

Specimens of Modern Mysticism

by W.R. Inge

W.R. Inge explores the resurgence of modern mysticism, emphasizing the importance of inner spiritual experiences and the potential dangers of superstition.

Scripture: Psalm 46:10, John 14:20, Colossians 2:8, James 1:5, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Mystical Experiences", "Spiritual Enlightenment"

Description

W.R. Inge delves into the psychology of religion, exploring the mystical experiences and teachings found in recent American books. These teachings emphasize the importance of constant connection with God, the power of intuition in revealing divine truths, and the practice of meditation for healing and spiritual enlightenment. While cautioning against superstition and false lights, Inge predicts a revival of mystical religion in America, akin to the medieval movement in Germany, with philosophical speculations and evangelistic efforts leading individuals to seek the kingdom of God within themselves.

Transcript

I conclude this introductory essay with a few extracts from recent American books on the psychology of religion. It is interesting to find some of the strangest experiences of the cloister reproduced under the very different conditions of modern American life. The quotations will serve to show how far Tauler and the "Theologia Germanica" are from being out of date.

"The thing which impressed me most" (says a correspondent of Professor William James)[33] "was learning the fact that we must be in absolutely constant relation or mental touch with that essence of life which permeates all and which we call God. This is almost unrecognisable unless we live into it ourselves actually--that is, by a constant turning to the very innermost, deepest consciousness of our real selves or of God in us, for illumination from within, just as we turn to the sun for light, warmth, and invigoration without. When you do this consciously, realising that to turn inward to the light within you is to live in the presence of God or of your Divine self, you soon discover the unreality of the objects to which you have hitherto been turning and which have engrossed you without."

The next quotation comes from a small book by one of the "New Thought" or "Mind Cure" school in America. The enormous sale of the volume testifies to the popularity of the teaching which it contains.[34]

"Intuition is an inner spiritual sense through which man is opened to the direct revelation and knowledge of God, the secret of nature and life, and through which he is brought into conscious unity and fellowship with

God, and made to realise his own deific nature and supremacy of being as the son of God. Spiritual supremacy and illumination thus realised through the development and perfection of intuition under divine inspiration gives the perfect inner vision and direct insight into the character, properties, and purpose of all things to which the attention and interest are directed. It is, we repeat, a spiritual sense opening inwardly, as the physical senses open outwardly; and because it has the capacity to perceive, grasp, and know the truth at first hand, independent of all external sources of information, we call it intuition. All inspired teaching and spiritual revelations are based upon the recognition of this spiritual faculty of the soul and its power to receive and appropriate them. Conscious unity of man in spirit and purpose with the Father, born out of his supreme desire and trust, opens his soul through this inner sense to immediate aspiration and enlightenment from the divine omniscience, and the co-operative energy of the divine omnipotence, under which he becomes a seer and a master. On this higher plane of realised spiritual life in the flesh the mind acts with unfettered freedom and unbiassed vision, grasping truth at first hand, independent of all external sources of information. Approaching all beings and things from the divine side, they are seen in the light of the divine omniscience.[35] God's purpose in them, and so the truth concerning them, as it rests in the mind of God, are thus revealed by direct illumination from the divine mind, to which the soul is opened inwardly through this spiritual sense we call intuition."

The practice of meditation "without images," as the mediaeval mystics called it, is specially recommended. "Many will receive great help, and many will be entirely healed by a practice somewhat after the following nature:--With a mind at peace, and with a heart going out in love to all, go into the quiet of your own interior self, holding the thought, I am one with the Infinite Spirit of Life, the life of my life. I now open my body, in which disease has gotten a foothold, I open it fully to the inflowing tide of this infinite life, and it now, even now, is pouring in and coursing through my body, and the healing process is going on." "If you would find the highest, the fullest, and the richest life that not only this world but that any world can know, then do away with the sense of the separateness of your life from the life of God. Hold to the thought of your oneness. In the degree that you do this, you will find yourself realising it more and more, and as this life of realisation is lived, you will find that no good thing will be withheld, for all things are included in this." [36]

This modern mysticism is very much entangled with theories about the cure of bodily disease by suggestion; and it is fair to warn those who are unacquainted with the books of this sect that they will find much fantastic superstition mixed with a stimulating faith in the inner light as the voice of God.

But whatever may be the course of this particular movement there can be no doubt that the Americans, like ourselves, are only at the beginning of a great revival of mystical religion. The movement will probably follow the same course as the mediaeval movement in Germany, with which this little book is concerned. It will have its philosophical supportees, who will press their speculation to the verge of Pantheism, perhaps reviving the Logos-cosmology of the Christian Alexandrians under the form of the pan-psychism of Lotze and Fechner. It will have its evangelists like Tauler, who will carry to our crowded town populations the glad tidings that the kingdom of God is not here or there, but within the hearts of all who will seek for it within them. It will assuredly attract some to a life of solitary contemplation; while others, intellectually weaker or less serious, will follow the various theosophical and theurgical delusions which, from the days of Iamblichus downward, have dogged the heels of mysticism. For the "False Light" against which the "Theologia Germanica" warns us is as dangerous as ever; we may even live to see some new "Brethren of the Free Spirit" turning their liberty into a cloak of licentiousness. If so, the world will soon whistle back the disciplinarian with his traditions of the elders; prophesying will once more be suppressed and discredited,

and a new crystallising process will begin. But before that time comes some changes may possibly take place in the external proportions of Christian orthodoxy. The appearance of a vigorous body of faith, standing firmly on its own feet, may even have the effect of relegating to the sphere of pious opinion some tenets which have hitherto "seemed to be pillars."

For these periodical returns to the "fresh springs" of religion never leave the tradition exactly where it was before. The German movement of the fourteenth century made the Reformation inevitable, and our own age may be inaugurating a change no less momentous, which will restore in the twentieth century some of the features of Apostolic Christianity.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wr-inge/specimens-of-modern-mysticism/>

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