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Practical Mysticism – Its Definition, Parts and Characteristics

Generally contrasted with theoretical mysticism, practical mysticism is defined more comprehensively in this article through clarifying its position in the dimensional definition of mysticism. The difference between practical mysticism and mystical practices, its relationship to ethics, and the scope of practices with which it deals are also discussed in the article. Distinguishing between two parts of practical mysticism, this article also tries to explain its three major characteristics, namely focusing on the relationship between human being and his self, dynamism, and egocentricity, in order to help its readers to have a clearer picture of practical mysticism.

Arthur Versluis

Basilides and the Political Implications of Negative Theology

Negative theology, of its very nature requires awareness of the fundamental inadequacy and the mere instrumentality of language and concepts. Basilides is a valuable example of this both because he is relatively early (within a generation or two of Christ and the apostles), and because we can discern in his teachings and lineage so much that is visible elsewhere in the history of Christianity. His example is synecdochic – he represents and in many respects incarnated what was excluded by the Ante-Nicene Fathers, by Augustine, and by the emergence of an orthodoxy that could bolster its legitimacy primarily by dualistic rejection, that is, by projecting ‘heresy’ onto Basilides, his followers, and countless other Gnostic groups and individuals. Politically, Basilides's negative theology implies pluralism in the open space created by gnosis, that is, experiential knowledge of not-being (*oukon*).

Robert Boenig

Julian of Norwich and the Art of Memory

Julian of Norwich composed two versions of her *Showings*, an initial Short Text and approximately twenty years later a Long Text – an expansion that includes some of her most famous passages, particularly her excursus on Jesus as Mother and her insistence on love as God's ultimate ‘meaning’. This article investigates the role memory played in the composition of the Long Text, particularly that of artificial memory, the elaborate system of heuristics developed in Antiquity and inherited by the Middle Ages. This so-called ‘art of memory’ depended on artificial associations of the things to be memorized with arbitrary visualizations, puns, or numerical grids. Analysis of passages from her *Showings* reveals that Julian's memory played a very complex role, one that simultaneously employs and rejects the methods of the medieval art of memory. Artificial memory gave her surprisingly little in the way of new facts called up from her the past; for Julian, the art of memory becomes essentially interpretive rather than heuristic, providing her with a method of generating her new ideas.

Charlò Camilleri

To Be is to Gaze and Be Gazed at – Vision in Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi's Mysticism

The visionary mysticism of the Carmelite mystic Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi (1566-1607) was from the seventeenth century onwards an object of admiration which triggered an hagiographical legend that surrounds the mystic to this day. As from the first half of the twentieth century scholars carried erudite studies on Maddalena's texts in an attempt to decode her rather exceptional mystical experience. In the following article the author approaches Maddalena's visionary mysticism through an analysis of 'vision' relying upon literary, biblical, mystical, philosophical and psychological perspectives on the subject. The interdisciplinary approach to the concept of 'vision' shows that de' Pazzi's mystical visions led her to gradually acquire both mystical divine knowledge and growth in the formation of self through the reciprocal communicative gaze between God and herself. Mystical vision therefore engenders openness to the other in a relationship that fosters communality against radical individualism.

Roberto Fusco

The Role of Christ's Physicalness in Angela's Experience of the Mystic Union

In this study, the Author examines the attention given to the flesh of Christ in the *Liber* by Angela of Foligno. In fact, it is possible to trace in it an exhaustive framework of the redemptive meaning of Christ's Incarnation. According to Angela, the image of Jesus, poor and naked, with no clothes in his mother's arms or suffering on the cross or lying in the sepulchre on Holy Saturday shows that each of us must relate to Him as we do to a friend, or, better yet, as a bridegroom, in that bond of unbreakable love that takes us directly to the centre of the Holy Trinity.

Albrecht Classen

Taste, Sound, and Smell in the Mystical Realm – Visionary Phenomenology on the Basis of Sensual Experiences: Agnes Blannbekin († 1315)

The investigations of the history of mentality in the Middle Ages led to the study of the history of emotions, and this has now opened the window toward the senses and sense perception – certainly a far-reaching critical approach in historical anthropology and cultural-religious history. Whereas Franciscan spirituality, for instance, has long been recognized as having been deeply determined by sense-oriented religiosity, medieval mysticism has not yet been fully examined in this light. The Austrian beguine Agnes Blannbekin († 1315) offers rich material in her mystical accounts that she related to her male confessor drawing from intense sense perception. In fact, as this article illustrates, much of her mystical theology was determined by visual, auditory, and savory signals. Other mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen also reported about strong spiritual images or musical experiences, but Agnes can be credited for having discovered the metaphysical especially via the human senses, and this more than most other mystics of her time. This even included the swallowing of Christ's foreskin, which carried no sexual overtones, as we might think today; instead it intensified for her the bodily experience of the Godhead in most sensuous terms. Through Agnes's mystical visions we can gain a clear understanding of how medieval people treated the senses and what relevance they attributed to a wide variety of sense perceptions. Some of the most important aspects were the visualization of the Godhead through colors and taste, but then also through

music and touch. Even though the mystical revelation was basically an out-of-body experience, Agnes intriguingly reconnects it with her body by way of physical sense perception.

Timothy Hessel-Robinson

Erotic Mysticism in Puritan Eucharistic Spirituality

This essay explores how Puritan writers between 1586 and 1729 articulated their experiences of the Lord's Supper as an erotically charged encounter with Christ. Drawing on the Song of Songs, many Puritan writers appropriated its erotic language and imagery to express their desire for Christ, and their sense that the Lord's Supper is the most intimate earthly medium by which Christ communes with his people. Three specific themes emerge, each treated in turn: 1) Christ as a seducer of the soul; 2) longing for consummation which is not fully possible in this life; 3) conception and pregnancy likened to bearing spiritual fruit. After a section specifically treating the Lord's Supper, the essay draws on the work of postmodern theorist Julia Kristeva, whose notion of 'semantic polyvalence' helps to interpret the phenomenon of erotic mysticism. Rather than seeing such experiences as the result of an unhealthy sublimation, they are interpreted as representations of an ultimately mysterious encounter with the holy. The essay concludes by suggesting that these historical themes provide resources for rediscovering Christ's intimate, embodied presence in contemporary Reformed Eucharistic spirituality.

Robyn Wrigley Carr

The Butterfly and the King – Self Knowledge in Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*

This paper seeks to examine Teresa of Avila's theme of 'self-knowledge' as outlined in her most celebrated work, *Interior Castle*. Teresa's spirituality is shaped by a self-understanding markedly different from our modern self consciousness. Rather than 'self-knowledge' being self-grounded, Teresian 'self-knowledge' is firmly based in the Augustinian tradition. The self is defined in the light of who God is: knowledge of self and knowledge of God are always conjoined. True self-knowledge is completely rooted in knowing God in a relational, experiential sense; a knowing formed in the soul by prayer through God's action. Teresa recognises her basic position of creatureliness, emphasizing both our fallen, sinful nature and our dignity as creatures made in the imago dei. Symbolism is used to mediate Teresa's message about the necessity of self-knowledge. This paper explores three symbols and how they relate to self-knowledge: the castle, water and the butterfly. The pervasive image at the high point of Teresa's mystical journey is the butterfly, a powerful symbol of self-knowledge. Teresa shows us the glory of humility: the true posture of the creature before the King.

Elisabeth Dreyer

The Spirituality of Philanthropy – The Women around Ignatius Loyola

This essay explores the meaning of a spirituality of philanthropy in the lives of a group of sixteenth-century wealthy, noble women who assisted Ignatius Loyola and the early Jesuits in their pastoral and educational ministries. It addresses issues of social context, class, female-male relationships, power, and interpretive lenses. Denied roles of preaching, sacramental ministry, and decision-making in the church, women have engaged in the spiritual ministry of

philanthropy to express their desire to help others, serve God, and influence church and society. From the very beginning of the Christian era, wealthy women founded, sustained and promoted house churches and engaged in active service.

After discussion of the situation of women in sixteenth-century Europe, and the role of letter writing in that context, this essay examines the ways the women close to Ignatius practiced their ministries of generous giving: material resources (money, land, buildings); influence (at various courts and the papacy); and personal engagement in ministry. Interpretation of these roles need to be continually updated as we progress in our ability to view women in their own right. We recognize and honor the spirituality of the women around Ignatius, characterized by freedom, love, commitment, self-direction and action.

Janet Ruffing

The Epistolary Soul-Friendship between Elisabeth Leseur and Soeur Marie Goby

Madame Elisabeth Leseur and Soeur Marie Goby were drawn together into an epistolary spiritual friendship from 1910-1914, initially through their love for the poor, discovering in one another a depth of spirituality and a shared love for God that they expressed in their correspondence. This married Parisian woman and this nursing sister achieved a satisfying and mutually supportive relationship based on their love for God and their distinct yet complementary vocations ending different forms of spiritual and emotional isolation in their lives. They became true friends and sisters to one another primarily through their correspondence.

Marie Baird

Mysticism and the Playful Slippage of Symbols – A Voegelinian Meditation on the Areopagite and his Heirs

Utilizing the philosophy of Eric Voegelin, this essay delineates the contours of the various paradoxes that govern human existence. It does so in order to reveal the precise nature of the dilemma the mystic faces when attempting to symbolize his or her experience of apophatic participation in a divine Beyond within the available conceptual parameters. Then, after a brief discussion of the dangers attendant upon conceptual reification, the essay shows that one of the classical apophatic gestures of evading such reification consists in the ceaselessly playful oscillation of symbols that seem to bear within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution. The essay also argues that the play of symbols at the heart of apophatic mystical texts functions as a symbolization of the paradox that Voegelin calls ‘consciousness-reality-language’ – the central paradox that defines human existence. The essay argues, finally, that such play also functions as an actual invitation to the reader to enter into an experience of participation in the divine Beyond him or herself.

Harald Walach

A Medieval Carthusian Monk’s Recipe to Multiple Kensho – Hugh of Balma’s Approach to Mystical Union and Some Striking Similarities to Modern Zen Teaching

The Carthusian Hugh of Balma (flourished around 1260) is one of the most important and least known writers of the Christian mystical tradition. He held that a unification of the soul with God was possible, following the Pseudo-Dionysian way of letting go of all mental

operations. The result of this union is experiential knowledge of God. After describing what is meant by this concept it is contended that this is rather similar to some Zen teachings in modern times, thus opening up a bridge between the traditions. What Hugh had in mind is pure receptivity, similar to enlightened mindfulness in the Soto tradition, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that dramatic experiences of enlightenment might also be possible. The relationship between these two traditions and the open questions is discussed. One of them certainly is the question about the nature of this final reality.

André van der Braak

Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age II – Dōgen on Fullness: *Zazen* as Ritual Embodiment of Buddhahood

The contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has identified three questionable trends in our current approach to ‘fullness’ (his term for what constitutes the goal of spiritual practice): excarnation (fullness is seen as a disembodied religious experience ‘in the mind’), therapeutization (self-actualization replaces self-transcendence), and a tendency towards re-affirmation of ordinary life, rather than aspiring to fullness, which is considered damaging to our humanity. In an earlier article I suggested that such trends could be counterbalanced by a more inclusive Zen spirituality. This follow-up article shows that the thought of Dōgen (1200-1253), founder of the Japanese Sōtō Zen school, within its Japanese Buddhist context, reveals a very different perspective on fullness: it is conceived as the ritual embodiment of buddhahood, expressed through the meditation practice of *zazen*. Dōgen’s thought challenges the trends of excarnation and therapeutization, and offers a new Zen perspective on the re-affirmation of ordinary life. It also forces us to rethink our Western dichotomies between meditation and ritual, inner experience and outer form, and spiritual practice and fullness.

René van Leeuwen

Towards Nursing Competencies in Spiritual Care

This article reports the outcomes of a doctoral thesis about spiritual care in nursing and the development of competencies of nurses in delivering that care. In nursing the holistic approach is emphasized which means that all aspects of human functioning should be considered in planning nursing care for that patient including the spiritual functioning of patients. Within the context of this study the following definition of spirituality is used: ‘The religious and/or existential mode of human functioning, including experiences and questions of meaning and purpose’. Spiritual care is understood as the care nurses provide so as to meet the spiritual needs and/or problems of their patients. The basic assumption in this study was that spiritual care is a part of the professional function which is supported by professional nursing organizations. There seems to be a gap between what is expected of nurses in theory and what is actually practiced. This raises questions about how the task of spiritual care in nursing can become clearer, and the level of expertise which should be expected from nurses. This study explored the content of spirituality and spiritual care in nursing and investigated the content of education in spiritual care and the learning effects of that education.