselves.

It is by the media of the Holy Spirit that Christians are to do greater works than their Lord.⁵⁸ This challenging saying, of the Lord, has often been misunderstood. It has been questioned: “how can we do greater works than Jesus?” But seen in the light of Acts 1:1 it makes perfect sense. It is not the believer who is to do the greater works as if on his own, but it is Jesus who will continue by His Spirit to do his deeds and teachings through him by his Spirit. This includes miracle, prophecy and vision.

It is the “Spirit of Jesus” who guides Paul to go to Macedonia.⁵⁹ He is forbidden to go to preach the gospel by the Spirit in Asia Minor at that time. People often wonder why we do not reach the people of this age. Perhaps it is because Christians do not follow the Spirit for

⁵⁷ Acts 3:12

⁵⁸ John 14:12

⁵⁹ Acts 16:8

guidance but rather agendas derived through man made programmes. It is the paraklete who draws attention to Jesus and reveals his present and future plans to his people today! ⁶⁰Jesus principle of ministry should be every believer's guide; He said of the way he conducted his mission the following in John 5:19:

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you,

The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but

only what he sees the Father doing; for

whatever he does, that the Son does likewise." [RSV].

⁶⁰ John 16:12-14

Do we follow this principle in our lives? Are we grace driven Christians? Do we do things where God is doing them, or do we set our own agendas? Are we Spirit gifted Christians? Do we receive the gift of the Spirit, and go where he blows us?⁶¹ Or do we go where we want to go following our agendas, and not the Father's heart? Jesus followed the passionate throb of his Father's heart. Jesus was the paradigmatic man; in him we see what it means to be gifted with the free gift of the Holy Spirit as he abides in our hearts.

The early church was a charismatic group who ministered following the example their master had modelled for them. They were known as the people of the way; That is they went in the direction that Christ directed them to go living by the flow of his Spirit. They were involved in abandoning themselves to do the biddings of Jesus' Spirit as he continued to exercise his deeds and teachings through them. Luke intended his gospel to set the criteria for what those deeds and teachings should look like. He wrote it so that the authentic voice of Jesus could be recognised. He penned it so that Christians of today can see that they need the God of miracle and prophecy working by his Spirit directly through them.

On considering John, the intrepid Apostolic guide on the felons island of Patmos, a picture develops of how the visions came to him. Almost 60 years had passed since he walked the paths of the Holy land with his Lord. Yet what is he found to be doing on the prison Isle. Lamenting that the church is failing, or not making progress? Weeping for the lack of commitment in his own life? Trying to think of an escape plan so as to be able to get back to

⁶¹ John 3:8

his new home in Ephesus? No he is to be found waiting on the Lord as he has done for the last 60 years. John is still switched on in the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit - exercising his gift of prophecy.⁶²

Chained and imprisoned he meets the risen Jesus. He is transported by the Spirit into visions of heavenly realms.⁶³ The posture of his heart is to look for vision from God.

Moreover, it was not just John who possessed these gifts of the Spirit, but it was also true for every believer without limit, except those which a believer's of that day put in the way of hearing and seeing in their hearts. The messages of Christ to the seven churches demonstrate that it was the people of these churches who had demonic and sin elated barriers keeping them from opening the door to Christ in their hearts.⁶⁴ These gifts were every Christians still to be exercised without qualification, or status, or educational or social background being reckoned upon. This is clear from Paul's own teachings on Spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 1, 2 and 12 - 14. Paul's reckoning was that a congregation should regularly be exercising these gifts. He comments in 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“What then, brethren? When you come together,

⁶² Revelation 1:10

⁶³ Revelation 4:1,2

⁶⁴ Revelation :20

each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation,
a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things
be done for edification.” [RSV]

It seems that Paul considered it to be a regular requirement for a church to exercise the gift of prophecy in worship services so that unbelievers would be forced by the miraculous evidence to see that God was really at work among them. He says:

“If, therefore, the whole church assembles and
all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers
enter; will they not say that you are mad? But
if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters,
he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,
the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so,
falling on his face, he will worship God and declare
that God is really among you.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 RSV

Why are so many churches empty in Europe? Why do so many outreach programmes reach so few? Could it be because we are not switched on in the Spirit of prophesy spoken of in Revelation 19:10? Could it be that the churches forbid the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit to local gifted prophets whom God has called in their congregations? Have his presence been denied entry? Is the church ruled by tradition and dogma which tries to lock the authentic voice of the God who speaks away from the people? "We've always done it this way it might be argued, why do it in another?" Has tradition, and limited leadership paradigms locked the people away from God as he stands with his hands full of his Spiritual gifts? Is fear of God speaking to leaders based on a sinful need to be in control of their patch? Would what the prophetic voice has to say to them be too challenging to their neat little world?

Every congregation needs its prophets. This is a fact of scripture, not a fancy. Leaders need to be honest bible students, not dishonest institutionalizers who want to keep the status quo balanced. And at the heart of prophecy and individual connection with the God who speaks is that we fear intimacy with him if it means we have to give over our lives to the scrutiny of his Spirit which will light up every dark area. I know my words are harsh and pointed here, but I will say that I spent some years of my Christian life avoiding this level of open intimacy with the Spirit of God. To lock God's voice of prophetic utterance from within ourselves personally or from the congregation forbidding the gift of prophecy can be to have a congregations candle in immediate danger of being removed from the presence of the Lord.⁶⁶ Although I have stated

⁶⁶ Revelation 2:5

things bluntly at this point, I would ask the reader to persevere and to consider what has been written here as the thesis of this paper is developed later. Please carefully consider the need for personal intimacy with the God who dialogues with our hearts as well [as this is developed later in this paper]. It is to bring corrective judgment down on churches. It is so easy to lock God away between the pages of the bible. It is so easy to be selective about what portions of scripture are read. But the challenge is for prophets to be allowed to exercise their gifts again in local congregations. It is clear from Revelation 19:12 and Acts 2:16 - 21 that every congregation is to have the Spirit of prophecy in living speaking prophets today. This will rock the boat. This will lead to excess and challenge in some peoples estimations, but if it is to be weighed and balanced by scriptural counsel; then the church will be far better off for it!

In the later part of the first century Ad, and in the early 2nd century, it is clear from reading Clement of Rome's Epistle to the Corinthians, and Ignatius's epistles to the churches to whom the Apocalypse was first addressed, that disunity had taken root among believers, that they were looking more to themselves than God. Paul's warnings to the Corinthians about the dangers of following human ideas as opposed to divine guidance had led to the charismatic gifts dying out in many parishes.⁶⁷ Ignatius's epistle demonstrates that disunity had led to a repression of the gifts of the Spirit within congregation – certainly itinerant prophets were disliked.⁶⁸ Churches must have direction and leadership as local congregations, but this must not

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:10 & Holmes W. M., The Apostolic Fathers Greek texts and English translations, Baker Books, USA, 2004, pp. 22 - 101

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 128 - 194

be based on dogma and tradition so much as following the prophetic voice; and discerning God's plans by listening and weighing words given, and uttered by mysteries of the Spirit.⁶⁹

If consideration is given to the Greek word for "gifts" it is CHARISMATA [χαρισματα]. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. It describes spiritual gifts. It informs the concept that all the gifts outlined in these chapters were supernaturally given as a miraculous gift to individual believers.⁷⁰ These gifts included prophecy, tongues, discernment of spirits, healing gifts and so on.⁷¹ All God's people are to exercise the CHARISMATA, the free presents given to God's grateful children. They are offered without money or price,⁷² HP agreement or down payments. No repayment instalments are required. There is no 19% APR. They are free for the asking. And this is all to happen mystically through a Christian intuition in the hearts of believers.

⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:29

⁷⁰ Op Cit, Moulton – see his comments on χαρισματα under χαρισ commenting on χαρισμα.p.434.

⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 12

⁷² Revelation 22:17

The God of all resources gives all that is needed to complete his mission through his people.

This mission is that all may return to heart derived intimacy with the deity. These resources are poured out without limit in the person of his Son, and his Son continues to exercise those gifts through his people today!

The Apostle John, the last of the 12 apostles, was found to be still a man of the Spirit exercising the gifts. If he had not been filled with the "Spirit of Jesus", then the great scenes of worship and future events would never have been written down in the form of the revelation for us to read. These visions in the first place were journal led by the Apostle, and then they were posted to the seven churches.

Christians cannot really enter into the worship of God's new covenant kingdom unless they are baptised/switched on in the Holy Spirit. It is clear that Christians may have accepted Jesus as Saviour, but they can remain bereft of the power of the Holy Spirit, they may not have been switched on in his full power and presence, this is what the Apostles discovered to be true of the Samaritans converted under the ministry of Phillip.⁷³ Whenever there is a power cut the absence of electrical power is obvious. When Christian people are not switched on in the Spirit they will continuously note the lack of God's beautiful presence, peace and power. It is common for many charismatic groups to claim that Christians do not have the Spirit until they have spoken in tongues. This flies in the face of Acts 2:38 that identifies the Spirit's presence in every true believers heart. Hence all Christians have the Holy Spirit, but not all have allowed

⁷³ Acts 8:15,16

themselves to look for his activity in their hearts. “Webster’s” definition of inner intuition is not part of this class of people’s experience. So the analogy of becoming “switched on in the Spirit” by looking for the door of their hearts to be opened to receive vision and words is a useful one, and by a long chalk a better approach to the teaching of Acts.

The failure to be switched on may simply be because barriers have been erected which stop people from allowing themselves to invite the fullness of the Spirit in. These blockages may be as follows:

[1] The barrier of fear. The question is often asked “How can I know that this is really of God?” when talking of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

All that can be said to this is that God will not let people be deceived if they ask for his protection seeking Jesus. If we ask to be switched on in the Spirit, and let the barriers down, then he will protect us on our new journey. He will not let us be deceived by the enemy.

Would a good Father let his child be abused knowingly by a pervert? No! No! No! However, it would be a good idea to take this new journey under the guidance of a mature Christian who has walked in the Spirit for some time, and knows some of the challenges and pitfalls.

Scripture sets the scene for what must be seen as normal for the Christian.⁷⁴ It is normal for the disciple to be a learner. It is often pride and arrogance that prevent the modern day believer admitting to him self/herself that he/she needs to deny themselves and take up their crosses, and go on the way of a lifetime of following, learning and being open to vision in the eyes of their hearts. John's eyes were open. The principle of the body of Christ ⁷⁵informs the need that all believers have of others, none have all the answers, or all the gifts, that are needed. We need each other. None need to stand alone in the Christian family where Christ is the head of the body.⁷⁶

It is normal for Christians to have visions, prophesy, speaking in earthly languages and heavenly languages of tongues, which will need interpretation. It is normal for miracles to happen and for healings to occur, and so on. These things, and more, will happen if Christians lower the drawbridge of their minds, raise the portcullis of their hearts and let the King come in.⁷⁷

[2] The fear of loss of control.

Society today has mass produced an age of control freaks. It seeks scientific control of disease, the environment, the skies, the roads, the food chain etc. It wants to be in control.

⁷⁴ Nee Watchman, The Normal Christian Life, Kingsway, UK, 1997, p. 9

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 12

⁷⁶ Ephesians 4:4

⁷⁷ Psalm 24

The teaching of Scripture is that mankind must let go of control and turn its' life over to Jesus, the only one who can give rest from man's freakish sin problem of self centred control.⁷⁸

The Holy Spirit works his miracles not on the basis of human agendas, or capabilities, but on the foundation of his power and resources, and man's need to accept this as normal.⁷⁹

It has often been said to me by non-Charismatic's, "If I let down my guard then how can I be in control of what happens in my life? Perhaps the Devil will take advantage of me!"

At the most basic level God wants us to let go control of our lives, and hand them over to him.

We need to say with Jesus in our Gethsemane of fear of loss, "Not my will but yours be done!"⁸⁰ This is the great mystical challenge. We need to stop trying to get an experience for ourselves, and to start looking for the presence of Jesus in our hearts.

God wants man to let go of self control giving his wills over to him! Frightening? No, in my experience amazing!

⁷⁸ Matthew 11:28

⁷⁹ Galatians 3:1-5

⁸⁰ Mark 13:46

It is a matter of sinful distrust if God's people do not take God at his word, and let him possess their wills and their desires. He wants them to let him direct their lives, rather than their innate humanism. Yet many Christians are humanists who first and foremost want to do things on the basis of self control, rather than divine government of their lives. They fear that they may lose their very selves, even when Jesus promises that he "who would lose his life will find it".⁸¹ And this is paradoxical. Yet since I have been switched on in the Spirit over the past years I have been on some painful journeys of discovery, but I have also found my true God-given self. I am far happier now than I have ever been. May the lord continue his work!

There are other fears that could be mentioned, but the crucial thing is that Christian people let God's will be done in their lives. This means that they must be obedient to Scripture's normality for the Christian. It seems strange to Westernised empirical minds to speak of living by heart and mystical Christian intuition as the basis for man's highest destiny – yet the lives of the Apostles, climaxing in John the revelatory, demonstrate this as the fundamental paradigm of Christian experience.

This is all reinforced by the Revelation given to John. The very word APOCALYPSIS [αποκαλυψις] gives the key to all life in the Spirit. At its root it describes the miraculous uncovering of something which is hidden to man without divine disclosure taking place. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul Prays that all Christians may be given a Spirit of revelation and inspiration so as to enter into the mysteries of God.

⁸¹ Matthew 17:33

Jesus is at the heart of every uncovering of the Mystery of God.⁸² It is the Spirit's first function to reveal Jesus, and his plans.⁸³ It is by looking at him, and hearing from him by his spirit that man comes to know God personally rather than abstractly or intellectually. Yet it is true that many possess endless degrees of theology, but possess little of the power of God's presence by the Holy Spirit working through their hearts at an intimate level. Human knowledge and educational traditions are probably the devil's way of locking us into human means of trying to know God and his ways and nature. But 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2 declare that such ways are foolishness to God, and that the only means of receiving God's presence is through the miraculous means of the power of the cross, which opens the window to the gifts of the Spirit, and to Vision, words and prophecies.

⁸² Revelation :1-3

⁸³ John 16:12-14

All of the revelations of Christ in the book of Revelation result in ever greater worship responses from Angels and men. John falls at Jesus' feet as though dead, but he is raised by the King, and brought into the joy of the very presence of God.⁸⁴

John the Apostle "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day".⁸⁵ And as a man of the Spirit he did not just spend his life looking back on what had once happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but he was also accustomed to hearing from the risen, ascended and living Jesus of today by his Spirit. This was the key to the early churches success. It was not down to a method, but it was down to abandon, listening, relationship and obedience to God's living government in the person of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is not the "Acts of the Apostles", but it is the "Acts of the Spirit of Jesus".⁸⁶

Christianity is not just a historical religion, but it is also a present reality shaping the history of today for those who still hear from the living speaking Jesus.⁸⁷ Christian Mysticism is the active presence of his Spirit in the heart of man. Man's rational mind must bow in subjection to the way of love flowing out of the new regenerated heart.

Once again the inadequacy of "Webster's" definition is apparent. And this is even more evident as the manifestation of Christian mystical experience is explored in the next section.

⁸⁴ Revelation 1:14;4,5

⁸⁵ Revelation 1:10

⁸⁶ Barclay William, The Daily Study Bible The Acts, The Saint Andrew Press, UK, 1986, pp. 1-18

⁸⁷ Revelation 1

Christian Mysticism in Church History

As suggested in the introduction it is impossible in a short paper to do any justice to the vast body of information regarding the Christian Mystics. It would seem that by far the best approach is to focus on developments in mysticism by way of classification rather than by exploring each individual example. Individuals will be referred to as representative and as they have found significance in this writers' life.

Polycarp

As a reader of the so called Apostolic Fathers it has always fascinated me that beyond the New Testament itself we have the writings of the next meaningful generation of those who followed after the Apostles themselves. This is particularly demonstrated in the person of the humble bishop of Smyrna Polycarp. His epistle to the Philippians demonstrates his humility.⁸⁸ Indeed he was not known for great learning, although he was often consulted by the churches because of his first hand passed on knowledge from the days when he had sat as a disciple at the Apostle John's feet.⁸⁹ This makes anything he wrote, or that was written authoritatively about him by those who knew him of paramount importance when understanding the nature of his mystical journey. Indeed in the church of Smyrna's account of his arrest and martyrdom authoritative tradition remains in relation to the topic. It is written concerning a trance state he entered into before his death. The record states:

“Και προσευχομενος εν οπτασια γεγονεν προ τριων ημερων του

συλληφθηναι αυτον και αιδεν το προσκεφαλαιον αυτου υπο πυρος

⁸⁸ Op Cit, Apostolic Fathers, pp.206 – 221..

⁸⁹ Penguin, Early Christian Writings, Penguin Books, UK, 1987, p. 115

κατακαιομενον. Και στραφεις ειπεν προς τους συν αυτω Δει με
ζωντα καηναι.”⁹⁰

This may be translated:

“And while he was praying he fell into a trance three days before his arrest, and he saw his pillow being consumed by fire. And he turned and said to those who were with him: ‘It is necessary that I be burned alive.’”

This short reference means that there is a clear witness not just to Polycarp’s mysticism, but also to the church of Smyrna’s attitude to mysticism. For if they did not experience this sort of connection with God themselves, or disagreed with it, then they would certainly not have recorded Polycarp’s vision. This means that the church in Smyrna was still having vision experiences well into the 2nd century AD. The category of vision Polycarp has is like that of Peter when he fell into a trance and saw all kinds of unclean animals come down before him.⁹¹ The visionary experience was alive and well in the post apostolic area, well into the period in which a Gnostic counterfeit was trying to usurp the place of Christ-centred vision with its Docetist and Cerinthian protégés.

It may be concluded also from the “trance” which Polycarp had that he lived with a humble, open and waiting posture to seek vision from God. The Holy Spirit’s role is not mentioned in the document in relationship to the trance, but this must be taken as understood given Polycarp’s own teaching, and his relationship as a disciple to teacher that he had served with the Apostle John. It would not be

⁹⁰ Ibid 231

⁹¹ Acts 9,10 & Ibid 231

speculation to surmise that John had taught his disciple Polycarp how to posture himself to receive vision just as he had recorded it for future generations to discover in the gospel by his name.

Origen [185 – 254 AD]

Great among the names of the early church was Origen. For him the great mystical experience was martyrdom. This was seen as the ultimate type of the mystical journey by which the mysticism of the heart was tested for true fruit.⁹² The Origenist treatise which most affected Christian Mystical theology was his mystical commentary on the Song of Songs. His exegesis of this document reveals his heart when it came to his own experience of connection with God, and it was a connection which went to the very depths of human intimacy far beyond words or pictures. Firstly, as the poem is at first site an erotic document exploring sexual rhythms it is not surprising that Origen saw the relationship of these human rhythms with that of the mystic as he or she united with God their most desired love.⁹³

Secondly, Origen identified the union which was to take place between the Christian and the Word Incarnate in the symbolism of the song. This was viewed as a marriage that was to take place between the Christian soul and the divine soul of Christ. Thirdly, none of the bodily functions referred to in the song were to be taken as bodily functions, but were really descriptive of the divine senses implanted within the inner man. Hence Origen clearly believed that there was to be a deep union and communion between the inner man, eyes, ears, mind and heart etc. Fourthly, Origen was the first writer to derive the concept of spiritual senses in a theological paradigm. These were a completely new set of five inner senses. Johnson Comments:

⁹² Johnston William, *Mystical Theology the science of love*, Harper Collins Publishers, UK, 1995, p.17

⁹³ *Ibid* p. 17

“Be that as it may, the notion of interior senses is taken up by other mystics, notably St Teresa of Avila who speaks of seeing but not with these eyes, hearing but not with these ears, smelling but not with these nostrils and so on. It seems impossible to explain mystical experience without some such psychology. And studies in this area continue today.”⁹⁴

What is true of the Apostle John, Polycarp, the Smyrnan church, Origen and St. Teresa is that they all maintain the tradition of the essential knowableness of God. He does communicate with his children in an open, understandable revealed fashion. However, this was to change in the next developments of mystical experience and teaching.

Theology of Negation [4th Century AD]

The so called Cappadocian fathers derived a doctrine which was to hold sway to a large extent well into and beyond the so called Dark Ages in Europe. They had a doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God.⁹⁵ For them God could not be known in any sense that might be spoken of in a tangible sense. To them he was concealed by impenetrable darkness. The response of the heart must be to remain silent, and learn to live in this unknowing state. There was to be no expectation of revelation as Biblical characters experienced it. A radical turning point had occurred in which Origen’s theology of intimate apprehension of the revelation of God through inner senses was transformed into blindness and deafness. Gregory of Nyssa held to such a theology of negation in which the seeker after God in the heart was to meet God with utter unknowing. Such a negation of clear communication brought mysticism to the point of nihilism. A sense of obliteration of the self by consummation into the so called darkness of the divinity bore no resemblance to the revealed mystery of God through the gospel of Christ. Indeed the sense that Father, Son and Spirit should commune with the Christian was not to be found in any sense that could be correlated to the openness of God brought to the Christian in the

⁹⁴ Ibid p. 18

⁹⁵ Ibid p. 19

“Spirit of Jesus”. Indeed it may be argued that the New Testament sense of the positive knowable nature of God’s continued revelation to mankind; pictured in the direct guidance of the Spirit in the book of Acts was not to be found.

Dionysius the most significant proponent of this negativism spoke of:

“Περί μυστικῆς θεολογίας.”⁹⁶

Which is translated “concerning the mystery of theology” or “the mystery of knowledge about God;” to him theology was a mystery. God was unknowable. He was secret, hidden, formless, dark, and ineffable. There were to be no clear cut images or language. The divine mystery so far exceeded the human intellect that God remains unknowable. Even faith was seen as a veil which covered up the lack of definite knowledge. Hence the mystic must stop thinking. He was to forget; in a “cloud of forgetting” anything he assumed or thought he knew. He was to enter into a silent mystery of God. The later mystical writing entitled “The Cloud of Unknowing” was written by an unknown author. This was a later product of so called Christian Mysticism which was strongly influenced by Dionysius. We read:

“If ever you are to come to this cloud and live and work in it, as I suggest, then just as this cloud of unknowing is as it were above you, between you and God, so you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation. We are apt to think that we are very far from God because of this cloud of unknowing between us and him, but surely it would be more

⁹⁶ Ibid p. 20

correct to say that we are much farther from him if there is no cloud of forgetting between us and the whole created world.”⁹⁷

The cloud is a production of the 14th century AD, and it is not without saving graces, and some useful notions concerning mystical journey. In as far as it embraces negation it falls short of Biblical catechesis. However, the notion that the mystic needs to put a “cloud of forgetting” between him self and the deity is useful from a certain point of view. Especially if one considers the cloud to be a metaphor for left brain control submitting right brain intuition to its dominance. If it is taken to mean the need to suspend analysis and to go with flow, vision and thoughts from the heart then it is a useful metaphor. However, it is far better to clearly define, as Virkler does,⁹⁸ that we suspend judgment going with flow – later weighing what is revealed through meditation and anointed reason.

To some extent the “Cloud of Unknowing” has informed my Christian Mystical journey to the extent that it has encouraged me not to rely on my reason to find God, but rather on him being free to speak to and through my heart.

Thomism – Thomas Aquinas 1225 - 74

The great paradox of Greek philosophy is the one and the many. If there is one ultimate being – God, then what need is there for many lesser beings. If there is ultimate being then when lesser beings commune with the ultimate being then what need would there be for lesser beings to retain their identity. Surely ultimate being would consume them, and they themselves would want to be consumed. Aquinas wrestled with these concepts on a rational level. For him metaphysics are not rationally grasped.

⁹⁷ Penguin, The Cloud of Unknowing and other works, Penguin Books, UK, 1978, p. 66

⁹⁸ Op Cit, Virkler, p. 59

Aquinas came to understand that there comes a time when philosophers, mystics and even poets come to realise that all is one. They come to stand at zero point, at the foundation point. In Christian Mystical terms Aquinas discovered that he needed to come to the “one”, to Christ, and that all else seemed lesser or even insignificant compared to finding the source of everything in the deity of the Trinity. This experience also made him question how the experience of unity with ultimate God could be reconciled with the multiplicity of the many. It is clear that he was struggling to use his reason to grasp a reality of the heart.

Moreover, Aquinas struggled with the way mystics seem to lose the distinction between themselves and God. It was common for them to seem to indicate that they indeed were God. And this demonstrates that the modern notion of New Age mysticism is not a new thing. The genius of Aquinas was that he was open to search for a meaningful theological definition of Christian Mysticism which did away with the pantheistic blur and negativistic voids of the Dionysian genre.

Hence Johnston writes of the Thomistic solution to the paradox of one and many and separated-ness. He comments:

“Following Aristotle, Aquinas resolves this conflict with his theory of essence and existence. All things are one by reason of their existence – they are one in that they are; and all things are different by reason of their essence – in what they are.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Op Cit, Johnston, p. 47

This definition has been important in my journey to the extent that Charismatic Christians who walk the mystical journey seem to often go to one of two extremes. Firstly, they speak of themselves as becoming so consumed by Christ, that they lose sight of their individuality, which contradicts Genesis 1:26 which speaks of God creating men and women in his image and likeness; demonstrating that he wants to share himself with real beings, not with robots or automatons. Biblical mysticism lets God be God, and man be man in cooperative unity with Christ as Lord of love guiding not negating his people's sense of real being. Secondly, they speak of themselves as if they were Christ himself. There is a loss of humility – it is almost like they have come to see themselves as omnipotent – unteachable – almost ultimate authority which others have to obey. Both extremes have their own aetiology. The second extreme leads to an unchecked phenomenon where the person is not open to test anything that he or she feels God is saying. They come to a point of pride which locks out others input and Gods in the end. The former extreme leaves the person open to manipulation for there is no sense of the self that God created. Fear can be a driving force here – the person becomes open to any voice of man which seems certain of itself about what God requires and fear drives this category to embrace multiple takes on what God is asking them to do for fear of displeasing God; therefore losing out on his grace.

Aquinas helps me to define a balance. God loves to speak to me flowing through my heart, and he also loves for me to speak with him. He loves to take time in my presence as much as I in is. God is not threatened by me, because he made real people who always have a choice to trust and go with flow. He loves to give and not to hold back. So God is God to me, and I am I, yet I trust myself to walk with him in complete union because he loves to share his love and creativity with real self aware beings. Yes he is Lord, but he is Lord of love and sharing. As a son or daughter of God I choose to share all of him for he has poured all of his resources out in love through Jesus.¹⁰⁰ Both the other extremes are driven by something other than love in the end. Both are driven by fear. In the first case fear of intimacy with God and others, and in the second instance fear of being real, with real being,

¹⁰⁰ Colossians 2:9

and real choices which God loves to creatively give us. Aquinas's concept of existence and essence helps all God's people recognise that God has made them to be real existing self aware people with creative choices to be facilitated by openness of heart to the flow of God's power and presence. The sense of essence is to recognise that God will always remain God, and we his people will always remain his creatures. So the distinction of created and creator will always be there!

Thomism brought the task of reasoned theology into the far older biblical view of a theology of the heart as a thing God anointed reason would meditate on. Thomism brought Hellenised rationalism into mystical theology. Moreover, Aquinas's rational theology may be thought of as the foundation for much of later rationalistic thought entering the church. His desire to make a rational base line for mysticism has to a great extent moved Christianity more to a theology of the head, rather than a theology of the heart which grows out of a connected flow of the "Spirit of Jesus" through the believer. Much of my journey has been aided by his definition of the classical balance of the "I Thou" debate, as it has kept me from the aforementioned extremes. However, I part company with Aquinas beyond this and seek to live out of flow and connection in my heart with Christ.

Thomas a Kempis – 15th Century

A Kempis was educated by the brothers of the common life. They had been founded a century earlier by Geert de Groote. They were not a monastic order, but rather a loosely associated brotherhood with no rule for life or practice. Essentially they were left to pursue a life of contemplation as lay clerics in the way which worked best for them. This loose definition did not suite a Kempis so he joined the community of Mount Saint Agnes, a monastery of Augustinian canons. His mysticism takes the form of dialogues finding their focus particularly in the sacrament of communion. To him a true mysticism meant emancipation from one's self and pride. Pride is an anti-God state of mind. He sought union

with God by extreme denial of himself, and inner dialogues which focussed his mind on union with God – particularly the death of Christ and his ultimate union with him through death. He had a particular sort of death-wish to be separated from the world, and to be united with God. Hence separation and focus of his heart on the meaning of communion with death to self and the world and life with Christ was the mainstay of his mystical practice. He writes of the emptiness of worldly knowledge and pursuit as follows:

“1. ‘Son, let not the fair and subtle words of men influence you. For the kingdom of God is not in speech but in virtue. Give ear to my words, for they fire the heart and lighten the mind, they bring contrition, and supply manifold consolation. Never read a word that you may appear more learned or more wise. Give heed to the destruction of your vices, because this will be to your fuller advantage than the knowledge of many difficult questions.’”¹⁰¹

It is at once clear that a Kempis was used to hearing from God in his heart in the first person. His scriptural grounding is found in phrases like “the kingdom of God is not speech.....”. He clearly demonstrates an openness to hearing God’s voice with the ears of his heart and journaling them. Perhaps the saddest thing with a Kempis was his withdrawal from the counsel of others. He lost sight of the gift love aspect of Christ’s love which the Lord meant to flow out of his heart to others. We can see negative influences affecting his journey because of his withdrawn nature and death wish. Clearly he needed to focus on Christ the giver who gives through us to others in flow from his loving “mission-al” heart. His separation from others was in direct contradiction to the heart of Jesus’ family intimacy shared with man, and then man to share with other Christian people in the family of God. Intimacy grows intimacy, but for a Kempis it expressed itself as a self nihilism and selfish naval gazing mentality. However, I appreciate the way he sought to open his heart to find connection with

¹⁰¹ A Kempis Thomas, *The Imitation of Christ*, Hodder & Stoughton, UK, 1979, p. 151

Christ in his atonement. But this focus on atonement made him focus on death – there was no resurrection and going out to share Christ and new active life for a Kempis. How sad, how tragic.

The Celtic Way – St Columba

The Celtic way of prayer is also expressive of their mysticism. It is a journey. It is not static, it is moving, and it is moving in the way of the life of God now as he walks with his people as much as it is a journey with a definite teleological goal – to be with Christ in his final eschatological kingdom. St. Columba was reported once to have said:

“God counselled Abraham to leave his own country and go in pilgrimage into the land which God had shown him, to wit the ‘Land of Promise’ – Now the good counsel which God enjoined here on the father of the faithful is incumbent on all the faithful; that is to leave their country and their land, their wealth and their worldly delight for the sake of the Lord of the Elements, and go in perfect pilgrimage in imitation of Him.”¹⁰²

This journey is ultimately to find the place of resurrection – it is to seek to find the true self in Christ.

Secondly, this journey has to begin with a recognition of one’s self – where one is at the present time. It is a principle that God wants his people to join him on the journey. This means that he wants the Christian to be aware of where he or she is at a particular part of the journey. He does not speed man on his way at such a pace that he loses himself. Perhaps at times he may bring us to a new place in which we have to get to know it before he moves us on again. He and the person are involved in the

¹⁰² Chadwick Nora, *Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, OUP, 1961, p. 64

journey so it is taken at the pace that God knows is best for his child to follow.¹⁰³ This journey will mean that we come to many new places of transformation along the way. It is a continuous cooperative conscious journey between Christ and his son or daughter.

Thirdly, the Celtic journey may be expressed in terms of rhythms of light and darkness. There are times when God speaks more, and there are times when he speaks less to our hearts. There is a refusal in the way of Columba to refuse pain and dark nights of the soul and only embrace the light. The Celtic way recognises the pain of human existence as much as its joy. It embraces the complete journey of the human condition as we find ourselves in Christ and the journey he is taking us on. This has been to some extent true in my journey. It is not that I have embraced a search or acceptance of darkness, but God has spoken more sometimes in my journey than others. He is always there communicating, but often it is to say, "Have you learnt your lessons up to date Andrew, are you with me here now?" Do you understand what I want, and what you want?" So there are times when he moves me on with new things, and there are times when he lets me rest in a new place until it is time to move on again. He wants me to live by flow whether that be flow for today's journey, or flow to a very new and different place that he wants me to arrive at next. This is the Celtic way, and it certainly fits with the concept of there being specific times for things to happen in the Christian Journey. We only have to remember Jesus' recognition that there was a time for him to fulfil certain parts in God's plan, and a time when it was not yet part of God's plan for his Mystical "Mission-al" journey to arrive at a place. Mary asks him to turn water to wine, she really wants him to announce himself as Messiah, he says to her that "his time" had not yet come.¹⁰⁴ Luke's gospel demonstrates how Jesus is following a pre-ordained plan – so he sets his face to go to Jerusalem when it is time for him to start the journey to death and resurrection. Thirteen of Luke's 24 chapters are dedicated to this journey on the way of the cross for Jesus.¹⁰⁵ The sense of journey is a prime mystical recognition and method of the way of

¹⁰³ De Waal Esther, *The Celtic Way of Prayer the recovery of the religious imagination*, Hodder & Stoughton, UK, 1996, p.2

¹⁰⁴ John 2:4

¹⁰⁵ Luke 9:51;10:38; 13:22;17:11,25;19:1,28.

Columba, and it is useful for me to the extent that I do not expect to arrive, but rather to share an intimate journey with God forever.

Fourthly, the Celtic way takes the schism between the eastern and western churches seriously. The Reformation brought good things, but it also embraced scholasticism with its rationalistic bent. There was a dichotomous rift between head and heart, east and west, Christ's way of modelling life lived out of the heart, and the new western rational life of principles, and ideas driving the Christian life. The Celtic way of Columba was to bring to the British Isles what was true of the mindset of the Middle Eastern Jesus and his followers. This was the way of living out of flow with vision and words from the heart by the Spirit. Flow and journey may be equated with the Celtic way; because the flow of God's life is like living water which brings life to all life's situations and challenges.

Fifthly, the Celtic way is a life which goes beyond reason, and beyond book learning. A ninth century Celtic poem captures the flavour of this well:

The Father created the world by a miracle;

It is difficult to express its measure.

Letters cannot contain it, letters cannot

Comprehend it.¹⁰⁶

Although this smacks of Dionysian negativism, it does capture the sense of the limited nature of words and ideas which I might seek to use my understanding of to seek after God. So to the extent

¹⁰⁶ Davies O, Bowie f, Celtic Christian Spirituality, An anthology of medieval and modern sources, SPCK, USA, 1995, p.27

that I seek God not from rationality, but from spontaneity in vision and free flowing thoughts I find the distinction useful – although the mind was made by God to then describe in words what I have seen or heard, and this can be understood because God wants me to. So there is a limit to how far I would follow the Celtic way here.

Sixthly, God is pictured as an artist or author. He is involved in drawing all his creatures into his great piece of creative art work. I find the sense of what I am designed for here – to be in God’s image, and to be involved with God creatively bringing his and my created abilities to play in what he is creating through my life. This all starts in the heart, and then flows out of my heart to him and to others in creative love.

Seventhly, Imagination is crucial to the Celtic way. Thomas Merton writes:

“Imagination is the creative task of making symbols, joining things together in such a way that they grow new light on each other and on everything around them. The imagination is a discovering faculty, a faculty for seeing relationships, for seeing meanings that are special and even quite new. The imagination is something which enables us to discover unique present meaning in a given moment of our life. Without imagination the contemplative life can be extremely dull and fruitless.”¹⁰⁷

Hence the Celtic way sees the gift of meditation and imagination as connected entities. They arise out of flow, and out of the image of God’s creativity at work in each unique Christian person. Our

¹⁰⁷ Merton Thomas, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Image Books, USA, 1973, p.357

imaginations are the gift of God, given by God, so that we may be creators of things as he flows through our hearts. It all comes from God if we are open to vision only from him.

Eighthly, everyone comes to see themselves as related to each other in Christ, and all that he has created. Not in a pantheistic sense of the world, but rather in the sense that all things were made by Christ, and should live for Christ, and that we his redeemed creatures made in his image are to exercise redemptive dominion in love in shaping his creation from the flow of his creative love from our hearts, our total beings. It is so easy in a mechanised age to lose sight of the glory of God in all that he has made. When David journal-ed the words of Psalm 19 he did so as he saw God's glory shining out all around him. A ninth century Celtic Poem written on May Day captures the wonder of just being in the midst of God's creation so well for me. The poet captures, as it were, the life of God in a sunbeam and raptures about it in the context of creation all round him. It flows:

“May Day, season surpassing!

Splendid is colour then.

Blackbirds sing a full day,

If there be a slender shaft of day.

The dust-coloured cuckoo calls aloud:

Welcome, splendid summer!

The bitter bad weather is past,

The boughs of the wood are a thicket.

Summer cuts the river down

The swift herd of horses seeks the pool,

The long hair of the heather is outspread,

The soft white wild-cotton blows.

Panic startles the heart of the deer,

The smooth sea runs apace,

Season when ocean sinks asleep

Blossom covers the world.....

Delightful is the season's splendour

Rough winter has gone,

White is every fruitful wood,

A joyous peace is summer.

A wild longing is on to you race horses

The ranked host is ranged around;

A bright shaft has been shot into the land,

So that the water-flag is gold beneath it.”¹⁰⁸

The sense of the heart being connected to creation and to the light of God which comes into his heart in the metaphor of the “bright shaft” probably captures the heart and feeling of Celtic Christian Mysticism as opposed to the age of later British rationalism which has stunted the Christian heart in the 21st century.

Probably the Christian Mysticism of the Celts’ feels much more part of my journey because of its organic nature. It arises out of a love of God and a discovery of him in their hearts as he flows out from them, and flows back into them from all directions and all others. This must be a picture of what Jesus experience of God was like even more so as he found his Father in all of his life, his being and his mission to the world of men.

Mother Julian of Norwich – late 14th – to early 15th Century

For almost half a century this simple little woman had placed herself in a cell meditating on a series of visions she had received from Christ in her earlier life. These visions are known as the “shewings”.

By many she is recognised as one of the great Spiritual theologians of the church age.¹⁰⁹ The series of revelations which she received have always had a profound effect on me. Probably two which always stick in my mind are one in which she sees the suffering face of Christ as he dies on the cross, and the other of a vision of a hand with a nut in it. She asks the Lord what this means, and he tells her that this is everything that has ever been made.

¹⁰⁸ Meyer Kuno, *Four Old Irish Songs of Summer and Winter*, David Hutt, 1903, p. 8-9

¹⁰⁹ Obbard Elizabeth, Ruth, *See How Much I Love You*, meditating on the way of the cross with Julian of Norwich, The Canterbury Press, UK, 1996, p. 1

In the first vision we clearly see that Mother Julian sought vision by looking to Jesus with the eyes of her heart. He was always to be the prime passion and focus of her journey. In the second we meet with the utter profound nature of revelation given to her. She sees the magnitude of God the infinite compared to the finite small nut of creation.

Moreover, Julian clearly sought vision by stilling herself before God. She did go with flow and spontaneity seeking God with the eyes of her heart focussing on Jesus. And she did journal what she saw. Meditation on what she saw with the eyes of her heart and ears formed the basis of all her contemplations. Mother Julian speaks of what she had learnt from the many revelations she received. She wrote:

From the time I first had these revelations I often longed to know what our Lord meant. More than fifteen years later I was given in response a spiritual understanding and I was told ‘Do you want to know what our Lord meant in all this? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it to you? For love. Remain firm in this love and you will taste of it ever more deeply, for you will never know anything else from it for ever and ever.’¹¹⁰

So I was taught that love was what our Lord meant. And I saw very certainly that before God made us he loved us, and that this love never slackened nor ever will. In this love he has done all his works, in this love he has made all things for our benefit, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had a beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him for ever and without beginning. In this love we have our beginning. And all this we shall see in God without end.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 97

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 97

Julian's life is summed up by her own words. Julian the mystic now understands that God's love is to love us, and that her love springs forth in response to this completely selfless gift love back to him.

My mystical journey comes out of this as well; for John writes:

“In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the Day of Judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If any one says ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”¹¹²

And here is the key to all Christian Mysticism to me, it arises from complete trust in God's 100% acceptance and love of me as a person, and with me modelling that love by the flow of that love coming through my heart to all others – saved or unsaved. Now that is the heart of mysticism intimacy with God which gives birth to intimacy with others which all goes in the great circuit back to God and out of him again as it flows through our hearts by the “Spirit of Jesus”.

Christian Mysticism in my experience and my theology

My own journey began with my conversion. It was a very hand's on conversion in the sense that the moment Christ came into my life I started to sense Christ in my heart – giving me a deep sense of

¹¹² 1 John 4:17-21 RSV

eternal security, and visions and words of knowledge. This was strange as the person who was instrumental in leading me to Christ was not switched on in the Spirit in this way. Indeed I joined a church which was essentially cessationist bar a few exceptions. This was for my good to the extent that I was helped to explore my faith and experience of the Christ I knew within in the light of the scriptural blue print. It is also interesting that I started to seek the mystical in the lives of God's people in the history of the church. It was as I learnt from how they knew God in their hearts that I started to better understand how God worked in mine in feelings, thoughts and visions.

The great turning point early on in my journey arose in a time in which I was going through a lot of temptation to just give up because the young people in the cessationist church I attended did not even want to know about my experience of God. They did not seem to know God in their hearts only in their heads.

In my family home I had my own room, with my bed being next to built in wardrobes and cupboards, with a sizeable book case in the centre of the units. I had all my new Christian books on this including several bibles. I dreamed one night and found myself standing in front of the book case – all the books vanished and I came into this joyful place full of light and peace. I saw Jesus – his face everything about him. He spoke to me words of life and peace; as he did this I felt secure, and I was at perfect peace. Then I heard a terrible voice screaming abuse at me from behind me over my left hand shoulder. That voice told me to doubt everything, and as I listened to that more and more I lost focus on Jesus and his voice, and the sense of perfect peace and security. This was of course the devil. I then heard Jesus again and found peace, then he faded back into the books and the bibles and I awoke. What he had just shown me was what was going on in the spiritual world. It was a war, a battle. The message was clear to seek him, to seek the truth about him in the Scriptures, to focus on his words and no other voice which would seek to take Jesus my Lord out of my life.

Jesus taught me how to walk by the Spirit, and how to recognise the enemy's voice as anything which took peace away from my heart when I heard it, or learnt about it in visions or teaching from people. Now I seek to focus on Jesus' face in everything. I often meditate on his face. I find vision flow through my heart as I listen. The face of Jesus is alive bright and shining in the new heart he has given me as he dwells there by his Spirit. I often spend hours if not weeks just seeing his face, and meditating on it, and hearing his words, and being guided by the vision of his face.

As I have gone through terrible experiences in my life of temptation and illness I have again and again been strengthened and guided by that Vision. "Look to me" says Jesus "Hear my words and test all words against my words in the Scriptures for they agree."

A great passage which says it all to me in a practical sense is one that my non-charismatic friends find so hard to take literally. It reads:

"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. We have renounced disgraceful, underhand ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'

who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”¹¹³

This is all so practical and true of the vision of Christ which has remained the whole utter strength of my life – he literally shines in my heart. I literally see his face shining there. It is the vision of his wonderful and beautiful face that I always find strength from. He speaks to me, and he is my Lord, and my only means of Strength – “apart from him” and always only “apart from him” can I “do nothing”.¹¹⁴ Lord Jesus may I always find life in you only; the one and true vine of life sap. May I never seek it in my self. Amen.

So my journey has been informed by the many aspects of what is to be found in the biblical story, and in the lives of his people in history; as already discussed. However, I also want to draw attention to some important modern day voices which have informed my journey theologically. I guess my theology may be best described as a living relationship journey theology which comes from the flow of the “Spirit of Jesus” as he lives in my heart.

Klaus Bockmuehl is a great name in my journey. In his ground breaking book “Listening to the God who speaks” I have found the basis for a theology of the Christian Mystical journey in terms of hearing the voice of God.¹¹⁵ Bockmuehl’s central thesis that God speaks to human hearts as well as guiding through Scripture and experience set the biblical paradigm into my contemporary situation. The posture of a listening heart is fundamental to his emphasis, and it has taught me how to put my thoughts aside so that I might have a clear space for God to speak into.

¹¹³ 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 RSV

¹¹⁴ John 1:5

¹¹⁵ Bockmuehl Klaus, Listening to the God who Speaks, Helmers & Howard, USA, 1990.

Around the time when I started studying his teaching, I had also started to grow in the ideas shared in the passage from second Corinthians recorded above. I thought of the Words where Christ's speaks words of spiritual light into our inner darkness. I considered their background in Genesis, and saw how God created light out of the formless void¹¹⁶ of the chaos of nothingness. I came to understand that God wanted me to have a creative space in which he could work; if you like a formless void, or a sense of an empty vessel which he was to fill. The kenotic principle of Philipians struck me; Christ emptied himself so he could be filled¹¹⁷ with all the fullness of God. So listening and allowing the vessel of my heart to be filled, was for it to be completely submitted to God waiting on his words and his visions.

In terms of setting out the way I have come to understand the mystical way I have found the work of Jack Deere of paramount importance. In both "Surprised by the Power of the Spirit" and "Surprised by the Voice of God",¹¹⁸ I have come to understand the truth of the fundamental thesis that Scripture pictures daily revelation to Christian hearts as normal. Deere comments:

"When I read the stories of the people of the Bible, I did not expect their experiences to be like mine. They were special people living in special times. Their experience of God was unique; mine wasn't. Mine was more normal, whatever that meant. So I read and memorized the Bible, never expecting much of what I read to ever be reproduced in my life."¹¹⁹

Of course Deere came to see the experience of the people of Scripture as normal for himself and all other Christian people. What Deere's mystical theology demonstrates to me is the need to understand

¹¹⁶ Genesis 1:2

¹¹⁷ Philipians 2:7

¹¹⁸ Deere Jack, Dr., Surprised by the Power of the Spirit, Kingsway, UK, 1993; Deere Jack, Surprised by the Voice of God, Kingsway, UK, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, Voice of God, p. 21.

the present context of the expectations of many Christians, and then to use the stories of the people of Scripture to demonstrate the normal Christian life. And connected to Deere's narrative demonstration of the essential truth that God speaks through our hearts is the fact that he is probably one of the best narrative theologians of our day and age. God has utilised Deere's theological and visual story telling skills into a convincing picture for all to behold in the eyes of their hearts concerning what real Christian mystical experience should look like in its normative functioning.

Moreover, the work of Watchman Nee in his ground breaking book "The Normal Christian Life, the basis of life in the Spirit", has aided me to revision my journey in the mystical way. Nee comments:

"What is the normal Christian life? We do well at the outset to ponder this question. The object of these studies [in the book mentioned above] is to show that it is something very different from the life of the average Christian. Indeed a consideration of the written Word of God – of the Sermon on the Mount for example – should lead us to ask whether such a life has ever in fact been lived upon the earth, save only by the Son of God Himself. But in that last saving clause lies immediately the answer to our question."

"The apostle Paul gives us his own definition of the Christian life in Galatians 2:20. It is 'no longer I, but Christ'. Here he is not stating something special or peculiar – a high level of Christianity. He is, we believe, presenting God's normal for a Christian, which can be summarized in the words: I live no longer, but Christ lives His life in me."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Op Cit, Nee, p.9.

Nee's comments say it all for me – I now live a new life as a united being with Christ. I have my past put to death with him, and I am resurrected to a new place with my submitting myself in trust and love to him.

Further to this I have also found the work of Gordon Fee to be very significant to my mystical theology. In his book “Paul, the Spirit and the People of God”¹²¹ he sets out a clear teaching about two great things. In the first place he talks of eschatological salvation; by this he means that with the Death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus we have now become united in Spirit to God's future kingdom. We have passed over from death to life; to coin his phrase “we now live the life of the future in the present” in our attitude to our position in Christ. We are no longer part of this world but God's kingdom. We now have all the power and presence of Christ delivered to our aid by the Spirit. And this leads to the second great thing we now have direct connection to Christ in victory far above all rule and authority through his Spirit in our hearts. In a divine time warp we are now positioned in eternal victory with his Spirit in our hearts – hence this mystical union affects how we see ourselves as saved saints, not as possibly lost worms. We position our minds with the mind of Christ delivered into our hearts by his Spirit – hence we have a new “Christ I” identity. No rule or authority exceeds his, so his presence in our hearts flows out removing all ungodly and demonic obstacles.

And this is important to my mystical journey – for now I see that the primary Work of Christ is to let us know to the depths of our hearts that we are his, and that he wishes to pour all of his love and gifts out through our lives and hearts.

¹²¹ Fee Gordon, Paul, the Spirit and the People of God, Hodder & Stoughton, UK, 1996.

Conclusion

My journey has been informed by many factors – particularly my sense of mystical connection with Christ in the very depths of my heart. When I seek to still myself for intimacy with God I look deep into my heart for the face of Jesus. He is the rudder of my life ship, and as I look to him he flows through my heart – giving me words and pictures which are for me, but also for his mission to restore this intimacy with all men and women. I once tried to make myself fly and like a chicken could not achieve flight, but God is teaching me day by day to learn how to let go and glide in his Spirit. As I let myself submit to the thermals of his Spirit I find a new sense of life and love which is nothing to do with my resources and everything to do with letting his flow into the vessel of my soul. May Lord Jesus keep the balance of his gift love bringing me to intimacy and living by letting it flow out to others so they too may listen to the God who speaks. Amen!