

# **CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY 201: MYSTICISM – CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity is not first a set of beliefs. First, it is a Way of Life. This Christian way comprises both ethics and spirituality. They are the twin engines of transformation and sanctification as we follow Jesus on his way of life.

This aide-mémoire is an introduction to mysticism. The word “mysticism” sounds, well, mystifying - as in the word “mist,” although it really is the opposite.

Mysticism just means being consciousness of God, of the divine presence in ordinary life. (Consciousness is just a fancy word for “awareness.”) Becoming aware of the presence of God in everyday life is, well, mysticism.

If you’ve got your knees up with a cup of coffee on an Adirondack chair at a cottage, with the early morning mist drifting away as the sun rises and the loon calls, and you experience the divine in those moments, well, you’re having a mystic experience.

If you go home and then decide you’d like more experiences of the divine within ordinary life, and you begin to try some of the ethical and the spiritual practices of Christianity, well, you’re entering the mystic life.

Along the Way of Life, one discovers that there are endless possibilities for experiencing the divine in ordinary life. The more one learns and grows, the more one grows aware of the truth of what the apostle Paul told the Athenians when he visited.

Paul was invited to speak to the Areopagus, variously an Athenian council and a court for religious cases. The council was named for the place they met. This was the rocky outcropping a short distance from the Acropolis called the Hill of Ares (*Areios Pagos*.)

Paul said this:

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, *so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being";* as even some of your own poets have said, "*For we too are his offspring.*" (The Acts of the Apostles 17:22-28; italics mine)

*"In him we live and move and have our being."*

Becoming conscious of the divine in ordinary life is like:

- fish becoming conscious of the ocean;
- birds becoming conscious of the sky;
- worms becoming conscious of the earth.

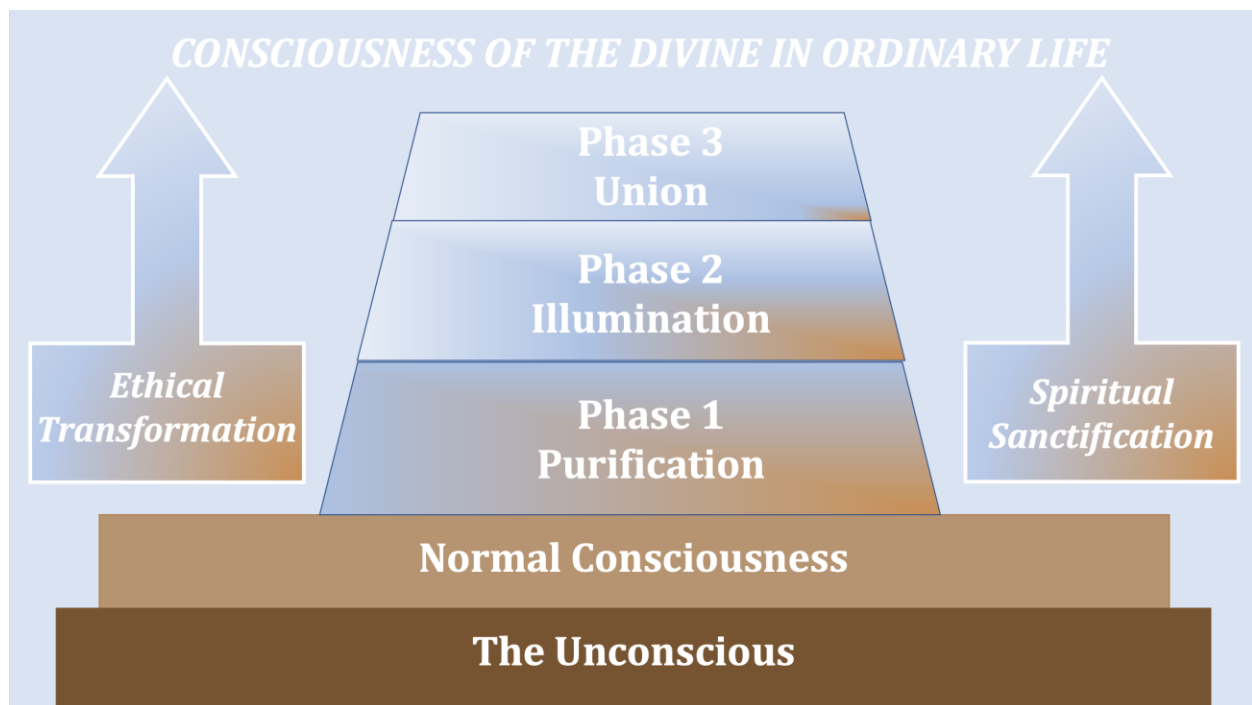
The mystics of the Christian millennia have left us with a description of how this God-consciousness develops over a lifetime.

This primer will explore this with the help of an English mystic.

There are three stages of growth in the divine presence in ordinary life:

- 1) purification,
- 2) enlightenment,
- 3) and union.

Visually, it looks something like this.



Christian mysticism is for everyone. It is not reserved for rare spiritual geniuses, although we are thankful for those who have recorded their journeys into the heart of reality. We may learn from them as people did from the records of the great explorers.

A century ago, the English Anglican writer Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) <sup>1</sup> was such an explorer of the mystics and God-consciousness. She was a prolific author of some 30 books and her greatest book, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) is still the magisterial authority on the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on Underhill's life and work at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn\\_Underhill#Mysticism\\_\(1911\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Underhill#Mysticism_(1911))

Underhill became prominent in the Anglican Church as a leader of spiritual retreats, a spiritual director for hundreds of individuals, guest speaker, radio lecturer and proponent of contemplative prayer.<sup>2</sup> She was part of the Anglo-Catholic movement and restored many forgotten classical and medieval mystics to the Anglican heritage.

### *a) Evelyn Underhill's Five Key Points*

#### **(1) God-consciousness is for ordinary Christians**

Mysticism was for ordinary Christians. Her essays and books helped numerous Anglicans explore their consciousness of God along the way of life. Underhill demonstrated from the writings of classical mystics, such as Plotinus, and medieval writers like Ruisbroeck, the importance, and sufficiency, of a healthy ordinary consciousness in following the mystic way.

#### **(2) Mysticism is not esoteric**

She showed that mysticism wasn't esoteric: it certainly had nothing to do with magic or the occult.

#### **(3) The simple life is the best basis**

She pointed to the simple life as the stable basis for learning the mystic way.

#### **(4) Divine unity underlies the complexity of life**

She demonstrated the key role of focused attention in seeing through the multiplicity of the daily world into the unity that is the divine reality. This divine unity underlies all the chaos and multiplicity of daily life. When we become lost in the complexity of the world, we lose sight of this underlying unity and peace.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* at her biography on Wikipedia.

## **(5) God-consciousness produces healthy psychological growth**

Underhill's emphasized the psychology of the mystic way and described the healthy, balanced growth within the individual. She noted the "mental and emotional enhancement" which accompanies the practices of the mystic.

She also insisted that mysticism had no place for harsh physical practices such as mortification and abnormal psychological phenomena such as visions or voices.

*Rather, mysticism simply produced more insight, more compassion, more peace, more inner harmony within the practitioner.*

### ***b) What You're Going to Read***

What follows are a collation<sup>3</sup> of extracts from her essay called "The Essentials of Mysticism,"<sup>4</sup> which Underhill wrote in 1920. It is an introduction to mysticism and overview of the mystic way and the three phases of purification, illumination, and union. The essay is a marvelous summary of the God-consciousness of the mystic. Please be patient with the following:

(1) You're going to read extracts from a work from a hundred years ago that uses old words with many syllables. These days we write for clarity, brief and to the point. I have tried to extract only the most relevant parts and I do hope that helps.

(2) Reading theologians and philosophers in a book is often made more difficult by the complexity of their themes and the length of

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<sup>3</sup> Either in the Italian sense of a light repast or in the monastic sense as in a reading during supper hour.

<sup>4</sup> In Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London: 1920. Hereafter known as *Essentials*. It can be found online at <https://archive.org/details/essentialsofmyst00unde/page/n3/mode/2up>

their sentences. Their sentences often have multiple compound clauses, like trains with multiple carriages. I have made generous use of white space to create separation between sentence clauses in order to improve readability and comprehension.

(3) The topic under discussion, God-consciousness and its three stages over a lifetime, is a powerful thing to experience, but a difficult one to describe. Evelyn Underhill and the writers she quotes often use images and metaphors to try to convey their experiences. When you read, please approach it as if it is poetry, which it is in a numinous way.

(4) Underhill quotes some of her favourite mystics. I'm presenting them here so that the reader may not be surprised in the text by strange names from history. These are:

Plotinus was a philosopher who lived in Roman Egypt c. 205 – 270 C.E. He followed Plato and expanded on his ideas. Plotinus wrote a book called *The Enneads*, which had a deep impact on Hellenic Christians who lived in Europe and had lost contact with Jewish roots.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (there's a funky name :=) was an anonymous Christian theologian who wrote between 485 – 528 C.E. He also followed Plato and Plotinus in his thought and also influenced the medieval mystics. Among his works, the two most influential were *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*.

His funky name has a funky story. After Paul's speech at the Hill of Ares (the Greek god of war), the book of Acts tells us:

But some of them joined him and became believers, including *Dionysius the Areopagite* and a woman named *Damaris*, and others with them. (17:34)

In the ancient and early medieval world, it was a respected practice for an anonymous writer to write under the name of someone famous from history. Our anonymous mystic wrote under the name of one of the first converts in Athens, Dionysius the Areopagite, to give his works more prestige. When people learned that these books weren't written by Paul's famous convert, the author became known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Now you know how that mouthful came about!

Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173) was a medieval Scottish philosopher and mystical theologian.

Jacopone da Todi, (c. 1230 – 1306) was an Italian Franciscan friar from Umbria.

Eckhart von Hochheim (c. 1260 – c. 1328), commonly known as Meister Eckhart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic.

Jan van Ruysbroeck, known in English as John van Ruysbroeck (1293 –1381) was one of the most important of the Flemish mystics, who wrote in the Dutch vernacular rather than in Latin. His work had a deep influence on Underhill.

Jakob Böhme, known in English as “Boehme,” (1575-1642) was a self-taught Lutheran Christian mystic, a cobbler by trade, and an original thinker.

The text follows on the next page:

## WHAT IS GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS?

We will begin then with the *central fact* of the mystic's experience.

This central fact, it seems to me,  
is an *overwhelming consciousness* of God and of his own soul;  
a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses  
all other centres of interest.<sup>5</sup>

This is *the one essential* of mysticism...

But on the other hand, when anybody speaking of mysticism  
proposes an object that is less than God –  
increase of health,  
of knowledge,  
of happiness,  
occultism,  
intercourse with spirits,  
supernormal experience in general –  
then we may suspect that we are off the track.

Now we come to the *next group of essentials*:  
the *necessary acts and dispositions* of the mystic himself,  
the *development* which takes place *within* him  
— the *psychological facts*, that is to say,  
which are represented by the so-called “mystic way.”

The mystic way is best understood as *a process of sublimation*,<sup>6</sup>  
which carries the correspondences  
of the self with the Universe

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<sup>5</sup> *Essentials*, p.4. Underhill uses masculine pronouns; please understand her context.

<sup>6</sup> The word “sublimation” comes from the Latin word “*sublime*” means “high”, *sublimare*, means “to elevate.”



up to higher levels  
than those on which our normal consciousness works.<sup>7</sup>

Just as the *normal consciousness*  
stands over against the *unconscious*, which,  
with its buried impulses and its  
primitive and infantile cravings,  
represents a cruder reaction of the organism  
to the external world;  
does the *developed mystical life*  
stand over against *normal life*  
with its preoccupations and its web of illusions...

Normal consciousness sorts out some elements  
from the mass of experiences beating at our doors  
and constructs from them a certain order;  
but this order *lacks any deep meaning or true cohesion*,  
because normal consciousness is incapable  
of apprehending the *underlying reality*  
from which these scattered experiences proceed.

The claim of the *mystical consciousness* is to a closer reading of truth;  
to an apprehension of the *divine unifying principle*  
behind appearance.<sup>8</sup>

Reviewing the first-hand declarations of the mystics, we inevitably  
notice one prominent feature: the frequency with which they break  
up their experience into *three phases*...

- (1) *purification*,
- (2) *enlightenment*,
- (3) and *union (ecstasy)*

bringing new and deeper knowledge of reality as the self's interest,

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<sup>7</sup> *Essentials*, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

urged by its loving desire of the Ultimate, is shifted from (1) *sense* to (2) *soul*, to (3) *spirit*.

We are invited to *one gradual, undivided process of sublimation*, penetrating ever more deeply into the reality of the Universe, to find at last

“that One who is present everywhere  
and absent only from those who do not perceive him.”<sup>9</sup>

What we behold, that we are:

*citizens, ...*

(1) of the surface *world of the senses*,

(2) the deeper *world of life*, or

(3) the ultimate *world of spiritual reality*.<sup>10</sup>

Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>11</sup> says in a celebrated passage:  
*Threefold* is the way to God.

(1) The first is the way of *purification*,  
in which the mind *is inclined to learn* true wisdom.

(2) The second is the way of *illumination*,  
in which the mind *by contemplation is kindled*  
to the burning of love.

(3) The third is the way of *union*,  
in which the mind, *by understanding, reason and spirit*  
*is led up by God alone*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Underhill quotes from memory. The quote comes from the *Enneads* VI.9.7, *The Essential Plotinus*, Elmer O'Brien, tr., Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 1975, p.83.

<sup>10</sup> *Essentials*, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (there's a name :=) was a 5<sup>th</sup> c. C.E. Christian theologian and Platonic philosopher.

<sup>12</sup> This quote is likely a paraphrase by Underhill, based on *The Divine Names* VII.3 and *The Mystical Theology* chapters I and V. For more, see *The Mystical Theology and The Divine Names*, C.E. Rolt, tr., Dover, Mineola, NY: 2004, original SPCK, London, UK: 1920.

[This quote] profoundly impressed the later Christian mystics, and has long been accepted as the *classic description* of spiritual growth, because it has been found again and again to answer to experience.

It is therefore worth our while to examine it with some care.<sup>13</sup>

## 1. **THE WAY OF PURIFICATION**

First, the self is “inclined to learn true wisdom.”

It *awakes* to new needs,  
is *cured* of its belief in sham values, and  
*distinguishes* between real and unreal objects of desire,  
that craving for more life and more love  
which lies at the very heart of our selfhood,  
her slips from the charmed circle of our senses into a  
wider air.

When this happens abruptly, it is called “*conversion*;”  
and may then have the character of a psychic convulsion,  
and be accompanied by various secondary  
psychological phenomena.

But often it *comes without observation*.

Here the essentials are *a desire and a disillusionment*  
sufficiently strong to overcome our natural sloth,  
our primitive horror of change.

“The first beginning of all things is a *craving*,” says Boehme...<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Essentials*, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Jakob Böhme, known in English as “Boehme,” (1575-1642) was a self-taught Lutheran Christian mystic, a cobbler by trade, and an original thinker. More information at <http://jacobboehmeonline.com/>

The *divine discontent*,  
the hunger for reality,  
the unwillingness to be satisfied with  
the purely animal or the purely social level of consciousness  
is the *first essential stage* in the development of mystical  
consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

So, the self is either suddenly or gradually *inclined to "true wisdom;"*  
and this change of angle affects the whole character,  
not only or indeed specially the *intellectual* outlook,  
but the *ethical* outlook too.

This is the meaning of "*purgation:*"  
False ways of feeling and thinking,  
established complexes  
which have acquired for us an almost sacred character,  
and governed, though we knew it not, all our reactions to life  
- these must be broken up.

That mental and moral sloth which keeps us  
so comfortably wrapped in unrealities must go.<sup>16</sup>

But when we come to the *means* by which it is to be attained,  
we re-enter the region of controversy;  
for here we are at once confronted  
by the *problem of asceticism*,<sup>17</sup> and its connection with mysticism...

Asceticism was identified by Christian thought  
with the idea of *mortification*;  
the killing out of all those impulses  
which deflect the soul from the straight path to God.

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<sup>15</sup> *Essentials*, p.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> The word "ascetism" means the notion that through renunciation of worldly pleasures it is possible to achieve a high spiritual or intellectual state.

For the true mystic, it [ascetism] *is never more than a means* to an end; and is often thrown aside when that end is attained. Its necessity is therefore a purely practical question.

Some ascetic practices again are almost certainly disguised indulgences of those very cravings which they are supposed to kill, but in fact, merely repress.<sup>18</sup>

No one will deny that austerity is better than luxury for the spiritual life; but perfect *detachment of the will and senses* can be achieved without resort to merely physical expedients *by those living normally* in the world, and this is the essential thing.

The *true asceticism* is a gymnastic not of the body but of the mind.

It involves *training in the art of recollection*; the *concentration* of thought, will, and love upon the eternal realities which we commonly ignore.

The embryo contemplative...must acquire and keep *a special state of inward poise, an attitude of attention...* If we do not attend to reality, we are unlikely to perceive it.

The *readjustments* which shall make this attention natural and habitual are *a phase* in man's *inward conflict* for the *redemption of consciousness* from its lower and partial attachments.

This conflict is no dream.

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<sup>18</sup> *Essentials*, p.11.

It means *hard work; mental and moral discipline* of the sternest kind.

The downward drag is incessant, and can be combatted only  
by those who are clearly aware of it,  
and are *willing to sacrifice* lower interests and joys  
to the demands of the spiritual life.

Unless the self's "inclination to true wisdom" is strong enough to  
inspire those costing and heroic efforts, its spiritual cravings do not  
deserve the name of mysticism.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. THE WAY OF ILLUMINATION

We go on to the next stage, the so-called "way of *illumination*."

Here, says Dionysius,  
the *mind is kindled* by contemplation to the burning of love.  
There is a *mental and an emotional enhancement*,  
whereby the self *apprehends the reality* it has sought;  
whether under the veils of religion, philosophy,  
or nature mysticism.<sup>20</sup>

Plotinus says that by spiritual intuition man,  
"wrought into harmony with the Supreme,"  
enters into communion with *Nous*,<sup>21</sup>  
the "intelligible world" of eternal realities -  
that splendour yonder which is his home:  
and further,  
that this light, shining upon the soul, *enlightens it*,

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<sup>19</sup> *Essentials*, p.11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.12.

<sup>21</sup> *Nous* is the Greek word for intelligence/understanding. Classical philosophy discussed how human intelligence shares in the divine intelligence. Mystics like Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius explained how we grow in awareness of the divine in ordinary life in this second phase of Illumination.

makes it a member of the *spiritual order*, and so  
“transforms the furnace of this world into a garden of flowers.”<sup>22</sup>

Ruysbroeck<sup>23</sup> declares that this eternal world  
“is not God, but it is *the light in which we see Him.*”

It seems to me clear that these,  
and many other descriptions I cannot now quote,  
refer to an identical state of consciousness,  
which might be called *an experience of Eternity,*  
*but not of the Eternal One.*

I say “an experience,” not merely a mental perception.

*Contemplation*, which is the traditional name for that  
*concentrated attention*  
in which this phase of reality is revealed,  
is an activity of all of our powers; the heart, the will, the mind.<sup>24</sup>  
“By love he may be gotten and holden, by thought never,”  
says the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>25</sup>

It is only through the mood of humble and loving receptivity  
in which the artist perceives beauty,  
that the human spirit can apprehend  
a reality which is greater than itself.  
The meek and poor of spirit really are the inheritors of Eternity.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12. I can't find the quote in *The Enneads*. It might be a composite paraphrase, a synthesis from different paragraphs.

<sup>23</sup> Jan van Ruysbroeck, known in English as John van Ruysbroeck (1293 –1381) was one of the most important of the Flemish mystics, who wrote in the Dutch vernacular rather than in Latin. His work had a deep influence on Underhill.

<sup>24</sup> *Essentials*, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* is an anonymous work of Christian mysticism written in Middle English in the latter half of the 14th century. It draws on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Christian Neoplatonism.

So, we may place the attitude of selfless adoration,  
the *single-hearted passion* of the soul,  
among the *essentials* of the mystic in the illuminated way.

A very wide range of mystical experiences must be attributed  
to this second stage in man's spiritual growth.

Some at least of its secrets are known  
to all who are *capable of aesthetic passion*;  
who in the presence of beauty,  
know themselves to stand on the fringe of *another plane of being*,  
where the elements of common life are given new colour and value,  
and its apparent disharmonies are resolved.<sup>26</sup>

So, too, that *deep sense of a divine companionship*  
which many ardent souls *achieve in prayer*  
is a true if transitory experience of illumination.<sup>27</sup>

All the personal raptures of *devotional mysticism*,  
all the *nature-mystics joyous consciousness of God in creation...*  
belong to the way of illumination.

Here the reality behind appearance  
is still *mediated to the mystic under symbols* and forms.  
The variation of these symbols is great;  
his adoring gaze now finds new life and significance  
in the appearances of nature,  
the creations of music and art,  
the imagery of religion and philosophy,  
and reality speaks to him through his own credal conceptions.

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<sup>26</sup> *Essentials*, p.12. Underhill notes that "the enormous majority of mystics never get beyond this level of consciousness."

<sup>27</sup> *Essentials*, p.13.



But *absolute value* cannot be attributed to any of these,  
even the most sacred;  
they change, yet the experience remains.<sup>28</sup>

Among these symbols we must reckon a large number  
of the *secondary phenomena of mysticism*:  
divine visions and voices,  
and other dramatizations  
of the self's apprehension and desires.

The best mystics have always recognized the *doubtful nature*  
of these so-called divine revelations and favours,  
and have tried again and again to *set up tests for discerning*  
those which really “come from God” –  
i.e., mediate a valid spiritual experience.

Personally, I think very few of these phenomena  
are mystical in the true sense.  
Just as our normal consciousness is more or less  
at the mercy of invasions from the unconscious region,  
of impulses which we fail to trace to their true origin;  
so too the mystical consciousness is perpetually  
*open to invasion from the lower centres.*

These invasions are *not always understood by the mystic.*<sup>29</sup>

Whatever the essence of mysticism may turn out to be,  
it is well to recognize these lapses to lower levels  
as among the least fortunate of its accidents.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Essentials*, p.13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

### 3. THE WAY OF UNION

We come to *the third stage*, the true goal of mystic experience;  
the *intuitive contact with that ultimate reality*  
which theologians mean by the *Godhead*  
and philosophers by the *Absolute*,

a contact in which, as Richard of St Victor<sup>31</sup> says,  
“the soul gazes upon Truth without any veils of creatures  
— not in a mirror darkly, but in its pure simplicity.”<sup>32</sup>

The claim to this is the loftiest claim  
which can be made by human consciousness.

There is little we can say of it, because there is little we know;  
save that the vision or experience is always  
of a *Unity which reconciles all opposites,*  
and *fulfils all man's highest intuitions of reality.*

When the great mystic achieves the  
“still, glorious and absolute Oneness”  
which finally satisfies his thirst for truth -  
the “point where all lines meet and show their meaning” -  
he generally confesses *how symbolic was*  
the object of his earlier devotion,  
*how partial* his supposed communion with the Divine.

“How, then, am I to love the Godhead?” says Eckhart.<sup>33</sup>  
“Thou shall love Him as He is:

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<sup>31</sup> Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173) was a Medieval Scottish philosopher and mystical theologian.

<sup>32</sup> *Essentials*, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> Eckhart von Hochheim (c. 1260 – c. 1328), commonly known as Meister Eckhart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic.

not as a God, not as a spirit, not as a Person, not as an image,  
but as *a sheer, pure One*.

And in this One  
we are to sink from nothing to nothing,  
so help us, God.”<sup>34</sup>

“This consciousness of the One,” says Plotinus,  
“comes *not by knowledge*,  
*but by an actual Presence* superior to any knowing.

To have it, the soul *must rise above knowledge*,  
above all its wandering from its unity.”<sup>35</sup>

He [Plotinus] goes on to explain that  
*all partial objects* of love and contemplation,  
even Beauty and Goodness themselves,  
*are lower than this*,  
springing from the One  
*as light from the sun*.

To see the disc,  
we must put on smoked glasses,  
*shut off the rays*  
and *submit to the “radiant darkness”*  
which enters so frequently into  
mystical descriptions of the Absolute.

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<sup>34</sup> This quote is from Eckhardt’s “Sermon 96” in *The Complete Mystical Works Of Meister Eckhart*, Maurice O’C. Walshe, tr. & ed., New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009, 1<sup>st</sup> published 1979.

Walshe’s translation has this:

- ‘Well, how should I love Him then ?’

- You should love Him as He is: a non-God, a non-spirit, a non-person, a non-image;  
rather, as He is a sheer pure limpid One, detached from all duality.

And in that One may we eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness. So help us  
God. Amen.

<sup>35</sup> Sixth Ennead, 9<sup>th</sup> Tractate, Section 4 first paragraph.

The *ecstatic condition* is *no guarantee* of mystic vision.

It is frequently pathological,  
and is often found along with other abnormal conditions  
in *emotional visionaries*  
whose revelations have no ultimate characteristics.

It is, however, just as uncritical  
to assume that ecstasy is necessarily a pathological symptom  
as it is to assume that it is necessarily a mystic state.

We have *a test* that we can apply to the ecstatic;  
and which separates  
the results of nervous disorder  
from those of *spiritual transcendence*.

“What *fruit* dost thou bring back from this thy vision?”  
is the final question  
which Jacopone da Todi addresses to the mystic's soul.

And the answer is: “*An ordered life in every state.*”<sup>36</sup>

So, *ordered correspondence with each level of existence*,  
physical and spiritual,  
successive and eternal,  
a practical realization of the proportions of life -  
*is the guarantee of the genuine character*  
of that sublimation of consciousness  
which is called the mystic way;

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<sup>36</sup> Jacopone da Todi, (c. 1230 – 1306) was an Italian Franciscan friar from Umbria. The quote is from “Lauda LXXIX,” *La bontate en finita*. See Evelyn Underhill's *Jacopone da Todi, Poet and Mystic -1228-1306, A Spiritual Biography*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London: 1919, p.453.

and this distinguishes it from  
the fantasies of *psychic illness*  
or the disguised self-indulgences of the *dream-world*.

The *real mystic is not a selfish visionary*.

He grows in vigour as he draws  
nearer and nearer the sources of true life,  
and his goal is only reached when he participates  
in the creative energies of the Divine Nature.<sup>37</sup>

“Then only is our life a whole,” says Ruysbroeck,  
“when contemplation and work dwell in us side by side,  
*and we are perfectly in both of them at once.*”

Plotinus speaks in the same sense under another image  
in one of his most celebrated passages:

“We always move round the One,  
but we do not always fix our gaze upon It.

We are like a choir of singers standing round the conductor,  
who do not always sing in time  
because their attention is diverted to some external object.

When they look at the conductor,  
they sing well and are really with him.

So, we always move around the One.  
If we did not, we should dissolve and cease to exist.

But we do not always look towards the One.

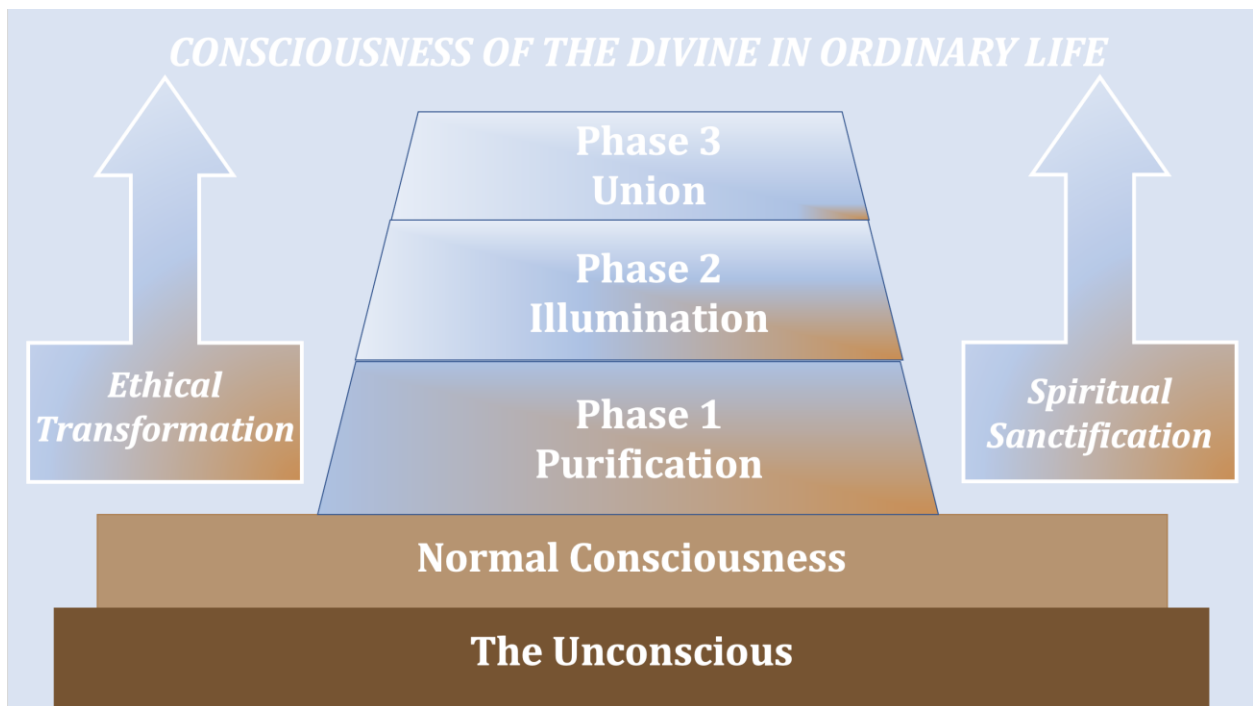
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<sup>37</sup> *Essentials*, p.16.

When we do, we attain the end of our existence and our rest;  
and we no longer sing out of tune,  
but *form in truth a divine choir about the One.*"<sup>38</sup>

In this conception of man's privilege and duty  
we have the indestructible essence of mysticism.<sup>39</sup>

### **SUMMARY**



The Way of Life is an adventure of the spirit. We follow Jesus into a lifelong process of transformation and sanctification. Along this way, we become more conscious, more aware, of the divine in everyday life, until we are flooded with holy Spirit.

Thank you for reading.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Sixth *Ennead*, 9<sup>th</sup> Tractate, Section 8 concluding paragraph.

<sup>39</sup> *Essentials*, p.17.

<sup>40</sup> Compiled for the Anglican parish of St. Mary's, Russell, Gerrit Botha, February 2021.