

The Quest for True Joy in Union With God  
in Mystical Christianity: An Intuitive Inquiry Study

by

Susan Ellen Carlock

A dissertation submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Transpersonal Psychology

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

May 8, 2003

I certify that I have read and approved the content and presentation of this dissertation:

  
Dwight Judy, Ph.D., Chairperson

April 10, 2003  
Date

  
Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., Designated  
Dissertation Director

April 10, 2003  
Date

  
Pat Campbell, Psy.D., Committee Member

April 10, 2003  
Date

  
Paul Roy, Ph.D., Dean, Residential Program

May 15, 2003  
Date

UMI Number: 3129583

Copyright 2003 by  
Carlock, Susan Ellen

All rights reserved.

#### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform 3129583

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright

©

Susan Ellen Carlock

2003

All Rights Reserved

## Abstract

### **The Quest for True Joy in Union With God in Mystical Christianity: An Intuitive Inquiry Study**

By

**Susan Ellen Carlock**

Intuitive Inquiry, an emerging research method, is used in a quest for *true joy*. *True joy* is defined as a permanent level of consciousness that transcends suffering in which one experiences wholeness, fulfillment, sweetness, purity, and love. Allowing that the world's great mystics have found true joy in union with the Absolute or God, this study focuses on 8 joyful Christian mystics: Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Brother Lawrence, John Ruusbroec, Julian of Norwich, Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Faustina Kowalska. Thoughts on joy from 5 great spiritual and wisdom traditions and 15 psychological thinkers are briefly explored. Highlights of the researcher's quest for true joy and *meeting with emptiness* are shared. As an application of Intuitive Inquiry the research design includes 3 levels of research: (a) cycle 1 identifies primary research themes through reflection, meditation, and journaling, (b) cycle 2 examines works of 4 Christian mystics to find research lenses, (c) cycle 3 tests the original conception of true joy through the writings of 4 more Christian mystics. Sympathetic resonance, a deep inner recognition of authenticity, is used as a validation procedure for the interpretation of data. Embodied writing expresses the richness and depth of experience in the findings and evokes sympathetic resonance in the reader. As a result of the study, the researcher changed her definition of true joy to be the



transforming and healing power behind suffering. When our human perceptions are aligned with God, we experience true joy as the fundamental healing energy of the universe. Life necessarily includes joy in union with God and suffering in estrangement from God; however, true joy is found in a mystical perception of the universe beyond the ordinary experiences of joy and suffering. True joy is found by forsaking the hollow pleasures of the world and turning to God.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation was a team effort

Thank you to the following people:

WILLIAM BRAUD, Ph.D., who helped me find out what I wanted to do and then provided continuous inspiration and many different kinds of assistance so that I could accomplish it.

GENIE PALMER, Ph.D., for her invaluable guidance and priceless friendship.

DWIGHT JUDY, Ph.D., for his generosity, unfailing faith, encouragement, insight, and kindness.

ROSEMARIE ANDERSON, Ph.D., for Intuitive Inquiry, for her academic rigor, and for her inner beauty.

PAT CAMPBELL, Psy.D., for keeping the thread of joy moving through the labyrinth of my dissertation, for calling me on what I needed to be called on, and for her enthusiasm for the research topic.

MARIA JAOUDI, Ph.D., for her scholastic expertise and joyful presence.

SHARON HAMRICK and KATRINA RAHN--The Librarians-- for their efficiency, encouragement, and continuous goodwill.

And to all the many other declared and undeclared friends and teachers that have helped me on my path to true joy in union with God.

Dedication

To God

Jesus Christ

and

The Eight Mystics

## Table of Contents

	Page
Copyright.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Definition of True Joy.....	1
Purpose of Research .....	2
Proposed Areas of Exploration.....	2
Research Method and Design .....	3
Contribution to Psychology.....	5
Caveat.....	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	9
The Psychologists.....	11
Sigmund Freud.....	12
Carl Rogers.....	14
B.F. Skinner.....	15
Erich Fromm.....	16
Albert Ellis.....	19
Abraham Maslow.....	20

Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.....	24
Carl Jung.....	26
Verena Kast.....	28
Robert Johnson.....	29
Frances Vaughan.....	31
Roger Walsh.....	32
Roberto Assagioli.....	33
The Major Spiritual and Wisdom Traditions.....	35
Jewish Mysticism: Hasidism.....	36
Shamanism.....	42
Buddhism.....	47
Sufism.....	55
Hindu Mysticism.....	60
Mysticism.....	69
Stages of Mystical Development.....	74
The Foundations and Early History of Christian Mysticism.....	81
Christian Theology.....	102
Soren Kierkegaard.....	103
Karl Barth.....	108
Chapter 3: Research Methods and Design.....	111
Limitations of Empiricism and Rationalism.....	112
Intuitive Inquiry.....	114

Cycle 1: Define Research Topic.....	114
Cycle 2: Uncover Interpretive Lenses.....	115
Cycle 3: Read and Interpret Texts, and Test Initial Research Premises.....	116
Collection and Synthesis of Data.....	119
Presentation of Research Findings Using Embodied Writing.....	120
Reliability and Validity .....	120
Purpose Of Intuitive Inquiry .....	124
Chapter 4: The Forward Arc of the Hermeneutical Circle--Intuitive Inquiry:	
Cycles 1 and 2.....	125
Cycle 1: Uncovering the Research Topic.....	125
Cycle 2: The Christian Mystics.....	132
Saint Francis of Assisi, (1182-1226, Italy.....	141
Mechthild of Magdeburg, (1212-1299?), Germany.....	156
Clare of Assisi, (1195-1253, Italy.....	165
Brother Lawrence, (1611-1691), France.....	174
Chapter 5: The Return Arc of the Hermeneutical Circle--Intuitive Inquiry:	
Cycle 3.....	190
Cycle 3: The Christian Mystics.....	190
John Ruusbroec, (1293-1381), The Netherlands.....	192
Julian of Norwich, (1343-1416), England.....	205
Elizabeth of the Trinity, (1880-1906), France.....	217
Faustina Kowalska, (1905-1938), Poland.....	231

Chapter 6: Interpretations and Discussion.....	243
Interpretation Of Findings From Cycle 2 Research.....	244
What is True Joy?.....	244
What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being that	
Lead to True Joy?.....	245
What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being that	
Lead Away From True Joy?.....	247
How Does Suffering Relate To True Joy?.....	247
Can True Joy Be Found In This Life?.....	249
Interpretation of Findings From Cycle 3 Research.....	250
What Is True Joy?.....	250
What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being that	
Lead to True Joy?.....	251
What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being that	
Lead Away From True Joy?.....	253
How Does Suffering Relate To True Joy?.....	254
Can True Joy Be Found In This Life?.....	256
Discussion.....	258
Critique of Intuitive Inquiry.....	265
Personal Highlights.....	268
Delimitations.....	271

Epilogue.....	273
Future Research.....	274
References.....	275



## The Sermon on the Mount

And then he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

(Matt. 5: 2-12)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!  
 Place your soul in *the brilliance of glory*!  
 Place your heart in *the figure of the divine substance*!  
 And *transform* your whole being *into the image* of the  
 Godhead Itself through contemplation!  
 So that you too may feel what His friends feel  
 as they taste *the hidden sweetness*  
 which God Himself has reserved  
 from the beginning  
 for those who love Him. (Clare of Assisi, 1982, p. 200)

My dissertation is an inquiry into the experience of true joy. For me the above quotation from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Christian mystic Saint Clare of Assisi holds the exquisite promise of transcendent joy. Within most, if not all, of us there is a deep longing for the ineffable, remote, and yet so profoundly intimate experience that is communicated in this sacred text. What is this experience and how can one achieve it? Our quest for true joy is designed to find the answer to this question if, indeed, there is one.

### *Definition of True Joy*

For the purposes of this dissertation I am using the term *true joy* to describe this experience of transcendent joy. I define *true joy* as a state of consciousness or level of psychospiritual development, in which one experiences a sense of wholeness, sweetness, completeness, fulfillment, purity, and a sense of being totally loved. There is a feeling of warmth and contentment, and one feels an uplifting of the spirit and a buoyant hope for the future. One is at peace with all that is. This state of joy is nonconditional, a permanent state of awareness deep within an individual that is always available, not predicated upon or

influenced by the erratic and unpredictable events of the outside world. It can be experienced in loss or gain, sickness or health, wealth or poverty, acclaim or ignominy. *True joy* is different from both the conventional emotion of joy--the opposite of sadness--and the transcendent but transitory joy of the peak experience; however, I believe that both joyful emotions and peak experiences can help an individual move forward on the path to *true joy*. I believe that true joy is a reconciliation of the opposites of pleasure and pain and is attained through the transformation of these two opposites into something new. This something new, I believe, is a direct, immediate, and enduring connection with the Reality or God.

### *Purpose of Research*

The purpose of my research is to determine whether or not the psycho-spiritual level of development I have described as true joy exists. If it does, is it possible to attain it in this world? If it is possible, what do we need to do to achieve it, and what are we doing that might be preventing it? The hypothesis of my research is that some of the great Christian mystics have attained, in union with God, the state of consciousness I call true joy.

### *Proposed Areas of Exploration*

In this dissertation we study the sacred writings of eight Christian mystics who share with us their direct experience of true joy and union with God. We also read some of the works of two great Christian thinkers, German Protestant theologian Karl Barth and Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, to discover their ideas of joy. We look very briefly at the mysticism of Judaism and Hinduism and at Sufism, Shamanism, and Buddhism to determine what these great wisdom and spiritual traditions say about joy. And we examine what some

of the pivotal psychological thinkers from traditional psychology, Jungian psychology, and transpersonal psychology think about joy. The writers from traditional psychology are Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, Abraham Maslow, Albert Ellis, Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, Martin Seligman, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The writers from transpersonal psychology are Roberto Assagioli, Frances Vaughan, and Roger Walsh. The writers from Jungian psychology are Carl Jung, Verena Kast, and Robert Johnson.

The goal of this comprehensive research is to learn what some of civilization's greatest traditions, most brilliant thinkers, and most heroic lovers of God say about true joy: what it is, how we can attain it, and how we might be sabotaging its presence in our lives.

### *Research Method and Design*

In order to determine these things, I am using Intuitive Inquiry as my research method. Intuitive Inquiry is a method of research created by Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2000) that is in the process of development. Intuitive Inquiry is a hermeneutical method that uses cycles of interpretation that shape the ongoing inquiry. Cycles 1 and 2 make up the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle. Cycle 3 is the return arc of the hermeneutical circle. The 1st cycle involves determining the research topic and developing a hypothesis. The 2nd cycle involves conducting initial research and finding research lenses. The 3rd cycle involves testing the original hypothesis from cycle 1 and evaluating the evolving hypothesis formed in cycle 2.

For my dissertation the 1st cycle of Intuitive Inquiry consists of a daily practice of meditation, journaling, and reflection upon two sacred works of art in order to determine and develop my research topic. These activities are explained in Chapter 4.

The 2nd cycle of intuitive inquiry is found in Chapter 4 and involves my reengaging my research topic through a set of texts to find the preliminary lenses through which I conduct my research in cycle 3. The texts with which I am working in cycle 2 are the writings of four Christian mystics who have been recommended to me by people knowledgeable in the area of Christian mysticism as particularly joyful. They are Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare of Assisi, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Brother Lawrence.

The 3rd cycle of intuitive inquiry is found in Chapter 5. In this cycle of research I inquire into an alternate set of texts from four different Christian mystics. These mystics are Blessed John Ruusbroec, Julian of Norwich, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Saint Faustina Kowalska. The criteria for choosing the mystics for cycle 3 evolve from my research in cycle 2. The lenses for cycle 3 emerge from what I learn in my review of the literature and from cycle 2 of my research. These research lenses reflect my developing understanding of true joy in union with God. The purpose of my research in cycle 3 is to test the beliefs about true joy that I have acquired up to this point in my research process. Several of the cycle-3 mystics present a more sophisticated religious philosophy than the cycle-2 mystics. For example, Ruusbroec, one of the greatest mystics, writes in great detail about the very highest states of joy in union with God.

In Chapter 6, I present the research findings, interpret and discuss the research findings, and present my new understanding of true joy. I then offer a modest critique of the methodological adequacy of Intuitive Inquiry as to its application to the task of the exploration of true joy. Then a few ideas for future research are given. Finally highlights from my personal quest for true joy and from my direct *experience of emptiness* while writing this dissertation are shared.

In her classic book *Mysticism*, Underhill (1999) states, “The mystics are the pioneers of the spiritual world” (p. 4). I am interested in doing my major research on mysticism because I believe that the kind of joy in which I am interested can ultimately be attained only through spiritual development, and I think the mystics are among those individuals who are the most spiritually advanced. Underhill believes that, “Christian philosophy . . . supports and elucidates the revelations of the individual mystic as no other system of thought has been able to do” (p. 104). As mentioned above, the primary focus of my research is on Christian mysticism. My intention for this research is to learn about and immerse myself in the joy found in the writings of eight great Christian mystics in order to come closer to the source of this joy within myself and to inspire others to do the same.

### *Contribution to Psychology*

One of the ways in which my dissertation can contribute to traditional psychology is to bring the human potential for nonconditional true joy into the discussion. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), psychology since World War II has concentrated on “repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning,” and because of this emphasis on pathology, “psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living” (p. 5). Myers (2000) agrees, suggesting that during psychology’s 1st century, “psychologists focused on illness more than health, on fear more than courage, on aggression more than love” (p. 56). Myers states that in an electronic search of *Psychological Abstracts* since 1887 the following articles turned up: 8,072 articles on anger, 57,800 on anxiety, and 70,856 on depression. On the happy side of the ledger, only 851 abstracts mentioned joy, 2,958 happiness, and 5,701 life satisfaction (p. 56).

The psychologists in the relatively new field of positive psychology want to change the focus of psychology from its preoccupation with “repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi state that positive psychology on the individual level is about developing positive individual traits such as the capacity for love, spirituality, altruism, and wisdom. My dissertation can contribute to this essential work. In my dissertation I am suggesting that humankind is capable of experiencing a fundamental, inner, and nonconditional joy that is stronger than the pain, sorrow, and suffering inherent in human life. I am also suggesting that this true joy is gained on a level of psychospiritual development that can be achieved through an acceptance of and surrender to one’s highest spiritual nature, and that once it is found this true joy cannot be destroyed. Spiritual joy, love, altruism, and wisdom are just a few of the fruits available at this stage of development. I understand the difficulties involved in bringing a concept like true joy into the science of psychology. How, for instance, can a researcher scientifically measure the subtle human experience of true joy? However, psychology is a healing profession, and it is a hypothesis of this dissertation that this joyful spiritual orientation is essential to the healing process. It is also a hypothesis of this dissertation that this joyful spiritual orientation, which I call true joy, requires a deep, inner, spiritual connection with something greater than oneself. I am proposing that some of the world’s great mystics have achieved the state of consciousness of true joy, and that we too can learn how to do this in our own way, whatever our starting point may be.

A second contribution this dissertation can make is to emphasize Christian mysticism as one of the major roots of transpersonal psychology (Judy, 1996). Writers in transpersonal psychology often shy away from religion in general and Christianity in particular, and many

only theorize about spirituality and the Absolute. However, I believe that in order to experience healing, transformation, and true joy it is essential to go beyond the abstractions of thought that transpersonal psychology often presents. We must go back to the Christian roots of transpersonal psychology and to the immediate connection with the Reality or God that Christian mysticism demands and that the greatest Christian mystics experience.

In my dissertation I examine the writings of some of the most influential Christian mystics using my mind, my emotions, my body, and my soul. These Christian mystics are able to bring their relationship with God to life in their writings, and their vibrant joy challenges our old way of being and inspires us to reach higher than ever before. To experience the transforming power of the mystics' joy, all aspects of the human being must be aroused and engaged including the soul, the emotions, the intellect, and the perceptual, visceral, sensori-motor, kinesthetic, and imaginal senses of the body. In this dissertation I use sympathetic resonance and embodied writing as tools to gather and present my data (Anderson, 2001). According to Anderson (2001), "Embodied writing seeks to reveal the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body and evoking sympathetic resonance in readers" (p. 1). Embodied writing engages all of the senses of the researcher and involves an intimate relationship between the body and the sensuous natural world. According to Anderson, too often scientific research writing is dry and dull as researchers attempt to distance themselves from the experience. Through the use of embodied writing the researcher and reader are able to relate to the research not only on an intellectual level but also on a deeper level of kinesthetic and sensory experience. This makes the experience come alive and presents the opportunity for the reader to relate to the research through sympathetic resonance.



To describe sympathetic resonance Anderson (2000) uses the musical metaphor of plucking a string on a cello that then causes a string of another cello across the room to vibrate. This resonance or vibration is direct, immediate, and true and can be recognized without distortion from the outside. According to Anderson, sympathetic resonance can be a validation procedure for research. I hope that my research will not only contribute to the body of intellectual knowledge on joy but that through embodied writing and sympathetic resonance I will be able to be a conduit for true joy from the mystics to you, my reader.

### *Caveat*

In this dissertation there are many quotations that do not include gender-neutral language. In particular, references to God as masculine (e.g. *He* or *Him*) are consistently found in the works of the eight Christian mystics. There is, of course, no word or concept that can reflect the entirety of God. Therefore I perceive the use of the masculine pronoun *He* to describe God as, at best, a profound limitation. If, however, we *do* choose to characterize God in terms of gender I believe that the neglect of the feminine aspect of God is detrimental to both women and men.

I have attempted to maintain gender neutrality in the body of this dissertation; however, in order to honor the integrity of the writings of the mystics I choose to leave intact their use of the words *He*, *His*, and *Him* to refer to God, as I wish to present the works of the mystics to my readers, as much as possible, as they were written.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this dissertation we are embarking on a quest for true joy. Joy! The word itself fairly jumps off the page. Perhaps it brings back some of the delights of childhood, or the sweet fulfillment of some special longing, or one might remember the breathtaking beauty of a sunrise or the birth of a deeply wanted child. Whatever thoughts or emotions the word *joy* evokes, there are few people who would not like more of it in their lives.

However, for most of us enduring joy remains elusive and the path unclear. In my dissertation I will not be searching for the transitory joy that is found in the brief rush of ego-centered exultation caused by some success or acquisition in the material world, nor am I looking for the joy found in a peak experience. Although I believe that the emotion of joy and the peak experience of joy have enormous value, they are not the ultimate joy for which I search. Instead, I inquire into *true joy*: an enduring experience of joy that I believe one can find when one has achieved a specific level of consciousness, a joy that is available to us despite the inevitable pain and suffering we must experience in life. For those who wish to embark on the quest for true joy there are only two requirements: (a) an open mind, and (b) an open heart. If we are set, then let the heroic quest for true joy begin.

First, it is necessary to look at the traditional definition of the word *joy* and to distinguish it from its most common synonyms: *pleasure*, *happiness*, *delight*, and *ecstasy*. The *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (1984) defines joy as “the emotion or state of great happiness, pleasure or delight (e.g., produced by success, good fortune, or the prospect of possessing what one desires)” (p. 794). *Happiness* is defined as “the state of

being happy.” The word *happy* is partially defined as “enjoying or expressing pleasure and contentment. Happy suggests a more passive pleasure than joyful or joyous. Joyful and joyous are the strongest terms, suggesting elation and rejoicing” (p. 795). *Pleasure* is defined as “a state of feeling of happiness or satisfaction” or “frivolous or sensual gratification” or “enjoyment, recreation” (p. 1129). “*Pleasure* is the most general and least forceful term, the pleasure of your company. *Delight* suggests a keener and an evident *pleasure*, which is often fleeting, and may take one by surprise. . . . *Joy* suggests a deeper more lasting and intensely felt *delight*, and is frequently linked with spiritual happiness or pure minded pleasures” (p. 1129). The word *ecstasy* is defined as “1. a state of overwhelming emotion or feeling, often to the point of loss of self-control; esp. rapturous delight 2. a trance; esp. a mystic or prophetic trance” (p. 463; emphasis in original text).

*The Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (1984) initially suggests the experience of joy is produced by some event in the outside world (e.g., possessing what one wants). In the dictionary definition, joy is also related to elation and rejoicing, and it is also linked with spiritual happiness. It is the potential for this spiritual happiness or pure minded pleasure that I wish to explore. In my dissertation, when I am speaking about the conventional emotion of joy, the opposite of sadness, I will use the term *joy*. When I am speaking about the consistent joy that comes from the state of consciousness of union with God, I will use the term *true joy*.

One perspective on joy comes from Christopher Meadows (1968) who, in his dissertation, defines joy as a phenomenological experience in which, “the self and its world are experienced from the perspective of immensity, integrality, or complete wholeness. There is something complete, whole, perfect about the *moment of joy*. Life is experienced in terms

of its infinite possibility, goodness, or beauty” (p. 7; italics added). According to Meadows, there are two major phenomenological types of joy, individuated joy and affiliative joy. Individuated joy is an elated type of joy in which the autonomous side of the individual takes precedence over the relational side. Affiliative joy occurs within a context of participation or union with someone loved in which oneness takes precedence over individuation.

Meadows (1968) suggests that one cause of individuated joy can be a sudden creative insight. One cause of affiliative joy is “the re-integration of a strong interpersonal relationship in which loss, separation, or estrangement had occurred” (p. 8). Although Meadows’ initial definition of joy is similar in some respects to true joy, it is very obvious we are not talking about the same thing. First of all, Meadows speaks about the *moment of joy*; however, the true joy we are exploring in this paper is an enduring level of consciousness, not a momentary experience. Second, Meadows states that individuated joy is a sudden experience while our true joy is a permanent one. Finally, Meadows attributes the cause of affiliated joy to events external to the individual. In the definition hypothesized in the introduction to this study, true joy exists regardless of external circumstances.

### *The Psychologists*

Our quest for true joy would be incomplete without discovering how some of the pivotal psychological thinkers from traditional psychology, Jungian psychology, and transpersonal psychology view joy.

### *Sigmund Freud*

Sigmund Freud (1930/1961) believed that more than anything else human beings “want to become happy and to remain so;” however, he pessimistically states, “One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be ‘happy’ is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’” (p. 23).

Freud (1920/1981) believed that all mental events are governed by the pleasure principle. This principle states that human beings have two aims, a negative one and a positive one. The negative aim is to avoid what Freud calls tension or unpleasure, and the positive aim is to lower the tension and create strong feelings of pleasure. In other words, Freud (1930/1961) believed that “what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle” (p. 7). The dilemma is, according to Freud, that the aims of the pleasure principle can never succeed as “all the regulations of the universe run counter to it” (p. 23).

According to Freud (1930/1961), what we call happiness is simply having our needs “that have been damned up to a high degree” satisfied, and this experience of happiness can only be temporary (p. 23). Human beings can only experience intense pleasure from a contrast, not from the way things are, Freud argues, and thus, “our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution” (pp. 23-24).

Freud (1930/1961) suggests that the prototype of all happiness is sexual (genital) love; however, to make genital love a priority in life creates a painful dependency on the object of one’s love and is therefore not advisable. Freud does acknowledge that there are small minorities of people who, because of their constitution, are able to find happiness on

the path to love. In order to make this work, however, Freud states that one must change the focus of loving from receiving love to giving love and from loving one person to loving all of humankind. Freud suggests that Saint Francis exploited love in this way for a sense of inner happiness. However, Freud does not agree with the concept of loving all of humankind because “[a] love that does not discriminate [forfeits] a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object; and secondly not all men are worthy of love”(p. 49). Here Freud suggests that loving all people is an indiscriminate love, and thus less valuable. This is predicated upon the need of individuals to feel special. If you love me then I am special. If you love everyone then I am not more special than anyone else. This belief comes from the illusion of a separate ego.

Freud’s idea that only a few saints can attain happiness is a limited and somewhat sad view of human beings. We undoubtedly do have many primitive and self-centered drives and desires for survival and satisfaction. We also have an ego that wants power, domination over others, wealth, fame, and admiration. We have a superego that, based on our social conditioning, is often making us wrong. But this is not all of who we are. Freud’s concept of human nature does not take into consideration our higher or spiritual nature. Through this higher nature we are able to become aware of and observe these various aspects of ourselves, thus lessening their power and allowing our authentic self to emerge and grow. It is my opinion that our authentic self is able to experience true love and true joy, as many mystical writers attest.

### *Carl Rogers*

Carl Rogers (1951) in *Client Centered Therapy* does not discuss joy or happiness in his list of the potential benefits of therapy. “In every therapeutic orientation,” Rogers states, “people are helped. They feel more comfortable within themselves. Their behavior changes often in the direction of a better adjustment. Their personalities seem different both to themselves and to others who know them” (p. 131). For Rogers, learning in the therapeutic process is very important, especially learning new things about oneself, about new ways of behaving, and about new ways of relating to others. He also discusses the positive movement that can occur in clients from symptoms to self, from environment to self, from others to self, and from past to present (p. 135).

When Rogers (1951) suggests some of his major goals for the client in the therapeutic process, joy and happiness are not included. Instead he speaks about the client gaining more positive self-references, greater comfort, more integration, greater ability to cope with life problems, and the satisfaction of becoming more truly oneself. All of the things Rogers mentions are, of course, very worthwhile achievements and may potentially lead to the emotion of joy, the peak experience of joy, and ultimately even to the state of consciousness of true joy; however, it appears that for Rogers, neither joy nor happiness, in and of themselves, are relevant enough to be considered as goals. Sometimes, inner growth is taken so seriously that joy might be considered undignified, unscholarly, or unscientific: perhaps even a trivial pursuit. Rogers does use the word *satisfaction*, but this is not the same as joy. The importance of developing one’s capacity to experience joy cannot be overestimated. It is

my contention that true joy is one of the highest states of consciousness we can attain. It is the sure sign of spiritual attainment.

*B. F. Skinner*

B.F. Skinner (1971; 1985) apparently does not consider joy or happiness to be appropriate or relevant topics of discussion either. In *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Skinner (1971) states that there is a “need to make vast changes in human behavior” (p. 4), and he advocates the development of a technology of behavior to accomplish these changes. For Skinner, feelings, states of mind, and even the thinking process itself are by-products of behavior and not, as many people would like to believe, the causes of behavior. Skinner challenges,

We do not need to try to discover what personalities, states of mind, feelings, traits of character, plans, purposes, intentions, or the other perquisites of autonomous man really are in order to get on with a scientific analysis of behavior. (p. 15)

According to Skinner, one can neglect these things and go directly to the relationship between behavior and the environment. Humans are not autonomous beings who use their mental faculties to control their lives, Skinner argues. The environment, through stimulus and response, operant conditioning, and positive and negative reinforcement, controls human beings. “The environment,” Skinner (1985) insists, “selects behavior” (p. 291).

So what does Skinner feel about joy? He does not mention it. Therefore it might be safe to conclude that from Skinner’s point of view, receiving positive reinforcement from the environment (e.g., through rewards such as praise, admiration, approval, and credit) is as close as human beings will ever get to the experience of any type of joy or happiness.



It is not clear whether Skinner acknowledges the unconscious or not. He does not appear to acknowledge our spiritual essence. Undoubtedly, our environment conditions us to some degree, and we learn to respond to stimulus in predictable ways. Desensitization techniques can be effective in changing one's behavior. However, we are more than just our behavior, and we can become aware of some of our conditioning. We can question our beliefs and assumptions and gradually learn to free ourselves from our conditioned sense of reality. We can learn to validate ourselves from within rather than rely on praise and approval from our environment. This is not easy, but it can be done.

#### *Erich Fromm*

Erich Fromm (1966) on the other hand, considers joy and happiness to be essential to human physical and mental well-being. In *Man For Himself*, Fromm says

In fact happiness and unhappiness are expressions of the state of the entire organism of the total personality. Happiness is conjunctive with an increase in vitality, intensity of feeling and thinking, and productiveness; unhappiness is conjunctive with the decrease of these capacities and functions. (p. 185)

Fromm makes a direct connection between physical illness and unhappiness and speculates that some time in the future doctors might be able to determine to what degree the individual is experiencing happiness or unhappiness through examination of the body's chemistry. He also makes a connection between our emotional and mental capacities and our level of happiness and unhappiness. According to Fromm, "Unhappiness weakens or even paralyzes all our psychic faculties. Happiness increases them" (p. 185).

Fromm (1966) sees joy as humankind's greatest achievement: the fruit of the inner effort necessary for productive activity. Fromm goes head to head with Freud insisting that

happiness and joy are not the relief from tension or the satisfaction of a need but the companion of productivity. Fromm defines productivity in a broad sense to mean “man’s ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him” (p. 91). At this point in his life, Fromm does not distinguish between happiness and joy qualitatively but instead sees joy as a momentary expression and happiness as a long-term integrated experience of joy.

According to Fromm (1966), physical and mental suffering are also a necessary part of human existence. To avoid them one must become completely detached, which, he suggests, is a state of being that prevents happiness and joy. Fromm states that the opposite of happiness is not pain and suffering but depression that results from an inner bareness and lack of productivity.

In *To Have or Be?*, Fromm (1976) discusses the difference between having and being and joy and pleasure. According to Fromm having and being “are two different kinds of orientation toward self and world”(p. 24). In the having mode of existence the drive of the individual is toward possession and ownership of things and of people. In the being mode one experiences aliveness, authentic relatedness to the true reality, and the will to give, share, and sacrifice. Fromm also makes a distinction between being and appearing, believing that most of the time our behavior does not reflect our true character but is simply a mask we wear to attain what we want in the world. Being, on the other hand, requires seeing through the appearances to the truth about oneself, others, and the world. To achieve the being mode of existence Fromm suggests that we must give up the having mode, that is, the illusion of security we find in holding on to our possessions and our ego. “‘To be’ requires giving up

one's egocentricity and selfishness, or in words often used by the mystics, making oneself 'empty' and poor" (p. 89).

For Fromm (1976) the difference between joy and pleasure is directly related to the difference between the being and having modes respectively, although the difference is difficult to see, "since we live in a world of joyless pleasures" (p. 116). Pleasure, according to Fromm, can be gained from a number of pursuits in our society including making more money, acquiring more possessions, winning, social prestige, conventional sexual pleasure, drinking and taking drugs, and even satisfying one's sadistic or homicidal desires. However, Fromm insists, these intense pleasures or peaks of satisfaction or excitement may be motivated by pathological passions that do not lead to positive self development or the betterment of the human condition but to "human crippling"(p. 117). It is the lack of joy in human society, Fromm declares, that requires men and women to seek more and more exciting pleasures. According to Fromm,

Joy is the concomitant of productive activity. It is not a 'peak experience,' which culminates and ends suddenly, but rather a plateau, a feeling state that accompanies the productive expression of one's essential faculties. Joy is not the ecstatic fire of the moment. Joy is the glow that accompanies being. (p. 117)

Fromm's definition of joy includes some of the aspects of true joy that are presented in the definition in the introduction to this dissertation. It is the lack of true joy that is at the core of our materialistic society. Fromm's description of the *having mode* of being describes the craving and acquisitiveness of our culture today. His *being mode* is a spiritual state of being, and cultivating a state of emptiness, as he suggests, does seem to be necessary in order to become our spiritual selves. Fromm links joy with realizing and using the potentialities

within us. What he does not say is that our greatest potentialities are spiritual and to realize and to make use of them requires a surrendering to spirit or to something greater than self.

### *Albert Ellis*

Albert Ellis (1975) sees joy and happiness as important human goals; however, he suggests that the goal of joy and happiness must be modified with words like *appropriate* or *humanistic* because not all kinds of joy and happiness are good. Ellis defines humanism as the concept of working with the whole human being rather than with traits and performances so that the individual can live a happier, more creative self-actualizing life. Ellis lists a sequence of values that are necessary for achieving a humanistic concept of creative joy and happiness:

1. Humanity as a primary value.
2. Human survival and happiness as correlative values.
3. Forms of human happiness such as intimate relating, creative and productive work, and a vital, absorbing, and meaningful interest as significant derivative values.
4. Rational thinking to find appropriate, helpful emotions. (p. 11)

The term *appropriate* involves initially choosing survival and long-term happiness and then making choices that support these goals and the values listed above.

Ellis (1975) in his rational emotive therapy has developed criteria one can use to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate happiness. According to Ellis, although the sadist might enjoy doing cruel things, this kind of enjoyment is obviously not humanistic or appropriate. "Even noble sentiments," Ellis points out, "such as love and sacrifice can get taken to extremes where they sabotage individual and social well-being" (p. 12). Ellis's criteria for assuring appropriate happiness include (a) avoiding absolutistic or magical

statements about oneself, other humans, or the state of the universe, (b) disputing extremist propositions of a highly unlikely or improbable nature, and (c) challenging illogical propositions (pp. 12-13). Ellis encourages these actions because he believes if our self-statements or profound beliefs are irrational, they can cause harm and tend to bring about less joy and happiness.

Ellis's ideas are logical and good as far as they go. We are influenced by our thoughts, be they positive or negative. However, trying to change our thoughts from the outside is only working on the surface of who we are. In order for us to become the compassionate, selfless, noble beings that we truly are, our old self-centered self must die, and our higher, spiritual self must emerge. This takes a profound transformation. It cannot be accomplished through changing our thinking from the outside although this can be a first step.

#### *Abraham Maslow*

Abraham Maslow (1962) has done a great deal of work with what he calls *peak experiences*, and because these experiences appear to involve a kind of transcendent joy, learning about them may help us to understand more about how to find true joy. Most of us have had what Maslow defines as a *peak experience* at one time or another.

According to Maslow (1962), a *peak experience* is "a transient or temporary episode of self-actualization or health" (p. 11). Maslow became aware of what he later called the peak experience through his study of individuals who were very highly developed physically, psychologically, and spiritually, although *spiritual* would not be a word Maslow would necessarily use. During his investigation he discovered that these highly evolved individuals,

whom he labeled as self-actualizing, reported having moments of joy, ecstasy, rapture, and bliss--moments, they said, in which there were no doubts, fears, or unsatisfied yearnings. Instead, they reported feeling just a pure, positive experience of happiness and of being one with the world. Even more wonderfully, Maslow tells us, these individuals reported experiencing "the ultimate truth, the essence of things, the secret of life, as if veils had been pulled aside" (p. 9).

Although Maslow suggests that positive, permanent changes can occur to the individual who experiences a peak experience, it is not possible, he explains, to make peak experiences happen at will. He does suggest, however, that there is a frame of mind that is more conducive to receiving them. This frame of mind requires that the individual give up pride, will, and dominance and become receptive, surrendering control over one's life. "You have to be able to relax," Maslow says, "and let it happen" (p. 13).

If this is beginning to sound mystical, Maslow (1962) states that peak experiences and mystical experiences are similar in kind, but different in degree. One difference Maslow does mention is that, in contrast to the mystical experience, in the peak experience one does not need to have a dark night of the soul to break down pride. According to Maslow, healthy pride does not interfere with receptivity; it is only the unhealthy pride that needs to be broken down.

In *Future Visions*, a collection of Abraham Maslow's unpublished papers, Maslow (1996b) writes about happiness. In an unpublished essay written in 1964 entitled *The Psychology of Happiness*, Maslow (1996a) states that we must give up on the idea that happiness is a permanent state of consciousness that can be attained; instead, he insists, we must change our idea of what happiness is. According to Maslow, true happiness is not the

absence of pain but must include difficulties. In an unpublished lecture delivered in 1961 entitled *Laughter and Tears: Psychology's Missing Values*, Maslow (1996b) states

I am reporting to you that the happiest most ecstatic moment of bliss or rapture has within it an element of sadness and poignancy. In an odd way, this sadness is a beautiful thing. Should we take it away, we may destroy the peak-experience. (p. 102)

In this same lecture, however, Maslow states that the seeming opposites of pain and pleasure can be transcended. According to Maslow, at the highest level of human existence “there is a resolution of normal dichotomies, including those pertaining to pleasure and pain”(p. 100). Maslow states that he has observed this resolution of apparent opposites in high-functioning self-actualizing people and suggests that “the two qualities somehow become interwoven or fused together” (p. 100).

Maslow (1971), in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, presents the concept of *plateau experiences* and compares them to peak experiences. Maslow defines the plateau experience as “a serene and calm, rather than poignantly emotional, climatic, autonomic response to the miraculous, the awesome, the sacralized [and] the Unitive” (pp. 335-336).

According to Maslow (1971), there are several important differences between the peak experience and the plateau experience. One difference is that the plateau experience always has a poetic and cognitive aspect, while peak experiences are often just emotional. Another difference is the plateau experience is more likely to be brought about by one's will. Maslow states, “One can learn to see in this Unitive way almost at will. It then becomes a witnessing, an appreciating, what one might call a serene, cognitive blissfulness which can, however, have a quality of casualness and lounging about it” (p. 336). Another difference between the peak experience and the plateau experience that Maslow presents has to do with

death. The peak experience, according to Maslow, is like a little death and a rebirth. The plateau experience is less intense and is experienced as pure enjoyment and happiness.

Maslow gives the following example:

A mother sitting quietly looking, by the hour, at her baby playing, and marveling, wondering, philosophizing not quite believing. She can experience this as a very pleasant continuing contemplative experience rather than as something akin to a climactic explosion, which then ends. (p. 336)

Maslow (1971) sees the peak experience as a transient glimpse into the high state of Unitive consciousness that can come to almost anyone at any time, but he suggests the plateau experience, although it can actually be aspired to, can be achieved only through maturing, learning, and hard work. The spiritual disciplines, Maslow reminds us, take commitment, study, and self-discipline, and the walk on the spiritual path tends to be a life long process.

Maslow (1971) points out that the experience of transcendence is not just a dramatic moment “on top of Mt. Everest” (p. 337). “There is also,” he contends, “the high plateau where one can *stay* ‘turned on’” (p. 337). This second state sounds like true joy; however, when Maslow gives an example of the plateau experience he suggests it is like a mother gazing at her baby by the hour in a state of awe and wonder. This sounds like a temporary, not a permanent, state of being “turned on.” Perhaps the joyful, contemplative experience the mother is having is still just a glimpse into the Unitive state, albeit a longer and more calm one than in the peak experience. The high plateau state that Maslow describes as *staying turned on* could be the end state of consciousness that is gained through a lifetime of spiritual work. The joy felt in this state might be true joy.



Another confusion in Maslow's (1971) writing involves the apparent contradiction between his reference to the state of staying turned on, and his statement in his 1964 unpublished essay, *The Psychology of Happiness*, that there is no permanent achievable state of consciousness of happiness (Maslow, 1996b).

*Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*

According to positive psychologists Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000), the purpose of psychology should not be limited to fixing pathology, weakness, and damage, but should also focus on developing the positive characteristics that prevention researchers have found prevent mental illness and help make life worthwhile. These qualities include "courage, future mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight, to name several" (p. 7). These qualities also lead to *subjective well-being* the scientific term for what people generally call happiness.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) distinguish between pleasure and enjoyment and the positive experiences that lead to each. Pleasure, they suggest, comes from the satisfaction of homeostatic needs such as hunger, sex, and bodily comfort. Enjoyment occurs when people break through homeostasis and overcome their limitations "in an athletic event, an artistic performance, a good deed, a stimulating conversation" (p. 12). According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, it is enjoyment not pleasure that leads to growth and long-term happiness; however, despite this fact most people, if presented with the opportunity, choose pleasure over enjoyment.

Seligman (1990), in *Learned Optimism*, states that there are two ways of looking at life: optimistically and pessimistically. According to Seligman pessimists are likely to get depressed more easily, achieve less at work, have poorer physical health (a weaker immune system), and have a less pleasurable, more miserable life than optimists. Optimists, on the other hand, generally have a higher quality of life in key areas. They bounce back from defeat, achieve more at work, have better physical health, and may even live longer than their pessimistic counterparts. According to Seligman, which one you are depends on your inner dialogue and how you explain life's good and bad events (i.e., your explanatory style).

The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their entire fault. The optimists who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case [and that it] is not their fault. (pp. 4-5)

According to Seligman (1990), pessimists, if they choose, can learn to be more optimistic through developing a set of new cognitive skills to use when bad or good events occur in their lives, thereby gaining more health, productivity, and happiness.

Seligman (1990), and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), are on the right track. They, like Ellis, point out the effect thinking can have on our actions, our choices, and our lives. We are all in agreement here. How well, however, does changing one's thinking from the outside work? It can help, but true lasting change is a difficult, long-term process of psychological and spiritual growth, healing, and transformation. To *develop* our ego strength we must focus on our strengths, as Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi suggest. To *transcend* our ego we must recognize our weakness and surrender. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi do

mention the importance of certain spiritual qualities such as courage, wisdom, and faith; however, they are hesitant to go beyond the scientific paradigm.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in *Flow*, suggests that we will never find happiness by directly seeking it. Instead, happiness occurs when one is totally immersed in enjoying an activity so that all else is forgotten. This all-consuming focus on an activity is what Csikszentmihalyi calls an *optimal experience*. He defines *optimal experience* as an experience of harmony in which there is “order in consciousness” (p. 6). This state of harmony in which nothing else seems to matter but the activity in which one is engrossed he calls *flow*.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), to be able to have optimal experiences and enter the flow one must free oneself from the dictates of the body and from social controls so that one is able to control the mind moment by moment. The joy we derive from living is based on how the mind interprets life events. In order to have optimal experiences despite negative outside events one must learn to control one’s mind and one’s inner life. There is no intrinsic meaning to life. We must instill our own meaning into each thing that we do. Ultimately our individual purpose can merge with the universal flow.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has taken some of the truths from the major spiritual and wisdom traditions and translated them into the vernacular of late 20<sup>th</sup> century American psychology. This can be an aid to growth up to a certain point. However, this approach loses something in the translation: the beauty and the power of Spirit.

### *Carl Jung*

According to Carl Jung (1944/1968),

“Happiness” . . . is such a noteworthy reality that there is nobody who does not long for it, and yet there is not a single objective criterion which would prove beyond all doubt that this condition necessarily exists. As so often with the most important things, we have to make do with a subjective judgment. (p. 148)

Jung (1914 /1961) also states in a personal letter: “A man must be able to enjoy life, otherwise the effort of living is not worthwhile” (p. 278). Apparently Jung considers happiness and joy to be very important in life, and yet Forryan and Glover (1979) in the *General Index to the Collective Works of C. G. Jung*, have included no references to joy and only four references to happiness, two of which are cited here. Indeed, even in his description of the process of individuation, Jung (1928/1976) appears to ignore the goal of and potential for happiness and joy. Individuation, he suggests involves “[divesting] the self of the false wrappings of the persona . . . and of the suggestive power of primordial images” (p. 123), “coming to selfhood” and “self-realization” (p. 122), and ultimately achieving “the better and more complete fulfillment of the collective qualities of the human being” (p. 122).

Carl Jung’s (1928/1976) individuation process, as he describes it, appears to be a process that potentially can lead to union with God and true joy. He discusses the importance of stripping away the false self, and becoming aware of and overcoming the images from our collective unconscious and presumably our personal unconscious as well. He also speaks about becoming more human. Becoming spiritual does not mean becoming less human, but involves our expressing our total humanity. Yet there is no mention of joy. Perhaps there is a seriousness here that does not make much room for joy, and yet spiritual joy is something every human being wants and needs, and is a sure sign of spiritual development.

*Verena Kast*

Verena Kast (1991), a professor of psychology and an instructor at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, has her own feelings about this apparent disregard for happiness and joy and conveys her astonishment at how little attention psychology, and in particular depth psychology, pays to what she calls the emotions of elation: joy, inspiration, and hope. According to Kast, "Psychology has fastened our attention on anxiety to such an extent that we are quite wary when it comes to surrendering ourselves to joy" (p. 15). Kast defines joy as a vital emotion of elation that allows us to transcend ourselves, and she accuses depth psychology of promoting the idea that individuation is a serious process. She also suggests that the depth psychologist may even see the goal of individuation to be "to live the remainder of our lives in tragic resignation, conscious of darkness and difficulty, while dismissing the lighter, happier side of life" (p. 3). Kast however, sees the human being as a creature of both anxiety and joy: anxiety propelling the individual into a mode of isolation, joy creating a connectedness to other persons. Kast believes that both solitude and relationship are necessary for individuation to take place.

Kast (1991) proposes that therapeutic work should begin at the level of joy. She sees joy as a strengthening resource that can be drawn upon to strengthen the ego complex. She also believes that joy helps us to experience an affinity with that which transcends us, with other persons, and with the spiritual. In order to recapture one's ability to feel joy Kast recommends that an individual create a biography of joy, in which one remembers and relives the moments of joy throughout one's life. The purpose of this biography is to open up one's capacity to feel joy.

The joy about which Kast speaks seems to be closer to the emotion of joy, not the true joy as defined in this dissertation; however, it sounds as if she believes the emotion of joy can lead us to our spirit. It is the contention in this study that the emotion of joy does play an important role in the transformational process that can lead to the union with God that brings true joy. Her biography of joy seems like a practice that can help individuals experience the emotion of joy. This involves opening to our bodies as well, however, as emotions are experienced in the body.

### *Robert Johnson*

According to Jungian analyst Robert Johnson (1987), "It is the great tragedy of contemporary western society that we have virtually lost the ability to experience the transformative power of ecstasy and joy" (p. vi). Instead, Johnson explains, we look for physical equivalents that can never provide the spiritual nourishment we really need, and we are thus left with craving, addiction, and a gnawing emptiness. The spiritual nourishment we need to fill this emptiness, Johnson insists, can only be found through the inner experience of divine ecstasy and joy, and to have this experience we need to awaken the dormant source of ecstasy and joy within us.

In *Ecstasy: Understanding the Psychology of Joy*, Johnson (1987) uses the Greek myth of Dionysus to represent the lost archetype of ecstasy. According to Carl Jung (1944/1968), "An archetype means a *typos* [imprint], a definite grouping of archaic character containing, in form as well as in meaning, *mythological motifs*. Mythological motifs appear in pure form in fairy tales, myths, legends, and folklore" (p. 41). Johnson describes

archetypes as patterns or blueprints of basic human drives that we all share in the collective unconscious.

The Greek god Dionysus, according to Johnson (1987), “represents the continual rebirth of life in the spring, the irrational wisdom of the senses, and the soul’s transcendence” (p. 11). Because our society has focused almost exclusively on the rational, the masculine, and the scientific, we have repressed the Dionysian archetype and have forgotten how to experience spiritual ecstasy and joy. Instead, Johnson warns, “we can express our need for Dionysus only symptomatically: through substance abuse, child molesting and domestic violence, muggings, wars, terrorism, madness” (p. 25). It is imperative, Johnson states, that we acknowledge and express this archetype of ecstasy and joy, and to do this we must leave behind the *sensual* world of materialism that is devoid of spirit, and learn to embrace the *sensuous* world, the world of our emotional and irrational natures: the divine realm. If we can do this, Johnson promises, we can begin a wonderful new life.

According to Johnson (1987), we can reach Dionysus and the archetype of ecstasy through three psychological disciplines: (a) active imagination, (b) dream work, and (c) ritual. In active imagination we can dialogue with the image of Dionysus presented by our imagination. In dream work we can connect with the inner Dionysus in the framework of dreaming. In ritual we can create a divine connection between Dionysus and ourselves.

Johnson recognizes the importance of joy in the healing of our society. The material world is filled with false promises and transitory pleasures. We must, indeed, begin to turn away from this world and open ourselves to the true joy within. It would have been nice if Johnson had included a body discipline in his list of ways of getting in touch with our

capacity for joy (e.g., yoga, walking). The body has its own wisdom and the vitality of joy is expressed through it. The body, the mind, and the spirit must express themselves in harmony.

*Frances Vaughan*

In *Shadows of the Sacred*, Frances Vaughan (1995), one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, states that the world in which we live makes many false promises of happiness based upon having more consumer products, more money, more power, and greater control over nature (to name a few); however, she warns that the perpetual search for happiness cannot be successful if separated from spirituality. Vaughan defines spirituality as a “subjective experience of the sacred” (p. 5) and suggests that spirituality leads to healing and joy.

If we search for happiness where it can never be found, we are like the fool who looks for his key under a lamppost where the light seems better, although he lost the key inside the house where it is dark. The key to meaning is never found in the outside world of appearances. By turning attention inward, we may discover a new source of meaning in the universe within. (p. 38)

Vaughan (1995) distinguishes between the world of the ego and the soul suggesting that when we are identified with our ego we are ruled by our desires for excitement, stimulation, and domination. When we are identified with our soul, we long for peace, joy, and self-expression. Vaughan sees the soul as “the spark of divinity that links body and mind to spirit”(p. 109) and as “the witness of all experience” (p. 114).

When we remember who we are as souls on a journey of awakening and realize that we have been caught by illusions of separation, we discover a boundless source of peace and joy that is always present in the innermost depths of the soul. (p. 135)



Vaughan provides a rich, complex, and healing model of the human being, which includes the body, mind, soul, and spirit. She apparently sees the soul as a spark of spirit within each individual that links each individual with the universal Spirit. She also suggests how important it is to identify with the soul and not the ego. Identification with the soul, or spirit, and not the ego, enables us to become selfless. The desire for the false happiness of the world then begins to fall away, creating the emptiness within necessary to find true joy.

### *Roger Walsh*

Roger Walsh (1999), in *Essential Spirituality*, states that our culture is lost in the illusion that if we can just get enough of the “physical foursome of money, sensuality, power, and prestige” (p. 32) we will finally achieve the happiness we are seeking. According to Walsh, we then compound the problem by becoming attached to what we decide will make us happy. However, Walsh insists, happiness is not found in these temporary pleasures because they are not what we really want and need.

According to Walsh (1999), true happiness and bliss are available to us; we just have to learn where and how to look. Walsh describes bliss as “a type of happiness that is infinitely more profound and satisfying than any of our fleeting pleasures” (p. 31), and he says to attain it we must let go of our attachments to the things that do not bring us true happiness and bliss. We then must identify what does bring us true happiness. According to Walsh, what does bring us true happiness is our awakening to our true self. The chapter headings Walsh (1999) has used in his book give a good picture of what practices he thinks are necessary to awaken to one’s true self and find bliss or “a taste of our spiritual nature” (p. 66).

1. Transform your motivation: reduce craving and find your soul's desire.
2. Cultivate emotional wisdom: heal your heart and learn to love.
3. Live ethically: feel good by doing good.
4. Concentrate and calm your mind.
5. Awaken your spiritual vision: see clearly and recognize the sacred in all things.
6. Cultivate spiritual intelligence: Develop wisdom and understand life.
7. Express spirit in action: embrace generosity and the joy of service. (pp. vii-viii)

The definition of bliss that Walsh (1999) provides seems to correspond to true joy.

His stress on turning away from the false pleasures of our material culture and following a spiritual practice is essential, it seems, to developing our higher or divine nature. All of the seven practices he lists above are positive. Walsh does appear to be very action oriented: the seven practices are all about what we can *do* to make spiritual awakening happen. There is, of course, the necessity to *be* instead of to do, and to let go rather than to gain or to achieve. By not doing, and by letting go of our ways of being in the world, spiritual development can come through God's grace. Our own efforts can only take us so far. It is a balance each one must find.

#### *Roberto Assagioli*

Assagioli (1988/1991) describes joy as a "precious effect of the spiritual life shining down like a bright ray of light from the sun of the Spirit to illuminate and give life to the human personality" (p. 266). In *Transpersonal Development*, Assagioli states that in all major spiritual traditions one of the essential characteristics of Spirit is bliss, which, he suggests, confirms the spiritual origin of joy.

According to Assagioli (1988/1991), this divine bliss manifests itself as pure joy in our highest self and then "gradually works its way down to the different levels of the

personality, refracting and combining with other elements” (pp. 266-267). These various levels of human joy have different degrees of intensity and different values, and finally end up as physical joy, which manifests as well-being and the satisfaction of the senses and one’s natural needs.

Assagioli (1988/1991) differentiates between spiritual joy and “the pleasures of the senses, the pleasures of ambition, achievement, and material victories” (p. 267). The pursuit of these latter pleasures does not bring lasting happiness, Assagioli insists, and creates within oneself a drying up of the source of pure happiness and true joy. However, according to Assagioli, our higher spiritual nature will not be ignored forever, and it gives us pain and torment until we begin to pay attention to it. In the beginning we try to avoid this pain through the frantic pursuit of amusements and distractions in the outside world, but eventually the tide turns, and we begin our ascent, a process of replacing physical pleasures with greater and greater degrees of spiritual joy.

Assagioli (1988/1991) also discusses the coexistence of pain and joy, which he suggests is experienced by those in the intermediate stage of development who have awakened to spiritual consciousness but still have many aspects of the lower personality (e.g., ego-centered desires and attachments). In these people the personality can be suffering, and at the same time their soul can be filled with the joy of the spirit. Some of the characteristics of this joy of the spirit include “peace, security, and a sense of complete self-fulfillment.” It is also “life giving and rejuvenates the body” (p. 267).

According to Assagioli (1988/1991), it is difficult to feel joy, and he discusses some of the obstacles to achieving it. These include: (a) rebelling against pain and adversity, (b) irritability, (c) being too demanding, (d) taking life and ourselves too seriously, and (e)

dwelling on the tragic side of things. On the positive side, acceptance, generosity, praise, and gratitude “help the flower of joy develop and bloom” (p. 270). Other sources of joy include (a) having an appreciation of the spiritual view of life and its glorious goal, (b) finding communion in love and friendship, (c) working and being active, and (d) being of service to others. “But,” Assagioli explains, “the most direct method of reaching spiritual joy is that of silence and meditation: this may lead to contemplation, communion, and identification with the Supreme Being, Who is glory and bliss” (p. 272).

Assagioli (1988/1991) proposes a model of joy as coming down from the spiritual level to different levels of the person, and this is appealing. Of course, none of the many models of the human being can be scientifically proved or disproved. Assagioli also mentions the body and how joy becomes the satisfaction of one’s physical needs. So many spiritual writers ignore the body and so many secular writers ignore the spirit. Often both of these aspects are ignored leaving us with only the rational mind, our infantile drives, or our conditioned reflexes for comfort. Assagioli also states that spiritual joy can best be reached through contemplation and identification with the Supreme Being. It is not clear if he is using the word *identification* to mean union in the mystical sense. However, his idea that joy is found through going within to the silence and being with a divine Being is similar to the definition of true joy. His idea of experiencing both joy and suffering simultaneously is an important one. The spirit is joyful at the demise of the ego.

### *The Major Spiritual and Wisdom Traditions*

Although this dissertation is primarily focused on true joy in Christian mysticism, it is important to honor the other major spiritual and wisdom traditions and the wisdom they have

given the world about true joy and how to find it. It is not my intention to examine these traditions in any depth but to provide the reader with a taste of some of the primary literature from these rich and beautiful traditions in case there is a future interest in learning more about them. Because my research is on Christian mysticism, however, it is beyond the scope of this study to critique these other traditions.

### *Jewish Mysticism: Hasidism*

The underlying purpose of all great religions and religious movement is to beget a life of elation of fervor which cannot be stifled by any experience, which, therefore, must spring from a relationship to the eternal, above, and beyond all individual experiences. (Buber, 1947/1975, p. 2)

According to Jewish mystic and scholar Martin Buber (1906/1988), Jewish mysticism “is one of the great manifestations of ecstatic wisdom”(p. 4). The first period of Jewish mysticism occurred in the 8th to the 6th century (B.C.E.) and was the era of the mystical visions of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah (Drob, 2000). According to Drob in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*, contemporary scholarship believes that the Kabbalah, an overall term for the practice of Jewish mysticism, developed from a combination of early Jewish (*Merkaveh*) mysticism, Neoplatonism, and Gnosticism. From the earliest times the practice of Jewish mysticism had always been secret, the mystical teachings only understood by an elite few. In 11th century Spain a philosopher, Ibn Gabriol, named these secret oral teachings Kabbalah or *tradition* (Epstein, 1979, p. xvi). The Kabbalah, according to Drob, “was a reaction of the emotional and symbolical against the conceptual, and has always flourished when the rational has become obsessional and rigid” (p. 3).

According to Buber (1906/1988), Hasidism is “the last and highest development of Jewish mysticism . . . [and] is a highly realistic guidance to ecstasy as to the summit of existence” (p. 10). Hasidism was a Jewish spiritual movement in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Europe that brought the esoteric wisdom of the Kabbalah to the masses and breathed into these teachings the core concept of “a life of fervor, [and] of exalted joy” in the world--as it is--moment by moment (Buber, 1947/1975, p. 2). Its founder was Israel ben Eleazar, the Baal Shem Tov, or Master of the Holy (Good) Name. The Baal Shem Tov was the first to renew the ancient concept of joy and make it one of the foundations of Judaism. In the Hasidic system Jews were called on to rejoice, and pray, and dance in faith and ecstasy (Klepfisz, 1986).

According to Epstein (1979), at the center of the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings was *devekuth*, a cleaving to God in a very personal and emotional way, “not by means of fasts and mortification, but through joyful celebration of the Divine in everyday life” (p. 108). According to Hasidic teachings, cleaving to God was the highest state of consciousness human beings could achieve, and it came, not through pain and repentance but by returning to one’s source or root through joyful prayer and rejoicing. With asceticism, according to Buber (1906/1988), the spiritual being, the *neshama*, is empty, confined, and asleep. It is only in joy that it can awaken and fulfill itself in the Divine.

All innate sorrow wants only to flow into the fervor of your joy. But this joy must not be the goal toward which you strive. It will be vouchsafed you if you strive to “give joy to God.” Your personal joy will rise up when you want nothing but the joy of God--nothing but joy in itself. (Buber, 1947/1975, p. 4)

For many years the Hasidic legend was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Martin Buber received the Hasidic stories and legends from notebooks, from

pamphlets, from folk books, and from word of mouth, and he has reconstructed them and told them anew. In Buber's (1958/1966a) work, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, editor and translator Maurice Friedman states that Buber almost single-handedly re-created Hasidism and transformed it "from a little-known movement, misprized and neglected by the whole of Western culture, into one of the recognized great mystical movements of the world" (p. 11).

The Hasidic stories are beautiful, powerful, filled with a timeless wisdom, and often contain a sense of romance, magic, and delight. Buber (1955/1969) relates the Hasidic tale, *The Conversion*, in which the Baal Shem Tov's story-telling ability is described. The joy in this description is tangible--pulling at the heart and awakening the hope asleep inside.

But the narration of the Baal-Shem was not like your narrations, children of the present, which are twisted like a little human destiny or round like a little human thought. Rather the vari-coloured magic of the sea was in them and the white magic of the stars, and most ineffable of all, the soft wonder of the infinite air. And yet it was no report of distant times and places that the story told; rather, under the touch of its words, the secret melody of each person was awakened, the ruined melody which had been presumed dead, and each received the message of his dispersed life, that it was still there and was anxious for him. It spoke to each, to him alone, there was no other; he was everyone, he was the tale. (Buber, 1955/1969, p.152)

The importance in Hasidic stories of the active power in the living word is described in this tale:

A rabbi, whose grandfather had been a disciple of the Baal Shem, was asked to tell a story. "A story," he said, "must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself." And he told: "My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal Shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story." (Buber, 1947/1975, pp. V-VI)

This tale seems to speak to the healing power of spiritual joy. The Baal Shem Tov was known as and indeed describes himself as a joyful man, and it is quite possible that the joy felt by the Baal Shem while hopping and dancing in prayer was experienced at the time by

his disciple, and later, when the disciple recounted the story, he experienced that same joy again so powerfully that he was healed of his lameness.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was the great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, and according to Buber (1906/1988), based his spiritual devotion on serving God in joy. According to Epstein (1979), Rabbi Nachman was “the most hopeful, cheerful, and optimistic [man] of Hasidism” (p. 123). Rabbi Nachman always emphasized the importance of being happy and in *Azamra!* (1984) he teaches about the way to happiness. *Azamra!* is the English translation of Rabbi Nachman’s original lesson found in *Likutey Moharan* 1:282. This lesson was first given by Rabbi Nachman in 1807.

Initially the lesson seems very simple, almost obvious, and yet wisdom often seems obvious once we see it. Basically, Rabbi Nachman’s advice is: we must “be very sure to be happy always and keep far way from depression” (p. 8). Well, this is what we all want, but how do we do this? According to Rabbi Nachman, we can do this by judging others favorably and finding their good points no matter how wicked they might be because, in so doing “you genuinely move him out of the scale of guilt and into the scale of merit . . . and as a result he will return to God” (p. 8). We must also look for the good within ourselves, no matter how difficult this might seem, in order to “recover your inner vitality and bring joy to your soul” (p. 9). We must then continue to find points of good in ourselves so that we can avoid sinking into despair, and so that we too can return to God. *Azmara* means “I will sing,” and Rabbi Nachman suggests that when an individual continues on this path of finding the good points in others and in oneself, melodies are made and “then [we] will be able to pray, to sing, and give thanks to God” (p. 11).



Two important concepts in Hasidism that appear to be particularly relevant to our quest for true joy are (a) the unification of the soul, and (b) *hitlahavut*, *the burning*, or the ardour of ecstasy. According to Buber (1950/1966b), Hasidism believed that the divine force in the core of the human soul could unify the diverging and conflicting elements in the soul. To the Hasid, union of the soul meant union of the whole person, body and spirit, and unless this occurred one should not attempt to undertake some unusual work for fear of failure.

According to Buber (1950/1966b), the unification of the soul can never be completely achieved, as there are always inner difficulties one must confront. But, any action we take with a united soul helps the soul toward greater unification: “a steadier unity then was the preceding one” (p. 24). Ultimately it is possible to reach a point where one can rely on the soul, “because its unity is now so great that it overcomes contradiction with effortless ease” (p. 24). Vigilance is still necessary, Buber states, but it is “a relaxed vigilance” (p. 24). The unification of the soul is not done for the sake of one’s own salvation, but so that the world may be redeemed.

True, each [soul] is to know itself, purify itself, perfect itself, but not for its own sake--neither for the sake of its temporal happiness nor for that of its eternal bliss--but for the sake of the work which it is destined to perform upon the world. (p. 34)

This passage implies that both temporal happiness and eternal bliss can be gained through the unification of the soul. Perhaps true joy can be described as a unity of body and spirit in which, with a relaxed vigilance, one can effortlessly overcome contradiction.

Buber (1955/1969) also discusses *hitlahavut* or ecstasy and the different levels of Holiness a Hasid can attain. According to Buber, *Hitlahavut* is the climb to God rung by rung, and the one who experiences it experiences holiness. “*Hitlahavut* unlocks the meaning

of life. Without it even heaven has no meaning and no being" (p. 17). According to Hasidic thought,

If a man has fulfilled the whole of the teaching and all the commandments, but has not had the rapture and the burning, when he dies and passes beyond, paradise is opened to him, but because he has not felt rapture in the world, he also does not feel it in paradise. (p. 17)

Hasidic legends, according to Buber (1955/1969), tell of those special few on a high level of *hitlahavat*, "who remembered their earlier forms of existence, who were aware of the future as of their own breath, who saw from one end of the earth to the other and felt all the changes that took place in the world as something that happened to their own bodies" (p. 20). However, according to Buber, even this is not the highest state of *hitlahavat*. To describe this even higher state, Buber retells the legend of one master who, when he wanted to see individual things, had to control his spiritual vision by putting on spectacles, "for otherwise he saw all the individual things of the world as one" (p. 20).

The highest rung of ecstasy that has been reported, according to Buber (1955/1969), is when one's ecstasy is transcended. In this state one becomes detached from one's own being. The perfect form of this state of ecstasy can be seen in the dance. A Hasidic tale describes the dancing of one Zadick (i.e., a teacher and leader of the community).

His foot was as light as that of a four-year-old child. And among all who saw his holy dancing, there was not one in whom the holy turning was not accomplished, for in the hearts of all who saw he worked both weeping and rapture in one. (p. 21)

This is an example of the earthly life of *hitlahavut* in which holy men detach themselves from being and cleave to God. This tale speaks about the resolution of the opposites. Perhaps the Zadick's working of *both weeping and rapture in one* described in the above passage is a description of the state of true joy, both in the Zadick and in the observer of his dance.

### *Shamanism*

Shamanism is not a religion in the sense that it involves a goal of unifying with a Higher Reality, and thus true joy as defined in the introduction does not seem to exist. According to Roger Walsh (1990), the term *ecstasy*, in the case of shamanism, is not bliss. Instead, it describes the experience of journeying or an out-of-body experience. According to the religious historian Mircea Eliade (1951/1972), shamanism is a technique of ecstasy, and the shaman is the “great master of ecstasy” (p. 4), a “specialist in the sacred” (p. 509), and the guide of the human soul. According to Walsh (1990), shamanism is a “family of traditions” (p.11) in which the practitioner, either male or female, is able to enter, at will, into altered states of consciousness (i.e., ecstatic trances) and experience traveling to upper, middle, and lower worlds. In these worlds the shaman is able to relate to the people, animals, and spirits (both helpful and demonic) and thereby gain power and knowledge to bring back to help heal the members of the tribe.

Shamanism is a magico-religious phenomenon primarily of Siberia and Central Asia, but it has also been found in such diverse cultures as aboriginal Australia, native North and South America, eastern and northernmost Europe, and southern Africa. Despite cultural differences, the heart of shamanism is the same: the shamanic journey and the shamans’ control of or intercession with spirits for the betterment of the tribe. According to Walsh (1990), it can be considered the “most ancient of humankind’s religious, medical, and psychological disciplines” (p. 3). It is also the first to use altered states of consciousness for religious purposes.

According to anthropologist Michael Harner (1980), in this altered state of consciousness, the shaman “contact[s] and utilize[s] an ordinarily hidden reality” (p. 20) to help others. It is this shamanic journey or soul flight that is at the core of shamanism and sets the shaman apart from other ecstasies, healers, and mystics. This soul flight may be joyful but the joy is apparently only temporary.

The making of a shaman is a two-fold process: ecstatic and didactic. In the ecstatic part of the process the shaman, as discussed above, undergoes initiatory ordeals in dreams and trances and is taught by spirits. In the didactic part of the process the shaman is taught by old shaman masters and must learn shamanic techniques for entering into altered states of consciousness, the names and functions of the spirits and how to contact and control them, diagnostic and healing practices, the mythology and genealogy of the clan, and the secret language used to communicate with the spirits. This training is to enable the shamans to transform their transitory initiatory ecstatic experience into a more permanent state in which they can see spirits.

Knut Rasmussen (1929/1976), in *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, writes about an expedition he went on to learn about the shamans in the Eskimo culture, and some of his stories discuss an intense experience of joy found in various aspects of the shamanic process. The following is a story of the shaman Aua and what appears to be his ecstatic initiatory crisis:

Everything was . . . made ready for me beforehand, even from the time when I was yet unborn; nevertheless, I endeavoured to become a shaman by the help of others; but in this I did not succeed. . . . Then I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song, with only room for the

one word: joy, joy! And I had to use the full strength of my voice. And then in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way. I had gained . . . my enlightenment, the shaman-light of brain and body, and this in such a manner that it was not only I who could see through the darkness of life, but the same light also shone out from me, imperceptible to human beings, but visible to all the spirits of earth and sky and sea, and these now came to me and became my helping spirits. (pp. 118-119)

According to Eliade (1951/1972), it is the seeing of spirits, either in a dream or when awake, that is the verification of the shamanic vocation as this is the sign of the shaman's transcendence of the nonsacred human condition.

Rasmussen (1929/1976) tells a story of Uvavnuk, a female shaman, who has a terrifying and joyful encounter with her helping spirit:

Uvavnuk had gone outside the hut one winter evening to make water. It was particularly dark that evening, as the moon was not visible. Then suddenly there appeared a glowing ball of fire in the sky, and it came rushing down to earth straight toward her. She would have got up and fled, but before she could pull up her breeches, the ball of fire struck her and entered into her. At the same moment she perceived that all within her grew light, and she lost consciousness. But from that moment also she became a great shaman. She had never before concerned herself with the invocation of spirits, but . . . the spirit of the meteor had entered into her and made her a shaman. She saw the spirit just before she fainted. It had two kinds of bodies, that rushed all glowing through space; one side was a bear, the other was like a human being; the head was that of a human being with the tusks of a bear.

Uvavnuk . . . without knowing what she was doing, came running into the house . . . singing . . . [T]here was nothing that was hidden from her now, and she began to reveal all the offences that had been committed by those in the house. Thus she purified them all.

Every shaman has his own particular song, which he sings when calling up his helping spirits; they must sing when the helping spirits enter into their bodies, and speak with the voice of the helping spirits themselves. The song which Uvavnuk generally sang, and which she sang quite suddenly the first evening, without knowing why, after the meteor had struck her, was as follows:

“The great sea  
Has sent me adrift,  
It moves me as the weed in a great river,

Earth and the great weather  
 Move me,  
 Have carried me away  
 And move my inward parts with joy." (p. 122)

When the shamans experience a connection with their interior life joy seems to be the result.

The shamanic journey is the most unique and powerful technique of shamanism, and it is the shamans' abilities to access an ecstatic state of consciousness that enables them to explore the cosmos. How this ecstatic experience relates to true joy, however, is unclear. According to Walsh (1990), there are three stages of the shamanic journey: (a) preparation and purification, (b) entrance into the shamanic trance or altered state of consciousness, and (c) the journey itself. The preparation and purification phase often involves a period of fasting, isolation, and celibacy. The séance itself can involve a family or perhaps the entire village, and during the ceremony the shaman(s) might drum, sing, dance, play the guitar, or ingest mushrooms to aid in the attainment of the ecstatic state of consciousness necessary for flight. The shaman then summons the spirit helpers and speaks the secret or animal language, imitating the cries of beasts and songs of birds (Eliade, 1951/1972).

The shamanic journey is undertaken for various purposes including (a) to perform a horse sacrifice and ascend to the sky, (b) to search for the causes of and cure for an illness, (c) to escort the soul of a deceased person to the underworld, (d) to search in the underworld for a patient's strayed soul, (e) to placate angry spirits, and (f) to perform a ceremony of exorcism of evil spirits. Sometimes the journey is taken for the sheer joy of it (Eliade, 1951/1972; Rasmussen, 1929/1976; Walsh, 1990).

Walsh (1990) states, "During the journey shamans experience themselves as disembodied spirits no longer limited to, or constricted by the body, able to roam vast

distances at great speeds" (p. 222). The shamans believe that the worlds they explore, the strange animals and plants they see, and the spirits with whom they connect have a separate reality outside of their own mind. Some think that it is the shaman's soul that is traveling. Others think that both the body and soul of the shaman travel the cosmos.

In any case, the shaman always describes the journey in minute detail either during the journey or afterwards.

Harner (1980), a contemporary shaman, describes the shaman's cosmic traveling as a very joyful journey:

In the SSC [Shamanic State of Consciousness], the shaman typically experiences an ineffable joy in what he sees, an awe of the beautiful and mysterious worlds that open before him. His experiences are like dreams, but waking ones that feel real and in which he can control his actions and direct his adventures. While in the SSC, he is often amazed by the reality of that which is presented. He gains access to a whole new, and yet familiarly ancient universe that provides him with profound information about the meaning of his own life and death and his place within the totality of all existence. During his great adventures in the SSC, he maintains conscious control over the direction of his travels, but does not know what he will discover. He is a self-reliant explorer of the endless mansions of a magnificent hidden universe. Finally, he brings back his discoveries to build his knowledge and to help others. (pp. 21-22)

Harner defines what he calls the Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC) as the ecstatic trance state the shaman achieves plus the learned methods and point of view that the shaman uses in the altered ecstatic state. However, Walsh (1990) does not agree that there is only one altered state of consciousness that all shamans experience. According to Walsh, despite what many popular writers believe, there is no evidence to suggest that all shamans assume the same state of consciousness during their journeys, and he points out that "the concept of a 'state of consciousness' is a static crystallization of what is in real life a dynamic flow of experience" (p. 216). Each shaman uses a variety of techniques and each technique may

induce its own unique state, although there may be some overlapping. Walsh goes on to say that not only are there different states of consciousness in shamanism, “there are also significant differences between religions in the type and depth of realization” (p. 31). Whether it is Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Shamanism, or Christianity, each has its “own unique family of states” (p. 216).

Do the shamans experience true joy? Although the Shamans do appear to experience periods of joy (e.g., during their mystical birth and often in the journey itself), this joy appears to be temporary. Also, the shamans do not seem to be seeking what in the west we might describe as a union with God or the consciousness of the Divine presence. Perhaps the ecstatic experience in the shamanic journey corresponds to the consciousness of the presence of God. Are they experiencing the joy found in union with God and not using this terminology? Walsh (1990) does not know but states, “I have found no reference to [this mystical union] in the [shamanic] literature; nor apparently have others” (p. 239). However, Marcoulesco (1987) believes that the ecstatic techniques used in shamanism imply the existence of some kind of supreme being that the shaman can reach in the journey to heaven, and she states, “The ecstatic states attained by the shamans through mushroom intoxication, lasting sometimes from four to seven days, seem to represent an early matrix of mystical union” (p. 243).

### *Buddhism*

Cultivating the factors of Enlightenment with the pure mind of meditation, you will stop all grasping. Taking no delight in attachment and destroying all defilements, full of light, you will completely pass beyond the suffering of this world. (The Buddha, Dhammapada, 1995, p. 47)



When the average man or woman thinks of Buddhism, suffering, not joy, is often the first thought that comes to mind. However, according to Rahula (1974), a Buddhist monk, scholar, and translator of ancient Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist texts, Buddhism is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but realistic. Buddhism, Rahula insists,

is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world. It looks at things objectively. . . . It does not falsely lull you into living in a fool's paradise, nor does it frighten and agonize you with all kinds of imaginary fears and sins. It tells you exactly and objectively what you are and what the world around you is and shows you the way to perfect freedom, peace, tranquility and happiness. (p. 17)

Rahula (1974) suggests that the essential truths of the Buddha, according to the original texts, can be found in an examination of The Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth states that life is *dukkha*, which most scholars translate as suffering, but, Rahula states, also includes the concepts of imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, and insubstantiality. According to Rahula, the Buddha does not deny happiness in life when he says life is suffering. Indeed, he acknowledges different forms of happiness such as that gained in family life, in friendship, from sense pleasures, from material comfort, and so forth. However, the Buddha includes these in *dukkha* because they involve craving, attachment, loss, or impermanence, all of which bring suffering. The Buddha teaches that examining and penetrating into this suffering is essential to the attainment of the happiness we are all seeking. That this intense focus on suffering can lead to true happiness is one of the paradoxes of Buddhism.

The Second Noble Truth is the origin of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* arises because of our thirst for and attachment to such things as sense pleasures, wealth and power, opinions, beliefs, and ideals.

The Third Noble Truth is the cessation of *dukkha*. To eliminate *dukkha* it is necessary to eliminate thirst.

The Fourth Noble Truth is that of the Way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. This is the Middle Path that involves neither indulgence in sense pleasures nor rigid asceticism. This path is also known as The Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path includes eight categories: (a) Right Understanding, (b) Right Thought, (c) Right Speech, (d) Right Action (e) Right Livelihood, (f) Right Effort, (g) Right Mindfulness, and (h) Right Concentration.

According to the Tibetan Nying-ma lama Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay (1982) in *Tantric Practice in Nying-ma*, human beings want what is good and satisfying, that is, happiness; however, they do not know how to achieve it. He lists the causes of happiness calling them the ten virtues:

Three physical virtues

- Abandoning killing and sustaining life
- Abandoning stealing and engaging in giving
- Abandoning sexual misconduct and maintaining pure ethics

Four verbal virtues

- Abandoning lying and speaking the truth
- Abandoning harsh words and speaking lovingly
- Abandoning senseless talk and talking sensibly

Three mental virtues

- Abandoning covetousness and cultivating joy for others' prosperity
- Abandoning harmful thoughts and cultivating helpfulness
- Abandoning wrong ideas and learning correct views. (p. 21)

Practicing these ten virtues can bring a kind of happiness now and can help lead to the goal of Buddhism: Ultimate Happiness or *nirvana*. Happiness or joy does not appear to come without self-discipline and moral effort.

The Tibetan Lama Rinbochay (1982) defines joy as, "the antithesis of jealousy; it is an inner delight at the good fortune of others" (p. 128). Rinbochay includes joy in what is

called the “Four Immeasurables” (a) equanimity (a sense of even-mindedness toward all beings), (b) love (a wish that all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness), (c) compassion (a wish that all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering), and (d) joy (delight in the happiness and prosperity of beings) (p. 220). Rinbochay explains that the reason these four qualities are called the “Four Immeasurables” is because cultivating them accumulates immeasurable merit.

Rahula (1974) defines joy as “the quality quite contrary to the pessimistic gloomy or melancholic attitude of mind”(p. 75). He also points out that joy (*piti*) is included as one of the Seven *Bojjhamagas* or “Factors of Enlightenment,” which, he explains, are the essential qualities to be cultivated for the realization of nirvana.

Pandita (1993), a meditation master and scholar, defines *piti* as rapture or joy, and states that it is “a physical and mental lightness and agility resulting from purity of mind, a delightful interest in what is happening” (p. 287). There are five types of rapture or joy: Lesser Rapture, Momentary Rapture, Overwhelming Rapture, Uplifting or Exhilarating Rapture, and Pervasive Rapture. According to Pandita, the Buddha taught that wise attention brings rapture. Pandita also lists eleven more ways to develop rapture including remembering the virtues of the Buddha, reflecting on perfect peace, and considering your own virtue.

*Vipassana meditation.* Meditation is at the heart of the Buddhist path to true happiness (*nirvana*), and according to Pandita (1993), *vipassana* meditation is practiced in order to reach the Buddha’s state of purity and to contribute to peace in the world. Meditation, Pandita explains, is a process of developing “the controlling factors” of faith, effort or energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Eventually these factors can

become powerful enough to dominate the mind continuously. Joy, true happiness, or *nirvana* is found through awareness and the long-term spiritual practice of meditation.

According to Pandita (1993), when one begins to practice meditation one can experience a happiness that is more enjoyable and more refined than the pleasure found through the senses. Pandita speaks of the four *vipassana jhanas* and explains how each one brings its own kind of joy. The term *jhana* “refers to the quality of mind that is able to stick to an object and observe it” (p. 179). If the mind is not wandering it can be more mindful of what is happening and can penetrate into the true nature of things. This penetration into the true nature of things could bring the joy that Christians say is found in the union with God. According to Pandita (1993), in the first *vipassana jhana* the yogi attains insight into the arising and passing away of phenomena. The five hindrances (i.e., sense desire, anger or aversion, restlessness, sloth and torpor, and doubt) are kept away, and the yogi experiences the happiness of seclusion.

In the second *vipassana jhana* the yogi leaves behind reflective thinking and enters bare attention. The yogi experiences the happiness of concentration in the form of rapture and comfort.

In the third *vipassana jhana* rapture fades, and mindfulness and concentration deepen. The yogi experiences the happiness of equanimity. The mind realizes that the happiness of rapture and joy is rather coarse.

In the fourth *vipassana jhana* the yogi experiences equanimity and one-pointedness of mind. This is the happiness of equanimity, stillness, and peace, and is the deepest happiness of all. These four *jhanas* are known as the happiness of renunciation. However, according to Pandita (1993), the yogi must transcend this level in order to experience the

Ultimate Happiness of *nibbana* (nirvana). Apparently, for the yogi there are many different kinds and levels of happiness or joy. Trying to determine whether these subjective states are similar to true joy is not possible here; however the joy found in the fourth *jhana* could be similar to true joy

*Nibbana* occurs, Pandita (1993) explains, “upon the cessation of mind and matter. It is the peace of the extinction of suffering” (p. 207). *Nibbana* is blissful because it is not based on the fleeting pleasure from the senses. Nonsensate experience is “much more refined, much more subtle, much more desirable” (p. 210). The following is a part of a song that is sung by those who emerge from a state Pandita calls nonexperience:

How wonderful it is to have this suffering of mind and matter extinguished in *nibbana*. When all sorts of suffering connected with mind and matter are extinguished, one can deduce that the opposite will occur, that there is happiness. So in the absence of suffering we noble ones rejoice, so blissful is *nibbana*. Happy is *nibbana* as it is free from suffering. (p. 210)

According to Pandita, the characteristics of *nibanna* are “permanence, eternity, nonsuffering, bliss, and happiness” (p. 107). *Nibanna* is the experience many people call enlightenment and is completely free from sorrow, greed, hatred, delusion, pride, conceit, jealousy, and miserliness (p. 211). It is, according to Pandita, “irreversibly transforming” (p. 272). The bliss and happiness found in *Nibanna* may be similar to the true joy found in union with God but, again, the research required to determine this cannot be undertaken here.

According to Rahula (1974), in the sacred texts of Buddhism *nirvana* is often described in negative terms such as “*Tanhakkhaya* ‘Extinction of Thirst,’ *Asamkhata* ‘Uncompound,’ ‘Unconditioned,’ *Viraga* ‘Absence of Desire,’ *Nirodha* ‘Cessation,’ *Nibbbana* ‘Blowing out’ or ‘Extinction’ [of suffering]” (p. 36). *Nirvana* is Absolute Truth, and in Buddhism “the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything

is relative, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul or *Atman* within or without” (p. 39). *Nirvana* extinguishes the false belief that there is a permanent self.

*Dzokchen Tibetan Buddhism.* According to Dowman (1994), the Dzokchen tradition of the Nying-ma school of Tibetan Buddhism “is the highest, most secret, and most direct path to Buddhahood in the tradition of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism” (p. 3). It is called The Great Perfection. The Four Noble Truths are at the heart of the Dzokchen tradition, and Dowman states that those who follow this path are different from those who are not aware of The Four Noble Truths because of their conviction that *satisfying their desires has nothing to do with happiness*.

Dowman (1994) states that true happiness is found in the state of *nirvana*, and it is only through cessation of attachment that this state is achieved. According to Dowman, the quality of happiness is unending, ‘empty,’ blissful awareness. If happiness doesn’t possess these attributes it is not the Buddha’s happiness but rather a lesser degree of suffering in which attachment is still involved. According to Dowman, detachment means “without identification with or separation from” (p. 30), and the yogin’s goal is to be detached from but compassionate in every situation.

According to Dowman (1994), the starting point in Dzokchen practice is ignorance or dualist perception and lack of Gnostic (mystical) awareness. Ignorance, he suggests, is a function of attachment, and nirvana is liberation from attachment and ignorance. The intent is to penetrate each moment of consciousness with “the purifying flame of awareness” (p. 5), thus achieving nirvana. Dowman describes nirvana as “a fundamental level of reality, omnipresent and indestructible . . . that we can know experientially and can learn to abide in

constantly and uninterruptedly” (p. 13). In Dzokchen, the attainment of nirvana is guaranteed in this lifetime. This dissertation hypothesizes that true joy can be found in this lifetime in union with God. We don’t know, however, whether the Christian union with God is the same state of consciousness as the Buddhist *nirvana*.

The *Dhammapada* (1985) is a collection of teachings given by the Buddha in many different places and at many different times. These teachings tell about how the level of awareness of mind affects the presence or absence of happiness.

All things have the nature of mind. Mind is the chief and takes the lead. If the mind is clear, whatever you do or say will bring happiness that will follow you like a shadow. (p. 3)

All things have the nature of mind. Mind is the chief and takes the lead. If the mind is polluted, whatever you do or say leads to suffering which will follow you, as a cart trails a horse. (p. 3)

Just as rain leaks into a house with a poorly made roof, desire and attachment will seep into a house unprotected by meditative awareness. (p. 7)

Just as rain does not enter a house with a well-made roof, desire and attachment do not enter a house protected by meditative awareness. (p. 7)

Happy in this life, happy in the next; the one who does good is happy in both. The happiness from the good you have done will delight you, and when you pass to the heaven realms, your delight will continue to grow. (p. 9)

The mind is like space, difficult to see, moving wherever it pleases. Watching it carefully is wise indeed: a guarded mind invites true joy. (p. 19)

The mind is flighty and elusive, moving where it pleases. Taming it is wonderful indeed--for a disciplined mind invites true joy. (p. 19)

Holy beings do not communicate personal desires in any situation, for happiness and misery are all the same to them. Elation and depression are not found in the wise. (p. 43)

The wise desiring happiness, give up all that they desire, and thus subdue all the emotional turmoil of the mind. (p. 45).

Apparently desiring happiness or joy does not bring them. Only the controlled mind can bring what the Buddha calls true joy.

### *Sufism*

According to transpersonal psychologist and Sufi Sheikh Robert Frager (1997) in his introduction to *Essential Sufism*, the Sufis are often identified as the mystics of Islam; however, many Sufis believe that mysticism of Sufism is the hidden mystical teaching at the core of every religion. The goal of Sufism, Frager explains, “is the elimination of all veils between the individual and God” (p. 1).

In his introduction to *Essential Sufism* Frager (1997) states that historians date the appearance of Sufism to the beginnings of Islam about the 9<sup>th</sup> century C. E. Islam is the religious tradition taught by the prophet Mohammad, who received the initial divine revelation of the Koran (*Qur'an*) in the year 610 C. E. The Koran, as the word of God, is at the heart of the religious consciousness of Muslims and of most Sufis. Frager points out that although some religious authorities suggest that one can become a Sufi without becoming a Muslim, many other authorities insist that one must be a Muslim before one can become a Sufi.

According to Sufi Sheikh Idries Shah (1964), early Sufism “was based upon love, operated through a dynamic of love, [and] had its manifestation through ordinary human life, poetry and work” (p. 31). The Sufi, according to Shah, is known as “the seeker, the Drunken man, the enlightened one, the good, the Friend, the Near One, the dervish, a Fakir (humble, poor in spirit), or *Kalendar*, Knower (Gnostic) wise, lover, esoterist” (p. 55). Shah states that in Sufi literature it is said that “mankind sleeps in a nightmare of unfulfillment” (p. xiv).



Philosophy, according to Sufi thought, has been undermined because its wisdom has become only *truisms* that we endlessly repeat to each other without ever experiencing what they really mean. The mind of humankind must be liberated so that “intuition becomes the guide to human fulfillment” (p. 26). This can be achieved through a number of practices including prayer, concentration, contemplation, and the repetition of the Names Of God.

If Sufism recognizes one basic truth it is the doctrine of the Unity of Being (Bakhtiar, 1976; Helminski, 1992). According to Laleh Bakhtiar (1976),

the ultimate meaning of the Unity of Being is “to see things as they are”: to realize that all is reflected in the mirror of one’s own being. It is the dissolution of the profane consciousness of man who sees all things as independent of God: to realize that one was never separate from God; that God in His Oneness is both immanent and transcendent (p. 10).

Huston Smith (1991), a scholar of the world’s religions, identifies three paths to the Divine in Sufism: love mysticism, which yields “heart knowledge;” ecstasy, which brings “visual or visionary knowledge;” and intuition, which brings mental knowledge through *the eye of the heart* (p. 261). According to Smith, in Sufi love poetry, Persian poets especially focused on the pain of separation from a loved one “to deepen their love of God and thereby draw close to him” (p. 259). This is the theme of the lover and the Beloved: the lover or the devotee longs to be united with the Beloved or Allah.

The second path to the Divine outlined by Smith (1991) is the path of ecstasy. According to Smith, ecstatic means “to stand outside oneself,” and the experience of ecstasy involves experiences that are different from usual ones. At times, Smith explains, the Sufis become so engrossed in their inner experience that they enter a trancelike state becoming unaware of “who they are, where they are, or what is happening to them” (p. 261). Smith suggests that Sufis who have been in this ecstatic state say they experience their will being

overpowered by a superior will. The Sufi poets also write about union with God and refer to this state as the intoxicating wine that creates “drunkenness” in the devotee. This ecstatic intoxicated state does not seem to conform to my idea of the sustained level of consciousness of true joy.

The third approach to the divine, according to Smith (1991), is “intuitive discernment” (p. 261). The organ for this discernment is the *eye of the heart*. According to Vaughan-Lee (1996), the *eye of the heart* opens when the heart is awakened and “with this eye the lover is able to read the signs of her Beloved to see his face reflected in the world around” (p. 20). Vaughan-Lee explains that if we look at the world with devotion we can see the signs of God’s existence. Then, when we realize only He can fulfill us, we can shift our focus from the Creation and become inwardly aligned with the Creator.

Vaughan-Lee (1996) sees union with God as “an experience of our own nonexistence” (p.75) and states that the Sufi path requires the death (surrender) of the ego. Vaughan-Lee points out that it is very easy to get caught up in the desires encouraged by our society; however, *behind every desire is the true need that can only be satisfied by God*. Through concentration on the Beloved we can experience the fulfillment from within, thus enabling our outer desires to fall away.

According to Vaughan-Lee (1996), ultimately within our heart we can experience Union with the Divine; however, we still must also experience our separation from the Divine. The ego is still present with its difficulties, Vaughan-Lee warns; however, if we embrace the duality of our Union and our separateness we can reach a state in which “we no longer belong to the world or to our ego” (p. 30).

According to Ernst (1997), "Of all the products of the Sufi tradition by far the best known and appreciated is the legacy of Sufi poetry, together with the music and dance that have accompanied it" (p. 147). Two of the most beloved Sufi poets are Maulana (our Master) Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) and Shams-ud-din Muhammed Hafiz (1320-1389). Let us allow these extraordinary men of God to speak in their own words, and may they lead us away from our sorrow to the joy they have found.

The Reed Flute's Song (excerpt)

Listen to the story told by the reed,  
Of being separated.

"Since I was cut from the reedbed,  
I have made this crying sound.

Anyone apart from someone he loves  
Understands what I say.

Anyone pulled from a source  
Longs to go back.  
At any gathering I am there,  
Mingling in the laughing and grieving,

A friend to each, but few  
Will hear the secrets hidden

Within the notes. No ears for that.  
Body flowing out of spirit,

Spirit up from body: no concealing that mixing. But it's not  
given us

To see the soul. The reed flute  
Is fire, not wind. Be that empty." (Rumi, 1995, pp. 17-18)

Laughing At The Word Two

Only  
That Illumined

One  
 Who keeps  
 Seducing the formless into form  
 Had the charm to win my  
 Heart.

Only a Perfect One  
 Who is always  
 Laughing at the word

*Two*  
 Can make you know  
 Of  
 Love.

(Hafiz, 1999, p. 84)

For A Single Tear

I  
 Know of beauty  
 That no one has ever  
 Known.

How could that be possible  
 When I may seem  
 So new in infinite time?

It is because God belongs to only you!

Did you hear that?  
 Did you hear what Hafiz just said?

God belongs to only you!

It is the only reasonable payment  
 For a single  
 Tear. (Hafiz, 1999, p. 65)

### The Worms Waking

This is how a human being can change:  
 There's a worm addicted to eating  
 grape leaves.

Suddenly, he wakes up,  
 call it grace, whatever, something  
 wakes him, and he's no longer  
 a worm.

He's the entire vineyard,  
and the orchard too, the fruit, the trunks,  
a growing wisdom and joy  
that doesn't need  
to devour. (Rumi, 1995, p. 265)

### *Hindu Mysticism*

According to Huston Smith (1991), a fundamental precept in Hindu mysticism involves the existence of an infinite reservoir of love, strength, wisdom, and bliss that underlies the human self and that never dies. This hidden self in every life is called the Atman, and according to German theologian and philosopher Rudolph Otto (1962), "The soul of man, the 'inward atman' is nothing less than [the] one eternal, unchangeable, homogenous Brahman itself" (pp. 19-20). When the atman or the individual soul merges with Brahman or the whole, this is considered the mystical union that abolishes all duality (Marcoulesco, 1987, p. 240).

According to the Indian scholar Dasgupta (1927), it is only in the *Upanishads*, the sacred book of classical Hinduism, that we find the earliest and more sincere spiritual craving for immortality and Brahman: the highest and the greatest. According to Oxford professor R. C. Zaehner (1962), there are two main trends in the *Upanishads*: one toward monism or non-dualism, the other toward a dualistic belief in a transcendent, and yet still immanent, God. Both paths lead to the bliss of union with Atman/Brahman. In the theory of monism one is not seeking a God that is separate from oneself to whom one prays, or whom one tries to please, but instead, one is searching for "an experience which is at once self-illuminating and blissful and which is different from all else that is known to us" (Dasgupta, 1927, pp. 46-47). When this stage of supra-consciousness (*prajnana*) is reached, ordinary consciousness is

dissolved and submerged in Brahman, and all duality disappears. “There is no person who knows, nor anything that he is aware of” (p. 38). It is not known whether the bliss found in union with Atman-Brahman is the same as the true joy found in union with God. The ineffable nature of these two experiences and the imprecision of language are two of our main barriers to understanding.

According to Dasgupta (1927), the mysticism of the Upanishads states that one can come in touch with Brahman through a superior intuition or by a “supreme moral elevation” (p. 56), and an “untiring and patient search”(p. 56), but one must give up all desire for earthly things.

Perennial Joy (excerpt from *The Katha Upanishad*)

The joy of the spirit ever abides,  
 But not what seems pleasant to the senses.  
 Both these, differing in their purpose, prompt us  
 To action. All is well for those who choose  
 The joy of the spirit, but they miss  
 The goal of life who prefer the pleasant.  
 Perennial joy or passing pleasure?  
 This is the choice one is to make always.  
 The wise recognize this; the ignorant  
 Do not. The first welcome what leads to joy  
 Abiding, even though painful at the time.  
 The latter run, goaded by their senses,  
 After what seems immediate pleasure.  
 (In the Katha Upanishad as cited in E. Easwaran, 1991, p. 52)

This passage reminds us that the pleasure and joy of the material world are not substantial and the pursuit of them causes only suffering. We must renounce these passing pleasures in order to find perennial joy. It is this perennial joy (true joy?) that we want.

You Are That (excerpt from *The Chandogya Upanishad*)

This is the teaching of Addalaka to Shvetaketu, his son:

As by knowing one lump of clay, dear one,  
 We come to know all things made out of clay –  
 That they differ only in name and form,  
 While the stuff of which all are made is clay

As bees suck nectar from many a flower  
 And make their honey one, so that no drop  
 Can say, "I am from this flower or that,"  
 All creatures, though one, know not they are that One.  
 There is nothing that does not come from him.  
 Of everything he is the inmost Self  
 He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.  
 You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that.  
 (In the Chandogya Upanishad as cited in E. Easwaran, 1991, p. 172-173)

You are that, dear reader; you are that!

*Vedanta mysticism.* According to Otto (1962), Acharya Sankara is the classic teacher of the *Advaita* school of Indian Vedanta mysticism and is usually thought of as the greatest philosopher of India. Sankara follows a monistic doctrine in which true being is the Eternal Brahman, unchanging, and undivided. The multiplicity of things, for Sankara, exists only in *maya*, the world of illusion. Sankara teaches that salvation comes with union with *Brahman* and that one cannot know *Brahman* from the scriptures but from inward vision and realization or "knowledge through the self" (p. 52).

According to Otto (1962), although Sankara's experience and the experience of the individual who has attained *Brahman-Nirvana* are particularly restrained, immobile, and static, the state of *Brahman-Nirvana* is not a state without feeling. On the contrary, for Sankara, *Brahman* is not only being and spirit but deep, endless joy. This joy in *Brahman*, Otto explains, is not "joy in general" because there are different kinds of joy, and it is not the same as other mystic joys; instead, "it is a joy which also differentiates this form of mysticism" (p. 169). For Sankara, however, life in the world (*samsara*) is unbearably painful

and is the complete opposite of *Brahman-Nirvana*. For this reason Sankara believes that salvation in *Brahman* can only occur after death. In order to experience a joy without suffering, some kind of a transcendence of one's humanness seems necessary, for inherent in being human is suffering. Having a body brings the suffering of illness, decay, and death. How one could transcend one's humanness and one's suffering in order to find a permanent state of joy while still have a body is a mystery.

According to Dasgupta (1927), it is the view of the immortal and unchangeable self--*Atman-Brahman*--that is the root of Indian mysticism. However, although the union with *Brahman* is discussed at length in the Upanishads, there is no clear explanation of how to achieve it. Dasgupta explains that it was Patajali around 150 B.C. who described the practices of and the philosophic basis for yoga mysticism and thus explained for the first time how yoga could be used "for the emancipation of man from the bondage of his mind and senses" (p. 64).

The yogins or seers who practiced the discipline of yoga wished more than anything else to become free from the bonds or restrictions imposed upon them from all mundane experiences. According to Dasgupta (1927), the first thing that compelled the yogin to want this extraordinary freedom and to follow the path of yoga was the lack of interest in all worldly things (*varagya*). For the yogin there is no pleasure or satisfaction derived from the things of the world, not because there are no pleasures to be found, "but because their desire for attaining their highest good, their true selves, was so great that it could tolerate no compromise with any other kind of desire" (p. 68). Dasgupta also explains that the yogins were extremely sensitive and experienced suffering much more intensely than the ordinary



person. According to Dasgupta (1927), this disinclination toward the world can only be attained when the mind has risen to the highest state of absolute purity.

*Yoga mysticism.* Yoga mysticism perceives the self as “the ultimate principle of pure consciousness, distinct from all mental functions, faculties, powers, or products” (Dasgupta, 1927, p. 68). However, for some reason we lose touch with this Self or Spirit and, thinking it does not exist, we ascribe its qualities to the mind; the mind takes the place of the Spirit. Therefore, the yogins believed that it was necessary to control all activities of mind in order to let the true Self shine through. Yoga, according to Dasgupta, “consists in stopping the conscious and sub-conscious mental flow entirely and absolutely” (p. 71). In other words, the yogins wanted to destroy the mind.

The yogins insisted on the highest level of moral perfection, and one of the most important requirements was to do no harm to any living being. Other essential positive qualities the yogins cultivated were “purity, contentment, indifference to physical difficulties, study and self-surrender to God” (Dasgupta, 1927, p. 73). The yogins had to be able to control their physical movements, and breath control was also crucial. Both of these abilities enabled the yogin to completely suspend the respiratory system and other functions of the body and stay in a state of suspended animation apparently for hours, days, or in some instances, weeks at a time.

For the mind there was yoga concentration, a technique aimed toward stopping the mind to prevent its tendency toward “comparison, classification, association, assimilation and the like” (Dasgupta, 1927, p. 78). This is accomplished by fixing one’s mind on an object so intently that the mind becomes one with it. This state is called *samadhi*. When *samadhi* occurs, a new kind of intuition is produced (*prajnana*) through which the yogin can

experience the true nature of things. As the yogin progresses, new forms of yoga knowledge are experienced, “and the yogin develops many miraculous powers over natural objects and over the minds of men” (p. 80).

According to Dasgupta (1927), both in the teachings of the *Upanishads* and in the yoga of Patanjali the ultimate goal is contentless and nonconceptual, the extinction of all our experiences. Although apparently this is a blissful state, there is no separation between the subject and object. Therefore there is no enjoyer to enjoy the joy.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a work of great sacredness and popularity among the Hindus, and according to R.C. Zaehner (1962), a scholar of Hinduism, it originated and facilitated a major change in Hinduism from a technique of ascetic virtues, renunciation, and extinction of desires, to a religion of proper enjoyment and self-abandonment to God. According to Dasgupta (1927), the mysticism of the Gita is based on the perception that the seeker can find liberation or highest realization through actions that are carried out (a) without personal attachment, (b) without a selfish motive, and (c) in dedication to God. “It is faith in the special grace of God to those who have surrendered themselves to Him that forms the essence of the Gita” (Dasgupta, p. 119).

The *Bhagavad-Gita* offers three paths leading to liberation and the Absolute: the path of knowledge (*jnana*), the path of action (*karma*), and the path of *bhakti*. Knowledge is the intuitive apprehension of *Brahman*. Action is the path to God through work. *Bhakti* yoga is the way to God through love. It is the path of love that seems to be the most relevant to us on our quest for true joy.

*Bhakti* yoga. According to Zaehner (1962), *bhakti* yoga, the way of loving devotion, introduces a new element into Hinduism, and from the 10<sup>th</sup> century on “all that is most vital

in Hinduism manifests itself in the form of *bhakti*” (p. 134). This new element is the belief that not only does God lead the soul to the state of *Brahman*, but God also causes the soul to enter into God. God then loves the soul and asks to be loved by it in return. *Bhakti*, according to Zaehner, means participation in God’s life.

Whatever You Do (excerpt from *The Bhagavad-Gita*)

A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even  
 Water, offered to me in devotion,  
 I will accept as the loving gift  
 Of a dedicated heart. Whatever you do,  
 Make it an offering to me--  
 The food you eat or worship you perform,  
 The help you give, even your suffering.  
 Thus will you be free from karma’s bondage,  
 From the results of action, good and bad  
 Give not your love to this transient world  
 Of suffering, but give all your love to me.  
 Give me your mind, your heart, all your worship.  
 Long for me always, live for me always,  
 And you shall be united with me.  
 (In the *Bhagavad Gita* as cited in E. Easwaran, 1991, p. 104)

In the *Bhagavata Purana* from the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. the idea was presented that devotion is the supreme source of bliss or spiritual joy, and it is this spiritual joy, not wisdom or philosophical knowledge, that is the highest spiritual goal (Dasgupta, 1927). It is the surrender to God and a life spent in God intoxication that brings the most happiness. Indeed, the enjoyment from the constant companionship with God keeps the individual “absolutely happy and content with all things” (p. 123).

According to Huston Smith (1991), the *bhakta* (the individual who follows the devotional path to God) does not see God as oneself, and does not try to identify with God. Instead the *bhakta* sees God as something other, and adores God with body, mind, heart, and soul. The degree to which one is successful in this is the degree to which one can experience

joy. The love the *bhakta* has for God and the joy found in this love do not seem to come from a union with God. In union with God one does not see God as something separate from oneself. In *bhakti* yoga God is experienced as something separate from oneself. Therefore the joy found through *bhakti* yoga does not appear to be the same experience as true joy.

The legend of Krishna (the wayward lover) as an incarnation of God as man provided the *bhakta* with a personal human God to be adored. Thus, according to Dasgupta (1972), not only is the *bhakta* able to see God as all-powerful and transcendent but also as a dear friend or passionate lover with whom to participate in a drama of divine joy. According to Smith (1991), all the basic principles of *bhakti* yoga are found in Christianity.

Dasgupta (1927) gives us a dazzling description of the joy the *bhakta* can experience:

Thus they learn to live a life of supreme devotion. They come to experience such intense happiness that all their limbs and senses become saturated therewith and their minds swim, as it were, in a lake of such supreme bliss that even the bliss of ultimate liberation loses its charm. Such an individual desires to live on, enjoying the love of God with heart, soul and body. . . . So great is his passion for God that it consumes all his earthly passions. . . . As a great spring of happiness, it is ultimate and self-complete.

The *bhakta* who is filled with such a passion does not experience it merely as an undercurrent of joy which waters the depths of his heart in his own privacy, but as a torrent that overflows the caverns of his heart into all his senses. Through all his senses he realizes it as if it were a sensuous delight; with his heart and soul he feels it as a spiritual intoxication of joy. ( pp.125-126)

One of the most well-known practitioners of this mysticism of divine love is the Indian mystic, religious reformer, and poet Kabir. Kabir was born around 1440 of Mohammedan parents and was a disciple of the Hindu ascetic Ramananda. The influence of Sufism on his writing is obvious.

In the introduction to a collection of Kabir's (1915) poems, Evelyn Underhill describes the songs of Kabir as love poetry written with a missionary intention. According to

Underhill, for Kabir the universe is a Love Game; God is the manifestation of love, and God's activity is joy. "All is soaked in love," Underhill explains, and "the whole of creation is the Play of the Eternal Lover; the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma's love and joy" (p. xxx). Perhaps we too can participate in this joyful Love Game with God; Kabir can show us how.

## XVII

What a secret splendour is there, in  
the mansion of the sky!  
There no mention is made of the rising  
and the setting of the sun;  
In the ocean of manifestation, which  
is the light of love, day and night  
are felt to be one.  
Joy for ever, no sorry, no struggle!  
There have I seen joy filled to the  
brim, perfection of joy;  
No place for error is there.  
Kabir says: "There have I witnessed  
the sport of One Bliss!" (Kabir, 1915, p. 24) excerpt

## XLI

O SADHU! The simple union is the  
best.  
Since the day when I met with my  
Lord, there has been no end to the  
sport of our love.  
I shut not my eyes, I close not my  
ears, I do not mortify my body;  
I see with eyes open and smile, and  
Behold His beauty everywhere:  
I utter His Name, and whatever I see,  
it reminds me of Him; whatever  
I do, it becomes His worship.  
The rising and the setting are one to  
me; all contradictions are solved.  
Wherever I go, I move round Him,  
All I achieve is His service:  
When I lie down, I lie prostrate at  
His feet.

He is the only adorable one to me: I  
 have none other.  
 My tongue has left off impure words,  
 it sings His glory day and night:  
 Whether I rise or sit down, I can  
 never forget Him; for the rhythm  
 of His music beats in my ears.  
 Kabir says: "My heart is frenzied,  
 and I disclose in my soul what is  
 hidden. I am immersed in that  
 one great bliss which transcends  
 all pleasure and pain." (Kabir, 1915, pp. 48-49)

Kabir appears to have experienced a bliss or joy that is free from suffering. And he says that this joy can last forever. This sounds like true joy. Whether he is experiencing this as a permanent state or is only hypothesizing about a permanent state of joy, we don't know. In any case, his writings speak of a beauty, love, and joy that our hearts yearn to know.

### *Mysticism*

In this section of our review of the literature we will find different definitions of mysticism, and we will be able to look more closely at exactly what a mystic is. Several different models of the stages of the mystic path will be provided. We will then look briefly at the concept of union with God in Christian mysticism. Finally we will take a short look at some of the key Christian monks and mystics whose inspired, and sometimes radical, ideas have laid the foundation for the history of Christian mystical thought. These ideas can direct us toward experiencing true joy in our own union with God.

The main purpose of this research into mysticism and in particular into the writings of selected Christian mystics is to learn about true joy and what steps need to be taken in order

to prepare for this transformative level of consciousness and how to cultivate it. Let us be open to this powerful experience as we continue on our quest for true joy.

What is mysticism and who are the mystics? According to Evelyn Underhill (1999) in her classic book *Mysticism*, in all the major spiritual and wisdom traditions occasionally certain of the most highly developed individuals have such a craving for the Absolute Truth that they refuse to be satisfied with the common experiences of life and embark upon a spiritual quest. Their purpose is to find a way out of the ordinary and a way to a more desirable state of being in which they can experience a personal connection with Ultimate Reality or what most theologians call God. Mysticism focuses on the renunciation of worldliness and the transformation of self in Ultimate Reality or God as the only path to joy. This quest is not an intellectual pursuit of knowledge, Underhill insists, but requires a profound inner change. It is a real, living, breathing communion between a human being and the Absolute. It demands the complete surrender of everything one has and is. It is the ultimate journey a human being can make.

According to Underhill (1999), we are all potential mystics because “the germ of that same transcendent life, the spring of the amazing energy which enables the great mystic to rise to freedom and dominate his world, is latent in all of us; an integral part of our humanity” (p. 445). How, then, we must ask, have the mystics in various spiritual traditions achieved a level of spiritual development that is apparently so far beyond what ordinary human’s have been able to achieve? This is an important question for those of us who are seriously participating in the quest for true joy because, if the mystics of diverse spiritual and wisdom traditions have achieved the consciousness of true joy as I believe many of them have, we want to know, indeed we must know, how we might follow in their footsteps.

The mystics of all faiths throughout the ages have claimed to have a unique experience of Ultimate Reality that is very different from, and more profound than, the ordinary person in their community, and although the Absolute can be found in the religious observances of that community (e.g., prayer, meditation, rituals), it can also, they insist, be found outside of them. According to McGinn (1992), in Christian mysticism, “what differentiates it [the mystics’ experience of God] from other forms of religious consciousness is its presentation as both subjectively and objectively more direct, even at times immediate” (p. xix). However, McGinn states that this immediacy is found only in the encounter itself, not in the preparation for it, nor in its subsequent recounting.

According to McGinn (1992), the experience of immediacy takes place “on a level of the personality deeper and more fundamental than that objectifiable through the usual conscious activities of sensing, knowing, and loving” (p. xix). The mystics believe that this immediate meeting with God is not subject to the mediations of their personal history nor those “found in all thought and speech” (p. xx) but lies in between. McGinn expresses some skepticism about the accuracy of this claim but withholds judgment pending further scrutiny.

McGinn (1994), in *The Growth of Mysticism*, defines mysticism as “the consciousness of a direct or immediate presence of God” (p. xi). Mysticism, he suggests, is not a religion in itself and cannot be understood outside of its context within the theology of the religion in which the mystic believes (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism). In other words, mysticism is an element in a religious tradition. According to McGinn (1992), the mystical element in Christianity is “that part of its beliefs and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to the immediate presence of God” (p. xvii).



One of the most interesting concepts of Christian mysticism involves the paradox of the necessity for both the presence *and* the absence of God. In the early history of Christian mysticism, both Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century and Dionysus in the next century discuss this concept. According to McGinn (1992), the presence and absence of God “is one of the most important of all the verbal strategies by means of which mystical transformation has been symbolized” (p. xviii). An example of this is contained in the story of the Divine Lover (God or Christ) meeting in ecstatic union with the soul, and then leaving her. Many mystics, according to McGinn, believe that it is “the consciousness of God as negation [nothing], which is a form of the absence of God, that is the core of the mystics’ journey” (pp. xviii-xix). Is there joy found in the absence of God? If so is it the same joy that is experienced in the presence of God (i.e., true joy)? We will need to continue on our quest to look for an answer to these questions.

According to William Inge (1964), the Dean of St. Paul’s, religious mysticism is “the attempt to realize, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal and of the eternal in the temporal” (p. 5). Cox (1985), in *Handbook of Christian Spirituality* defines mysticism as “the passionate and all consuming quest for supreme and perfect knowledge, for the Ultimate Reality philosophy calls Truth and theology acknowledges as God” (p. 19). In *Mysticism: Experience, Response and Empowerment*, Hollenback (1996) describes mysticism as the “dramatic metamorphosis of the waking consciousness caused by simultaneously focusing the attention and quieting the mind together with the responses in both deed and thought that it generates” (p. 1). Underhill (1964), in *The Mystics of the Church*, states, “Mysticism is the direct intuition or experience of God; and the mystic is a person who has . . . such a direct experience” (p. 9).

Underhill (1964) insists that for the religious mystics of all faiths the first hand personal knowledge of the Absolute is critical, for their religion is not one of the intellect or one of outer forms and empty ritual, but comes from a powerful intuitive connection with the Divine. Indeed, this connection with the Absolute is, Underhill reminds us, the foundation upon which all the great religions are built. For the Christian mystics, therefore, God and Christ are not just figures of intellectual belief but “living facts experientially known at first hand” (p. 10).

Inge (1964), in his classic *Christian Mysticism*, conceives of mysticism as a type of religion resting on the following propositions:

1. The soul and the body can see and perceive.
2. Since we can only know what is like ourselves, in order to know God we must have a spark of the divine nature already in us.
3. We must be holy and pure in heart to be able to see God. Sensuality and selfishness prevent union with God.
4. Our guide on the upward path to God is unselfish love. The mystic seeks God solely out of love for Him. (pp. 6-8)

Inge states that it is the nature of religious doctrine and symbols to lose their mystical origin and become lifeless, and he proposes that the historical purpose of mysticism is to appear “as an independent active principle” bringing with it “fresh springs of the inner life” to religious rigidity or unbelief. Mysticism, he suggests, is “the spirit of reformations and revivals” (p. 5). Indeed, the mystical element is truly the lifeblood of religion and is the impetus for all that is beautiful, noble, and true in philosophy, in the arts, and in the human spirit.

### *Stages of Mystical Development*

According to Underhill (1999), the validity of the reality of mysticism is supported by the fact that the stages of spiritual development described by different schools of contemplatives from different traditions are practically in the same sequence. She also points out that the typical mystic, although very difficult to identify, does seem to progress through marked stages of pain and stages of pleasure. The Mystic Way, or scala perfectionis, a model of spiritual development first used by the Neoplatonists and then the medieval mystics, has been divided into three stages: The Purgative Life, the Illuminative Life, and the Unitive or Contemplative Life.

Michael Washburn (1994), in *Transpersonal Psychology in Psychoanalytic Perspective*, describes four stages of transcendence experienced by the ego, the Dark Night of the Senses (purgation), the Awakening to the numinous (pseudonirvana), the Dark Night of Spirit (the second Night), and Integration (the Regeneration by and Integration in the spiritual power within the non-egoic core of the psyche).

Underhill (1999) suggests a five-stage model of mystical development: The Awakening of the Self, Purgation, Illumination, Dark Night of the Soul, and Union. In all of these models one truth emerges: the Mystic Way is clearly a transformational roller coaster ride of unimaginable terror, beauty, despair, joy, and ultimately, for those remarkable few, victory. It is the total remaking of the self and involves superhuman courage, dedication, a desperate longing to be something infinitely finer than what one now is, and an almost mad surrender to the forces of the Unknown.

In Underhill's (1999) five-stage model of mystical development the 1st stage is the awakening of the transcendental consciousness in which the self is filled with joy. However,

this joy is not the same joy as what we are referring to as true joy. Although in most cases this awakening appears to be abrupt, Underhill assures us that, as a rule, it usually is the culmination of “a long period of restlessness, uncertainty, and mental stress” (p. 179). This period involves a break from the confines of one’s conventional life and the beginning of a new one. The Christian Scriptural (previously called the New Testament) story of Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus is a famous example of this stage of development.

At some point, however, during this joyful stage of awakening to the transcendental consciousness, a dark cloud enters. Being an *observer* of the Reality, it turns out, is just the beginning. Shockingly, there is a sudden awareness of all that stands between the self and God, and the rejoicing and joy are gone. There is an awareness of one’s wretchedness and a desperate desire to purify oneself and to be rid of all that is not God: illusion, evil, and imperfection of every kind. This intense desire propels the self into a frightening downward spiral ending in the painful 2nd stage of the Mystic Way: the Dark Night of the Senses or Purgation (Underhill, 1999).

According to Cox (1985) in *Handbook of Christian Spirituality*, in the Purgative Life or Dark Night of the Senses, the sensual part of the soul is purged through the process of detachment, renunciation, contrition, confession, asceticism, and self-mortification. The Transpersonal psychologist Michael Washburn (1994) states that during The Dark Night of the Senses the ego experiences despair and believes that meaningful life has come to an end. There is an experience of dying to the outer world and a loss of faith that is also “a death of God” as the God one has previously perceived (p. 234). The ego is then left with “nothing but an incomprehensible sense of emptiness and longing” (p. 234).

But then, in the hour of darkest despair, there is a “great swing back into the sunshine” (Underhill, 1999, p. 233), a reward for the painful purification process the self has undergone in the Dark Night of the Senses. This is the Illumination Stage in which the self emerges from the dark, “to find that it is able to apprehend another order of reality” (p. 233). The consciousness of the mystic is remade and is drawn nearer to the divine unity within.

According to Inge (1964), in this stage all of the mystic’s faculties, instead of being focused on the self, are now concentrated upon God. This is the essence of Illumination, and, according to Underhill (1999), it is this mystical illumination or heightened vision of reality that all real artists, musicians, prophets, poets, and dreamers share to some degree with the mystics. Much of the most beautiful writings of the mystics are descriptions of the joy, love, and rapture experienced in the Illumination stage.

From Washburn’s (1994) point of view, the Illuminative Life is the ego’s encounter with the numinous, a supernatural energy previously lying latent in the non-egoic core of the psyche. It is, he states, a spiritual awakening “typically experienced as a joyous-ecstatic breakthrough of spiritual power” (p. 23). However, Washburn explains, although the ego at this point believes it has reached its ultimate destiny, it “has only begun to set sail on the ocean of the deep unconscious . . . and the darker possibilities in awakening soon begin to emerge” (p. 241). Instead of the initial joy, the ego now finds itself in a terrifying struggle with the dark overwhelming forces of the unconscious. It fears annihilation, extinction. This is a much more painful stage than was the Dark Night of the Senses. According to Washburn, the Dark Night of the Senses is the experience of outer or worldly death. The Dark Night of Spirit is the experience of inner or psychological death (p. 235). Underhill (1999) agrees, pointing out that visions and voices lighten the pain of purgation, but the Dark Night of the

Soul “is generally a period of utter blankness and stagnation as far as mystical activity is concerned” (p. 381).

Underhill (1999) states that The Dark Night of the Soul is brought about by psychic fatigue from the intense exaltation and ecstatic joy the self has experienced in the Illumination stage, and the resulting sense of darkness and deprivation prohibits any awareness of the Transcendent.

This stage must be as close to Hell on earth as one can experience. However, despite the negative appearance of things, something very positive is going on within, for the Dark Night is, according to Underhill (1999), “contributing to the remaking of character, the growth of the New Man; his transmutation in God” (p. 382). Very few individuals make it to this stage of development.

Finally, a few heroic individuals reach the ultimate goal of the Mystic Way and the culmination of all the sacrifice, suffering, and dedication: the Unitive or Contemplative Life. This is the triumph of the spirit “in which man beholds God face to face, and is joined to Him” (Inge, 1964, p. 12). According to Underhill (1999), there are two modes of expression an individual mystic may use to describe this Unitive experience: (a) the mystic who sees God as absolute, impersonal, and transcendent (i.e., emmanent) describes this final stage of the mystic journey as “*deification*, or the utter transmutation of the self in God.” (p. 415), and (b) the mystic who has experienced an intimate personal relationship with God (i.e., immanent) describes the Unitive State as “the *Spiritual Marriage* with God.” (p. 415)

According to Underhill, the mystics who have achieved the Unitive state are infused with a new “spiritual vitality” (p. 419) that enables them to accomplish great things in the world for others. Indeed, they become a center of spiritual energy that draws others to them.

The *deified* man or woman, according to Underhill, has been able to attain a level of consciousness that most can only achieve after death. In this state, Underhill explains, the mystic, even in hardship and suffering, lives upon high levels of joy and experiences the “perennial possession of a childlike gaiety an inextinguishable gladness of heart” (p. 437). The Unitive State is the answer to the longings of the heart and the fulfillment of love. The essential requirement of the Unitive State is surrender of selfhood.

Marcoulesco (1987), in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, defines mystical union as the unmediated, transforming experience of the unification of man or man’s soul with the highest reality. Such union represents the supreme and most authentic elevation of the human spirit as it reaches a fusion with, or at least a living cognition of, God (*cognito dei experimentalis*) or of the transcendent ground of being. (p. 239)

Marcoulesco goes on to say that the mystical union is seen to be the ultimate stage of the mystical experience, and “it is always and everywhere accompanied by a heightened sense of release, ineffable joy, and peace” (p. 239). In most religions, Marcoulesco continues, this union is reached only “at the end of a long and strenuous path” (p. 239). Paradoxically, most mystics agree that it cannot be reached through one’s own efforts but only through an openness and receptivity to the divine (e.g., grace in Christianity).

According to Washburn (1994), in this final stage, the regeneration of spirit that has begun to take place under cover of darkness in the Dark Night of Spirit approaches integration and the resultant “opening of the soul culminates in transparency” (p. 294). Washburn explains that transparency is a state in which the ego no longer needs to hide or create a false image for others, and “the unguarded openness of integration leads to intimacy” (p. 295). Does the mystic or integrated person feel any negative emotions in this final state? According to Washburn, although integrated persons do feel negative emotions such as

sadness, anger, or fear in certain situations, these emotions tend to be passing fluctuations. "The more basic tone of integrated life is subtly and powerfully positive" (p. 299). Indeed, Washburn's description of this state tends to make one believe that all the sacrifice and suffering might be worth it. Blessedness and bliss, according to Washburn, are the fundamental feeling states in the integrated stage of development. Washburn defines blessedness as, "a feeling of fresh, superabundant, thankful clarity. It is a feeling of serene passion or joyful sobriety that is humbly appreciative of the beauty and perfection of the world" (p. 298). Washburn defines bliss as, "the purely pleasurable feeling that occurs when numinous power passes caressingly through [an opening in the soul] experienced as a channel of grace" (p. 298). Washburn also states that the integrated person lives in a "hallowedly resplendent home" (p. 300). Washburn describes this home as "a synthesis of qualitative opposites" (p. 300), an enchanted world in which the hot and wet are fused imbuing everything with a "burnished radiance, translucent depth, succulent, or dewy freshness" (p. 300). Washburn explains that the sparkling diamond (a union of fire and ice), and the lush garden paradise are the two main symbols of hallowed resplendence.

I have experienced a taste of what may be Washburn's hallowed resplendence on several occasions. On one occasion, 8 years ago on the day my Mother died, I returned to her home and sat outside in her garden. The whole world seemed radiant and sparkling; every blade of grass, every leaf gleamed magically, and I felt like I was, for an afternoon, in paradise with my mother and God.

The term *joyful sobriety* used by Washburn to describe the feeling of blessedness sounds like it might be similar to true joy, more so than the ecstatic joy experienced in the



Illumination Stage. Washburn defines ecstasy as “a wilder, expansive, intoxicated condition” (p. 301). The integrated state, he says, is a more stable, discerning, and contemplative stage.

According to McGinn (1992), the most essential characteristic of Christian mysticism and the main goal of the mystic path has most often been seen as some kind of union with God “particularly a union of absorption or identity in which the individual personality is lost” (p. xvi). However, McGinn points out, if we continue using this definition of mysticism there is almost no mystic in the history of Christianity that will qualify as a mystic! Therefore, McGinn suggests, it is necessary to expand the concept of union with God and to give up the idea that this union is central to mysticism.

Throughout the history of mysticism there have been many ways in which Christians have perceived the encounter with God, and the concept of union with God is just one of the symbols or metaphors used by the mystics to describe this encounter. “Among the other major categories,” McGinn (1992) explains, “are those of contemplation and the vision of God, deification [in eastern Christianity], the birth of the Word in the soul, ecstasy, even perhaps radical obedience to the present divine will” (p. xvii). Christian minister Rosemarie Anderson (personal communication, February 25, 2003) states, “There may be as many mystical experiences in God as there are mystics. Variety may be the very signature of mystic experiences.”

According to Marcoulesco (1987),

The paradigmatic Christian mystical union is the hypostatic union, meaning that in Jesus Christ a human being became the created self-expression of the Word of God through the permanent union of a human nature with the divine. Deification is the revelation of the personal God in man who is illumined with grace, flooded by the Holy Spirit, and lightened with the divine light: union of the created with the uncreated. (p. 242)

When we think about mystical experience, McGinn (1992) suggests, we also think about altered states of consciousness and such phenomena as visions, voices, raptures and so forth; however, there are, McGinn points out, many mystics who do not consider these experiences to be the essential aspect of the meeting with God. McGinn names Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, and Origen as a few of the great Christian mystics who “have been downright hostile to such experiences emphasizing rather the new level of awareness, the special and heightened consciousness involving both loving and knowing that is given in the mystical meeting” (p. xviii).

Obviously, for those on the quest for true joy, the understanding of the mystical encounter with God is important. McGinn (1992) prefers to use the word *consciousness* rather than the word *experience* and to use the word *presence* rather than the word *union* because he thinks these words “are more true to the historical record” (p. xviii). Out of this comes his definition of the divine encounter with God as the consciousness of the immediate presence of God. This definition gives us another way of perceiving the experience of true joy. It supports the original definition given in the introduction to this dissertation that states true joy is found at a certain level of consciousness and is not dependent upon any particular experience. However, McGinn’s definition does not support the hypothesis that this immediate level of consciousness of the presence of God is a permanent state of awareness.

### *The Foundations and Early History of Christian Mysticism*

Although the power and mystery of Christian mystical thought is compelling, only the most cursory look at some of the primary figures who have influenced the history of Christian mysticism can be undertaken here. The intention in including this brief overview is

to provide a context for the eight post 12<sup>th</sup> century European mystics whose lives and sacred writings we will be discovering in cycles 2 and 3 of this intuitive inquiry study. The eight Christian mystics think, act, and express themselves within a framework provided by the Christian Church, and it is within this Christian context that they have found true joy. Knowing where these Christian mystical ideas were born and following their development over time informs us and enables us to understand the eight mystics more completely. Two of Bernard McGinn's (1992; 1994) volumes in his comprehensive series on the history of Christian mysticism, will be relied on for this endeavor: *The Foundations of Mysticism* and *The Growth of Mysticism*. For those readers who would like more information on the history of mysticism these two volumes, and McGinn's (1998) third volume, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, are an important starting place. Reading these volumes gives us the background necessary to interpret the eight Christian mystics.

### The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's  
 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.  
 Because of thy savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth,  
 therefore do the virgins love thee,  
 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will  
 be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright  
 love thee. (Song 1:1-4)

I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying* Open  
 to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and  
 my locks with the drops of the night.  
 I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I  
 defile them?  
 My beloved put in his hand by the hole of *the door*, and my bowels were moved for  
 him.  
 I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped *with* myrrh, and my fingers  
 with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him: I called him, but he gave me no answer. (Song 5: 2-6)

*The foundations.* According to McGinn (1992), “Early Christianity was characterized by its belief that God had become present in Jesus Christ who since his return to heaven is made accessible through the word and rite in the midst of the community of believers” (p. 64). It took several centuries after the death of Christ for the fullness of the Christian religion to develop, and although there have been mystical elements in the Christian religion from its inception, the first comprehensive philosophy of Christian mysticism was created by the Egyptian thinker Origen of Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and manifested in the monasticism of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Christians created the term mysticism (first in French, *La Mystique*) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Western mysticism had its origins in Judaism, in the Greek pagan contemplative tradition, and in early Christianity (McGinn, 1992). In Judaism, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses were revered as mystics who had seen God. *The Psalms* and the *Song of Songs* were viewed as stories describing the soul’s journey to God. The Jewish apocalypses and the creation of the canon of sacred Jewish texts “provided a matrix for Christian mysticism” (p. 22).

The Jewish apocalypses are revelatory literature, which includes dreams, symbolic visions, and visionary journeys to Heaven in which God is seen along with the heavenly court. According to McGinn (1992), both the apocalypses and the Greek philosophical religious tradition begun by Plato actually made Christianity and Christian mysticism possible as “they were ways of making God accessible to a world in which the divine was no longer present in its traditional forms” (p. 6).

*Greek contemplative mysticism.* Greek contemplative mysticism began with Plato (429-347 B.C.E.) who saw contemplation as a new means of connecting with the divine. For Plato the human is always seeking the Absolute Beautiful-Good and will remain dissatisfied until it is possessed. This possession is achieved through *theoria* or contemplation and through a process of the purification of love and knowledge. The goal is achieved “when nous, the divine element in the soul, is assimilated to its supernal source” (McGinn, 1994, p. 25).

Plato was followed by Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, who was “the first figure in western history to wed the Greek contemplative ideal to the monotheistic faith of the Bible” (McGinn, 1992, p. 35). Philo believed that the spiritual Truth was to be found in the scriptures for those who had the eyes to see it. Subsequent figures in the Greek contemplative tradition whose thought had a major impact on Christian mysticism were Plotinus, Porphyry, and Praclus.

*Influence of Christian Scriptures on mysticism.* According to McGinn (1992), the essential nature of Christian mysticism, especially before the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was exegetical (i.e., it centered around the analysis and interpretation of the scriptures). Indeed, McGinn explains that “the cultivation of immediate consciousness of the divine presence took place within the exercise of reading, meditating, preaching, and teaching the biblical text often within a liturgical [within the public rituals of the church] or quasi liturgical context” (p. 64).

In the Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) Jesus is presented as a teacher and as a Savior. He is also seen as a model to be imitated, and this desire to imitate Christ in his humility, his poverty, his goodness, and even in his suffering played an important role in much later Christian mysticism. McGinn (1992) states that there are several

key verses in the Synoptic Gospels that influenced Christian mysticism. One of the key verses that led to the imitation of Christ is found in Matthew 10: 38, “And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me”(Matt. 10:38; Authorized King James Version).

Matthew 11:27 is another key verse from the Synoptic Gospels, “All things are delivered unto me of my father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*” (Matt. 11:27). According to McGinn (1992), for the mystics, this verse implied the possibility of a connection with God through Jesus Christ to certain chosen people, and “because the risen Lord lives on in word and Sacrament [these] special experiences of [God’s] presence were thought to remain a constant possibility” (p. 67).

According to McGinn (1992) the perfection and vision of God were two important concepts from the Synoptic Gospels that later Christian mysticism used to describe the mystics’ goal. Both of these concepts are found in Jesus’ preaching of the *Sermon on the Mount*. The call for the perfection of the self is found in Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

The fifth beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount was to become very important in the history of Christian mysticism (McGinn, 1992), “Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). According to the notes in *The Holy Bible*: “The Latin *beatus* is the basis of the English ‘beatitude,’ meaning ‘to be fortunate,’ ‘to be happy,’ or ‘to be blessed’” (Holy Bible, 1979, p. 1192). The meaning of meek can be “gentle, forgiving, or benevolent” (p. 1192). Again in the notes, “the Heb. in Ps. 37:11 characterizes as the humble those who have suffered” (p. 1192). In Psalm 37:11 in the Hebrew Scriptures we find a similar message

as that in the fifth beatitude, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalms 37:11). Both joy and suffering seem to be intertwined in Christianity and in Christian mysticism.

The fourth beatitude is another important idea taken up by Christian mysticism, often in the context of the necessity for seeking inner, and usually outer, poverty. In Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5: 3). In the notes from the Holy Bible we are told that the phrase *poor in spirit* can mean “poor in pride, humble in spirit . . . Contrite Heart; Humility” (Holy Bible, 1979, p. 1192).

According to McGinn (1992), Paul and his “eschatological Christ mysticism” (p. 364) also had a significant influence on Christian mysticism, especially his account of his apocalyptic rapture to the Third Heaven. Indeed, McGinn suggests that, “along with the Exodus story of Moses’ encounter with God atop Mount Sinai, it has served as a model narrative for mystical experience of the divine presence” (p. 70). The essence of Paul’s experience is found in the following:

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body;) such an one caught up to the third heaven [celestial glory]. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or not of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable [ineffable] words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Cor. 12:24)

McGinn states that in the above passage, Paul is describing the rapture found in the divine presence. From Paul’s description it is difficult to determine, however, how his experience relates to our true joy.

In Corinthians 13:12 Paul states, “For now we see through a glass [veil], darkly [obscurely, enigmatically]; but then face-to-face: now I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor.13:12). According to McGinn (1992),

the connection of the perfection of *agape* [love] with face-to-face vision, and a higher gnosis [knowledge] here in Corinthians 13, even though Paul is speaking about the future heavenly state, was often subsequently interpreted as applying, at least to some degree, to this life. (p. 71)

This interpretation, McGinn explains, might be due to another text, 2 Cor. 3:12-18:

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech [frankness]:  
And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:  
But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the; which *vail* is done away in Christ.  
But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.  
Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.  
But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:12-18)

This text refers to the time of the Hebrew Scriptures when spiritual understanding was clouded (Moses is described with a veil over his face) and how in the time of the Christian Scriptures Christ removes the veil and the spiritual blindness. According to McGinn (1992), the phrase *open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord* from the above passage can be translated as, “with unveiled faces reflecting, like mirrors the brightness of the Lord” (p. 71). McGinn suggests the Greek word *katoptrizomenoi*, which in his version of the passage is translated as *reflecting*, was often understood as *gazing* or *contemplating*. “Thus, the text could be read to mean that it is by contemplation of the glory of the risen Christ that the image of God in us (Gen 1:26) is being conformed to the Word, the Father’s perfect Image”



(p. 71). McGinn points out that this is an important passage in Christian mysticism because contemplation and the image of God are brought together. "Seeing the Christian life as the gradual restoration of a damaged image or lost likeness of God" (pp. 70-71) was a common theme in the interpretation of Biblical texts especially the Epistles of Paul.

Finally, the Gospel of John has often been looked at as a foundational text for Christian mystical thought. According to McGinn (1992), Jesus is presented in this Gospel as the only person who brings light and knowledge to humanity. In John 14:6-7 Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him"(John 14: 6-7).

For McGinn (1992) the highpoint of John's teachings is his emphasis on the love of God coming through Jesus Christ to the group of believers who love one another, and in this love God, Christ, and the believers are one. In John 13:34, Jesus says: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). If the believers follow this new commandment then the Father and Christ will dwell within them, and together they will all be one.

In John 17:21-23, Jesus speaks of the perfection of God, himself, and the faithful as one:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:21-23)

This concept of love between God, Christ, and the believers presented in John was, according to McGinn (1992), a powerful source of the mystical belief that the love between the individual and Christ was not enough, and that in order to love Christ completely, we must love others. Obviously love is a fundamental emphasis in Christianity. How does this love fit in with true joy? Are they different? Which comes first? Can they be separated? As we continue to read about the foundational Christian mystics perhaps we can learn more about these essential questions.

*Early Greek Christianity.* According to McGinn (1992), in the 2nd century the Christian ideal of perfection was found in the imitation of Christ through the act of martyrdom. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was an early Christian writer whose seven letters suggest that martyrdom is the perfect imitation of Christ and the way of attaining God after death. Ignatius himself was martyred in Rome in approximately 110 C. E. Ignatius had an intense desire for death that “borders almost on a morbid fascination” (McGinn, 1992, p. 82); however, this desire was evidently based on his longing to be with Jesus and the Father. In his conception of the perfect imitation of Christ, Ignatius also includes the importance of suffering based on the life of Jesus; however, this is not a new idea but can be found in the Synoptics, Paul, and elsewhere in the Christian Scriptures (McGinn, 1992). According to McGinn (1992), Clement of Alexandria in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was the first to examine in depth many of the ideas that found their way into later Christian mysticism, including vision, divinization, and union. Clement also speaks of different stages on the mystical path to God.

Ambrose Origen, born around 185 C.E. in Alexandria, was, according to McGinn (1992), the master of Christian thought and was the first to lay out the foundation for a

mystical theology. Origen lived an ascetic life and advanced the ideal of virginity, ideas that influenced later monastic life. Origen believed in the existence of a prior and perfect creation, and suggested that it was the freedom of human beings that caused the fall and created the necessity for this world we now live in. The purpose of this world is to teach human beings how to rise above it and go back to their “unimpeded vision of God” (p. 114).

Origen presents the use of erotic symbolism in his writings, although interestingly, he was a strong advocate for the strict separation of sexual practice and the mystical life. Origen explained that any erotic mention of the body was actually referring to the spiritual senses and the soul’s relationship with the Word. Origen also discussed the relation of action and contemplation and proposed that the contemplation of God leads to the divinization of the soul. Divinization is one of the ways mystics describe union with God. Perhaps we can hypothesize then that true joy is found in the divinization of the soul.

*Monasticism and mysticism.* According to McGinn (1992), it was the institution of monasticism that began in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that enabled the continuation of mystical ideas through the centuries. The roots of monasticism are found in early Christian ascetical ways of life; however, asceticism was not seen as a goal in itself but as a means of transformation. The goal of the monastic way of life was the divinization of the ascetic into “a god upon earth” (p. 137). The idea of being a god on earth goes beyond one’s imagination! According to McGinn, the most important aspects of the purgative process in the monastery were obedience to the spiritual father, discretion, discernment, humility, patience, and charity (p. 137). Although it is easy to rush over these concepts with little attention, the attainment of these qualities requires depth, courage, and spiritual power.

Many new types of literature emerged from the monastic lifestyle, and according to McGinn (1992), the three great Greek Christian mystics of the end of the 4th century were Macarius the Great, Evagrius Ponticus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Of the three, we will look only at Gregory of Nyssa.

Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 C.E.) was an important monastic mystical theorist of the early church, and was “one of the most penetrating and original thinkers of Greek Christianity and one of the major mystical theorists of the ancient church (McGinn, 1992, p. 139). One of his more interesting accomplishments was the creation of the first system of negative theology: his doctrine of *epektasis*. According to McGinn, this teaching suggests that the Christian’s goal both here and in heaven is the pursuit of God, and that the perception of God is always of, paradoxically, both the presence and absence of God.

Gregory of Nyssa’s negative theology had a powerful influence on another monastic writer, Dionysus. Dionysus lived around 500 C. E. and, according to McGinn (1992), “was to become more powerful than any other Eastern mystic” (pp. 157-158). Dionysus expressed a dialectical view of the relation of God and the world that influenced Christian mysticism for at least 1000 years (McGinn, 1992). One of his most beautiful ideas is his concept of ecstasy or *ek-stasis* (standing outside). Dionysus saw ecstasy as “the power of love, the divine eros (*theios eros*) implanted in the world through the ecstasy of God” through which “all values are transmuted . . . and transcendentalized by passing beyond *both* affirmation and negation” (p. 179). In the belief of Dionysus, it is through the power of love that we transcend the limitations of our humanness and become divinized. Thus love appears to be a very important element in our quest for true joy.

*Latin Christian mysticism.* We have looked briefly at Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity and at some of the individuals who prepared the way for the development of Latin Christianity and Latin mysticism in the 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to McGinn (1992), early Christian documents written in the west during the 1<sup>st</sup> century were always Greek, but a Latin-speaking Christianity, primarily from North Africa, began to emerge at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century with authors such as the monk Tertullian, and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage. Both were from Africa, and both were Roman intellectuals familiar with Latin and Greek.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Christianity was accepted by the Roman emperor Constantine (313-337 C. E.) and became the official religion of Rome. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, monasticism and the Roman papacy developed. There was also during this period a split between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire, creating the beginning of the split between eastern and western Christianity.

One of the most influential of the western Latin mystics was Ambrose of Milan, born around 334 C.E. and made bishop of Milan in 374 C.E. According to McGinn (1992), Christian mysticism is indebted to Ambrose for three things: (a) Christianizing many ideas of Plato and the Neoplatonists, especially the descent and ascent of the soul; (b) putting the interpretation of the Song of Songs within a framework of the Church and its sacraments: “ecclesial mysticism” (p. 203); and (c) joining this new mysticism with the ideal of virginity. Western Christianity’s concentration on sexuality as the major imperfection of the body is, for better or worse, in part due to Ambrose. It is also due to his influence on the father of mysticism, Augustine (McGinn, 1992). Indeed, Christian mysticism, in contrast to the

mysticism of Judaism and Islam, has often been antisexual. For Ambrose, the body is not completely evil, but virginity is a superior state.

Two other significant Latin monastic Christians of this time period were Jerome, whose *Vulgate* translation of the Bible became the standard Bible used by the western Church, and John Cassian, who believed that Christian perfection was possible only through monasticism.

Augustine, the father of mysticism, was born in 354 C.E. In 391 C.E., he founded a monastic community where he was ordained a priest. In 395 C.E., he was consecrated bishop of Hippo. Augustine was a prolific author; however, McGinn suggests that the work that had a major influence on Christian mysticism was the *Confessions*, which he wrote between 397-401 C.E.

According to McGinn (1992), the three major “building blocks” (p. 231) of Augustine’s mystical theory that contributed so much to later western mysticism were

first, his account of the soul’s ascension to contemplation and ecstatic experience of the divine presence; second, the ground for the possibility of this experience in the nature of the human person as the image of the triune God; and third, the necessary role of Christ and the church in attaining this experience. (p. 231)

Augustine often spoke about the nature of love and how the love of God for us enters into our hearts and gives us a type of knowledge of God in faith. In this world, however, the fullness of this knowledge can only be experienced in the momentary flashes of ecstatic consciousness that are given by God to those who earnestly desire God (McGinn, 1992). These momentary flashes of ecstatic consciousness are undoubtedly a magnificent gift, but they aren’t true joy. For Augustine our concept of enduring true joy in this life does not appear to exist.

*Medieval Christianity.* The years 400 C.E. and 800 C.E. saw the end of ancient Christianity, which had been tied to Rome, and the birth of Medieval Christianity, which was usually “rural and monastic in character” (McGinn, 1994, p. 17), and was “characterized by an all pervasive and concrete sense of sacrality based upon clerical dominance and a monastic ethos” (pp. 17-18). Monasticism was the driving force behind the development of Medieval Christendom, and according to McGinn, it remained so into the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

According to McGinn (1994), two of the main spiritual issues that became relevant during the Middle Ages were the relationship of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ and the growing centrality of Christ’s death on the cross. The earliest portrayals of Christ’s passion (crucifixion) date to about 430 C.E. and show a young hero triumphant over death with his weapon, the cross. These depictions would become very different in the late Middle Ages with its emphasis on the humanity of Christ and the suffering of his passion. This focus on the suffering of Christ may prevent the wholeness required for true joy if it becomes excessive.

During these years the bond between mysticism and monasticism became stronger as the monks were the main exegetes (scriptural interpreters) and mysticism still revolved around praying and reading the Bible. Also the monastery was the best place to practice the ideal of contemplation (McGinn, 1994).

According to McGinn (1994), the Rule of Benedict (*Regula Benedicti*) is a work of genius and the most important document in the history of western monasticism. Benedict’s main concern was the ordering of his monastic community, and moderation, not “physical feats of asceticism” (p. 28), was the basis of the Benedictine vision. According to the Rule of Benedict, the Benedictine life was to revolve around communal prayer, private reading,

devotion, and physical labor. Benedict also stressed the importance of the presence of God in the monastery, a value of central importance in early Christian mysticism.

Gregory the Great reigned from 590 C.E. to 604 C.E. and was the greatest of the early medieval popes. He was also a great mystical author. Gregory had a spirituality of interiority and taught that Christians in this life can attain “a vision of God, the vision that is contemplation” (McGinn, 1994, p. 39). Contemplation is the focus on God alone, and from Gregory’s point of view, is only possible through the study of the Bible.

For Gregory, the first step in preparing for the contemplative way is to turn away from the distractions of the outside world and enter into oneself. Love is essential because it is our loving desire for God that is the primary force behind the contemplative path, and it is love that draws the mind away from the outside world and lifts it up to God. (McGinn, 1994).

According to McGinn (1994), the paradox in all this and the negative theology underlying Gregory’s mystical thinking are found in the fact that for Gregory, the goal of contemplation is impossible to achieve because God is incomprehensible: our limited spirit is incapable of grasping the Unlimited Spirit. Gregory also states that we should work to prepare ourselves for the contemplative path; however, we cannot succeed through our own efforts, as “contemplation is always a divine gift dependent on God’s initiative” (McGinn, p. 56).

John Scottus Eriugene in the 9<sup>th</sup> century played a primary role in the creation of dialectical Platonic mysticism, a very important tradition in later western mysticism (e.g., Meister Eckhart). Dialectical mysticism was a system of thought that brought traditional Latin learning together with many aspects of Greek Christianity (McGinn, 1994). The



dialectical view sees God as both positive and negative, in the world (positive) and not in the world (negative), “simultaneously and reciprocally within and beyond all things” (p. 98).

Eriugene, as did Origen and Dionysus, sees the path back to God as a tripartite process: purgation (*purgatio*), illumination (*illuminatio*), and perfection (*perfectio*). The Christian experiences the purgation of ignorance and the illumination by wisdom as part of the process of overcoming sin through the study of Scripture. According to McGinn (1994), “This was the preparation for deification, contemplation (*theoria*), and union with God which were the work of grace” (p. 114). These last three could be partially experienced in this life but could only be completely realized after death.

According to McGinn (1994), during the period from 600 C.E. to 1100 C.E. there were no great classic mystical writers; however, the efforts of the monks in this period provided the foundation for all that was to follow in Christian mysticism.

*Twelfth century mysticism.* It was in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, according to McGinn (1994), that the greatest development in the monastic mystical tradition in the west took place, and the primary preoccupation of the mystics of this time was love. Indeed it was in the 12<sup>th</sup> century that the most exploration of Bridal mysticism or Spousal love took place.

According to McGinn (1994), 12<sup>th</sup> century mysticism brought the tradition it had inherited to completion through what was called the ordering of love (*ordinatio caritatis*). Love was, of course, meant to be experienced, but it was also to be set in order. The purpose of the ordering of love was not to suppress or control love but was seen as “the only way to allow it to develop the fullness of its power and passion” (McGinn, p.155). Ordered love, McGinn explains, does not mean that we have to choose between God or creatures, or to

disavow completely the body or the material world, “but rather that we need to put all our affections and desires in the proper relation” (p. 219).

The Cistercian monastic order had a major influence on 12<sup>th</sup> century mysticism. The Cistercians were interested above all in reform and “were consumed by the desire to find a better, truer, more authentic form of monastic life” (McGinn, 1994, p. 159). The most famous Cistercian was Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux. Bernard of Clairvaux was an important theologian, a superb writer, and a major spiritual authority (McGinn).

In 1135, Bernard began his mystical masterpiece, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. This work and his *Sermons on the Liturgical Year* comprise, McGinn (1994) suggests, the most important part of his teaching. Love is at the heart of Bernard’s mysticism, and his focus was on the relationship between love and contemplation with the divine presence.

Bernard teaches that there are four degrees of love: “love of self for the sake of self, love of God for the sake of self, love of God for God’s sake, and love of self for God’s sake” (McGinn, 1994, p. 183). *Love of self for God’s sake* implies loving oneself in an unselfish way, and how to do this was one of Bernard’s preoccupations.

Bernard was also very interested in the relationship between the soul as Bride and God as the Divine Lover. For Bernard the soul or Bride desires to grow more in love in response to the love she receives from her Divine Lover, and it is this love that propels the soul on the path “toward the heavenly joy and love that are its true goal” (McGinn, 1994, p. 195). For Bernard, this joy and love could be tasted on earth through the initiative of God, but they could only find their completion after death.

William of St. Thierry was Abbot of the Benedictine monastery at St. Thierry near Reims and later was monk of the Cistercian house of Signy. He was also, according to

McGinn (1994), “one of the true giants of the monastic mystical tradition” (p. 273). Like Bernard, William’s primary focus was on love. For William, our love for God is the Holy Spirit, and he sees the unity that is the Holy Spirit as both the state of loving oneness with God and the feeling of love in its moments of ecstasy. According to McGinn, for William

the ascent to God . . . consists of a whole series of motions or desires . . . placed in us by God which all work together, not like separate rungs of a ladder but more like the united cords of a net drawing us up to our goal. (p. 251)

William sees the issue of the ordering of love revolving around enjoying the one loved and using the one loved. Obviously using the one loved for one’s own ends is not the appropriate ordering of love. He also stressed the importance of allowing the divine love within us to love the divine love within others. Our love of God is our love of self and of our neighbor. William teaches that the ability to love God is a gift from God and is a manifestation of God’s grace. For William, this love for God is so passionate that like other 12<sup>th</sup> century mystics he sees and writes about it as “a form of insanity” (McGinn, 1994, p. 253).

Other major Cistercian authors of the 12<sup>th</sup> century include Gilbert of Hoyland, John of Ford, Gueric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, and Aelred of Rievaulx. For many of these monastic writers the interpretation of the *Song of Songs* was of primary importance. Indeed the *Song of Songs*, according to McGinn (1994), has played a central role in Christian mysticism since Origen. Origen was able to interpret the scripture so that *eros* was transformed into the spiritual love God had for God’s people in both the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures. This transformation also enabled the *Song of Songs* to be seen as a guide to the spiritual love between the soul and God (McGinn).

The English abbot Aelred of Rievaulx helps us to understand more about love.

McGinn (1994) explains that for Aelred, in order to attain the goal of *ordered love*, “the true lover must be . . . attracted, discerning, and strong” (p. 312). The lover is attracted to and desires the sweetness of that which is loved; however, the lover needs discernment to avoid the excessiveness of love and needs the strength to overcome the temptations and challenges that will arise. The abbot of Rievaulx also teaches about spiritual friendships and how these friendships can help prepare an individual for contact with God in this life.

McGinn (1994) divides the non-Cistercian mystics of the 12<sup>th</sup> century into two categories: visionaries and contemplatives. He describes a vision as a view of non-earthly reality gained either by traveling to another place or through an interruption of ordinary waking consciousness. Visions, however, are not experienced by many mystics and are not an essential part of being a mystic. This is because visions don’t necessarily include the immediate and transformative consciousness of the presence of God.

In order to help us discern which authors are mystical and which are not, McGinn (1994) offers three categories: (a) mystics who tell about a direct experience of the presence of God, (b) mystical authors who have had the direct consciousness of the presence of God and write about their process and their lives which are then based on this experience, and (c) visionaries who have had visions, which may or may not be considered mystical based on whether or not there has been a direct connection with the Divine. Is there a type of joy that can be found in these visions that does not include a direct connection with the Divine? If so, it is not true joy, of course, but may be a precursor of true joy.

According to McGinn (1994), some of the important and influential monastic writers of this period include Rupert of Deutz, Hildegard of Bingen, and Joachim of Fiore. Rupert of

Deutz is important to the history of mysticism because he was one of the first to use his visions as a source for his teachings, something the 13<sup>th</sup> century mystics (especially the women) would continue to do when they needed to cite an authority for their writings.

Rupert had nine visions, eight of which occurred in the dream state. Some of them are erotic, as when he engaged in a long, deep, open-mouthed kiss of love with the God-man. Some of them involve direct encounters with the persons of the Trinity; some involve demons; many convey an indescribable sweetness. All of them are powerful and appear to have a potentially deep effect on the unconscious mind of the reader. McGinn (1994) does not see the abbot as a mystical author, but possibly a mystic.

Hildegard of Bingen, the German Benedictine abbess, was, according to McGinn (1994), the first great woman theologian in Christian history. She was also a visionary, a prophet, and a reformer, but probably not a mystic in that she did not have an experience of a direct connection with God. She did have many visions that, she insisted, had nothing to do with the dream state. These visions often involved a living light in which she received messages from God through individuals within the vision.

Joachim of Fiore was born around 1135 and lived as a wandering preacher before he joined the Cistercians in 1171. In one of his most notable visions Joachim received a sudden understanding of a chapter in scripture that had baffled him for a year. McGinn (1994) calls this experience “an immediate and infallible reception of divine truth in the mind” (p. 388). In another powerful vision the abbot received a penetrating glimpse into the mystery of the Holy Trinity. McGinn sees Joachim as an apocalyptic mystic.

Many of the clergy belonging to the abbey of St. Victor outside of Paris were pioneers of the new scholastic mysticism and made important contributions to 12<sup>th</sup> century

mysticism. Scholastic mysticism represented a desire for a more scientific form of theology and was “a novel approach to the . . . understanding of faith” (McGinn, 1994, p. 367). Two of the most important Victorines were Hugh of St. Victor and his disciple, Richard of St. Victor.

Hugh played an important role in the development of scholasticism. He used biblical images to present the “marriage of logic and symbol” (p. 376). Noah’s Ark was one of his favorites. Hugh believed that it is within this inner ark that we meet God. Through the fall we have lost the ability to contemplate God and, therefore, we must create a dwelling place for God in the heart. This will be the ark, or God’s house, within us. Within the ark there is a sense of safety and peace, a refuge. “The ark, then, symbolizes the presence of eternity in time, the only secularity and stability humanity can possess amid the dual flood of the welter of history and the interior raging of the unquiet heart” (McGinn, 1994, p. 380). Hugh stressed, however, that illumination was impossible without the God man (Christ).

According to McGinn (1994), Richard of St. Victor is the most significant of the Victorine mystics. Indeed McGinn states, “Perhaps more than any other 12<sup>th</sup> century writer . . . Richard’s treatises combine the practical and the theoretical aspects of the spiritual exercise that prepares the soul for immediate contact with God, nourishes the experience itself, and enhances its effects” (p. 401).

*The Twelve Patriarchs* is a how-to book that shows how the soul is to be trained in order to attain ecstatic contemplation. Using the arc of the covenant as another symbol, Richard outlines six levels of contemplation that are necessary to attain the height of knowledge. The Ark of the Covenant is used to represent these six levels (e.g., the wood from which it was constructed represents the first level, the crown made of wood and gold represents the third level).

Like most 12<sup>th</sup> century mystics, Richard saw both love and knowledge as important on the path to God, love being the most powerful (McGinn, 1994). Richard also suggests that there are different modes of ecstasy. The final form of ecstasy, the supreme joy, is exultation. According to McGinn,

Richard's association of joy, exultation, and even jubilation (*jubilatio*) with the highest stage of mystical experience is not necessarily novel, but it does point to a new note of ecstatic rejoicing that was to find increasing favor among the mystics of the later Middle Ages. (p. 413)

Although Richard of St. Victor states that the highest stage of mystical experience is jubilation, it is not clear whether he is referring to an ecstatic state or to a more quiet contemplative state. True joy as envisioned in this dissertation is a more serene, enduring state. He does equate joy with the highest state of mystical development, however, and this agrees with our definition.

Our brief look at some of the major figures who participated in the building of the foundations of Christian mysticism or in the early growth of Christian mysticism is now complete. The eight Christian mystics that we study in Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 of this Intuitive Inquiry study have relied on these historical figures for much of their mystical theology and inspiration.

### *Christian Theology*

This section presents the perspective on joy of two highly regarded Christian thinkers: Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and German Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968).

*Soren Kierkegaard*

In his essay *Every Good and Every Perfect Gift is From Above*, Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1843/1946) writes about the dynamic, problematic, and astounding relationship between the human being and God, and how our insistence on attaining what we believe will bring us joy in the temporal world blinds us to the real joy already present here and now in the spiritual world.

For Kierkegaard (1843/1946) God is a personal God who loves us and acts in our highest good. This is exemplified in a quotation he refers to from the Bible (James 1:17-22): “Every good and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17-22; as cited in Kierkegaard, p. 110). According to Kierkegaard, these are not idle words, nor are they just beautiful words; they are words that “have the power to lift up the soul, [and the] strength to sustain it” (p. 110). But if this is the case, why, he asks, are these powerful words so often ignored?

In his discourse, Kierkegaard (1843/1946) answers this question by telling a story about how most people live their lives and how they deal with good times and bad. While things are going well for us, Kierkegaard suggests, we accept our good and perfect gifts and expect that our “plans, wise, and intelligent, [will] succeed as is natural since [we ourselves] are wise and intelligent” (p. 111). But even those who have suffered, “whose thought attempted to penetrate through the changing to the permanent” (p. 111), and who have gained strength and confidence from these words, even they, Kierkegaard explains, are still plagued with disappointment. The words “gave them wings which could indeed lift them up to God, but which could not help them in their walk through life” (p. 111-112).



With bewildered hearts, Kierkegaard (1843/1946) continues, these individuals begin to ask questions:

“Heaven only knows . . . that God is good; the earthly life knows nothing about it! Is there then no mutual harmony between what happens in heaven and what happens on the earth! Is there joy in heaven, only sorrow on earth, or is it only said that there is joy in heaven! Does God in heaven take the good gifts and hide them for us in heaven so that we may sometime receive them in the next world”? (p. 112)

Perhaps you have asked these questions yourself, Kierkegaard (1843/1946) suggests. Perhaps you have asked God to give you a testimony; you wanted just one thing you told God: the desire of your heart in that moment. If God will just give you your desire, then you will praise God unceasingly, and then you will truly believe in God. However, Kierkegaard continues, God denied your wish and perhaps you tried to tempt God, bargain with God, cajole God: “This wish is so important to me; my joy, my peace, my future, all depend on this; for me it is so very important, for God it is so easy, for He is all-powerful” (pp. 112-113). But still your wish was not granted. Perhaps you became desperate, then angry, even defiant. You may have hardened your heart against God.

But then, Kierkegaard (1843/1946) suggests, perhaps your praying, your desiring, and your crazy thinking brought you to exhaustion. Perhaps the clamoring of the personal self stopped, and the awareness of the limitations of your personal power came, and you humbled yourself, and surrendered to God, acknowledging God’s power.

Then perhaps your being became more quiet, then perhaps your heart, secretly and unnoticed, had developed in itself the meekness which received the word which was implanted in you and which was able to save your soul, that every good and perfect gift cometh from above. (p. 113)

Perhaps then you were able to see the truth, that God had been there all along and after all,

He did not treat you unfairly when He denied your wish, but for compensation created this faith in your heart; when instead of the wish, which even if it could do everything was at most able to give you the whole world, He gave you a faith through which you gained God and overcame the whole world. (p. 113)

The joy of this world cannot compare with the joy of overcoming the world.

Kierkegaard (1983/1946) shows keen insight into the average persons' relationship with God. Our main goal, Kierkegaard suggests, is to get what we think will bring us joy from God through any strategy that might work. However, Kierkegaard wants us to know that through surrendering what we think we want in this world we can find true joy in overcoming this world. Surrendering the pleasures of this world is based on the awareness that indeed they do not fill our emptiness. When this awareness comes we begin to turn within.

In his essay *The Expectation of Eternal Happiness*, Kierkegaard (1844/1943) writes about what effect the wish for eternal happiness has on one's temporal life. According to Kierkegaard, we receive many benefits in this life by wishing for and being concerned about our eternal happiness in the next. Kierkegaard believes that eternal happiness is received whether one wishes for it or not; however, he states that our being occupied with "the vigilance of expectation"

will . . . become a reward to [us] in this life, and the result of this expectation a blessing to [us] in time. For the expectation of an eternal happiness is able to do what ordinarily seems impossible, to be in two places at once: it works in heaven and on earth, it "seeks the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and these other things are added to it." (pp. 102-103)

According to Kierkegaard (1844/1943), human beings need a goal and a standard; otherwise life becomes "desolate and confused" (p.104). When our goal becomes eternal

happiness we then have a goal and a standard that are always valid, and can help us understand ourselves in temporal existence:

As success and prosperity, the favor of men, victory and gain, will not trick him out of his goal, and give him the false goal of vanity in its place, teaching him wrongly to rejoice as one who has no hope, so neither shall sorrow nor the false goal of suffering teach him to sorrow in despair as one who has no hope. (p. 105)

In his essay, Kierkegaard (1844/1943) cites Paul (Corinthians 4:17), “For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”(Cor. 4:17; as cited in Kierkegaard, p. 105). Paul, Kierkegaard points out, suffered enormously during his life, and the fact that he is able to experience this suffering as a *light affliction which is but for a moment* is because he had a goal and a standard: “for eternity was his goal, and its eternal happiness his measuring stick” (p. 107). Without eternal happiness as his measuring stick, Kierkegaard insists, Paul would have had to rely on the consolation of this world, and his suffering would have become unbearable.

Experience has long known how to bring gladness to the anxious, but a joy beyond all understanding it naturally does not know. Experience knows all the many inventions of the human heart, but a joy which does not originate in any human heart, it does not know. (p. 108)

Heaven, Kierkegaard explains, is our only true consolation, and our expectation of an eternal happiness is a “refuge” and a “fortress” against suffering (p. 108).

Kierkegaard (1844/1943) cites another of Paul’s quotations, Corinthians 4:18:

“While we look not at the things seen but at the things not seen, for the things seen are temporal; but the things not seen are eternal” (1 Cor. 4:18; as cited in Kierkegaard, p. 112).

Usually, Kierkegaard explains, we put off thinking about the happiness of heaven, and, instead, focus our attention on the things of the temporal world. However, Kierkegaard

warns, it would be better if we let the earthly things pass by and not consider them, for those who value the perishable, counterfeit pleasures of the world become unable to appreciate heaven. However, "he who turns away from the temporal to the eternal, and is concerned for his own eternal happiness, he is reconciled with himself, and reconciled with everyone" (p. 112).

According to Kierkegaard (1844/1943), eternal happiness is not gained through any action on our part but through the grace and mercy of God. However, even if our concern for eternal happiness does not gain us entrance into heaven it would still be beneficial to strive for it, because through the expectation for eternal happiness one can develop an "inwardness" that is separate from the world, "a holy of holies in the soul," (p. 113) that can bring together all the inequalities in life, make our suffering momentary and light, and "join [our] anxious soul[s] to the inward joy, inseparably, like everything which God has joined together, fruitfully, like the covenant God Himself has blessed" (p. 110).

Kierkegaard (1944/1943) suggests here that turning our gaze away from the seductive, but counterfeit, beauty of the temporal world and letting go of the hopes engendered by its false promises, we can put our trust in eternal happiness and discover true consolation, reconciliation, and inner joy in this life. When we are hoping to find happiness in this world we prevent the interior emptiness necessary to hear God. When we focus on eternal happiness we are helping to create this interior emptiness. Kierkegaard speaks of an inward joy and an inward emptiness. It is this inner emptiness that enables the flower of inner joy to bloom. There is some suffering in this state but it is made momentary and light. This is not true joy but it might turn out to be the best we can hope for.

### *Karl Barth*

According to Karl Barth (1951/1961), considered to be one of the great theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, joy is gratitude for fulfillment.

Life is movement in time--the continual striving and desire for small or great ends, for new or distant goals as guided by specific ideas, wishes, relationships, obligations, and hopes. Joy is one of the forms in which this movement is arrested for a moment . . . in the awareness in which man experiences himself in the fulfillment of this moment. (p. 376)

Barth (1951/1961) believes that the desire for joy is universal. Individuals, he explains, want many different things in life, however, in everything that a human being wills or strives for there is always, whether spoken or unspoken, the unconscious desire for joy. Indeed, Barth goes so far as to state, "In every real man the will for life is also the will for joy" (p. 375). To deny this reality, he insists, is hypocrisy.

Barth (1951/1961) sees humankind's desire for joy, delight, and happiness as an important ethical consideration and suggests that we must ask what it means to want to be happy through obedience. According to Barth, there are many biblical references in the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures that emphatically demand, "delight, joy, bliss, exultation, merry making, and rejoicing"(p. 375). To be obedient, Barth suggests, we must want joy and continuously be open to experiencing joy. For Barth, life is a gift from God, and to respect that gift we must be continuously rejoicing in anticipation of the revelation and manifestation of divine grace. "The man who hears and takes to heart the biblical message is not only not permitted but plainly forbidden to be anything but merry and cheerful" (p. 376).

We can, of course, close ourselves to the experience of joy. We can, Barth (1951/1961) suggests, be too busy to anticipate it. We can be living in a rut. We can think that life is too solemn for joyful celebrations. We can become embittered because of our

disappointments. We can allow our pain and suffering to interfere. For Barth, however, joy should not be limited by suffering because what we consider to be suffering comes from God, “the very One who summons us to rejoice” (p. 383). In fact, Barth suggests that perhaps our greatest fulfillments await us “in our confrontation with the dark aspect of life” (p. 383).

According to Barth (1951/1961), there are some requirements we must follow if we are to experience joy. We can have joy only as we give it to others. We can have joy only when we can let go of trying to dictate how and when it should appear; joy comes only with the Holy Spirit and is therefore impossible to control. We can have joy only when we are open to experiencing the unknown. We can have joy only by accepting that only God knows what actually is our true joy.

For Barth (1951/1961), the essence of joy is anticipatory and fleeting; even when we experience fulfillment we are anticipating further fulfillment. The ultimate fulfillment, however, comes through the revelation of God’s glory:

In all the provisional forms in which we actualize it here and now the will for joy must be the will for the eternal joy and felicity which in all cases of joy is the only one in which it can be lasting and complete joy, the definitive revelation of the fulfillment of life accomplished for us and addressed to us by God. (pp. 384-385)

Barth (1951/1961) provides a number of reasons why people are unable or unwilling to experience joy; however, he explains that from a Christian theological view experiencing joy in anticipation of God’s promise of salvation is mandatory, as is surrender to God’s will for us. According to Barth, however, only intimations of the enduring consciousness of true joy can be experienced in this life.

We have now completed our brief look at joy through the eyes of five great spiritual and wisdom traditions, 15 pivotal psychological thinkers, and two major Christian thinkers. We have also looked at the historical foundations for Christian mystical thought, and at several descriptions of mysticism and the mystical path. In Chapter 3, *Intuitive Inquiry*, the research method used in this dissertation, is discussed.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods and Design

In this chapter the importance and validity of using alternative research methods for transpersonal research is discussed. Also Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000), the innovative research method used in this study, is explained.

Science . . . has done great things, but it has not been in the end a success. The human mind is beginning to perceive that it has left the heart of almost every problem untouched and illumined only outsides and a certain range of processes. There has been a great and ordered classification and mechanization, a great discovery and practical result of increasing knowledge, but only on the physical surface of things. Vast abysses of Truth lie below in which are concealed the real springs, the mysterious powers and secretly decisive influences of existence. Sri Aurobindo (Ghose, 1990, p. 14)

In my dissertation I am conducting qualitative research on the experience of true joy in union with God in Christian mysticism, and I am using Intuitive Inquiry, a form of hermeneutical interpretation, as my research method. Mertens (1998), in *Research Methods in Education and Psychology*, defines hermeneutics as “the study of interpretive understanding or meaning” (p. 11). In *Entering the Circle*, Packer and Addison (1989) state, “The term hermeneutics . . . refers to the business of interpreting” (p. 1). According to Mertens, historians use hermeneutical research when they try to understand what an author meant within the author’s time and culture. More generally, hermeneutical research involves the interpretation of meaning from a certain point of view or forestructure.



*Limitations of Empiricism and Rationalism*

In *Entering the Circle*, Packer and Addison (1989) discuss the limitations of the twin perspectives of empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism talks of stimulus and response, dependent and independent variables, and statistical significance. Rationalism speaks of information processing, memory retrieval, scheme and structure, and sensory input. From the point of view of Packer and Addison, empiricism and rationalism have limitations because they are not able to capture the depth, breadth, and height of human character and experience: "Hermeneutics provides a better perspective on the world than the traditional twins" (p. 14).

According to Packer and Addison (1989), from the positivist point of view psychological research must limit its investigation to what can be observed through the five senses and to finding regularities in behavior, and this approach ignores consciousness and inner experience. Packer and Addison explain that one of the main limitations of this point of view is that it involves the attempt to separate the observer from the observed, and the researcher from the participant (or text), in the belief that this separation can enable the observer to dispassionately find neutral and unbiased facts. According to Packer and Addison (1989),

The hermeneutic perspective does not accept the claim that a researcher can be neutral, objective, and value free, nor does it believe that the researcher is investigating a reality whose existence is independent of him or her and about which there are objective facts and which is value neutral. (p. 11)

To undervalue the traditional scientific method, however, would be shortsighted. The Positivists have a valued and valuable place in psychological research. Some of the scales of measurement used by the Positivists and others can be useful in certain types of research.

For instance, in a research study inquiring into participants' experience of three different meditation techniques, a researcher could effectively use a Likert scale to measure participant response: "I found this meditation technique to be: not at all difficult, a little difficult, somewhat difficult, very difficult." However, in my research of the spiritual state of consciousness I define as true joy, the positivist approach would not be helpful. Instead, I use the hermeneutical method of Intuitive Inquiry because it is better able to capture the subtle transpersonal experience of true joy.

According to Packer and Addison (1989), there are three stages in hermeneutical or interpretive inquiry. The 1st stage is entering the hermeneutic circle in the proper way. This requires that the researcher adopt an appropriate perspective or stance from which to do the research. The 2nd stage is the actual inquiry from the chosen perspective. The 3rd stage is the evaluation of the interpretive account, the outcome of the inquiry. According to Packer and Addison, "an interpretive account opens up, lays out, and articulates the perspective from which an event or interaction has been understood at the same time as it puts the perspective to test" (p. 106).

### *Intuitive Inquiry*

Intuitive Inquiry, a research method developed by Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2000), is a type of interpretive account that uses transpersonal skills such as intuition and altered states of consciousness to deeply inquire into profound and subtle human experiences. According to Anderson (2000), "Intuitive inquiry seeks to provide an approach to research that systematically incorporates both objective and subjective knowledge through a step-by-step interpretive process--cycles of interpretation that shape the ongoing inquiry" (p. 32).

The format for this Intuitive Inquiry research into the quest for true joy involves 3 cycles of inquiry. There are 2 cycles of inquiry in the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle and 1 cycle of inquiry in the return arc of the hermeneutical circle.

### *Cycle 1: Define Research Topic*

The purpose of the 1st cycle of Intuitive Inquiry is to find the topic for research. Initially, this process involved my allowing an image to come to me during meditation that would guide me to my topic. The *teaching image* that came to me was Michelangelo's *The Pieta*, a moving and beautiful sculpture of Mary holding Christ after he has been taken down from the cross. In this 1st cycle of intuitive inquiry I engaged daily with and reflected upon a picture of *The Pieta*. I also asked for divine guidance, emptied myself to receive it, and meditated on what I received. I also made daily entries in my journal. This process involved determination, patience, and faith.

The first potential topic about which I considered writing was the liminal period in the process of transition, a time between the ending of one thing and the beginning of another. This was an idea I saw reflected in the *Pieta*. However, as the process evolved I began to think about death and resurrection and eventually, suffering and joy. I had already completed a research study on the positive value in suffering, and had learned what I wanted to know. What about hope, I wondered; what about joy? Also during this time I was inspired to read Dwight Judy's (1996) work, "Transpersonal Psychology: Roots in Christian Mysticism," and I became excited and entranced by Christian mysticism and the Christian mystics. As the process continued, I began to see that perhaps I could combine Christian mysticism and joy. Thinking of this possibility filled me with joy. At another point I had a

dream that I translated as guiding me toward using hermeneutical research, although, at the time, I had only a very vague idea of what hermeneutical research actually entailed. A full explanation of my intuitive search for a topic for my dissertation is presented in Chapter 4.

### *Cycle 2: Uncover Interpretive Lenses*

The 2nd cycle of intuitive inquiry involves re-engaging the research topic through a set of texts to find preliminary lenses of interpretation. Finding the lenses of interpretation in cycle 2 develops around the “initial structure and accompanying values” (Anderson, 2000, p. 36) of the researcher and involves identifying “consistent patterns or clusters of ideas” (p. 36-37) from the set of texts studied in cycle 2 and from the review of the literature. In this dissertation, my interpretive lenses reflect how I see true joy--what it is and how to find it. These lenses or perspectives on true joy are based on the ideas I have formulated from my research up to this point. The texts that are examined in cycle 2 are the writings of four Christian mystics known for being joyful: the Franciscan monk Saint Francis of Assisi, an Italian mystic of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; Saint Clare of Assisi, an Italian mystic of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and protégé and spiritual complement of Saint Francis; Mechthild of Magdeburg, a beguine and German mystic of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; and Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite lay brother and French mystic of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the writings of these four mystics, works that describe true joy as a psychospiritual end state or as an aspect of union with God, and passages that explain how these mystics achieved true joy, are read and studied

At the beginning of cycle 2 the identification of the researcher’s conscious and, hopefully, many of the unconscious pre-understandings about the topic takes place in order to avoid, as much as is possible, projecting them onto the interpretation of the texts. Identifying

one's initial preunderstandings and then discovering one's new understandings (the interpretive lenses) are essential parts of the process of finding the appropriate research perspective. Intuitive Inquiry requires that the researcher let go, as much as possible, of preconceptions so that the topic of research can be met with an open mind and an open heart. In this way the hermeneutical process is allowed to change the researcher. To find the appropriate stance or perspective from which to do research the researcher must also have a practical concern that is being investigated, and the interpretation must begin from concerned engagement. For me, concerned engagement means that I am passionately involved in and committed to the quest for true joy.

The research for this dissertation is based on a peak experience of wholeness and fulfillment that I have experienced and have come to identify as a glimpse of true joy. I investigate this experience of what I define as true joy so that I might cultivate it. I also have an earnest desire to inspire others to begin or to continue on their own quest for true joy, and I write this dissertation with that aim in mind.

Through the research process in cycle 2, critical information for the research in cycle 3 emerges. This information includes the research lenses, the criteria for choosing the final mystics, and finally, the actual names of the mystics that are studied.

### *Cycle 3: Read and Interpret Texts and Test Initial Research Premises*

For the 3rd cycle of intuitive inquiry I use the lenses I discover in cycle 2 to read another set of texts. These lenses represent a new set of beliefs and expectations that are different from and more evolved than those I had at the beginning stage of research. In reading these new texts I use the lenses as a framework from which to continue my research

on true joy and the path back to God. I also test and evaluate the ideas (or hypotheses) about true joy I had formulated at the beginning of my research, and I test the framework developed in cycle 2. The testing of the original research hypothesis is similar to traditional psychological research. For cycle 3 I read the works of four more Christian mystics with the intention of modifying, redefining, reorganizing, and expanding my understanding of what true joy is and how to find and experience it (Anderson, 2000). As mentioned earlier, I have asked respected scholars who are knowledgeable in the fields of psychology, the major spiritual and wisdom traditions, or Christian mysticism to recommend a number of possible texts that I might read for cycle 2 and cycle 3 of my research, as well as for my literature review. The purpose of my reading texts suggested by others is to avoid circular research by allowing “the circle of understanding to expand beyond [my] projections (in the positive sense) by spiraling in the experiences of others” (Anderson, 2000, p. 37).

Steele (1989) suggests that to read a text critically one must develop what he calls the *hermeneutic gaze*. Steele defines the hermeneutic gaze as a kind of double vision that enables the reader to see the traditional outer meaning of the text and to read between the lines to understand the inner meaning of the text. According to Steele, one must be able to see the text from odd angles and multiple points of view. This involves a radical alteration in consciousness. Steele states,

Reading with a radical eye means that one should not only be able to immerse oneself in a text and faithfully follow the author’s intended argument, but one is also capable of moving outside the text and viewing it from several different perspectives with an eye to seeing it more completely. (p. 224)

Because language can be imprecise, especially when describing subjective experiences or states of consciousness from different traditions and in different contexts,

throughout this dissertation when writers talk about joy or happiness or other positive states of being, these states are compared with the original definition of true joy found in Chapter 1 (p. 1). This research inquires into this experience of true joy regardless of what words the various writers use to describe it.

In this research study the lives of the four Christian mystics, and the historical contexts in which they are writing are briefly touched upon. Diaries, journals, letters, hagiographical writings, and biographies, if available, are included. According to Packer and Addison (1989), biographical information can be helpful, and may be essential, to hermeneutical inquiry. In the case of both Clare of Assisi and Brother Lawrence, the majority of the writings we have from them are found in their letters. In the case of Mechthild of Magdeburg, all we know about her life are the few facts she has included about herself in her writings. In the case of Clare of Assisi and Saint Francis of Assisi, most of what we know about their lives, temporal and spiritual, is found in hagiographical writings.

For the brief historical inquiry into the lives and times of the four Christian mystics I ask myself the following questions while reading:

1. What could be written?
2. How could it be expressed?
3. Who would be reading it at this time?
4. What were the characteristics of the writer?
5. How should [I] view what was written in terms of its social location?  
(Mertens, 1998, p. 209)

Another issue that needs to be kept in mind is the authenticity of the writings (i.e., did the mystic actually write them)? This study defers to the general opinion of scholars on this point.

### *Collection and Synthesis of Data*

Data are gathered in a variety of ways through several different channels.

Intellectually, I (a) Establish the context and purpose of the work: who, what, why, and where? (b) find the self of the writer: what are the writer's intentions, thoughts, and feelings? how does the writer feel about himself or herself? is the writer expressing joy? (c) identify the feelings of true joy: what words, ideas, and metaphors does the writer use to communicate true joy? and (d) determine the source of the author's true joy: what do the mystics say is the source of their joy? how do they describe the end state of union with God?

From a transpersonal approach, I use imagination, intuition, inspiration, and an inner knowing to collect my data. I often engage in prayer and meditation before reading the chosen texts so that I am able to approach the sacred writings of joy from alternate states of consciousness. In these alternate states of consciousness I try to capture the experience of joy in its wholeness and allow myself to be transformed by it. I often help this process along by reading particularly joyful or meaningful passages aloud, and by expressing my deep emotions (e.g., lament, fear, joy, love) through organic body movement, verbal expression (laughter, moans, sighs, and effervescent shrieks!), journal writing, listening to music, and drawing. According to Schroeder (1995) in her beautiful little book, *Embodied Prayer: Harmonizing Body and Soul*, the experience and enjoyment of our bodies is essential in order to understand our inner life and to connect with others and with God. "Our bodies," she says, "allow us to let loose the wildness of God, to listen and see within and without" (p. 121).



### *Presentation of Research Findings Using Embodied Writing*

In intuitive inquiry the ideal aim is to present the research findings or validated interpretation in a way that will encourage transformation in the reader and in the researcher. In order to do this the researcher communicates the research results as much as is possible by using embodied writing and sympathetic resonance. Embodied writing, developed by Rosemarie Anderson (2001), allows the power and the subtlety of the body with its ancient wisdom and grace to feel and express its deepest secrets. The intellect, as important as it is, is simply unable to comprehend or communicate, in their entirety, the experiences of life and of living. Embodied writing is a way of bridging the gap. Through embodied writing the researcher is able to communicate fully an experience to a reader who then feels a sympathetic resonance on the kinesthetic or sensory level of experience. This can then enable readers to know the experience as if it were their own. Embodied writing then becomes “not only a skill appropriate to research, but a path of transformation that nourishes an enlivened sense of presence in and of the world” (p. 1). In this dissertation, preparation for presenting the data includes embodied prayer, meditation, drawing, movement, listening to music, and communing with nature. Ideally, in this way the researcher is able to communicate from the knowledge of the intellect, the wisdom of the body, and the joy of the spirit.

### *Reliability and Validity*

Packer and Addison (1989) point out that researchers have believed for many years that rigor and professionalism can only be found with the quantification and statistical analysis of data. Because of the domination of this paradigm there is concern about the

credibility of hermeneutical inquiry amongst outside critics and those who practice it. The concern, a justifiable one, is that the final interpretation may be just a projection of the researcher's personal biases and beliefs.

According to Packer and Addison (1989), the solution to this concern will not be found by finding means of validation for interpretive research. Indeed, Addison (1989) suggests that in interpretive inquiry validation in the positivist sense is not relevant. Instead he says, "Appeals are made to the account's comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, intelligibility, credibility, meaningfulness, significance, and fruitfulness for opening up new possibilities" (p.55). In positivist research the researcher is attempting to present findings that correspond to a *reality* that is *out there*, and the closer these findings are to that *reality* the better they are. However, Addison argues that in interpretive research truth is not seen as something static that can be found once and for all but is instead, "an ongoing and unfolding process, where each successive interpretation has the possibility of opening up new possibilities" (p. 56). The credibility of an interpretation, Addison insists, cannot be judged by how close it comes to an objective reality out there but "whether the interpretation encourages the completion or continuation of self reflection" (Addison, p. 56).

Packer (1989) believes that in hermeneutical research the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle and the return arc of the hermeneutical circle "are the alternatives to the procedures that theoretically guarantee the validity and reliability of so called objective measurement in empiricist research" (p. 103). Packer defines the forward arc as the adoption of an informed starting point for the interpretation and the return arc as keeping the interpretation open to correction.

Packer and Addison (1989) suggest that it is important that the researcher be able to tolerate ambiguity and confusion in the process of inquiry. Parts of the interpretation may appear contradictory or may not agree with the researcher's ideas. However, Packer and Addison urge the researcher to seek out these difficulties rather than avoid them, because it is here that learning takes place. They also suggest that as another safeguard of the credibility of the interpretation, the researcher's initial expectations should be compared to the actual findings.

Packer and Addison (1989) suggest four approaches to the evaluation of an interpretation although they state these are not methods of validation: (a) we should find it plausible, (b) it should fit other material of which we are aware, (c) other people should find it convincing, and (d) it should have the power to change practice (p. 289).

Lincoln and Guba (1985), in *Naturalistic Inquiry*, state that we can be so conditioned by the scientific paradigm that we accept the assumptions upon which it rests as gospel, never considering that there may be other ways of thinking. According to Lincoln and Guba, the conventional criteria used by the traditional scientific paradigm to judge the trustworthiness of data are inappropriate for alternative paradigms such as naturalistic inquiry. Lincoln and Guba substitute four new criteria for the old criteria of internal validity, reliability, external validity, and objectivity. For the criterion of internal validity they substitute credibility, and they list five activities that make it more likely for the researcher to produce credible results, including: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and multiple sources of data collection. For the criterion of reliability they substitute dependability. Dependability can be established through several means, including an inquiry audit in which another person can examine the process of data collection and the accuracy of

the product. For the criterion of external validity Lincoln and Guba substitute transferability. For transferability the inquirer can provide a *thick description*, a report of “everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings” (p. 125). In place of the criterion of objectivity Lincoln and Guba substitute confirmability. The major technique for establishing confirmability is the confirmability audit. One question the auditor needs to ask is if the interpretation of the findings is grounded in the data. I intend to use these criteria and as many of the others mentioned above as are applicable and achievable to ensure that my interpretation is as open, responsible, and genuine as possible

In Intuitive Inquiry the principle of sympathetic resonance is used as a validation procedure for the researcher’s intuitive insights into and interpretation of the meaning of the text. Anderson (1998), in *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, speaks about consonant, dissonant, and neutral sympathetic resonance, a state of attunement between the researcher and the text, in which, she says, “The research findings are immediately apprehended and recognized, or reacted to with dissonance or neutrality (e.g., an arising yawn)” (p. 75). Sympathetic resonance is based on the recognition that each one of us has a deep sense of inner knowing. In order to experience that inner knowing we must learn to trust: to trust the Spirit within and to trust our bodies, which are the instrument of Spirit. “Our bodies,” Schroeder (1995) insists, “can bring us back to living life fully, to experiencing God in great depth, to paying attention to the deepest part of us, our natural selves” (p. 124). As a method of validation, sympathetic resonance relies on the wisdom of our *natural selves*. It requires of the researcher honesty, self-awareness, and above all, sensitivity to Truth within and without.

### *Purpose of Intuitive Inquiry*

I am using Intuitive Inquiry as my research method for the following reasons:

1. Intuitive Inquiry is, according to Anderson (1998), “uniquely suited to exploring experiences considered complex and subtle” (p. 258). True joy may be one of the highest of these complex and subtle experiences.
2. The method of Intuitive Inquiry helps me to connect with my deepest self in order to meet the deepest self of the writers whose works I am exploring.
3. With Intuitive Inquiry I am able to use all of who I am, body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit, in my research process, and I am more open and honest about my experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings, intuitive insights) as the research progresses.
4. I am intimately familiar with the process of sympathetic resonance, the validation procedure in Intuitive Inquiry, as I have been consciously using it to make decisions in my own life for many years. By opening to the experience of sympathetic resonance, I believe one is then open to becoming an instrument of the Divine.

I believe this method enables me, more than any other, to be affected and changed by true joy. In other words, I am able to shed my old self and become someone new and better.

I enter into the dissertation process with a description of what I believe true joy to be, and with the preunderstanding that it is found through The Mystic Way. It is not my intention to prove that I am correct. My intention is to find the Truth. In the synthesis of my data in a period of creative incubation a path to true joy can emerge, and an encounter with it as well.

## Chapter 4: The Forward Arc of the Hermeneutical Circle--Intuitive Inquiry: Cycles 1 and 2

### *Cycle 1: Uncovering the Research Topic*

In cycle 1 of my research I followed the process of Intuitive Inquiry to find and focus my research topic and to prepare to begin my research. The main part of this process lasted for approximately 2 months during which time I meditated daily on two sacred works of art and wrote my thoughts and experiences in my journal. In this chapter I explain this process as I experienced it. I also list the preunderstandings or biases I hold as I enter into the next phase of Intuitive Inquiry, cycle 2.

Early in December of 2000, Rosemarie Anderson, a professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and developer of Intuitive Inquiry, led us in a meditation designed to assist us in allowing a text, or piece of art or music to emerge from deep within ourselves that would, when worked with over a period of time, inform us as to our eventual dissertation topic. After just a few minutes of meditation, the image of Michelangelo's Pieta came to my mind. At first I was going to dismiss this image because it did not fit what I was expecting; however, I decided to be true to my intuitive process and accept this as my teaching image. As I continued to meditate on the Pieta I experienced myself lying in Mary's lap; the suffering was over, the resurrection was yet to be.

At home, after the meditation, I printed a picture of the Pieta from the Internet and pasted it in the cover of my journal. Each day I meditated on this picture with the intention of listening to the wisdom it might impart to me. I asked that God guide me to my dissertation topic.

On one occasion during a meditation on the Pieta, I was Mary holding myself. Then I was lying on the lap of Mary totally surrendered. In my journal after this experience I wrote, "This level of surrender is too frightening to me." When I spoke to my therapist about this image she said that I was being held on the lap of the divine feminine.

During this time I read a chapter by Dwight Judy (1996) on Christian mysticism in *The Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*. I was very interested in the mystics Judy described; however, I decided to postpone investigating Christian mysticism until my dissertation was completed. At this point in my process I was considering whether the meaning of the sacred moment captured in the Pieta might be a good dissertation topic.

About one week later, on December 8<sup>th</sup> I wrote, "What is the meaning of the moment depicted in the Pieta for all of us? I am open to your teaching, Pieta. What was Michelangelo thinking, feeling, and experiencing while he was carving you?" I thought that my understanding of what this moment might mean would develop over time. Some of the concepts I considered were dying to the old and being born into the new, the liminal period between death and resurrection, and the moment between hell and heaven. At this time I decided that perhaps I could actually include Christian mysticism in my dissertation, and I was thinking that I might do case studies of three Christian mystics

On December 10, I wrote that during my morning meditation the idea of transition and apparent death emerged. On December 11<sup>th</sup> I wrote,

Death is a moment between the suffering of mortal life and the joy of eternal life. What role does hope play? I have turned my dissertation over to God. It is not mine. It is God's sacred word. I am God's scribe. I am open to any topic to come in--the meaning of joy--the moment between suffering and joy--the Pieta as teacher--the relationship between human and spirit.

On December 12<sup>th</sup> I wrote: “Today I began reading *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross. Am I taking on too much? Will I find anything about the space between the suffering and the joy”?

On December 14<sup>th</sup> I wrote,

Is the void the dark night of the soul, or is the cross experience the dark night? In nature the trees shed their leaves. It looks as if the tree is dead--then new birth and spring come. The butterfly/caterpillar/cocoon is similar. The caterpillar dissolves inside the cocoon. The three days in the tomb--a gestation period--being in the womb. The fact that my *teaching image* is the Pieta would seem to imply that my focus for my dissertation should be on Christianity. What should I do with my three Christian mystics? Perhaps I should outline their spiritual process. Did they have a cocoon state in their lives? A dark night? A resurrection?

On December 16<sup>th</sup> I asked myself, “The Divine Feminine--does she hold us in our interstellar space moments? I am struggling with honing in on a topic.”

On December 19, 2000 I had a dream that I interpreted as telling me what research method to use for my dissertation.

THE DREAM: In the dream some friends of mine are insisting that I recognize that I am being pulled in two opposite directions. I realized that it was true: my head was being pulled in one direction and my feet in the opposite direction along a straight line. I then had the awareness that although it appeared I was being pulled in opposite directions the reality was that I was being pulled in these directions in order to unite ultimately in a circle. END

When I awakened I tried to draw this circle in my journal; however, for some reason I could only draw the bottom half of the circle not the top half of the circle. I was unable to imagine how the top half would fit into my dream image, so I drew it as a dotted line. I knew it was a whole circle, though, because that information was given to me in the dream. I decided to add the image of the circle to the image of the Pieta as a topic of meditation.



The next day I began to read *Entering the Circle* (Packer and Addison, 1989), a book about hermeneutical research recommended to me by a professor. I read:

From the interpretative stance, the researcher's point of view and the evaluation of explanatory accounts [of others] are not seen as being separated in this way, but as in a constant dialogue. Rather than opposite ends of a straight line, they are on the circumference of a circle: the hermeneutical circle. Establishing a point of view, a perspective is the forward arc, and evaluation forms the reverse arc.

I was stunned. This seemed to be talking about my dream. Packer and Addison were talking about the opposite ends of a straight line and the fact that they were part of a circle. This seemed to be almost identical to that section of my dream in which it appears as if I am being pulled along a straight line in two directions, but in fact these two apparently opposite directions are part of a circle. I considered that the reason I could only visualize one half of the circle when I woke and had to imagine the other half using a dotted line in my drawing could mean that I am only able to visualize the forward arc of the circle (the researcher's point of view), not the return arc (the evaluation of explanatory accounts of others), because I have not collected any data to evaluate yet.

I discussed this dream with my therapist and we looked at the circle as a symbol of the Self. My dream tells me that it only appears that I am being pulled in opposite, irreconcilable directions. The dream can also mean that I must experience the pain of feeling pulled in two directions in order to be able to form the healing circle and be whole.

On December 21<sup>st</sup> I wrote in my journal,

During the night I felt an overwhelming feeling--joy? And had to surrender to that. In the past I have only surrendered to suffering--often to the pain accompanying hopeless love, or the despair accompanying physical afflictions or loss. I tried to surrender to the pain in my back and hip but touched into a stubborn part of me that felt it wanted to hold out against God. I allowed that part of me to come forward and I experienced the pain of being pulled taut in

two directions between will and spirit toward “my will be done” and “thy will be done.” My willful aspect is contending against the word of the Lord or it is not in alignment with God or the Tao. My dream about the circle tells me that the willful part of me that is pulling one way is not something bad but is helping me to create the circle of wholeness. . . . What should I write my dissertation about? Something through the eyes of three mystics--the growth period between suffering and joy? How have the mystics turned their suffering into joy? From cross to resurrection?

On December 22nd I wrote:

There is something so rich and full and sacred about the Pieta. I am drawn back to seek shelter in that moment. I become a part of that moment. When my mind goes to other things I feel a loss of deep connection somehow . . . May I be the writing instrument of the Lord . . . I don't know how this is going to come together for my dissertation. I just have to be honest and write down my thoughts. I want this experience to be holy and transforming for me and my reader.

On Christmas Eve I wrote:

I want to write my dissertation on joy! What is it and what needs to happen to have it? Suffering? The interim moment (emptiness)? Dark Night? Humility? Surrender? Perhaps all of this through the eyes of Christian mysticism. Can we have it in this world or only in the next? Is it the same as salvation? It brings me joy to think about writing about joy.

On Christmas Day I wrote:

I don't want to limit my dissertation to the Pieta moment. Do I want to limit it to Christianity? I am not interested in psychology's viewpoint of joy. I want to know what the experts say about joy, not just ordinary people. The experts are the saints, seers, mystics, prophets, and masters. I want to be a religious mystic. That could be too difficult for me. What do you want God? It is your dissertation. My life belongs to you.

On December 26<sup>th</sup> I had the following dream:

**THE DREAM:** In my dream there are various corpses with which I am going to have to deal. One might be a female relative of mine. I believe she is wrapped in a white sheet. Another one seems like a child. The female relative may be my mother. There is no grief on my part. However, I am anxious about how to prepare the body of the child for its future. I am speaking to someone about it. I am worried. I think I am concerned about how to wrap the child for something that is happening to it in the future. **END.**

TRANSLATION: The mother and child could refer to the Pieta and how it relates to my future dissertation. I am letting go of it as a teacher. As a topic it is dead. The corpses could represent things I am letting go. It could involve my questions about whether the resurrection is real or a metaphor. My concern for the child could be my concern for Christ. How am I going to wrap the child or present the child in my life in the future? Or the child could represent my dissertation. Wrapping the child could symbolize the process of writing and presenting my dissertation.

On January 19<sup>th</sup> I wrote:

I think the usefulness of the Pieta image is over. Perhaps it was a vehicle to carry me from my investigation of, and focus on, suffering (the cross) to my present focus, joy (the resurrection). I feel inner joy inside of my chest.

I had written my scholarly paper on the growth that can be created through suffering. Now I wanted to focus in on what the growth from suffering could produce: joy.

On January 27<sup>th</sup> I wrote: "I have found my next piece of art on which to meditate for my dissertation: Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. I wonder which mystics are noted for being the most joyful."

I began to discuss the idea of joy and the Christian mystics with various professors and clergy, and I began to do research on joy and on Christian mystics. Eventually I decided to focus on four mystics who were noted for their joy, whose theology was clear and relatively uncomplicated, and who had been recommended to me by individuals knowledgeable in Christian mysticism.

During the summer of 2001 I read Evelyn Underhill's (1999) classic text, *Mysticism*, and I began to read excerpts from the writings of the four mystics I had tentatively chosen for

my dissertation: Brother Lawrence, St. Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, and Mechthild of Magdeburg.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup> I wrote in my journal: "I wonder what my preunderstandings are in investigating joy, religion, and mysticism: (a) joy comes from Union with God, (b) God is within everything--God is everything, and (c) God is changeless and in the material manifestation always changing."

I had found a book by Julian of Norwich on my stepmother's bookshelf, and on July 10<sup>th</sup> I wrote:

I am empty. I have no power of my own. Julian of Norwich says there are no accidents. God is the only doer. It sounds like she is saying there is no sin, but later she says there is. If God is the only doer then God does all the *good* things and all the *evil* things. So are we doing things (e.g., committing sins) or is God doing those things? Are we doing anything? Are we capable of acting separately from God? Is there a time when God and I are not one? If we are one then what I am doing is what God is doing no matter what it is--at all times--no exceptions.

On July 26<sup>th</sup> I wrote: "I am nobody. I have no power. I want to be filled up with God."

At the end of July, 2001, I wrote about a pivotal experience I had that became the source of my understanding of true joy:

I was in my garden and suddenly I had an experience of the complete fulfillment of all that I have yearned for my entire life. It was as if the two halves of myself that were separate had come together. I realized that I had been looking for this feeling of wholeness in relationships for many years, but I knew in that moment that only God could fulfill me.

Later I felt I had been given a glimpse into the Kingdom of Heaven, and I began to equate this experience with the experience of joy. However, I was interested in an enduring state of joy, not just a peak experience of joy. I began to conceive of joy as nonconditional

(i.e., not predicated upon the ups and downs of the physical world). Was there such a non-conditional, enduring state of joy? I began to call this state *true joy* in order to distinguish it from the emotion of joy, the opposite of sadness. Perhaps, I thought, this is a state the great mystics had experienced. I began to see true joy as a level of psychospiritual development, and I began to see it as the same thing as union with God. Later on I changed my idea and thought of true joy as one aspect of the union with God.

On January 12, 2002 I wrote:

MY COMMITMENTS TO GOD: To the best of my ability to (a) Follow the Ten Commandments to the best of my ability (or some equivalent), (b) Earnestly seek the Truth in all things, (c) Earnestly seek the will of God for my life, (d) Be true to myself, (e), Follow the commandments of Jesus Christ: Love God with all thy heart, mind, and strength, and Love thy neighbor as thyself, (f) Lead a clean and holy life, and (g) To do everything to please Thee. I am open to receive Thy revelations, oh my God.

My beliefs and biases as I enter into cycle 2 of the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle are that: (a) I believe that there is a higher force in the universe that is both immanent and transcendent that can be called the Absolute, or the Ultimate Reality, or God, (b) I believe that we are all on a spiritual path that leads back to this Ultimate Reality or what I call God, (c) I believe that there is a state of consciousness that I define as true joy that can be reached at the end of the spiritual journey in the union with God and where there is no suffering, (d) I believe that some of the great mystics of the world have achieved this state of consciousness and this union with God, and (e) I believe that we can achieve this too.

### *Cycle 2: The Christian Mystics*

In cycle 2 of my research I examine the writings and the lives of four Christian mystics and the context in which they were writing in order to identify my research lenses.

These lenses are different perspectives or points of view on true joy that emerge out of my experience with the four Christian mystics. Through these lenses I study four more Christian mystics in cycle 3, the final stage of research.

The criteria I use to select the four mystics for my cycle 2 research are the following:

(a) they have been identified by authors knowledgeable in the field of Christian mysticism as particularly joyful, (b) they are writing about what seems to fit my description of true joy, (c) There are a small amount of writings available for study, (d) their writings are relatively easily comprehensible, (e) they represent geographical diversity and a gender balance, (f) they come from historical time periods in which Christian mysticism flourished, and (g) their writings touch that deep place within me where joy resides.

The four mystics who are studied in cycle 2 are Saint Francis of Assisi, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Italian and founder of the Franciscan order of brothers; Clare of Assisi, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Italian, founder of the Franciscan women's order known as The Poor Ladies of Assisi, and spiritual companion to Saint Francis; Mechthild of Magdeburg, a 13<sup>th</sup> century German poet and beguine; and Brother Lawrence, a 17<sup>th</sup> century French lay brother in the Order of the Carmelites Dechausses in Paris. Preceding the section for each mystic, relevant historical highlights are provided to help the reader understand the context in which each mystic is writing. Since three of our first set of four mystics are writing in 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe, some of the most important and influential religious, mystical, and historical trends for that time period are included. The 13<sup>th</sup> century was an exciting time of growth and change in all areas of life.

Can we allow ourselves to be touched and changed by the words of these four extraordinary men and women of God? Do we have the courage to suspend our

preconceptions and walk unarmored into the unknown? If so, then let us continue on our heroic quest for True Joy.

According to historical theologian Bernard McGinn (1998) in *The Flowering of Mysticism*, Europe in 1200 was very different from what it had been in 1100. Politically it was better organized because of the emergence of powerful kingdoms such as France, England, and Norman Sicily, and the revival of the German Empire. These powers in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries began to create new forms of political, judicial, and financial bureaucracy, which had a unifying and stabilizing effect.

Europe, according to McGinn (1998), was also different economically in the year 1200, as it was enjoying a general period of economic expansion despite “periodic threats of bad harvest, plague, and war” (p. 2). This expansion continued until the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

There was also, in the year 1200, a change in methods of education and a growing literacy of the laity (nonclergy), and according to McGinn (1998), “The new literacy was a necessary foundation for the emerging vernacular (non-Latin) theology of the mystics” (p. 4).

According to Tavard (1989), during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when theological authority moved from the monasteries to universities, there was a transition from monastic theology to scholastic theology. During this period of scholastic theology “a separation of theology and spirituality began which reached its high point at the end of the Middle Ages” (p. 10). There were also, Tavard points out, economic and political shifts of power. Economic power in the 13<sup>th</sup> century shifted from an agriculturally based society to a society concentrated on the commerce of the cities. Political power shifted from the provincial aristocracy to the King’s court.

According to Durant (1950), "The Crusades [1095-1291] were the culminating act of the medieval drama" (p. 585). The two great religions, Christianity and Islam, after centuries of disagreement finally went to war. Ultimately, from the western point of view, the Crusades were a failure, because, Durant suggests, the power and prestige of the Roman Catholic Church, although augmented by the first Crusade, was increasingly damaged as time went on.

In 1198 a new Pope, Innocent III, was elected who had, according to McGinn (1998), a broad vision for the church. In November of 1215 he organized the great reform council in Rome. The two major issues discussed at this council were apostolic life and pastoral renewal. The *vita apostolica* (the apostolic life) was the imperative to live as Christ and the Apostles had done and was a fundamental idea in the spirituality of the later middle ages. The basic components of the *vita apostolica* were penance (for ones own and for the world's sins), poverty, and preaching. The main question that was being debated was whether preaching should be restricted to those who had been ordained (i.e., the bishops and the priests) or whether monks should be allowed to preach as well.

According to McGinn (1998), the second major issue discussed by the great reform council of 1215 was pastoral renewal. One of the major concerns involved in pastoral renewal was the necessity to combat heresy, at that time a major threat to the Christian world. Indeed, Pope Innocent III played a role in the creation of the Inquisition. Another major concern centered on the demand for more effective preaching and the necessity to feed the people with God's word. A third concern was the strengthening of the sacramental life of the church including the Eucharist, confession, and penance for sins. The fourth concern was the rise of devotionism, particularly the devotion to the passion of Christ and the devotion to



Mary. The devotional practices developed in the late middle ages were not all deemed appropriate by the Church (McGinn, 1998).

The year 1200, according to McGinn (1998), also marks the beginning of a major shift in western Christian mysticism. In particular, new ways of experiencing and explaining the presence of God begin to emerge. McGinn presents these new developments in mysticism in three categories: “(1) new attitudes toward the relation between world and cloister; (2) a new relationship between men and women in the mystical path; and finally, (3) new forms of language and modes of representation of mystical consciousness” (p. 12).

According to McGinn (1998), early medieval mysticism revolved around monastic orders that advocated withdrawal of the religious elite from society with the intent of creating the cloistered Kingdom of Heaven on earth. This idea began to change in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For many centuries, before the High Middle Ages, the energy of monastic Christian life had been focused inward; however, McGinn states that during the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century the monastics and the proponents of canonical reform began to insist that “preaching and evangelization of the world” (p. 6) were essential to their new understanding of the *vita apostolica*.

It was evidently, McGinn (1998) explains, an idea whose time had come because, despite some resistance, monastic Christianity opened its doors and its hearts to the outside world to preach and to teach. According to McGinn, the reason for this major shift was two-fold: (a) a recognition by the church hierarchy that lay persons as well as the religious elite could experience the presence of God, and (b) an awareness that it was not necessary to abandon the world to find God. This is a remarkable awakening on the part of the Church.

The second shift in Christian mysticism at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century involved the emergence of women and the powerful role in religious life they assumed “both in terms of hagiographical accounts and texts produced by women themselves” (McGinn, 1998, p. 15). Hagiography is a genre of medieval literature that was present in the development of mysticism before 1200, but began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to play a much more important role. Hagiographical texts contain stories about the lives and religious experiences of individual saints especially recognized for their sanctity, and they were written not so much for historical purposes but as a way of teaching how one should live life (McGinn).

Basic hagiographical themes, McGinn (1998) informs us, included compunction and tears, fasting, prayer, humility, chastity, and especially penance and satisfaction for sin springing from deep devotion to Christ’s passion (p. 36). In hagiographical texts most saints’ lives were presented in an intensified form within certain familiar conventions and often included standard phrases about the prayer life of the subjects and their strength as contemplatives.

According to McGinn (1998), much of what we know today about the women mystics of the late middle ages comes from hagiographical portraits developed by their male clerical advisors in order to spread the women’s fame. Later in the 14<sup>th</sup> century what some scholars call *autohagiographies* emerged which were “narratives in which an author presents aspects of her or his own life as a model of suffering in imitation of Christ’s passion and the reception of ‘divine consolations’” (pp. xii-xiii).

The third major shift in western Christian mysticism is what McGinn (1998) refers to as an “explosion” (p. 15) of innovative accounts of a visionary and ecstatic nature that were primarily by and about women and that “contain[ed] descriptions of direct encounters with

Jesus that signal a new form of mystical consciousness, or mystical knowing--more direct, more excessive, more bodily in nature than older forms" (p. 25). McGinn is quick to point out that the essentially nonvisionary and nonautobiographical nature of monastic Christianity that was dominant prior to 1200 should be recognized for having contributed foundational wisdom for the contemplative tradition and should still be seen as mysticism. McGinn describes the mystical element of Christianity as "a form of immediate encounter with God whose essential purpose is to convey a loving knowledge (even a negative one) that transforms the mystic's mind and whole way of life" (p. 26). This definition, McGinn suggests, is large enough to include both the monastic contemplatives before 1200 and the 13th- and 14th-century mystical visionaries.

According to McGinn (1998), the kinds of visions the mystics experienced changed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Before the middle ages, the visions that were experienced involved a journey to heaven or hell. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the visionary experience changed to continuing encounters with heavenly figures in pictorial form. McGinn insists that not all visions are mystical, and he lists three criteria for determining if they are or are not: (a) the kind of vision presented, (b) the purpose of the visions, and (c) the effect the vision has on the person receiving it.

But are these visions real? Are they, in other words, from God? During the middle ages the reality of visions was rarely questioned. Some observers (e.g., Hollenback, 1996; McGinn, 1998) suggest that the culture and religious convictions of the visionary mystic not only influence how the vision is interpreted after it is experienced, but also shape "the perceptual and existential landscape of a mystic's vision *while it is taking place*" (Hollenback, p. 9; emphasis added). However, McGinn does suggest that without some kind

of authentic underlying experience, the story of the vision would probably not have been told, and the Church, which had its own criteria for determining the validity of visionary experiences, would most probably not have accepted it.

Visions are problematic and their source is not always easily understood. Neurologist Oliver Sachs (1998) suggests that some of the visions of the 12<sup>th</sup> century mystic Hildegard Von Bingen, can probably be attributed to brain pathology: an epileptic episode or scintillating scotoma from a migrainous manifestation. Often hallucinations are seen as symptomatic of a psychotic disorder. Even Underhill (1999), a devoted supporter of the mystics, suggests that “the perceptive power and creative genius of mystics, as of other great artists, sometimes goes astray” (p. 271).

According to Underhill (1999), however, the mystics themselves were very aware of the problematic nature of visions and were cautious about giving too much importance to them, warning their disciples not to assume too quickly that they were messages from God. Inge (1964) agrees, suggesting that the masters of the spiritual life did not attach much importance to *ecstasy or vision* and believed that it was a gift from God to shore up the wavering faith of the struggling mystic, particularly the beginners. Spiritual aspirants were advised not to attempt to induce visions or to take pride in them if they did come. The mystics were also aware that visions could be the product of an aggravated nervous or digestive system and believed that some of them might come from Satan.

McGinn (1998) recommends that we should think of visions

primarily as “visualizations,” in the sense of powerful imaginative creations based on intense meditation on the imagery of the bible and the liturgy, as well as artistic representations of Christ, the angels and saints, heaven and hell, and so on. (p. 30)

Underhill (1999) acknowledges that some visions are probably “morbid hallucinations” (p. 269) or “symptoms of insanity” (p. 269), and that others may be based purely on imagination and personal experience; however, she states, “There are some [visions] experienced by minds of great power and richness, which are crucial for those who have them” (p. 269), and these visions, she continues,

belong to another and higher plane of experience from the radiant appearances of our Lady, the piteous exhibitions of the sufferings of Christ, which swarm in the lives of the saints, and contain no feature which is not traceable to the subject’s religious enthusiasms or previous knowledge. (p. 269)

Underhill believes that these higher kinds of visions are symbolic representations from the Absolute, and she uses the criterion of whether or not these visions are life-enhancing to determine if they are from God.

Underhill (1999) translates a passage from Delacroix (1908) in *Etudes d’Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme* that seems relevant to the discussion:

Such automatisms as these [St. Catherine of Siena’s mystic marriage] are by no means scattered and incoherent. They are systematic and progressive; they are governed by an interior aim; they have, above all, a teleological character. They indicate the continuous intervention of a being at once wiser and more powerful than the ordinary character and reason; they are the realization, in visual and auditory images, of a secret and permanent personality of a superior type to the conscious personality. They are its voice, the exterior projection of its life. They translate to the conscious personality the suggestions of the subconscious: and they permit the continuous penetration of the conscious personality by these deeper activities. They establish a communication between these two planes of existence, and, by their imperative nature, they tend to make the inferior subordinate to the superior. (As cited in Underhill, p. 273)

The above passage may be able to help us discern what experiences can aid us on our quest for true joy and what experiences are extraneous to or distract from it.

We now begin our inquiry into the lives and works of our four cycle-2 mystics.

*Saint Francis of Assisi, (1182-1226), Italy*

According to Cousins (1989) in *World Spirituality*, another significant shift in Christian mystical thinking during the High Middle Ages in Western Europe took place when Christians began to focus on the humanity of Christ. Of course, the awareness of the historical Christ had always existed; however, during the first 1000 years the emphasis of Christian spirituality was on Christ's resurrection, as directed by Paul himself. However, during the 12th and 13th centuries Cousins states

the awareness of his humanity took on new dimensions: it functioned as a catalyst of a new devotion, bringing about a transformation of sensibility, which evoked a spectrum of human emotions, such as tender affection and compassion. It produced one of the most characteristic and widely used forms of Christian meditation. In the field of art it effected a shift from a stylized image of the victorious Savior to the agonizing, bleeding human Christ on the cross. In the late Middle Ages it culminated in an almost exclusive emphasis on Christ's passion to the point of overshadowing his resurrection. (p. 375)

It was Francis of Assisi, according to Cousins (1989), more than any other saint or spiritual thinker, who influenced religious thought and feeling in the direction of devotion to the humanity of Christ.

Saint Francis was born in Assisi, Italy, to a wealthy textile merchant and the daughter of a distinguished French family, and according to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction to the writings of Francis of Assisi (1982), the youthful Francis had dreams of earthly fame and glory that far exceeded his merchant class life. His dreams of grandeur, however, were temporarily derailed when he ended up in jail after the military side he was on lost the battle. When he was released from prison, however, he was a changed man and was now interested only in responding "to the impulses of the Lord that moved mysteriously within him" (p. 3).

Francis's conversion came when he heard a voice from the cross of San Damiano calling him by name requesting that he, "Repair My Church." Immediately he gave up all his possessions, renounced his old life, and, taking this request literally, began begging for stones to build a church.

According to G.K. Chesterton (1960) in his biography, *St. Francis of Assisi*, before his conversion Saint Francis was an "extravagant, young eccentric whom most people probably regarded as a maniac" (pp. 70-71). If we want to understand Saint Francis, Chesterton suggests, we must see him as similar to a passionate lover who is willing to do almost anything for his ladylove, as this is perhaps the easiest way for us to appreciate the life of extreme self-denial he chose to endure for the sake of his love for Christ. According to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction to the writings of Francis of Assisi (1982), "he was a man overwhelmed by the goodness of a loving God" (p. 3).

According to Chesterton (1960), Francis, as a youth, had a passionate love for French poetry, and when he and his friends went out on the town they carried "their pageant of poetry" (p. 78) with them and called themselves Troubadours. The original Troubadours were a school of poets in southern France in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Usually they wrote about passionate love, but they could also be satirists and critics as well. They sang their own poems and played musical instruments, and sometimes the feminine objects of their love "were so airy as to be almost allegorical" (p. 80). Chesterton points out that Saint Francis was using the language of the Troubadours when he said that he had "a most glorious and gracious lady and that her name was Poverty" (p. 80).

Chesterton (1960) relates that after the conversion of Saint Francis, when he and his friends went out on the town to do their spiritual work Francis referred to them as the

*Jongleurs de Dieu*. A Jongleur, Chesterton explains, was a jester or sometimes a juggler, or sometimes even a tumbler. Chesterton, in order to help us understand Saint Francis better, relates a beautiful legend about an acrobat who was called *The Tumbler of Our Lady* because “he turned head over heels and stood on his head” (p.81) in front of an image of the Virgin Mary. He then received the thanks from her and all of heaven. Chesterton suggests that “when St. Francis named his followers the Jongleurs he meant something like the Tumblers of Our Lord” (p. 82).

According to Chesterton (1960), God turned Saint Francis’s life upside down so that the humiliation of his youth became holiness and happiness and so that his life of service, self-effacement, and self-abnegation became a freedom “almost amounting to frivolity” (p. 82). His practice of asceticism was not, Chesterton explains, negative self-denial or a rigid stoical regimen. It was, instead “as positive as a passion; it had all the air of being as positive as a pleasure” (p. 96).

In *The Life of St. Francis*, Saint Bonaventure (1217-1274), theologian and minister general of the Franciscan Order, tells a story about how St. Francis began his mission of poverty.

One day when he was devoutly hearing a Mass of the Apostles, the Gospel was read in which Christ sends forth his disciples to preach and explains to them the way of life according to the Gospel: that they *should not keep gold or silver or money in their belts, nor have a wallet for their journey, nor two tunics, nor shoes, nor staff* (Matt. 10:9). When he heard this, he grasped its meaning and committed it to memory. This lover of apostolic poverty was then filled with an indescribable joy and said: “This is what I want; this is what I long for with all my heart.” He immediately took off his shoes from his feet, put aside his staff, cast away his wallet and money as if accursed, was content with one tunic and exchanged his leather belt for a piece of rope. He directed all his heart’s desire to carry out what he had heard and to conform in every way to the rule of right living given to the apostles. (Bonaventure, 1978, p. 200)



This powerful and dramatic act appears to be for Saint Francis the beginning of what Underhill (1999) calls The Christian Way of Purgation, a period of self-stripping and purification that all true mystics must undergo. Saint Francis's act of giving up his worldly possessions, and thereby embracing poverty in the material world, was a symbol of the inner spiritual poverty that he so desperately desired. For the Way of Purgation, according to Underhill, involves a "casting off of one's burdens: a total self-renouncement, the attainment of a . . . poverty of spirit whereby [one] becomes 'Perfectly Free'" (p. 130).

Saint Francis finds joy in Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, the three primary virtues, according to Underhill (1999), which all mystics of all faiths agree are necessary for Union with God. According to Underhill, the mystics define Poverty as a mental detachment from all things of the world; they define Chastity as a soul that has been purified of all desire for anything other than God; they define Obedience as a "holy indifference" (p. 205) to the pleasure and pain of life. Underhill suggests that these three virtues are actually elements of the same thing--"Inward Poverty" (p. 205).

According to Underhill (1999), in the newly awakened self of the mystic there is first an awareness of God and then of one's human imperfections. From then on, through the period of Purgation, the mystic experiences an "acute consciousness of unworthiness" (p. 200), the "torment of contrition" (p. 200), and a "thirst for Perfection" (p. 201). The goal of the mystic is one-pointed: to escape from the now hated sense of self and to unite with the beauty, the good, and the love of Perfect Reality.

This heroic task is accomplished in two ways: through detachment and through mortification. Saint Francis, like all great mystics, followed this path (Underhill, 1999).

Detachment involves giving up those things that come between the mystic and God.

According to Underhill, these things can be different in every individual and can include, “riches, habits, religious observances, friends, interests, distastes, or desires” (p. 211).

Although Saint Francis chose to renounce all worldly goods and to own nothing, this is not always necessary, as the Poverty the mystics seek is an inner poverty, not necessarily an outer poverty. The purpose of Purgation, Underhill says, is not to become destitute but to detach the heart and will from all that is not God.

According to Underhill (1999), the second practice of purification in *The Purgative Way* is mortification in which the mystic deliberately looks for painful and difficult experiences. The purpose of mortification is to kill the individualistic self by ridding oneself of the attachments and cravings, likes, dislikes, and preferences of the ego so that “the higher center; the ‘new man,’ may live and breathe” (p. 217).

This is necessarily a painful process that involves hard disagreeable work, fierce suffering, and bitter disappointments. Some mystics seek physical pain, but more often, according to Underhill (1999), the mystic finds suffering in the mental realm: in loneliness, rejection, self-criticism, misunderstanding, and injustice. The story of how Saint Francis embraced and befriended the lepers, by whom he had initially been so repelled, is an example of his seeking a difficult and painful experience for the sake of mortification.

Saint Francis understood that the path to union with God is a painful one, and as a Christian the passion of Christ was his example of the suffering required. Indeed, Underhill (1999) explains, all mystics realize the necessity of pain on the quest for the Absolute and are thus driven “to an eager and heroic union with the reality of suffering, as well as with the reality of joy” (p. 222).

Although a process of purification continues for most mystics until the final state of Union with God, according to Underhill (1999), the painful Way of Purgation and its required practice of mortification does come to an end, and there emerges a more stabilized self: able to see reality not from a self-centered point of view, but from a God-centered point of view. This is the joyous, light-filled state of the Illumination of the Self. According to Underhill, "All pleasurable and exalted states of mystic consciousness in which the sense of I-hood persists, in which there is a loving and joyous relation between the Absolute as object and self as subject, fall under the head of Illumination" (p. 234). All real mystics and real artists share this illumined state "according to the measure of courage and self-abandonment in which [they have] drunk the cup of ecstasy" (p. 237).

The state of Illumination is the stage, according to Underhill (1999), in which most mystics reside, and the state from which most of the rapturous literature of mystical love and joy is written. However, this is not the final stop on the Mystic Way. Only the greatest souls, Underhill reports, realize that this Illumined state cannot satisfy their desire for the Absolute, and that it is "the 'betrothal' rather than the 'marriage' of the soul" (p. 140). The real difference between the Illuminative and Unitive stages of mystical development is that in Illumination the mystic still experiences a separate sense of self, whereas in the state of Union with God, the self and God are one and the same being, as it were. Those souls that will settle for nothing less than total union must go through the Dark Night of the Senses before they reach their Source.

According to Underhill (1999), Saint Francis wrote his works from the state of Illumination. One of his most mystical works is *The Canticle of Brother Sun* in which he embraces the aspects of nature as members of his family. This work was composed at the end

of his life, when he was ill, in pain, and nearly blind; however, from his hard-won state of detachment or Inward Poverty, Saint Francis is able to see the world through new eyes and is able to enjoy its beauty in a free, intense, and innocent way despite his suffering.

According to Chesterton (1960), *The Canticle of Brother Sun* is very characteristic of the way Saint Francis is. In this song Saint Francis expresses a childlike innocence and a poetic, spontaneous delight in his surroundings and has an awareness of the sacred unity of all things. We could call it God consciousness, as Saint Francis appears to see God's creation through God's eyes.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
 Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.  
 To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
 And no man is worthy to mention Your name.  
 Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
 especially Sir Brother Sun,  
 Who is the day and through whom You give us light.  
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;  
 and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.  
 Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
 in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.  
 Praised be You my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
 and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of  
 weather  
 through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.  
 Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
 Which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.  
 Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
 Through whom You light the night  
 And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.  
 Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,  
 Who sustains and governs us,  
 And who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs....  
 (Francis of Assisi, 1982, p. 39)

In their introduction to the writings of Francis of Assisi (1982) Armstrong and Brady state that *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* “is an expression of the inner life of Saint Francis” (p. 104). Here are some excerpts:

1. O OUR most holy Father,  
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Savior

2. WHO ARE IN HEAVEN:  
In the angels and in the saints  
Enlightening them to love, because You, Lord, are light  
Inflaming them to love, because You, Lord, are love  
Dwelling [in them] and filling them with happiness,  
because You, Lord, are the Supreme Good,  
the Eternal Good  
from Whom comes all good  
without Whom there is no good.

4. YOUR KINGDOM COME:  
So that You may rule in us through Your grace  
And enable us to come to Your Kingdom  
Where there is an unclouded vision of You  
A perfect love of You  
A blessed companionship with You  
An eternal enjoyment of You

5. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN  
HEAVEN  
That we may love You with our whole heart by always thinking  
of You  
With our whole soul by always desiring You  
With our whole mind by directing all our  
Intentions to You and by seeking Your  
Glory in everything. (pp.104-105)

In this prayer St. Francis speaks of the *eternal enjoyment of God* and the happiness that individuals can experience when God (Love) dwells within them. This prayer exemplifies a life totally devoted to God, a life that appears to be overflowing with a natural, spontaneous joy. For those of us on the quest for true joy we might ask ourselves whether the joy of Saint Francis comes from the state of spiritual poverty that he embraced.

The life Francis of Assisi (1982) chose was by normal standards an *extremely* difficult one, and he expected a great deal from himself and his brothers. In "The Admonitions," number V he encourages the brothers to glory in their infirmities and to endure daily the holy cross of Jesus Christ. In "Admonition VI" he says, "Let all of us, brothers, look to the Good Shepherd Who suffered the passion of the cross to save His sheep" (p. 29). This daily taking on of the holy cross of Jesus Christ is an intimidating idea.

The humility Saint Francis (1982) practiced, and that he demanded from his brothers, is extraordinary. In "Admonition XXII" he states, "Blessed is the servant who is not quick to excuse himself and who humbly accepts shame and blame for a sin, even though he did not commit any fault" (p. 34). In "Admonition XIX" he teaches:

Blessed is the servant who esteems himself no better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and despicable; for what a man is before God, that he is and nothing more. . . . And *blessed is that servant* (Mt. 24:46) who does not place himself in a high position of his own will and always desires to be under the feet of others. (p. 33)

In "Admonition XII," Saint Francis again reminds the brothers to put themselves beneath everyone else:

A servant of God may be recognized as possessing the Spirit of the Lord in this way: if the flesh does not pride itself when the Lord performs some good through him--since the flesh is always opposed to every good: rather he considers himself the more worthless in his own eyes and esteems himself less than all others. (p. 31)

In the "Earlier Rule," Chapter IX, Saint Francis of Assisi (1982) reminds his brothers of the importance of detachment and mortification:

All the brothers should strive to follow the humility and the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says, *having something to eat and something to wear, we be content with these*. . . . And they must rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are

looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside. (p. 117)

In "A Letter to the Entire Order," Saint Francis suggests the reward for following this way of life: "Look, brothers, at the humility of God and *pour out your hearts before Him!* Humble yourselves, as well, that you may be exalted by Him" (p. 58).

In "Admonition XI" Francis of Assisi (1982) reminds the brothers of the importance of material poverty: "That servant of God who does not become angry or upset at anything lives justly and *without anything of his own*" (p. 31; emphasis added). In "The Earlier Rule," Chapter 1, he again emphasizes the importance of owning nothing:

The rule and life of these brothers is this: to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own, and to follow the teaching and the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who says: *If you wish to be perfect, go* (Mt. 19:21) and *sell everything* (cf. Lk. 18:22) *you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me* (Mt 19:21). And, *if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* (Mt. 16:24)

Francis of Assisi (1982) believes, like many medieval mystics, that the body is an impediment to being with God and thus sees it as sinful. In "Admonition X," he states, "Many people when they sin or receive an injury, often blame the Enemy or some neighbor. But this is not right, for each one has the [real] enemy in his own power, that is the body through which he sins" (p. 30). In "Admonition XIV" he suggests: "[A] person who is truly poor in spirit hates himself (cf. Lk 14:26) and loves those who strike him on the cheek (cf. Mt 5:39)" (p. 32). In *The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, Saint Francis again mentions the idea of hating the body as a condition of living in penance, but then points out the reward for obeying his injunctions:

All those who love the Lord *with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength* (cf. Mt 22:39) and love their neighbors as

themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sin, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance:

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, since the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (cf. Jn 14:23). Oh, how glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! Oh, how holy, consoling, beautiful and wondrous it is to have such a Spouse [Holy Spirit]! Oh, how holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, loveable, and desirable above all things to have such a Brother and such a Son: in our Lord Jesus Christ. (p. 63)

The love of Christ, the imitation of His life in poverty, and following the gospel were at the heart of the life of Saint Francis, and judging from the above passage this way of life apparently brought him joy. According to Cousins (1989), Saint Francis chose to emphasize the poverty of the birth and death of Christ, and these two events became the major focus of his devotion to Christ's humanity. After Saint Francis received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ's passion in his hands, feet, and side, the crucified Lord became the center of his existence until his death 2 years later. In a sense through the stigmata, Saint Francis embodied Christ's suffering. Saint Bonaventure (1978) describes this experience:

On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph with six fiery and shining wings descend from the height of heaven. And when in swift flight the Seraph had reached a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the figure of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were lifted above his, two were extended for flight and two covered his whole body. When Francis saw this, he was overwhelmed and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced because of the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that he was fastened to a cross *pierced his soul with a sword* of compassionate sorrow (Luke 2:35). . . . Eventually he understood by a revelation from the Lord that divine providence had shown him this vision so that, as Christ's lover, he might learn in advance that he was to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the fire of his love consuming his soul. (pp. 305-306)



Francis of Assisi's (1982) idea of true joy is described in this powerful story:

[Brother Leonard] related, in the same place [the Portiuncula], that one day at Saint Mary the blessed Saint Francis called Brother Leo and said: "Brother Leo, write!" He answered: "I'm ready." "Write," [Francis] said, "what true joy is:

"A messenger comes and says that all the masters in Paris have come into the Order; write: this is not true joy. Or that all the prelates beyond the mountains [have entered the Order], as well as the archbishops and bishops; or, that the king of France and the king of England [have entered the Order]; write: this is not true joy. Again, that my brothers have gone to the nonbelievers and converted all of them to the faith; again, that I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles: I tell you that true joy does not consist in any of these things."

"What then is true joy?"

"I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night; and it is winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs, and blood flows from such wounds. And all covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and after I have knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: 'Who are you?' I answer: 'Brother Francis.' And he says: 'Go away; this is not a proper hour for going about; you may not come in.' And when I insist, he answers: 'Go away, you are a simple and a stupid person; we are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour!' And I stand again at the door and say: 'For the love of God, take me in tonight.' And he answers: 'I will not. Go to the Crosiers' place and ask there.' I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, there would be true joy in this and true virtue and the salvation of the soul." (pp. 165-166)

To try to understand and appreciate a culture, be it secular or religious, from the outside is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Those of us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who are not mystics might consider some of Saint Francis's ideas and practices to be extreme, particularly those around taking on the cross (and the suffering) of Christ, hatred of the body, radical poverty, and severe self-criticism and deprecation. Perhaps, for many of us, this life style appears to be the antithesis of joy. It is certainly the opposite of what the ego seems to want (e.g., possessions, comfort, self-importance, the pleasures of human love). And yet, there is no denying that many of the writings of Saint Francis express a spontaneous,

authentic joy. How are we to explain this? Suffering was more ordinary in the centuries preceding our own era of medical, social, and economic progress, and there were no remedies, so individuals were used to accepting it. In our culture today most people have a strong tendency to see all suffering as negative and to avoid it at all costs. However, there appear to be two types of suffering: neurotic and creative. Creative suffering or suffering that creates change appears to be a part of the path to union with God and true joy. Perhaps what brings us true joy is actually the opposite of what we think will bring it.

One of the most deeply touching and beautiful stories of Saint Francis is about how God led him among the lepers. According to Hellman (1989), this was the foundation for his conversion and was “an experience of mercy that moved his heart to a new and deep compassion” (p. 33). For the first time, Hellman explains, Saint Francis was open to the outcasts, and perhaps in his acceptance of them he found an inner acceptance of the outcast within. Shortly before his death, in his “Testament,” Francis of Assisi (1982) describes this experience:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world. (p. 154)

That which seemed bitter to Saint Francis before his conversion later became sweet. Perhaps this experience can show how creative suffering for the sake of purification and Inward Poverty can bring joy. According to Hellman (1989), “The poverty, patience, humility, wisdom, and divine love Francis experienced were a knowledge and an experience of the passion of the cross given to him by the Spirit of the Lord” (p. 34).

According to McGinn (1998), as beautiful as the writings of Saint Francis may be, there is, with the possible exception of *The Canticle of Brother Sun* and a few of his prayers, very little evidence of the mystical element in them. Indeed, McGinn explains, it is the hagiographical descriptions of Saint Francis that have had the major influence on western mysticism, not his writings. The two main ideas about Saint Francis that the hagiographical texts have put forth are (a) Francis as ecstatic contemplative and visionary, and (b) Francis as a literal image of Jesus, especially through his stigmata experience. This ecstatic visionary side of Saint Francis does not appear in many of his writings, which for the most part present the standard doctrine of the Christian Church at the time.

McGinn (1998) gives us a list of a number of mystical themes and does say that many of them are found in the writings of Saint Francis. These include (a) being espoused to Christ, (b) birth of Christ in the soul, (c) seeing human nature as *imago Dei* (image of God), (d) insistence on the surrender to divine action, (e) role of God conceived of as love and as the *summum bonum* (ultimate goal), (f) devotion to the Eucharist, and (g) the existence of the divine within oneself presented in terms of the Trinity as relating to God as spouse-brother-mother (p. 53). However, although these themes can be found in the writings of Saint Francis, McGinn insists that

there is a difference between expressing fundamental theological truths that underlie mysticism and a teaching that sets out a program of mystical transformation, whether expressed in exegetical, theoretical, or biographical terms. From this perspective, it does not seem that the majority of Francis's writings are explicitly mystical. (pp. 53-54)

As two of our 13<sup>th</sup> century Christian mystics are women, a brief look at the emergence of women mystics during this time is relevant and interesting. According to Caroline Bynum (1989) in *World Spirituality*, when the writings and lives of religious men

and women in medieval Europe are compared, there are no particular practices or devotional themes that belong exclusively to one gender or the other. However, Bynum states that recent study of the saints' lives and their mystical writings show there are different patterns in the spirituality of men and women. In her many years of study of women in mysticism Bynum found the following:

Mysticism was more central in female religiosity and in female claims to sanctity than in men's and paramystical phenomena (trances, levitation, stigmata, miraculous *inedia*, etc.) were far more common in women's mysticism. Women's reputations for holiness were more often based on supernatural, charismatic authority, especially visions and supernatural signs. Women's devotion was more marked by penitential asceticism, particularly self-inflicted suffering, extreme fasting and illness borne with patience. Women's writing was, in general, more affective, although male writing too brims over with tears and sensibility; erotic, nuptial themes, which were first articulated by men, were most fully elaborated in women's poetry. And certain devotional emphases, particularly devotion to Christ's suffering humanity and to the Eucharist (although not, as is often said, to the Virgin) were characteristic of women's practices and women's words. (p. 131)

According to McGinn (1998), one of the most remarkable and significant changes in the western mysticism of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, found most particularly among women, is the explicit, concrete, "embodied accounts" (p. 156) of the courtship and union of the female soul and God or Christ the Divine Lover. In many instances surprising and sometimes disconcerting sexual language and images are used with no attempt to explain them, as in the past, in allegorical terms.

Along with these erotic descriptions, McGinn (1998) explains, is "the 'excessive' character of [the] ascetical practice and loving devotion" (p. 156) characteristic of many female mystical writers. Although some of the desert monastics maintained practices of extreme self-denial, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century "it was the combination of extraordinary penitential practices and what the mystics themselves often spoke of as love's excess, insanity, madness,

and folly that was distinctive to the new mystical trends” (pp. 156-157). The intense longing for God, the abandonment of self in the insane pursuit of God, and the desire for suffering and annihilation were trends found especially in the writings of women.

However, according to McGinn (1998), there is a High purpose for these seemingly alarming practices. These women mystics were not satisfied with the traditional idea of the *unio mystica* (mystical union) as a union of love between the finite human person and the infinite Divine. The experience they wanted, McGinn suggests, involved a total annihilation of the self in a union with God in the *no-self*. The insane love for God, McGinn explains, serves to break down the boundaries of the limited, worldly self and the

infinite longing reveals that the soul or self is in some mysterious way itself infinite so that the annihilation of the created will leaves nothing present but God or rather, the ‘No-thing’ or ‘No-self’ that is the most adequate way to point toward the true God who lies beyond the God of limited human thoughts and aspirations. (p. 157)

We can recognize a number of these trends in the writings of two of the most influential women mystics of the High Middle Ages: Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Clare of Assisi.

*Mechthild of Magdeburg, (1212-1299?), Germany*

Oh, dear dove, [bride]  
Your voice is string music to my ears.  
Your words are spices for my mouth.  
Your longings are the lavishness of my gift.  
(Mechthild of Magdeburg, 1998, p. 41)

According to Underhill (1999), Mechthild of Magdeburg, although never made a Saint, was a woman of genius, an ecstatic visionary, and an exquisite poet whose works influenced Dante in the *Paradiso*. As we read the works of Mechthild we will discover that

she sought joy in union with God above all else, but she also sought joy in the estrangement from God.

All that we know about Mechthild comes from her only work, the seven books of *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, composed between 1250 and 1280. Whether this is an accurate self-portrait or an idealized one is, of course, unknown; however, McGinn (1998) suggests that there is no reason to doubt the historical facts. The original of *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, written in Mechthild's Middle Low German dialect, has been lost. What survives is a 14<sup>th</sup> century translation by a secular priest, Henry of Nordlingen. This translation is written in Middle High German.

When Mechthild was just 12 she received her first experience with God that was "a visitation so powerful she felt she would never be able to commit a serious sin again" (Flinders, 1993, p. 47). Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) called this visitation "God's true greeting" (p. 40), and from that day forward she desired only one thing--the joy of union with God.

According to translator Frank Tobin in his introduction to the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), at the age of 23, Mechthild left her family and friends and joined the beguines. The beguines were women who wanted to return to the ideals of early Christianity and to live more like the apostles. They led lives of poverty, chastity, and religious devotion but did not belong to any approved religious order. The beguines, Tobin suggests, strove to live pure lives in an impure world, and their thoughts were on only one thing--pleasing their divine Bridegroom. However, despite these lofty aims there was disapproval in some quarters of the beguines, and questions of religious orthodoxy were raised.

According to Bynum (1989), for religious women, especially in the 13th century, the orthodox religious affiliation and structure were not as important as they were to their male counterparts, and “women’s more informal arrangements for giving religious significance to ordinary life seemed odd and dangerous to male sensibilities” (p. 130). According to Wiethaus (1996), from the 12<sup>th</sup> century many medieval female authors experienced a more personal involvement in their work and greater creative freedom. There was also a greater emphasis placed on Christ’s humanity and on emotion; however, this “more intimate and personalized understanding of the divine posed the danger of undermining the church’s claims to hegemonic authority” (p. 21).

According to Tobin in his introduction, Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) faced three problems that undoubtedly influenced the confidence she had in her work: (a) she was a woman in a misogynistic medieval society that marginalized women, (b) she had no scholastic theological training, and (c) she was a beguine and not under the direction of any approved order. The question of authority that plagued all women mystic writers of the 13<sup>th</sup> century threatened to intimidate Mechthild: By whose authority was she writing? Mechthild did not allow these obstacles to discourage her, however, and with great courage and an unbounded eagerness to share her joy, she insisted that she had a special consciousness of God’s presence, and that she was writing her book from God’s authority.

In *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) often uses the symbolism of *brautmystik* (bridal mysticism) in a form that is “authentic . . . unique, mature, and consistent” (Hass, 1989, p. 142). Bridal mysticism describes the intimate relationship between God or the human Christ as the Bridegroom and the human soul as the beloved bride. Mechthild also uses much physical and sensual imagery in her writing; however,

Flinders (1993) explains that readers of her time would have understood that Mechthild was not celebrating sexuality, but describing physical pleasures “as presentiments, or intimations of an awakening into supreme joy--joy that is interior and immaterial and unending” (p. 45).

According to Wiethaus (1996), Mechthild had a desire to affect the heart of her readers and her poetic, sensual, and often intensely emotional dialogues, descriptions, images, and stories “defy rational, logical concreteness but appeal directly to the emotional, receptive, intuitive dimension of the mind” (p. 111).

In *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) relates the story of the passionate desire of God to experience spiritual union with the soul, and the unquenchable longing the soul has for God. She also vividly describes the ecstasy the soul experiences in their union, and makes us feel the suffering and anguished longing the soul feels when God withdraws God’s presence from her. Throughout the tale of divine love we also learn about Lucifer’s attempts to intervene by tempting Mechthild with worldly rewards, which she inevitably resists. These experiences resonate so powerfully within the reader that it is difficult to imagine that Mechthild is not relating her own soul’s joy and anguish in her personal relationship with God.

In “Book I, 2” Mechthild (1998) describes her initial greeting from God and the ecstatic effect it has on her. According to Wiethaus (1996) in *Ecstatic Transformation*, “The *gras* (greeting) given by God is the ecstatic initiation to a deeper dimension of being” (p. 35), and in order to receive this mystical greeting a kind of ego death is necessary. Of the union of the two lovers--soul and God--Wiethaus states, “A union of both lovers means a human loss of identity and an experience close to physical death” (p. 55). In “Book I, 2” Mechthild states: “No one is able or is permitted to receive this greeting unless one has gone beyond



oneself and has become nothing. In this greeting I want to die living" (p. 42). In this greeting Mechthild finds some kind of paradoxical joy; apparently one must *destroy* one's sense of self in order to find it. This is most probably true for finding true joy as well.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) describes this spiritual initiation as "coming from the heavenly flood out of the spring of the flowing Trinity," and explains that it "has such force that it takes away all the body's strength and reveals the soul to herself, so that she sees herself resembling the saints, and she takes on a divine radiance" (p. 40). Mechthild continues:

Then, the soul leaves the body, taking all her power, wisdom, love, and longing. Just the tiniest bit of her life force remains with the body as in a sweet sleep. Then she sees a complete God in three Persons. . . . He greets her in courtly language . . . and surrenders himself into her power. Then she can wish for and ask whatever she wants. It is granted her and she is enlightened. (pp. 40-41)

Mechthild then states that her soul "soars further to a blissful place of which I neither will nor can speak" (p. 41).

But alas, this ecstatic union with the divine cannot be a lasting or constant one:

Yet when infinite God brings the unfathomable soul to the heights, she loses sight of the earth in her astonishment and is not aware of ever having been on earth. Just when the game is at its best, one has to leave it. (Mechthild of Magdeburg, 1998, p. 41)

In the introduction, Tobin suggests that this description is not of one single experience, but of many similar experiences Mechthild had throughout her writing of the book and her life. She finds joy in God's presence and then agony in his absence.

In "Book I, 19," Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) describes God's ardent courtship of the soul, which appears to be a relationship between equals:

God Caresses the Soul in Six Ways:

You are my softest pillow,  
 My most lovely bed,  
 My most intimate repose,  
 My deepest longing,  
 My most sublime glory.  
 You are an allurement to my Godhead,  
 A thirst for my humanity,  
 A stream for my burning.

In "Book 1, 20," the soul responds to God's fervent caresses:

#### The Soul Praises God in Return in Six Ways

You are my resplendent mountain,  
 A feast for my eyes,  
 A loss of myself,  
 A tempest in my heart,  
 A defeat and retreat of my power,  
 My surest protection. (p. 48)

During the wedding celebration, it is apparent that God's longing for the soul is just as profound as is the soul's longing for God:

The more his desire grows, the more extravagant their wedding celebration becomes.  
 The narrower the bed of love becomes, the more intense are the embraces.  
 The sweeter the kisses on the mouth become, the more lovingly they gaze at each other. (p. 50; "Book I, 22," excerpt)

And then the wedding night arrives and the soul tells God:

"Lord, now I am a naked soul  
 And you in yourself are a well-adorned God.  
 Our shared lot is eternal life  
 Without death.

Then a blessed stillness  
 That both desire comes over them.  
 He surrenders himself to her,  
 And she surrenders herself to him.  
 What happens to her then--she knows--  
 And that is fine with me.  
 But this cannot last long.

When two lovers meet secretly,  
They must often part from one another inseparably. (p. 62)

The more the soul experiences the rapturous meetings with her Beloved, the more she suffers when God withdraws his presence: "Yearning love causes a pure heart much sweet anguish" (p. 135; "Book III, 24"). However, for Mechthild this suffering plays an important role in the mystical journey, and according to Tobin, the longing she feels when separated from God is for her, "as essential to love as union" (p. 14). Mechthild explains, "[T]he nature of love is such that it flows in sweetness; then it becomes rich in knowledge; thirdly it becomes full of longing in rejection" (p. 249; "Book VI," 20).

In "Book II, 25," Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) gives one explanation for why God cannot stay in constant, blissful union with the soul. He tells her:

My dear Dove, now listen to me!  
My divine wisdom is so utterly upon you  
That I direct all my gifts to you,  
As much as your frail body can bear. . . .  
No matter how softly I caress you,  
I inflict immense pain on your poor body.  
If I were to surrender myself to you continuously, as you  
desire,  
I would lose my delightful dwelling place on earth within  
you.  
For a thousand bodies cannot fully satisfy the longings of a  
soul in love  
And so, the higher the love, the holier the martyr. (p. 94)

For Mechthild this is the difficult path of love her soul must follow because the soul's wish to experience total union with God cannot happen on this earth. "What I now painfully long for can never happen on earth as I wish it" (pp. 304-305; "Book VII, 35"). In the preface to the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), Margot Schmidt states: "The highest state in this life ultimately remains that of hungering and thirsting after God. This blessed longing is

the final attitude to be assumed by the human heart" (p. xxxi). Is there joy to be found in this thirsting after God? Perhaps.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) not only renounces the consolation of worldly things: "I cannot endure that a single consolation touch me except my Lover" (p. 153: "Book IV, 12"), but ultimately gives up the joy she receives from God's consolation so that she might honor him: "Nothing tastes good to me but God alone; I am wondrously dead. I am freely willing to give up this taste so that he be wonderfully praised" (p. 153).

In 1270, a 63-year-old Mechthild, very ill and nearly blind, entered the Benedictine convent at Helfta where she completed "Book VII" of *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. According to Tobin in his introduction, at this point in her life Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) seems less interested in seeking the ecstatic greetings and begins to speak of concepts such as "sinking humility" (p. 183) and "estrangement" (p. 155), which she now sees as vital to her relationship to her divine Lover. Yes, there is heart-rending anguish, and yet somehow she is able to find joy in her suffering: "How it comes to me I dare not say; only that gall has become honey for the palate of my soul" (p. 155; "Book IV, 12"). She explains her situation as follows:

Further, no one possesses the whole of heaven in his heart but he alone who has removed himself from all consolation and all favors in this world. For pleasure has cut us off from God. And so we must return to him through suffering. And yet God cannot restrain himself--and we cannot do without it--From giving us his abundance and his favor for everything we do, refrain from doing, and suffer. (p. 249; "Book VI, 20")

In Christian theological terms, in the preface to the work of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), Schmidt suggests that Mechthild uses the concept of Christ as Physician not only in its traditional meaning of redemption and salvation of the soul but as "an expression of the *unio*

*mystica*, in which the lovesick soul receives her fulfillment through Christ, the Physician (as in VII, 58)” (p. xxvii).

In “Book III, 10” Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) compares her passionate and devastating love for God to the experiences of Christ during the crucifixion and resurrection: “She hangs on the cross of sublime love. . . . She also ascends into heaven [w]hen God takes from her all earthly things in holy transformation” (p. 119).

In the preface to the work of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), Schmidt explains from the Christian theological point of view how one can find joy in love’s suffering. According to Schmidt, devotion to the passion of Christ becomes “a mysticism of suffering in which pain loses its bitter quality as one concentrates on following Christ and on his suffering as redemption and reparation--all the more so when the heart is affected” (p.xxxiii). Apparently Mechthild finds some type of consolation from God in her estrangement from God and, according to Tobin in his introduction, “in a transvaluation of values incomprehensible to reason and categorized as an abnormality by human science, the soul rejoices in its desolation” (p. 18).

Mechthild is a passionate, emotional visionary often torn between the bliss of heaven and the torment of hell. Underhill (1999) calls these two states, Illumination and Purgation, the play of “the light and dark sides of the developing mystic consciousness” (p. 227). Mechthild’s writing about God’s courtship of the soul and their union is erotic, lush, often lovely, and sometimes filled with an intense rapture and joy. She often writes poignantly of the terrible pangs of her soul’s longing for God and of the agony of her naked heart’s exile from God. According to Underhill, the mystics call this alternation between the joyful presence of God and God’s absence *Ludus Amoris* or the *Game of Love* that God plays with

the soul that is longing for union. For many, the thought that God is playing a game with us by being present and then withdrawing might be distressing. One wonders if Mechthild's extreme swings of emotion might be due, in part, to her personality.

*Clare of Assisi, (1195-1253), Italy*

According to Armstrong and Brady, editors and translators of the writings of Clare of Assisi (1982), Clare is one of the great women of Christian spirituality and "is a translucent statement of the spiritual reality of life . . . so that whoever gazes into her writings will discover a reflection of the glory of God and the beauty of the human person" (p. 169).

According to Flinders (1993) in *Enduring Grace*, Saint Clare of Assisi, the friend and foremost disciple of Saint Francis of Assisi, was beautiful, nobly born, and known for her radiant light. In the years between 1205 and 1212 Francis had established a new form of evangelical ministry, and it is quite possible that the young Clare had been aware of him. In any case, on March 19, 1212, at the age of 18, she withdrew from her worldly life to become his follower. Eventually Saint Francis placed her, several members of her family, and some other women in San Damiano, one of the first little churches he had repaired.

At first glance one might see 18-year-old Clare's decision to reject her home and family to join Saint Francis as the acting out of a young girl's romantic fantasies; however, reading her writings and learning about her life at San Damiano puts this idea to rest: Clare is without a doubt a woman passionately and irresistibly drawn to God.

Clare founded the first Franciscan order of women known as the Poor Ladies of Assisi, and became its abbess. There, in this completely enclosed environment, she spent the next 42 years until her death in 1253 living a life of humility, poverty, chastity,

contemplation, and penance. According to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction to the writings of Clare of Assisi (1982), Clare's most urgent priority was to empty herself of anything and everything that kept her separate from God, and her life in the cloistered world of San Damiano was "characterized by the renunciation of every illusion, of every attraction and expectation, that was not rooted in God from whom every good comes" (p. 179).

According to Flinders (1993), Clare committed herself to practices of extreme mortification and rigorous penance and perhaps because of these practices was ill and bedridden for decades. However,

Clare's life of poverty was not a grim, calculated handing over, but rather a joyous, easy, impatient flinging aside: lovers don't feel the cold, lovers don't care what they eat--and Clare was a lover running full tilt toward her beloved. (p. 23)

Clare was in love with God; nothing else seemed to matter.

According to McGinn (1998), for Clare, Poverty was the most important aspect of her spiritual life, and around 1215 she convinced Francis to write a *form of life* or a *rule* expressing the importance of poverty. Pope Innocence III approved this rule and issued a special document known as the *Privilege of Poverty*, "which for the first time in ecclesiastical history allowed a female community the unheard of license to live without property" (p.48). Later she became the first woman to ever write her own rule, and have it approved by the religious authorities.

Poverty was not a new concept in the monastic world, but Armstrong and Brady suggest that Clare of Assisi's (1982) brand of radical Poverty was. Up until this time, McGinn (1998) explains, when monks first entered a monastery they took a vow of poverty giving up all of their personal possessions. However, the monasteries needed land and

resources in order to function. Indeed, according to McGinn, the Benedictine monasteries during the Middle Ages accumulated so much wealth that the monks sometimes lived a grander life style than the highest aristocracy. Much of the monastic reform of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries revolved around this issue.

Before Pope Innocent III created the doctrine of the Privilege of Poverty, the Poor Ladies of Assisi had been a disconcerting problem for the Church authorities as they had only the land on which the convent stood, and whereas Saint Francis and his brothers were able to go out among the people to ask for alms, Clare and her Ladies were completely dependent upon alms that were brought to the convent from the citizens of Assisi.

However, according to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction, Clare of Assisi's (1982) commitment to Poverty was essential to her goals of "following in the footsteps of the poor and humble Jesus Christ" (p. 199) and being free to become His Perfect Bride. It also enabled her to set up the Kingdom of God at San Damiano in which, Armstrong and Brady suggest, "eternal riches, glory, and honor were lavishly given by God" (p. 180). Clare's message here is that we can have the riches, joy, and honor that we want. However, we can find the *real thing* only in the spiritual world through inner (and perhaps outer) poverty.

O blessed poverty,  
     who bestows eternal riches on those who love and  
     embrace her!

O holy poverty,  
     to those who possess and desire you  
     God promises the *kingdom of heaven*  
     and offers, indeed, eternal glory and blessed life!

O God-centered poverty,  
     whom the Lord Jesus Christ  
     Who ruled and now rules heaven and earth,  
     *Who spoke and things were made,*  
     condescended to embrace before all else! (Clare of Assisi, p.192)



According to Flinders (1993), legend has it that Clare, through her intense faith, was on one occasion able to protect her convent against an attack by mercenaries and on another occasion was able to save Assisi itself. Periodically, Flinders explains, Clare's home region of Umbria was a war zone. It was common at that time for noblemen to hire mercenaries (Saracens) from the Holy Land to fight. When the battles were over these mercenary soldiers roamed the area. According to the legend, some of these soldiers had been able to enter Clare's convent, and she was able to turn them away through her faith. She was also able to deflect an attack on Assisi by the army of Vitale d'Aversa, again through her surrender to God and prayer. Hagiographical writers often exaggerated the strengths of the saints and minimized or ignored their weaknesses.

Clare of Assisi (1982) has left only a small number of writings that scholars agree are authentic. Clare's *Rule* is considered to be authentic; however, this is not, according to McGinn (1998), a mystical document and will not be included in this study. The majority of the firsthand knowledge we have about her mystical relationship with God is contained in four letters to Blessed Agnes of Prague. These four shining *letters of love* glow like precious jewels, and anyone who reads them can see that Saint Clare possesses a wonderful gift that no amount of money can purchase. This gift is joy: the kind of rich, sweet, almost delirious joy that naturally bubbles up from inside her heart and flows out to everyone's life she touches. According to McGinn, although Clare was not a visionary in the way that many other 13<sup>th</sup> century women mystics were, "the mystical elements enshrined in these letters guarantee Clare a significant role in the contribution of thirteenth-century women to mysticism" (p. 66).

According to McGinn (1998), the major mystical theme in Clare's writings is nuptial mysticism or the marital relationship between the soul as virgin bride and Christ as the Beloved husband. Although Francis had a passionate love for the crucified Christ, Clare developed this love into what McGinn calls "a Spousal motif" (p. 67).

We have seen this theme, of course, in the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) when she describes the relationship between the soul and God. However, Clare's descriptions are more delicate and refined than the fiery, flowing images created by Mechthild and are free from the "excessive eroticism" of many 13<sup>th</sup> century religious women writers (McGinn, 1998, p. 67).

Agnes of Prague, to whom Clare of Assisi (1982) addressed her four letters, was, according to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction, a daughter of royalty who, inspired by the spiritual message of Saint Francis, built a church, a friary, and a hospital dedicated to him and then later entered the monastery attached to the hospital. Above all, Agnes wanted to follow the spiritual example set by Clare, and to that end she began a correspondence with her.

In *The First Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague* the opening salute from Clare of Assisi (1982) is filled with the elegance, nobility, and gracious humility of a true queen of the Spirit beautifully adorned by God's love:

To the esteemed and most holy virgin, the Lady Agnes, daughter of the most excellent and illustrious King of Bohemia: Clare, an unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and *useless* handmaid . . . of the Cloistered Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, her subject and servant in all things, presents herself totally with a special reverent [prayer] that she *attain the glory of everlasting happiness*. (p. 190)

Clare then goes on to acknowledge the life of wealth and privilege that Agnes has left behind and describes the benefits of the choice Agnes has made, and she makes use of Nuptial language to describe the spiritual experience:

You have rejected all these things and have chosen with Your whole heart and soul a life of holy poverty and destitution. Thus You took a spouse of a more noble lineage, who will keep Your virginity ever unspotted, and unsullied, the Lord Jesus Christ:  
 When You have loved [Him], You shall be chaste; when You have touched [Him], You shall become pure; when you have accepted [Him], You shall be a virgin.  
 Whose power is stronger,  
 Whose generosity is more abundant,  
 Whose appearance more beautiful,  
 Whose love more tender,  
 Whose courtesy more gracious.  
 In Whose embrace You are already caught up;  
 Who has adorned Your breast with precious stones  
     And has placed priceless pearls in Your ears  
     and has surrounded You with sparkling gems  
 as though blossoms of springtime  
 and placed on Your head a *golden crown*  
*as a sign [to all] of Your holiness.* (p. 191)

In this deeply moving and exquisitely beautiful passage Clare promises fulfillment of the heart's deepest longings--for love, for spiritual power, for beauty, and for purity--through one's love for Jesus Christ. Perhaps, by allowing the essence of the words to become a part of us, we too can, for a moment, find the caress of holiness and a glimmer of true joy.

In the same letter, Clare of Assisi (1982) emphasizes the importance of leaving the world behind, and the joy found in doing so. "Be filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy! Contempt of the world has pleased You more than [its] honors, poverty more than earthly riches" (p. 192). Clare continues, "You know, I am sure, that the kingdom of heaven is promised and given by the Lord only to the poor . . . for he who loves temporal things loses the fruit of love (p. 193). And finally,

What a greatest laudable exchange: to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to chose the things of heaven for the goods of earth, *to receive the hundred-fold* in place of one, and to *possess* a blessed and eternal life. (p. 193)

To turn one's back on the promises and pleasures of earthly life is a painful task, and yet it is evidently essential to attain the joy Clare promises.

In *The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague*, Clare of Assisi (1982) speaks of becoming "a diligent imitator of the Father of all perfection" (p. 195)

which will prompt the King Himself to take you to Himself in the heavenly bridal chamber where He is seated in glory on a starry throne because you have despised the splendors of an earthly *kingdom* and considered of little value the offers of an imperial marriage. Instead, as someone zealous for the holiest poverty, in the spirit of great humility and the most ardent charity, you have held fast *to the footprints . . .* of Him to Whom you have merited to be joined as a Spouse. (p. 195)

Saint Clare urges Agnes to "go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly, on the path of prudent happiness" (p. 196). How does one find this joyful path of prudent happiness? Saint Clare explains it is through the contemplation and imitation of the poverty, humility, and suffering of Christ:

But as a poor virgin, embrace the poor Christ. Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in the world for Him. Your Spouse, though *more beautiful than the children of men . . .* became, for your salvation, the lowest of men, despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout His whole body, and then died amid the suffering of the Cross. O most noble Queen, gaze upon [Him], consider [Him], contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him].

If you suffer with Him, *you shall reign with Him*,  
 [if you] weep [with Him], you shall rejoice with Him;  
 [if you] die [with Him] on the cross of tribulation,  
 you shall possess heavenly mansions *in the splendor of the saints* and, *in the Book of Life*, your name shall be called  
 glorious among men. (p. 197)

In the first letter of Clare of Assisi (1982) to Lady Agnes, she refers to Agnes as “*the spouse and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ*” (p. 191). According to McGinn (1998), this is possible through the indwelling of Christ in the soul. Saint Clare explains this phenomenon in her third letter as follows:

Indeed, is it not clear that the soul of the faithful person, the most worthy of all creatures because of the grace of God, is greater than heaven itself? For the heavens with the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator. *Only the faithful soul is His dwelling place and [His] throne*, and this [is possible] only through the charity which the wicked do not have. (p. 201; emphasis added)

In her fourth letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague, Clare of Assisi (1982), writing in the last few months of her life, rejoices and exults with Agnes “in the joy of the spirit” (p. 203):

Saint Agnes, you have been marvelously espoused to the *spotless Lamb Who takes away the sins of the world*. . . .

Happy, indeed is she to whom it is given to share this sacred

Banquet,

To cling with all her heart to Him

Whose beauty all the heavenly hosts admire unceasingly,

Whose love inflames our love,

Whose contemplation is our refreshment,

Whose graciousness is our joy,

Whose gentleness fills us to overflowing,

Whose remembrance brings a gentle light,

Whose fragrance will revive the dead,

Whose glorious vision will be the happiness

Of all citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. (p. 204)

Clare of Assisi (1982) also refers to the mirror that, according to Armstrong and Brady in their introduction, was an important theme in the contemplative tradition within the monasteries. Saint Clare urges Lady Agnes to look into the mirror each day to study herself, and to see the reflection of “blessed poverty, holy humility, and ineffable charity” (p. 204). She is also to look into the mirror to contemplate the humanity of Christ. In perhaps the most

passionately intimate and sensuous passage in her four letters Clare goes on to tell Lady

Agnes:

[As you] contemplate further His ineffable delights, eternal riches and honors, and sigh for them in the great desire and love of your heart, may you cry out:

*Draw me after You!*  
*We will run in the fragrance of Your perfumes,*  
*O heavenly Spouse!*  
 I will run and not tire,  
   until *You bring me into the wine-cellar,*  
   until *Your left hand is under my head*  
   and *Your right hand will embrace me happily*  
 [and] *You will kiss me with the happiest kiss of Your mouth.* (p. 205)

Clare of Assisi (1982) lived for 41 years in extreme poverty and rigorous penance, and she spent 28 of those years ill and bedridden, and yet she seems to have found a source of authentic joy within her that never left her: a joy she calls “the joy of the spirit” (p. 203). In her final farewell letter to Lady Agnes, whom she says she has held “dearer than all the others” (p. 205), Saint Clare, in a deeply moving and beautiful expression of human and divine love, tells Agnes:

What more can I say? Let the tongue of the flesh be silent when I seek to express my love for you; and let the tongue of the Spirit speak, because the love that I have for you, O blessed daughter, can never be fully expressed by the tongue of the flesh, and even what I have written is an inadequate expression. (pp. 205-206)

Is it possible that, just for a moment, we might feel that Saint Clare is speaking to us in this passage, and that the love she expresses for lady Agnes is for us too? Can we allow her words to touch us in that deep and secret place within our hearts where the sorrow and the joy reside? Can we let the healing tears flow?

*Brother Lawrence, (1611-1691), France*

During the life of Brother Lawrence, King Louis XIV dominated France. He lived in opulent splendor at his court at the Palace of Versailles outside of Paris always seeking his own glory and the glory of France. To this end he tried to dominate Europe by waging wars. These wars often had a religious component to them: Catholic France against the Protestant English, Dutch, and some of the German princes (Roman Catholic Church, 2002).

In the previous century Martin Luther and his religious reformers had led a protest against the Catholic Church that was later to be called the Protestant Reformation. This protest was against certain aspects of Catholic theology and practice, but it was also opposed to what Luther and the Protestants saw as Catholic greed, corruption, and abuses of power. Indeed, in Europe bishops and the clergy often lived like wealthy aristocrats, and in France the king, not the Pope, chose people for positions in the church, thus giving them political as well as religious power (Roman Catholic Church, 2002).

From 1562-1598, Catholic France was embroiled in a series of religious civil wars between the Catholic nobles and wealthy bishops on the one side, and the Protestants on the other side. In 1572, The Queen Mother of Louis XIV ordered the massacre of approximately 20,000 Protestants in Paris on St. Bartholomew's Day (Roman Catholic Church, 2002).

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, France, weakened by wars, was crumbling. Finally, in 1685 Louis banned the practice of any religion in France other than Catholicism and sent royal troops to convert communities of Protestants known as Huguenots. This caused more massacres of Protestants and caused a state of economic disaster for France (Roman Catholic Church, 2002).

The Thirty Years War is one of the great conflicts of early modern European history. It consisted of a number of small wars, declared and undeclared, that lasted from 1618-1648. These wars were partly political and partly religious. The French phase of the war began in 1634, when France declared war on Spain, and ended in 1648 (Thirty Years War, 2002).

According to Underhill (1964), despite the “apparent worldliness and corruption of the time” (p. 187), 17<sup>th</sup>-century France produced a number of “saintly personalities” (p. 187) of many types including “the simplest to the most sophisticated” (p. 187). Within French mysticism, Underhill explains, there had always been a tendency toward an “unconditional self-yielding to God” (p. 188). When this tendency was balanced by other elements that constitute a healthy spiritual life, it could lead toward the rejection of mere self-centered involvement and a turning toward “pure adoration . . . which is the glory of all the French mystics” (p. 188).

However, toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century, a time, according to Underhill (1999), of decadence, this tendency toward passivity became unbalanced in the religious movement known as Quietism. Those involved in the degenerative side of this movement showed a lack of will, an exaggerated passivity, and an excessive self-abandonment.

Brother Lawrence, a lay brother in the Order of the Carmelites Dechausses in Paris, showed, according to Underhill (1999), “the passive tendency of French mysticism in its most sane, well balanced form” (p. 471). Brother Lawrence began life as Nicholas Herman in the French province of Lorraine. He was an uneducated man, the son of peasants--a simple farm boy. During his boyhood, the Thirty Years War began and he became a soldier. It is thought that it was during this time he sustained the injury that made him lame. When he finished his tour of duty as a soldier he then became a footman for M. Fieubert, the treasurer.



Brother Lawrence, however, was lame, awkward, and clumsy, so this employment did not work out well (Freer, 1967).

According to M. Beaufort, who writes about his alleged four “conversations” with Brother Lawrence (1985) in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Nicholas Herman had his first awakening to Reality when he was 18 years old. It was during the winter when Nicholas, seeing a tree without its leaves, speculated about how the tree would be renewed in the spring and that flowers and fruit would appear. It was in that moment, M. Beaufort explains, that Nicholas Herman (Brother Lawrence) “received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul” (p. 13). This experience caused him, according to M. Beaufort, to turn away from the world and embrace God.

When he was 30 years old, Nicholas Herman was received by the Order of the Carmelites Dechausses in Paris, becoming a lay brother and taking on the name of Brother Lawrence. The Carmelites were a mendicant order of barefooted friars who received their living through begging for alms and who placed great emphasis on contemplation. For the first ten years, Brother Lawrence served in the stables. Later he was promoted to the position of cook (Freer, 1967).

According to Christian minister H. W. Freer (1967), in most monasteries the founders and the heads worked out special times and patterns for prayers. In the Carmelite order the canonical hours for prayer were “seven periods of prayer beginning with matins with lauds soon after midnight and concluding with compline soon after nightfall” (p. 72). Brother Lawrence followed this practice daily.

Brother Lawrence had an immense influence on the people around him (Underhill, 1964). Many people came to learn from him as his relationship with God was exceptional.

Included among his admirers was the M. Beaufort mentioned above, who was the Grand Vicar of Cardinal de Noailles. M. Beaufort states that he visited Brother Lawrence (1895) and had four separate conversations with him; the first on August 3, 1666, and the last in November of 1667. After Brother Lawrence's death, M. Beaufort brought together the notes he had from his conversations and 16 letters Brother had written, mainly to nuns, and had them published in 1692. We also have a collection of sayings of Brother Lawrence (1907), *Spiritual Maxims*.

These few writings of Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) are simple, straightforward, sincere, sweet, and filled with a quiet, deep joy. The fact that they have survived all this time despite his humble, lowly, and obscure life in the monastery, attests to their power, wisdom, and relevance. As Underhill (1964) says, "His little book [*The Practice of the Presence of God*] is sometimes described as simple, but its simplicity is that of the heights" (p. 200).

According to Underhill (1999), Brother Lawrence showed little inclination to conform to the usual stages of the Mystic Way that most mystics experienced. He did experience a ten-year long period of suffering due, he tells us, to past sins, lack of devotion to God, and a feeling that he did not deserve God's favors. However, he states,

When I thought of nothing but to end my days in these troubles (which did not at all diminish the trust I had in God, and which served only to increase my faith), I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which till that time was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace as if she were in her center and place of rest. (Brother Lawrence, 1895, p. 36)

For Brother Lawrence, the fullness of joy is to be found through keeping heart and mind always fixed on God, an activity he calls *practicing the presence of God*. In *Spiritual Maxims*, Brother Lawrence (1907) states, "That practice which is alike the most holy, the

most general, and the most needful in the spiritual life *is the practice of the Presence of God*. It is *the schooling of the soul to find its joy in his Divine Companionship*" (p. 14).

Indeed, in his sixth letter Brother Lawrence (1895) wonders how religious people can be happy without practicing the presence of God and adds, "For my part, I keep myself retired with Him in the fund or center of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing, but the least turning from Him is insupportable" (p. 46).

The strength and power that practicing the presence of God gave Brother Lawrence was considerable, and the fact that he was an independent and innately intelligent spiritual thinker comes through clearly in his letters and conversations. For instance, in his second letter Brother Lawrence (1895) explains how for his first several years with the Carmelites he, along with his colleagues, meditated upon death, judgment, heaven, and hell during the prescribed prayer periods, as he was instructed by his superiors to do, but these meditations, he says, always distressed him. After these prescribed prayer periods, however, he tells us that he would always spend the rest of the day applying himself "even in the midst of my business, to *the presence* of God, whom I considered always as *with me*, often as *in me*" (p. 34). Eventually he decided to ignore altogether the subject of meditation on which his superiors had instructed him to focus and, instead, to turn his attention to the presence of God even during his set prayer times. This, he says, brought him "great delight and consolation" (p. 34).

In another example of the originality of his spiritual nature, Brother Lawrence (1895) relates, again in the second letter, how in a conversation with a "person of piety" (p. 34) he was told that "the spiritual life was a life of grace, which begins with servile fear, which is increased by hope of eternal life, and which is consummated by pure love" (p. 34). Brother

Lawrence goes on to explain, almost diffidently, "I have not followed all these methods. On the contrary, from I know not what instincts, I found they discouraged me" (p. 34).

Brother Lawrence (1895) had his own ideas about mortification and other purifying exercises done for the sake of eradicating sin. According to M. Beaufort, Brother Lawrence in their second conversation said,

that all bodily mortifications and other exercises are useless, except as they serve to arrive at the union with God by love; that he had well considered this, and found it the shortest way to go straight to Him by a continual exercise of love and doing all things for His sake. (p. 20)

According to M. Beaufort, Brother Lawrence went on to say,

that all possible kinds of mortification, if they were void of the love of God, could not efface a single sin. That we ought, without anxiety, to expect the pardon of our sins from the blood of JESUS CHRIST, only endeavoring to love Him with all our hearts. (p.20)

In other words, it appears as if Brother Lawrence decided that for him it was better to go straight to the loving God and renounce all for His sake, then to practice mortification and other exercises without love, and that he was better off loving Jesus Christ and relying on His atonement to absolve him of his sins, rather than to rely on the performance of exercises of penance.

Brother Lawrence (1895) again shows a great deal of his individual spirit in the following paragraph in his first letter:

Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the all for the all; so after having given myself wholly to God, that He might take away my sin, I *renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not He, and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world.* (pp. 31-32)

It takes enormous strength, courage, independence, faith, and vision to make this kind of decision and to live in this way. It also takes God's grace.

Exactly how does one practice the presence of God? Brother Lawrence (1895) tells us in his second letter that he keeps himself in God's holy presence "by a simple attention, and a general fond regard to God"(p. 36) and while he is in this state of attention and love for God, "an habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul" (p. 36) takes place "which causes me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others" (pp. 36-37).

Brother Lawrence (1895) tells us in his seventh letter that God does not require much from us in these conversations, only "a little remembrance of Him from time to time; a little adoration; sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favors He has given you" (p. 48). He also suggests in letter six that we include in our conversations with God "an act of praise, of adoration, or of desire . . . an act of resignation or thanksgiving . . . in all ways which our spirit can invent" (p. 48). This continuous state of conversing with God "in meekness, humility, and love" (p. 49) is at the core of Brother Lawrence's teachings, and according to Freer (1967), it "is the one experience above all others by which he came into his sense of God's presence" (p. 92).

How does one come to the presence of God? According to Freer (1967), one of the major teachings of Brother Lawrence is the abandonment of self to God as an act of love, and it was this full surrender of the whole self that "was the key to the practice of self abandonment by Brother Lawrence in which he discovered a continuing sense of God's presence" (p. 130).

According to Brother Lawrence (1895), one of the first things necessary to practice the presence is to seek God for the love of Him alone, not for any gifts He might bring us. In order for us to be able to love this much, Brother Lawrence says, "We must make our heart a spiritual temple wherein to adore Him incessantly" (p. 60). We must submit to God and drive away any thoughts focused on worldly things. However, if our thoughts do stray, whether during prayer and meditation or in our daily life, we are not to condemn ourselves, as this cuts us off further from God, but by an act of will return our thoughts to tranquility. "If you persevere in this manner," Brother Lawrence (1907) promises, "God will have pity on you" (p. 51). Although Brother Lawrence does recognize that this is a difficult practice, especially at the beginning, he assures us that "grace makes it easy and brings with it joy" (1907, p. 14).

One of the most remarkable aspects of Brother Lawrence is his attitude toward suffering. According to Brother Lawrence (1895), God often brings us afflictions of the body to heal the sickness of our soul. If we can see these afflictions as gifts of God and as proof of how much he loves us, Brother Lawrence insists, then we can find consolation in them.

When we are in the midst of suffering, Brother Lawrence (1895) urges us not to pray for relief from our suffering, but to pray for the ability to endure the suffering with humility, courage, patience, and love for as long as God wills it. Love, Brother Lawrence explains in his 13th letter, "sweetens pains; and when one loves God, one suffers for His sake with joy and courage" (p. 59). The world suffers, Brother Lawrence remarks in his 12th letter, but he, as undeserving as he feels he is, is "always happy" (p. 58) and feels "joys so continual and so great that I can scarce contain them" (p. 58).

It is obvious that Brother Lawrence felt God's love in his heart to a greater degree than most people ever can or ever will, and this love changed him. Indeed, as Freer (1967)

puts it, "An ordinary man because of his complete surrender to God, had become an extraordinary one" (p. 24).

For Brother Lawrence union with God was his top priority and practicing the presence of God as often as possible through conversation with God was the most direct route. According to Brother Lawrence (1907), there are three degrees of union of the soul with God. The first degree of union is when the soul is united to God solely by grace. The second degree of union is when we are temporarily united with God through an action for whatever time that action lasts. The third degree of union is what Brother Lawrence calls "*the perfect union*" (p. 19).

This is not a mere fleeting emotion . . . it is rather a state of soul--if I can but find words--which is deeply spiritual, and yet very simple, which *fills us with a joy that is calm indeed*, and with a love that is very humble and very reverent, which lifts the soul aloft to heights, where the sense of the love of God constrains it to adore Him, and to embrace Him with a tenderness that cannot be expressed, and which experience alone can teach us to understand. (Brother Lawrence, pp. 19-20; emphasis added)

This state of soul that Brother Lawrence describes sounds like true joy. One's heart longs to be in this transcendent place of inexpressible tenderness.

For those of us who have not yet achieved sainthood it might be difficult to understand the depth of passion and devotion our four mystics felt toward Christ and toward God, and the sacrifices they were willing to make for the sake of this love. Some of us might find the suffering experienced by these mystics to be intimidating. Brother Lawrence was a theocentric mystic who obviously had a very deep love for God, and chose to renounce the world, and abandon himself to that love. Although this act is an enormous one, Brother Lawrence does not appear to have chosen a lifestyle or a mode of expression that embraced the extremes. Even he, however, on his deathbed, voiced the desire to suffer for God (Freer,

1967). Our three 13<sup>th</sup>-century mystics chose what appears to be a more radical life style than Brother Lawrence, and certainly in the case of Mechthild a more extreme manner of expressing her spiritual passion. Also, as Christ-centered mystics, all three had the desire to meditate on the crucifixion of Christ and to suffer as He did. This is a desire that may leave some of us perplexed, as joy is probably seen by many of us as the opposite of suffering. How can one find joy when one is seeking suffering, we might well ask?

According to Cousins (1989) in *Christian Spirituality*, the meditation on the life of Christ, and particularly on his passion, that was practiced by Saint Francis and further developed by Saint Clare and Saint Bonaventure, had its roots in the early centuries of Christianity; however, it was during the 11th and 12th centuries that it began to appear in monasteries as a monastic practice known as *lectio divina*. Cousins states that in this practice the monks meditated on scripture passages that told about Christ's life. As the meditation progressed they intently focused their attention on the specific details of these events. The monks then were able to activate their imaginations to the point in which they became actors in the drama, feeling the same human emotions they would feel if the experience was actually happening to them. "This," according to Cousins, "led to an identification with Christ and a desire to imitate his virtues, especially humility and poverty, along with a willingness and even a longing to suffer with Christ in his passion" (p. 377).

According to Cousins (1989), a longing to suffer can be seen in the lives of the saints, and often "a morbid fascination with pain and humiliation" (p. 387). Cousins sees this devotion to the passion of Christ as problematic both from a psychological point of view and a doctrinal one. From a spiritual perspective Cousins believes that the focus on the negative (the crucifixion) precluded the emergence of the positive (the joy of the resurrection):



For attraction to the suffering and death of Christ . . . led to forgetfulness of the resurrection. Focus on the suffering humanity of Christ overshadowed the Trinity and its outpouring of divine love in creation. The concentration on Christ's suffering in itself distracted the Christian from discerning the role of the passion in the scheme of cosmic redemption and in the personal and collective spiritual journey. (p. 387)

So what do we make of our four mystics, and what have we learned about the quest for true joy? We now know something about the lives of these four mystics and their spiritual journeys. We have read some of their greatest and most influential writings, writings that had a powerful effect on people during their own time and on people today. There are, of course, for those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the outside looking in, some disconcerting and even alarming elements in the lives they chose to live. How should we respond to these disturbing elements? Should we dismiss our four mystics (and even mystics in general) as masochists, or perhaps as fanatics or hysterics?

In order to answer these questions one of the things we may want to determine is whether or not we found, on an intuitive level, authentic love and joy in the writings of the mystics. If we did, then perhaps we should ask ourselves what we could learn from them. What role *does* suffering play in our path to union with God? Is a purification process necessary? If so, is the suffering most of us experience in our daily lives sufficient, or must we create more as our four mystics evidently did? Are extreme practices of self-denial necessary to find true joy or did the mystics find love and joy in spite of these practices? Should we try as best we can to emulate these radically devoted men and women of God or should we attempt to carve out another path to true joy? Hopefully some answers to these questions will emerge through our four new Christian mystics in the next chapter.

From my research in cycle 2 on the four Christian mystics three essential aspects for my continued research have evolved: (a) the lenses I will be using to study the mystics in cycle 3 of my research, (b) criteria for choosing these mystics, and (c) the final names of our next group of mystics.

There are 33 lenses or perspectives on what true joy is and how to acquire it that have emerged from my research up to this point (i.e., from the pivotal psychological thinkers, the five major spiritual and wisdom traditions, the two Christian thinkers, the early history of Christian mysticism, and the writings of the four Christian mystics in my cycle-2 research.)

These 33 lenses or perspectives are

1. The stripping away of the false self and the revelation of the open heart within
2. The complete surrender of the self and Union with God (*unio mystica*)
3. The marriage of the soul as Bride with Christ the Divine Bridegroom
4. Spiritual Poverty: the renunciation of the consolations of the world
5. Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience
6. The contemplation of God in Christ: his poverty, his humility, and his suffering
7. Letting go of the wall protecting the heart
8. Love for oneself and one's neighbor
9. Longing for God
10. Practicing the presence of God
11. The resolution of the opposites of pleasure and pain and so forth
12. Purification of wants in favor of true spiritual and material needs
13. Detachment from the things of the world
14. Annihilation of self
15. Complete development of one's human nature
16. Inner silence
17. Anticipation of joy
18. Joy coming out of and intertwined with suffering
19. God's grace
20. Faith
21. Seeking God only
22. Self-abandonment without fear
23. To love God equally in suffering or in joy
24. Emptying the heart so that God can fill it
25. Turning away from the world and turning inward toward God

26. Contemplation of Christ or God
27. A surrender of self and all that comes between oneself and God
28. Loving desire for God
29. The expression of God's love planted in our hearts
30. The perfection of God's Word
31. The love we feel in God's presence
32. Breaking open the heart through suffering to connect with God within
33. Interior sweetness

From these 33 lenses I have allowed 6 lenses to emerge from a process of unconscious incubation and synthesis. Three of these lenses epitomize what I believe to be the necessary requirements of the path to true joy, and three of the lenses reflect what I believe, at this point in my research, to be the essence of true joy.

The path to joy requires

1. Giving Up the Consolations of the World (Inward Poverty).

The concept of inward poverty or the necessity of giving up the pleasures and consolations of the world in order to find joy is a basic premise of Christian mysticism and is found, for example, in the *Sermon on the Mount*: Matthew 5:3, and in the writings of Clare of Assisi (1982), Francis of Assisi (1982), and Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), to name a few.

2. Contemplation of God in Christ--Imitation of Christ (His Humility, Poverty, and Suffering).

The concept that God is found in Christ or manifests as Christ is found throughout the Gospel of John and is discussed by McGinn (1992) as a basic belief of early Christianity. The contemplation of God (or Christ) in order to achieve deification, or joy in union with God is fundamental to Christian mystical theology and is found in the writings of Plato, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory the Great, John Scottus

Eriugene, Hugh of St. Victor (McGinn, 1992; 1994), as well as in the letters of St. Clare of Assisi (1982) and Brother Lawrence (1895). The importance of the imitation of Christ in order to find true joy is found in the Holy Bible (Matthew 10:38) and in the writings of Ignatius (McGinn, 1992), Clare of Assisi (1982) and Francis of Assisi (1982).

### 3. The Complete Surrender of Self (e.g., One's Pride, Desires, Beliefs, Preferences) to God.

The surrender of the self (i.e., pride, desires, beliefs, preferences) to God is another basic requirement for the Christian mystical life and the experience of true joy. This concept is found in the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), Clare of Assisi (1982), Francis of Assisi (1982), and Brother Lawrence (1985; 1907).

True joy is

#### 1. Loving God For God's Sake.

Total love for God is, of course, the main tenet of Christian mysticism. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:37-38). St. Bernard of Clairvaux (McGinn, 1994) suggests that loving God for God's sake as opposed to loving Him for our own sake--or for what we can get from Him--is a more selfless and thus higher form of love, and this higher form of love is necessary for true joy.

#### 2. Union with God or Consciousness of the Direct Presence of God.

Achieving union with God is the main goal of Christian mysticism (Underhill, 1999; McGinn, 1992; 1994; 1998), and it appears that most if not all Christian writers

suggest that it is in this union with God that true joy can be found. All four mystics state this: Clare of Assisi (1982), Francis of Assisi (1982), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998), and Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907). This true joy does not seem to agree entirely with the definition proposed in the introduction to this study, however.

### 3. Practicing the Presence and Absence of God.

Practicing the presence and absence of God means being open to God's presence in the moment and practicing faith during the apparent absence of God's presence. The concept of continuously practicing the presence of God is found in the monastic Rule of Benedict (McGinn, 1994), and in the writings of Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907). The concept of the absence of God as an essential aspect of our relationship to God is discussed by McGinn (1992; 1994) and can be found in the writings of John Scottus Eriugene, Dionysus, Gregory of Nyssa (McGinn, 1992; 1994), and in Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998).

The idea of the absence of God revolves around the necessity for letting go of our conceptualization of God, because any conceptualization is a limitation. If we let go of our idea of God then perhaps we no longer *perceive God's* presence, but God's presence is always here and now.

The criteria that have emerged from my cycle-2 research and that I use to choose the mystics for my research in cycle 3 are

1. They (along with the cycle-2 mystics) come from a variety of countries and from historical time periods in which mysticism flourished.
2. Individuals knowledgeable in the field of Christian mysticism have recommended them to me, either personally or in texts.
3. Their works have been translated into English.
4. They are less well known than the more popular mystics and less has been written about them, so it seems as if I am exploring something new, rather than being

overly influenced by the opinions of other biographers.

5. They are unique for their joy, courage, and faith.

6. My heart draws me to them.

The four new mystics that we will be studying in cycle 3 are Blessed John Ruusbroec, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Flemish mystic; Julian of Norwich, a 14<sup>th</sup> century English mystic; Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century French mystic; and Saint Faustina Kowalska, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish mystic. They have much to tell us about the path to true joy.

## Chapter 5: The Return Arc of the Hermeneutical Circle--Intuitive Inquiry: Cycle 3

### *Cycle Three: The Christian Mystics*

In Cycle 3 of this Intuitive Inquiry research we study our four new Christian mystics. Before we look at their actual writings a brief section on the major historical events of the time in which each mystic lived is presented.

Two of our second set of four Christian mystics wrote in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe: Julian of Norwich in England and John Ruusbroec in the Netherlands. Therefore a brief look at the religious and historical context in which they wrote seems relevant. Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century saw the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, peasant uprisings, and problems in the Roman Catholic Church. The Hundred Years' War lasted from 1336-1564 and began in Flanders. The medieval princedom of the County Flanders was very prosperous, developed a thriving trade with England, Germany, France, and Italy, and had grown to be the industrial center of Northern Europe. In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century Flanders was invaded and subjugated by France. The Hundred Years' War began as a civil war in Flanders over trade issues between England and France. The English supported the middle class manufacturers and France supported the patrician landowners. The real war, however, began in 1340 in a sea battle between England and France at Sluys in the modern Netherlands. It dragged on for many years until finally, in 1565, the English were forced to give up their last stronghold in France, Calais (The Hundred Years' War, 2002).

The Black Death was the most severe epidemic in human history and swept through Europe from 1347 to 1351. By the year 1350 one-third of the population of Europe was dead.

The plague came from China and was carried by rats in trading ships. The fleas on the infected rats then spread the plague that started in Italy. The plague had enormous consequences on the population of Europe both economically and psychologically. Economically a shortage of workers enabled the serfs to leave their feudal lords and find work in the cities, thus bringing an end to feudalism. It also put a great deal of wealth in the hands of those who had survived, creating a growth in the economy. Psychologically it brought out darkness and a preoccupation with death that affected both art and religion. Many people saw the Black Death as a punishment from God and began to question God (The Black Death, 2002).

The Peasant's Revolt of 1381 began in South-West Essex in England when a tax collector was driven from the neighborhood. Nat Tyler, the rebellion's major leader, then led the peasants to Canterbury where Archbishop Sudbury was executed, the sheriff was seized, and judicial records burned. King Richard of England met with Nat Tyler several times, granting charters of pardon and freedom for the serfs. Tyler was later killed (Some Important Events in the Fourteenth Century, 2002).

The Church was not immune to this social and political turmoil. According to Durant (1957), "Throughout the fourteenth century the Church suffered political humiliation and moral decay" (p. 6). The initial energy of the new mendicant orders of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., the Dominican and Franciscan orders) had waned, and they were being attacked for their not so Christ-like accumulation of wealth. Also the secular Kings were becoming rebellious toward the supernatural power of the Papacy. King Philip IV of France managed to obtain the election of a French pope and convinced him to move the Holy See from Rome to Avignon, thus making the papacy a pawn of France for 68 years (Durant). This did not prevent the



popes from continuing to insist upon their absolute sovereignty over Kings and peasants alike. However, according to Durant, "The flight of the popes from Rome and their subservience to France undermined their authority and prestige" (p. 8).

There was a clash within the Church as well. In 1378 Pope Urban VI was elected pope but the cardinals later declared his election invalid and elected Clement VII who stayed as pope in Avignon while Urban stayed as pope in Rome. This Papal Schism, as it was called, did not end with Urban's death in 1389, but continued to cause disruption and bitterness amongst Christians of both sides until 1417. Heretical groups such as the Lollards and the movement of the Free Spirit found growing room in the corruption and weakness of the Church. All of these difficulties were leading to the need for a reformation of the Church.

*John Ruusbroec, (1293-1381), The Netherlands*

John Ruusbroec (spelled Ruysbroeck in modern English), the greatest Flemish mystic, was born in 1293 in the village of Ruusbroec in the powerful medieval principedom of the Duchy Brabant. He lived and worked in Brabant for the rest of his life. Brabant was situated east of the County Flanders, and together they formed the French and German border. Brabant shared the culture and language of Flanders; however, economically they were enemies. Brabant was prosperous because of its wool and other textile industries. Its major towns were Antwerp, Brussels, and Mechelen. For a time, Antwerp was the financial capital of Europe. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Brabant was under the rule of the German Emperor and during this time the relationship between the municipalities and their German rulers was often one of intense friction (Brabant, 2001; History of Flanders, 2002).

We know little about Ruusbroec's early childhood, but we do know that at age 11 he left his home and journeyed to Brussels to live with his Uncle John Hinckaeert and his uncle's friend Francis van Coudenberg who were both canons at the large cathedral of St. Gudula. According to his enthusiastic hagiographer, the Augustinian Canon Pomerius, this move by Ruusbroec to Brussels showed an early calling to the spiritual life. In 1317, at age 24, Ruusbroec was ordained, and he spent the next 25 years as a chaplain at St. Gudula (Underhill, 1915).

James Wiseman, the editor and translator of some of Ruusbroec's (1985) writings, states that during his years in Brussels, Ruusbroec spent much energy on opposing what he considered to be heretical movements, especially a group called the Free Spirits. Wiseman suggests that the desire to oppose these groups may have been the initial impetus for Ruusbroec's treatises.

In 1343 Ruusbroec and his companions, Hinckaert and Coudenberg, left the noisy distractions of the city of Brussels for the hermitage of Groenendael in the forest of Soignes outside Brussels. Several years later they became canons regular of St. Augustine and started the priory of Groenendael. The priory soon developed a reputation for holiness, and many students came to visit. The quiet of the forest evidently suited Ruusbroec, and legend has it that when his work was done he used to go out into the forest, sit under his favorite tree and write as the Holy Ghost directed (Underhill, 1915).

According to Underhill in her introduction to selected works of Ruusbroec (1916), Ruusbroec had a strong intellect and was well read in scholastic theology and philosophy. Thinkers such as Plato, Plotinus, St. Paul, St. Augustine, Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor, and St. Bernard influenced him. One of his greatest strengths was that he was able, unlike

many great mystics, to express his personal intuitions and experiences of God in words that most educated Christians of his time could understand. He was a devout and orthodox Catholic and accepted the precepts of the Church without question. However, according to Underhill, “when he is trying to interpret [eternal truths] to us the Middle Ages and their limitations fall away” (p. xiii). Ruusbroec continued on as prior of Groenendael until, in 1381 in the infirmary at Groenendael, he died a peaceful death at age 88. The Catholic Church beatified him in 1909.

Ruusbroec (1985) has a tripartite idea of spiritual growth, and he has divided his early work, *The Spiritual Espousals*, into three books corresponding to these three levels of spiritual growth: Book I is the Active Life, Book II is the Interior Life, and Book III is the Superessential or Contemplative Life. The Active Life is grounded in the cultivation of virtues that Ruusbroec sees as essential for the growth of the Christian life. They are also the virtues required to find true joy in union with God. These basic virtues require a deep commitment and great spiritual maturity. They are humility, obedience, renunciation of one’s will, patience, meekness, kindness, compassion, generosity, zeal, moderation, purity, righteousness, and charity. The achievement of each virtue is dependent upon the acquiring of all the virtues that come before it. Ruusbroec experiences these virtues on a much deeper level of being than the average person.

Humility is the first virtue and the foundation of all the other virtues. It is “an inward bowing down or prostrating of the heart and of the conscience before God’s transcendent worth” (p. 25). Humility casts off the first mortal sin: Pride.

Obedience is the second virtue and is “an unassuming, submissive, and pliable humour, and a will in readiness for all that is good” (p. 26). Obedience casts out disobedience.

Renunciation of self-will is the third virtue in which, Ruusbroec states, “the man’s will is so united with the will of God that he can neither will nor desire in any other way” (p. 28).

Patience is the fourth virtue and “is a peaceful endurance of all things that may befall a man either from God or from the creatures” (p. 28).

Meekness is the fifth virtue and provides peace and rest in all aspects of life. Meekness, too, is a kind of peaceful endurance and casts out the second mortal sin: Anger.

Kindliness is the sixth virtue and consists of friendship, cordiality, compassion, healing mercy, fire, light, and charity. It casts out jealousy.

Compassion is the seventh virtue and involves “sharing in the bodily and ghostly [spiritual] griefs of all men” (p. 30) and suffering with Christ in his passion. It also involves compassion for self. It casts out the third mortal sin: Hatred.

Generosity is the eighth virtue and is “a liberal flowing forth of the heart which has been touched by charity and pity” (p. 32). It casts out the fourth mortal sin: Avarice.

Zeal is the ninth virtue and is a state in which “a man longs to devote his heart and his senses, his soul and his body, and all that he is, and all that he has, and all toward which he aspires, to the glory and praise of God” (p. 34). It casts out the fifth mortal sin: Sloth.

Temperance or moderation is the tenth virtue. Temperance “divides the higher powers from the animal powers: it saves a man from intemperance and from excess” (p. 35). It casts out the sixth mortal sin: Gluttony.

Purity is the eleventh virtue. "Purity of spirit is this: that a man should not cleave to any creature with desirous affection, but to God alone; for we should use all creatures, but enjoy only God" (p. 37). Purity of heart increases the opportunity to receive God's grace. It overcomes the seventh mortal sin: Unchastity.

Ruusbroec (1985) also sees charity and righteousness as fundamental virtues. "It was . . . charity that made Christ stoop with loving faithfulness and kindness to the bodily and ghostly needs of all men" (p. 14). We must also possess righteousness to fight against our three powerful adversaries: "the devil, the world, and our own flesh." (p. 40). We must hate and persecute the lower parts of ourselves (e.g., our fleshly lusts) through penances and austerity of life. This view of the body and its desires as wrong and as an impediment to union with God is a common theme in the history of Christian mysticism. This is problematic, however, because it seems that loving one's whole self, including one's body, is necessary for the experience of wholeness and completeness that characterizes true joy.

In Book I, Ruusbroec (1985) also discusses the relationship of God and the human. One aspect of this relationship concerns the role of knowledge and love in the spiritual life, and Ruusbroec suggests that these two powers must be balanced. One must direct one's mind solely toward God, and by doing so one can see God. However, this seeing or knowledge of God is not enough: "To this activity belongs also affection and love, for knowing and seeing God without affection has not savor and does not help us advance" (p. 67).

There is also the interplay between activity and rest, which Ruusbroec (1985) states is the culmination of the Active Life. This idea is a fundamental tenet of his theology.

When the soul inclines with desire toward this incomprehensible God, then it meets Christ and is filled with his gifts. When it loves and is at rest above all gifts, above itself, and above all creatures, then it abides in God and God in it.

This is how we are to meet Christ at the highest level of the Active Life. (p. 70)

So there is an outward reaching toward God or Christ (virtuous activity) and a return to a repose in God (rest) in a higher plane. This is the movement between action and contemplation.

A third theme found in the writings of Ruusbroec (1985) is the paradox of *via negativa* and *via affirmativa*. In part, the *via negativa* implies that God is incomprehensible, transcending all things, and therefore it is only in God's absence in the darkness that we can know God. The *via affirmativa* suggests that God is immanent, and we can know God through God's personal presence. According to Wiseman in his introduction, Ruusbroec (1985) leans toward the *via affirmativa* believing that we should keep God present in our minds by naming God many names even though God is not nameable. Here again we find in Ruusbroec's thought an interweaving of the apparent opposites: everything is a part of the whole, everything works in opposition and in concert and everything seems to be moving. This implies that the duality of joy and suffering must exist as well and that perhaps at one point they might act in concert, and at another point they might act in opposition.

In Book II, *The Interior Life*, Ruusbroec (1985), explains that there is a threefold unity in each person naturally and in some supernaturally. The first unity in us by nature is our unity with God. The second is the unity of spirit or of the mind that is also in us by nature. The memory, the understanding, and the will come out of this Unity. The third unity that is in us by nature is the unity of the heart. From this unity comes all that has to do with the body and the five senses. This sounds similar to the body-mind-spirit model of the human creature.

Ruusbroec (1985) goes on to tell us that there is more to gain in the supernatural realm. "The kingdom and eternal dwelling place of these unities can also be supernaturally adorned and possessed, first of all through moral virtues practiced in charity in the active life"(p.73). These moral virtues were listed above. Ruusbroec then suggests that there is even more joy to be gained in the interior life: "This kingdom is still more beautifully adorned and more nobly possessed when the fervent exercises of the interior life are added to the active life, and it is most nobly and blissfully adorned through a supernatural, contemplative life" (p. 73). According to Ruusbroec (1985), the supernatural possession of these unities occurs in the interior life. When one offers oneself and all one's doings, with noble intentions, to the glory of God and waits with confidence to be filled, one is then able to "rest in that sublime unity where God and the loving spirit are united without intermediary" (p. 74).

In order to obtain this high level of unity, Ruusbroec (1985) tells us three things are required: (a) the illumination of divine grace "which touches and moves a person promptly from within which makes us able to see" (p. 75), (b) the gathering "together all [the individual's] powers from within and from without in the unity of the spirit and the bond of love" (p. 75), and (c) the freedom to turn within to God at any time without attachment to "pleasure and pain, gain and loss, exaltation and humiliation, strange anxieties, and joy and fear, just as he must also not be bound to any creature" (pp. 76-77). This is the foundation of the interior life.

Ruusbroec (1985) describes in intimate detail many different experiences during the interior stage of development, leading Underhill (1915) to believe that they are descriptions of his personal experiences. These descriptions help us to understand that many of the

extreme emotions and desires so many mystics feel may be part of an orderly process of spiritual growth. At least this is how Ruusbroec presents it.

Ruusbroec (1985) lists some of the experiences in the interior life under the heading of the coming of Christ the Bridegroom. This coming, he explains, occurs in three different ways raising the individual to “a higher level and a more fervent practice” (p. 76).

In the first coming there are four modes. The first mode “is an interiorly felt impulse of the Holy Spirit which urges and impels us toward all the virtues” (p. 77). In this mode one can experience the spiritual wine of joy and consolation. It is characterized by devotion and thanksgiving.

In the second mode God makes the virtues grow. There is sweetness giving rise to a feeling of delight that creates spiritual inebriation. This inebriation makes “one person sing and praise God out of the fullness of his joy, and it makes another shed many tears because of the delight he feels within the heart” (Ruusbroec, 1985, p. 82).

The third mode is a powerful attraction to God.

Here the heart opens wide in joy and desire, all the veins dilate, and the powers of the soul stand ready in their desire to fulfill what is called for by God and by the invitation to unity with him. (Ruusbroec, 1985, p. 85).

In this mode Christ shines on the heart and this causes so much joy that it is barely possible to close the heart again. The individual is now wounded by love and this wound causes pleasure and pain simultaneously. Ruusbroec explains the cause of this pain as follows:

When a person cannot attain God and yet cannot do without him, then from these two things there arises a transport of restlessness . . . [in which] a person is ready to suffer everything that can be suffered in order to obtain what he loves. (p. 86)



The fourth mode is a state of abandonment. In this mode Christ hides and withdraws the radiance of his light and the person finds himself “poor, wretched, and forsaken” (Ruusbroec, 1985, p. 91). All the love and joy and interior consolations disappear. This stage appears similar to the Dark Night of the Soul. In this state the individual surrenders to God allowing God’s will to be done. Ruusbroec continues,

Such a person will turn all his virtues and his entire state of abandonment into an interior joy and will place himself in the hands of God, rejoicing that he is able to *suffer for God’s glory*. If he does this properly, *he will savor more interior joy than ever before*, for nothing is more pleasant to one who loves God than the feeling that he belongs entirely to his Beloved.  
(p. 92; emphasis added)

Here, Ruusbroec is describing the experience of joy the mystics often find in suffering. This sounds like a very complex state of consciousness--more complex than masochism; however, without experiencing this state it is impossible to really comprehend it. What a gift this would be to be able to accomplish what Ruusbroec describes!

Ruusbroec (1985) sees the second coming of Christ as a spring with three streams, “unifying the memory,” (p. 99), “enlightening the understanding,” (p. 99), and “enflaming the will in love.” (p. 102). The third coming is like “a vein of water feeding a spring” (p. 110).

In Book Three, Ruusbroec (1985) describes The Contemplative Life as a state in which our spirit contemplates God with God without intermediary in the divine light. Ruusbroec divides the contemplative life into four parts based on a passage from Matthew 25:6: “See, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him.”

The first part, "See," involves the developing of the ability to see. In order to do this one must die to oneself, cleave to God, and enter into the darkness because, Ruusbroec (1985) tells us, it is

in the abyss of this darkness . . . God's revelation and eternal life have their origin, for in this darkness an incomprehensible light is born and shines forth; this is the Son of God, in whom a person becomes able to see and to contemplate eternal life. (p. 147)

In part two, "The Bridegroom is Coming," Ruusbroec (1985) explains that when we can see, then "we can joyfully contemplate the eternal coming of our Bridegroom" (p. 147). The coming of the bridegroom is "a new birth and a new illumination which knows no interruption" (p. 147). The bridegroom brings delight and joy and continually comes anew, and we continually receive him.

In part three, "Go Out," Ruusbroec (1985) states that God speaks to our spirit saying, "'Go out, in a state of eternal contemplation and blissful enjoyment after God's own manner'" (p. 148). We have, Ruusbroec tells us, an eternal being and life which is like God in that it rests without distinction in the divine essence and then goes out as a separate distinct entity.

Ruusbroec (1985) states that in part four, "To Meet Him," the spirit transcends its creaturely state and meets God in love, the highest state of blessedness. "This is the active meeting of the Father and the Son, in which we are lovingly embraced by means of the Holy Spirit in eternal love" (p. 152). In order to have this meeting, however, we must enter into "that dark stillness in which all lovers lose their way" (p. 152). Wiseman, in his introduction, suggests that Ruusbroec does not go as deeply into the *via negativa* as many mystics do (e.g., Meister Eckhart), because for him, the darkness is never the entirety of things; there is

always light within the darkness and there is always activity and a going out in the eternal state of rest. There is a time of desire and a time of fulfillment, and a time of separation and a time of union. Ruusbroec's mystical theology embraces and holds the opposites.

According to Underhill (1915), Ruusbroec's most original contribution to the history of mysticism is his description of the highest state of spiritual development in which "the human soul becomes totally free, and is made 'the hidden child' of God" (p. 85). In *The Sparkling Stone*, Ruusbroec (1985) describes this state as only a few of the great mystics have been able to do. Because of this fact, Underhill believes that Ruusbroec is one of the few mystics who has actually experienced it.

According to Ruusbroec (1985), whenever the union with God manifests itself to a spiritual person it is "without ground" (p. 158). This means "it is infinitely deep, infinitely high, and infinitely long and wide" (p. 158). In this union, Ruusbroec continues, a person's spirit "feels itself to be immersed in the life of God and to be one single life with God" (p. 158). The experience of one's being having no ground is fundamental to the contemplative life.

To be a contemplative one must renounce oneself and all things, own nothing of his own, and must cleave only to God. In this way it is possible for the contemplative to be empty of all things and to "constantly enter the inmost part of his spirit in a state of bareness and freedom from images. There an eternal light is revealed to him, and in this light he experiences the eternal call of God's unity" (Ruusbroec, 1985, p. 158). Ruusbroec goes on to explain:

When we rise above ourselves and in our ascent to God become so unified that bare love can envelop us at that high level where love itself acts, above and beyond all virtuous exercises--that is, in our source, out of which we have

been spiritually born--we will then come to naught, dying in God to ourselves and to all that is our own. In this death we become hidden sons of God and discover in ourselves a new life, which is eternal. (p. 170)

Ruusbroec (1985) states that at this point the contemplative feels like the eternal fire of love that desires more than anything else to be one with God. In this life we are immersed in love; however, Ruusbroec states, that love always wants to "know and savor thoroughly the fathomless riches which abide in the ground of its being" (p. 171). Therefore there is always an unsatisfied desire in which we are "poor in ourselves but rich in God, hungry and thirsty in ourselves but drunken and satisfied in God, active in ourselves but idle and empty of everything in God" (p. 172). We will remain, Ruusbroec states, in this paradoxical state for eternity!

Ruusbroec (1985) does not see union with God as a loss of our separate personality, and yet he says we experience our oneness with God. He explains it this way:

We cannot wholly become God and lose our creaturely state--that is impossible. But if we remained entirely in ourselves separated from God we would be miserable and deprived of salvation. We will therefore feel ourselves as being entirely in God and entirely in ourselves. (p. 172)

There is still only one life even though we are entirely ourselves and live entirely in God; however, we experience it as an existence of duality "since poverty and riches, hunger and satisfaction, activity and idle emptiness, are complete opposites" (p. 172).

Ruusbroec (1985) teaches that there are four ways of experiencing union with God. In the first way we experience God within us through God's grace and through interior fervor, love for others, good works and resistance to selfish desires, devotion, thanksgiving, praise, fervent prayer, and cleaving to God. Only contemplatives can go beyond this state.

The second way, according to Ruusbroec (1985), is through experiencing ourselves as embraced by God. The resplendence of God leads us above and beyond our reason and we experience “the transformation of our being in its entirety in God” (p. 175). It is when we feel “swallowed up in the groundless abyss of eternal blessedness” (p. 176) that we feel one with God and do not experience any difference between God and us.

In the third way we experience ourselves as one with God. In the third way, Ruusbroec (1985) suggests, we are transformed in God and “feel ourselves to be swallowed up in the groundless abyss of our eternal blessedness, in which we can never discover any difference between us and God” (p. 176). This, Ruusbroec explains, is the highest of all our experiences. In order to experience the third way of union with God we must be immersed in love. According to Ruusbroec, in this union our human powers stand “empty and idle” (p. 176) and we are “without rational reflection” (p. 176) so that we can “contemplate and enjoy” (p. 176). This state sounds very much like true joy.

The fourth way of experiencing union with God, Ruusbroec (1985) explains, is through an eager craving for God. This occurs when we try to examine what we are experiencing. When we do this we go back to reasoning and experience ourselves separate from God again. Ruusbroec describes this craving as a ravenous hunger that occurs when we realize that God wants to be wholly ours. When this awareness occurs, “our spirit is buffeted as in a storm by the heat and restlessness of love” (p. 176). In this state of eager craving, God’s grace flows into us. We then desire to savor God’s grace, and this opens us to God’s touch that then allows God’s sweetness to flow through and around us.

Ruusbroec (1985) states that the sparkling stone is Jesus Christ. The Son raises us up to our origin, and the Father draws us in enlightening us. Then:

All become one and one becomes all in the loving embrace of the threefold Unity. When we experience this Unity, we become one being, one life, and one blessedness with God. All things are then fulfilled and renewed, for when we are baptized in the powerful embrace of God's love each persons' joy is so great and so special that he can neither think about nor observe the joy of anyone else. He becomes blissful love, which is itself everything, so that a person never needs nor is able to seek anything else. (p. 182)

In this passage Ruusbroec tells us that we will be fulfilled and will never need anything else.

On another occasion, however, he talks about living in unsatisfied desire for eternity. The explanation for this apparent contradiction might lie in the fact that, although in union with God there is only one life, the individual experiences both being in God and being separate from God simultaneously. When one is feeling one's separate identity there is unfulfilled hunger. When one feels one's God-identity there is complete satisfaction and joy and no need for anything else. This is reconciliation, apparently, of the opposites. There is joy and delight in many of the stages of spiritual development Ruusbroec has described, particularly the ultimate joy of the threefold Unity. Intertwined with this joy, however, there is apparently painful craving. In order to understand true joy it is necessary to expand our thinking to include every possibility including the darkness and the pain.

*Julian of Norwich, (1343-1416?), England*

In *The English Mystical Tradition*, David Knowles (1961), a modern scholar of mysticism, states that England of the 14<sup>th</sup> century was a time of economic and demographic recession and frustration. Labor was in short supply, and the wool trade was suffering because of the financial demands of the Hundred Years' War. There were movements of discontent in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, including the peasant revolution of 1381 and the frustration in the merchant class against the taxation imposed upon them to support the war. This

frustration led to attacks against the pope and the religious orders because of what was perceived as their excessive accumulation of wealth. There were also attacks on Catholic theology by Wyclif and his Lollard followers. It was, Knowles states, a time of disruption, dissolution, and revolution.

Religion, according to Knowles (1961), was a daily affair, for life was short and hard and the Black Plague and death were right around the corner. According to Durant (1957), the Black Death returned to England in 1361, 1368, 1375, 1382, 1390, 1438, and 1464. It killed nearly half the clergy, and Durant suggests that perhaps some of the abuses of which the English Church were accused might have been due to “the necessity of hastily impressing into her service men lacking the proper qualifications of training and character” (p. 39).

In his introduction to selected writings of Julian of Norwich (2001), John Nelson, a researcher of church history, states that in Julian’s hometown of Norwich in 1300 the population of Norwich was 13,000. By 1373, the year in which she received her revelations, the town’s population had dwindled down to fewer than 6,000. The suffering of Jesus Christ spoke to the people of 14<sup>th</sup> century, and England experienced its Golden Age of mysticism.

We do not know much about Julian of Norwich other than what she chose to tell us, and what can be deduced from her writings. According to Colledge and Walsh, editors of her writings, Julian of Norwich (1978) probably entered a religious order when she was young and then later chose to live a more intense form of contemplative life as an anchoress in a solitary enclosure with only a maidservant in attendance. This enclosure or cell adjoined the parish church of St. Julian in Conisford at Norwich, opposite the house of the Augustinian Friars.

Julian of Norwich (1978) seems, according to Colledge and Walsh, to have been familiar with many of the writings that provided the foundation for the Christian monastic contemplative tradition although she describes herself as “a simple, unlettered creature” (p. 177). Her writings consist of a short text and a long text both describing her 16 revelations, or *showings* as she often called them, that she received on May 13, 1373, when she was 30 years old. She received fifteen showings, and then several hours later she received her sixteenth showing, a validation of the first fifteen. Julian believed that she had been divinely commanded to write down her record of these showings.

Julian of Norwich (1978) wrote her short text first (we don’t know exactly when), and she wrote her long text, with editorial rewriting, later. The long text we know was concluded in 1393. There are several additions to the long text that were not included in the short text, and it is believed that after she wrote her short text, she spent many years trying to understand the meaning of her showings and that the long text was written after she had achieved this understanding. Our examination of her writings will be confined to this long text.

J. Leclercq, in his preface to the writings of Julian of Norwich (1978), suggests that although Julian teaches on all the main issues of Christian theology her focus is on God, the human being, and their reconciliation. He also suggests that she has a very balanced approach to this theology. He points out that often in theology Christians have emphasized one aspect of the doctrine to the exclusion or lessening of other aspects. With Julian, however, there is an equal focus on

the Trinity and the Incarnation, the suffering of Christ and his glory, his uniqueness and the role of Mary, the present Church and eschatology, the pain and joy of the Christian, his sinfulness and his hope, his work and the



necessity of grace, the personal and the universal, human life and its relation to the cosmos, as well as to eternity. (pp. 13-14)

Cousins (1989) also looks at the question of theological imbalances and discusses the one sided focus on the suffering of Christ's passion by the Medieval Christian mystics and saints. Cousins suggests that this sometimes obsessive focus on the pain and humiliation of the crucifixion raises questions about the psychological stability of the mystics and also distorts the message of Christianity, as it ignores the symbolic importance of the resurrection for one's own spiritual journey. According to Cousins, the English mystic Julian of Norwich is "a striking exception to this imbalance" (p. 387). Although the visions of Julian are extremely graphic and intense, Cousins points out that they do not lead her into suffering but "into the mystery of the Trinity, which fills her with joy" (p. 387).

Julian of Norwich (1978) tells us that when she was young she asked for three things from God: (a) a recollection of the passion, (b) bodily sickness when she was 30 years old , and (c) to have God gift her with three wounds. Regarding the recollection of the passion, Julian says she wanted to suffer with Christ in the way in which those who loved him did at the time of his crucifixion. Regarding the bodily sickness, Julian wished God would give her a sickness so severe that she would think she was dying. She explains,

I intended this because I wanted to be purged by God's mercy, and afterwards live more to his glory because of that sickness; because I hoped that this would be to my reward when I should die, because I desired soon to be with my God and my Creator. (p. 178)

The three wounds she desired were "the wound of contrition, the wound of loving compassion, and the wound of longing with my will for God" (p. 179).

When she was 30 years old, Julian of Norwich (1978) tells us, God did indeed send her a sickness. She describes the progression of this sickness, and how when she believed she was at the point of death she experienced a miraculous healing:

And suddenly at that moment all my pain was taken from me and I was sound . . . as ever I was before. I was astonished by this sudden change for it seemed to me that it was God's secret doing and not natural. (p. 150)

Julian then tells us that she experienced a powerful desire to suffer with Christ. Again, her request is answered, and she receives her first revelation of a suffering Christ with his crown of thorns. According to College and Walsh in their introduction to Julian of Norwich (1978), this revelation expresses "the paradox of Crucifixion and Resurrection, life and death, joy and suffering" (p. 31).

Julian of Norwich (1978) tells us that her revelations were shown to her in three modes, "by bodily vision and by words formed in my understanding and by spiritual vision" (p. 192). John Skinner, in the introduction to his translation of the revelations of Julian of Norwich (1996), states that what Julian describes are the three classical ways in which the mystics directly experienced God. Bodily visions, he explains, are visions received through the senses--sight, hearing, and even smell. The words given directly to her understanding are spiritual or ghostly visions and sayings directly imparted to the soul. Spiritual or intellectual vision or enlightenment means that a new understanding of God illumined her mind (p. xi).

In her second revelation, Julian of Norwich (1978) sees the face of Christ "when he was in his cruel Passion, voluntarily going to his death, and of his often-changing colour, the brownness and the blackness, his face sorrowful and wasted" (p. 194). However, Julian insists "there was never so beautiful a man as he, until the time when his lovely complexion was changed by labour and grief, suffering and dying" (p. 195). For Julian this revelation

“symbolized and resembled our foul, black death, which our fair, bright blessed Lord bore for our sins” (p. 194).

What did Julian of Norwich (1978) learn from this sight full of sorrow? She learned, she tells us, that the individual’s search for God pleases God immensely. “Seeking with faith, hope, and love pleases our Lord and finding pleases the soul and fills it full of joy” (p. 195). When Julian allows herself to go into the suffering she is able to emerge with joy. Indeed, according to Thomas Merton (1967) in *Mystics & Zen Masters*, Julian’s theology is filled with mercy, praise, and joy. He states: “Nowhere in all Christian literature are the dimensions of her Christian optimism excelled” (p. 142). This optimism might very well have enabled Julian to open to spiritual joy.

In her third revelation Julian of Norwich (1978) saw that there is nothing that happens by chance in the world—that all is created by God’s wisdom. Julian wonders what this means when related to the concept of sin, and although she discusses sin in later revelations she never receives a satisfactory answer from her prayers. If there are no accidents and nothing is accomplished outside of God’s wisdom, how do evil and sin exist? Does God create them? Unfortunately an in-depth examination of these questions is beyond the scope of this research.

Her fifth revelation shows Julian of Norwich (1978) that Christ’s passion overcomes the fiend or the devil and how, when the devil is overcome, he is filled with sorrow, “and he is put to terrible shame, for everything which God permits him to do turns to joy for us and to pain and shame to him” (p. 201). And at that point Julian tells us she began to laugh, “for I understood that we may laugh, to comfort ourselves and rejoice in God, because the devil is

overcome” (p. 202). This revelation seems to imply that God permits the devil to do evil in the world but that somehow this is turned to joy for us.

In her seventh revelation Julian of Norwich (1978) is put through alternating periods of pain and then delight and joy, perhaps twenty times. “This vision was shown to teach me to understand that some souls profit by experiencing this, to be comforted at one time, and at another to fail and to be left to themselves” (p. 205). God does not intend that we dwell in our pain, Julian insists, but that we should swiftly “pass it over, and preserve ourselves in the endless delight which is God” (p. 205). After this period of intense pain and intense joy Julian receives another vision of the dying Christ:

And at this, suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it was at the time when the crown of thorns was pressed on his blessed head. I perceived, truly and powerfully, that it was he who just so, both God and man, himself suffered for me, who showed it to me without any intermediary. (p. 181)

She then goes on to say how she transcended this intense image of suffering:

And in the same revelation, suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of the greatest joy, and I understood that it will be so in heaven without end to all who will come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ. (p. 181)

Later she describes the love, protection, and comfort that Christ provides for us:

At the same time as I saw this sight of the head bleeding, our good Lord showed a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw that he is everything which is good, as I understand. (p. 183)

This is a powerful example of how Julian experiences the transformation of suffering into joy. The blood of Christ is a nourishing symbol; the blood of Christ is life giving.

In her eighth revelation Julian of Norwich (1978) is shown Christ as He is very close to death, and she shares his terrible pain. Indeed, if she had known, she tells us, how great the pain was she would have been reluctant to pray for it.

For at the time when our blessed saviour died upon the Cross, there was a dry, bitter wind, I saw: and when all the precious blood that might had flowed out of his sweet body, still there was some moisture in the sweet flesh as it was revealed. It was dried up from within by bloodlessness and anguish, from without by the blowing of the wind and the cold, all concentrated on Christ's sweet body . . . and though this pain was bitter and piercing, still it lasted a very long time. (p. 206)

Finally, in the ninth revelation the suffering is over, the transition is complete, and the new reality has been reached. Julian of Norwich (1978) says that she was waiting for Christ's death--indeed it seemed to her that it was only moments away--but "suddenly, as I looked at the same cross, he changed to an appearance of joy. The change in his blessed appearance changed mine and I was as glad and joyful as I could possibly be" (p. 215).

Julian goes on to explain that now we are all suffering on the cross with Christ but,

for this little pain which we suffer here we shall have an exalted knowledge in God which we could never have without it. And the harder our pains have been with him on the cross, the greater will our glory be with him in his Kingdom. (p. 215)

Suffering appears to be necessary for the transformation from the old to the new--from the natural self to the joy of the new self that is born in Spirit.

In the tenth revelation Christ speaks directly and joyfully to Julian of Norwich (1978) saying, "See how I love you," and Julian explains that it is "as if he said, 'behold and see that I loved you so much, before I died for you, that I wanted to die for you. . . . See how I loved you'" (p. 221). Christ continues speaking to Julian: "For my delight is in your holiness and in your endless joy and bliss in me" (p. 221). In this revelation Julian expresses the fullness of

the love Christ has for us, the joy he finds in us, and the joy we can find in Him. "Our Lord" Julian explains, "revealed this to make us glad and joyful" (p. 221).

In revelation eleven Christ asks Julian of Norwich (1978) if she would like to see his Mother Mary: "'Do you wish to see her?' I answered and said: 'Yes, good Lord, great thanks, yes, good Lord, if it be your will.' . . . And Jesus, saying this, showed me a spiritual vision of her." (p. 222). Julian explains that Christ wants us to know through this revelation "that all who take delight in him should take delight in her, and in the delight that he has in her and she in him" (pp. 222-223). Julian is truly bringing us a message of joy, and yet she is very unassuming about her revelations; she is not anyone special but just a conduit.

In her thirteenth revelation Julian of Norwich (1978) tells us that she realizes that nothing hinders us from God but sin, that sin creates much pain for us, and she wonders why God did not prevent sin in the beginning. Jesus answers her question by saying: "Sin is necessary but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well" (p. 225). Julian is not able to explain why sin is necessary or how when there is sin everything can be well. She is able to only say that we will know why God allowed sin to come when we are in heaven "and in this sight we shall rejoice forever" (p. 226). Much of the joy about which Julian speaks will come, she suggests, after our death if we are saved and thus in Heaven.

Also in this revelation Julian of Norwich (1978) states that God does not blame us for our sins but "regards us with pity and compassion as innocent and guiltless children" (p. 227). What a wonderful message this is: Julian does not see a severe, wrathful, judging God as found in the Hebrew Scriptures but a loving and forgiving Christian Scriptures God who wants us to find joy and delight in Him. In fact she explains that God is goodness and that it

is impossible for goodness to be angry. The atonement of Christ's Passion has washed away the sin of Adam. Julian does not forget the dark side of all this, however, and she discusses the people who are pagans or who are living unchristian lives who will die outside of God's love and thus "be eternally condemned to hell, as Holy Church teaches me to believe" (p. 233). The message here appears to be that Christ's atonement only works for Christians, and only Christians can find joy. Julian wonders how everything can be well in these circumstances, but she does not question this teaching from Holy Church and receives no answer to her dilemma. Julian's teachings are rooted in the scripture, and she always defers to the wisdom of the Church.

Julian of Norwich (1978) in her fourteenth revelation states that it is impossible for us to seek mercy and grace from God and not have it. "For everything which our good Lord makes us to beseech he himself has ordained for us from all eternity" (p. 248-249). God, she says, wants us to beseech God as this brings God great joy. Julian defines beseeching as "a true and gracious, enduring will of the Soul, united and joined to our Lord's will by the sweet secret operation of the Holy Spirit" (p. 249). According to Julian, sometimes there is a dryness and bareness in us and we cannot pray, but then

the power of our Lord's Word enters the soul and enlivens the heart and it begins by his grace faithful exercise, and makes the soul to pray most blessedly, and truly to rejoice in our Lord. This is a most loving thanksgiving in his sight. (p. 250)

The message here seems to be that God implants His desires in our hearts so that we will pray to Him for their manifestation, and that because they are God's desires for us, we will receive them.

In this same very long revelation, Julian of Norwich (1978) presents the idea that The Trinity is our Mother. She also refers to God as our Father and our Mother, and uses the term "our Mother Christ" (p. 294).

As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother, and he revealed that in everything, and especially in these sweet words where he says: I am he; that is to say: I am he, the power and goodness of fatherhood; I am he, the wisdom and the lovingness of motherhood; I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed; I am he, the Trinity: I am he, the unity; I am he, the great supreme goodness of every kind thing; I am he who makes you to love; I am he who makes you to long; I am he, the endless fulfilling of all true desires. For where the soul is highest, noblest, most honourable, still it is lowest, meekest and mildest. (pp. 295-296)

Here Julian presents a powerful and a very welcome feminine aspect of God.

Julian of Norwich (1978) writes about what was revealed to her about suffering in her fifteenth revelation. Our pain and our sickness, she tell us, are God's will and to his glory. When she wonders about the pain of this world God asks her to be patient and tells her that we should

accept our tarrying and our sufferings as lightly as we are able, and to count them as nothing. For the more lightly that we accept them, the less importance we ascribe to them because of our love, the less pain shall we experience from them and the more thanks and reward shall we have for them. (pp. 307-308)

Julian suggests that the more suffering we endure in this life, the more we will be rewarded in Heaven.

In her sixteenth and final revelation, which came to her at the end of the day, Julian of Norwich (1978) tells us that after her fifteenth revelation, all of her pain and sickness returned just as it had been before the revelations and that at first she negated the validity of her revelations, dismissing them as ravings. When she finally slept the devil came to her in her dream:



And as soon as I fell asleep, it seemed to me that the devil set himself at my throat, thrusting his face, like that of a young man, long and strangely lean, close to mine. I never saw anything like him; his colour was red, like a newly baked tile, with black spots like freckles, uglier than a tile. His hair was red as rust, not cut short in front, with side-locks hanging at his temples. He grinned at me with a vicious look, showing me white teeth so big that it all seemed the uglier to me. His body and his hands were misshapen, but he held me by the throat with his paws, and wanted to stop my breath and kill me, but he could not. (pp. 311-312)

When she realizes that this gruesome creature is the devil come to tempt her she prays to

God:

And at once I had recourse to what our Lord had revealed to me on that same day, and to all the faith of Holy Church, for I regarded them both as one, and I fled to them as to my source of strength. And immediately everything vanished, and I was brought to great rest and peace, without sickness of body or fear of conscience. (p. 312)

Then, she explains, God opened her spiritual eye and she saw Jesus sitting in her soul in the midst of her heart. "The place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate for in us is his home of homes and his everlasting dwelling" (p. 313). Julian's gift as a storyteller and writer comes out in this exciting description of her perilous brush with evil and her release from this evil through faith in God.

For 15 long years after her revelations Julian of Norwich (1978) tried to understand God's meaning in bringing the revelations to her, and finally God answered her, she recounts, in spiritual understanding:

What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. (p. 342)

Do we really need to know anything more about God than this? Somehow Julian has been able to turn the most terrible suffering and evil into joy. Indeed, she has faced the bitter suffering of Christ and transformed it into the joy of his resurrection.

*Elizabeth of the Trinity, (1880 – 1906), France*

France during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was involved in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), in which Paris fell to the Germans. Ultimately France lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, giving Germany greater military power. After this defeat Napoleon III was exiled, and in 1871 the Third French Republic was established, bringing centuries of rule by the monarchy to a close. The Industrial expansion continued at a rapid rate despite the war. In 1889, to celebrate the centennial of the French Revolution, the Eiffel Tower was constructed (French History, 2002).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France was in a climate of upheaval and suffering from anti-Semitism, flag-waving colonialism, and anti-clericalism (Milord, 2002). In 1901, the year Elizabeth of the Trinity entered the Carmelite order in Dijon, restrictive measures by the French government forced many religious orders to leave the country. Thousands of schools were suppressed, and religious orders and congregations were expelled. In 1905 the concordant, an agreement between Napoleon and the Vatican reestablishing the church in France, was renounced, and in 1906 church property was confiscated (Church History, 2002). Officially France was now an atheistic country. However, Conrad De Meester, in his introduction to the writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984), speaks of a mystical invasion at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and “a great evangelical awakening in Western Europe” (p. 22).

The Carmelite order to which Elizabeth of the Trinity belonged developed from a community of hermits on Mount Carmel in Palestine in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1210 they were given a rule of life by St. Albert, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. Ultimately they became a mendicant order modeled after the Dominicans (Secular Order Discalced Carmelites, 2002).

In 1562 St. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish Carmelite nun, established a new branch of the Carmelite Order, the Discalced (barefooted) Carmelites, with the aim of returning to the contemplative spirit of the original rule of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Later another Carmelite, St. John of the Cross, helped Teresa in this work (Secular Order Discalced Carmelites, 2002).

Elizabeth Catez was born in 1880 at the military camp of Avor in France, where her father, Joseph Catez, was a captain in the army. Captain Joseph Catez had fought in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and had been a prisoner of war. In 1879 he married Marie Rolland, the daughter of a retired army officer. They were to have two daughters: Elizabeth and Guite. After Elizabeth was born, she and her mother and father moved to Dijon, near Burgundy. When Elizabeth was 7 years old her father died, leaving Mme. Catez to care for her two daughters alone (Fanning, 2001).

According to Moorcroft (2001), Elizabeth inherited her imperiousness from her mother and her love of life and friendliness from her father. Elizabeth was musically gifted and at a very young age showed an intense love for God and prayer. Indeed, according to Fanning (2001), at age 7 Elizabeth stated that she wanted to be a nun. She also had quite a temper, which, according to James Milord (2002), “remains strong to the very end, and is a major characteristic of her spiritual combat” (p. 5).

In his introduction to the four treatises of Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984), Conrad De Meester states that as a child Elizabeth was “deeply touched by the total gift of

self that Jesus manifests on the cross and in the Eucharist” (p. 26). In 1891 Elizabeth had her first communion and, according to Moorcroft (2001), she stated that she had such a love for God that she could not imagine giving her heart to anyone else. At age 12 Elizabeth was hearing God talk to her in Church. At age 14 she was convinced she was to be a Carmelite nun (Fanning, 2001). According to Milord (2002), a turning point came when at age 19 she visited a nearby Carmel in Dijon and met the Chaplain. “He affirmed her first mystical inkling of God’s presence with her” (p. 3). Mme. Catez forced Elizabeth to wait for 2 years to enter the Carmelite order, perhaps hoping she would change her mind; however, in 1901 she finally relented and reluctantly gave Elizabeth, now 21 years of age, permission to enter the Discalced Carmelite convent in Dijon as a postulant. Moorcroft (2001) describes Elizabeth’s entry into Carmel:

Elizabeth was received at the enclosure door by the subprioress, Mother Germaine of Jesus; behind her stretched two long lines of sisters, their veils down. Elizabeth knelt to kiss the large crucifix held out to her and then, as the heavy doors closed on the outside world, the sisters threw back their veils to reveal faces smiling in welcome. She embraced each one, and then Mother Germaine took her to the choir where she knelt and offered herself with, as Mother Marie of Jesus had expressed it, “all she had of heart and soul to love our Lord.”

She was then taken to her cell to change into her postulant’s clothes: a long brown dress, a short cape, and a net bonnet with wide ribbons and a net veil attached. (p. 69)

Later Elizabeth was assigned to sweep and dust the choir and arrange fresh flowers for the altar, “a task that delighted her as she was so close to her Lord in the Blessed Sacrament” (p. 71).

In his introduction to the four treatises of Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984), Conrad De Meester suggests that even as a lay person Elizabeth had already found her interior world, feeling “drawn by the presence of God and [responding] to it with an

unlimited generosity” (p. 28). According to Moorcroft (2001), Elizabeth had a genius for contemplative prayer and in Carmel she found the solitude and silence she needed. She also found God in whom she found great joy, a joy she expressed in her many letters to family and friends. According to Fanning (2001), Sister Elizabeth was, like Brother Lawrence, constantly in the presence of God.

According to Moorcroft (2001), Elizabeth particularly liked the peace and solitude of her cell:

It was sparsely furnished with a bed, a straw-seated chair and a writing desk. She also had a small portable desk that she placed on her knees to write on. The floor was of bare boards. There was no heat or running water, and the only light was from a small oil lamp. Above the bed was a large wooden cross painted black without the figure of Christ: the Carmelite was to put herself there. On the white walls were three sepia pictures with a small picture on the door that indicated the sister's name. It was stark and bare, but the very plainness and absence of superfluities gave it a simple austere beauty and a visual peace. (pp. 70-71)

Unlike her joyful postulancy, Elizabeth's year as a novice (the time for the sister to decide if this is truly the life she wants) was very difficult (Moorcroft, 2001). Elizabeth's conflict between her dedication to the convent and her love for her family (her mother still hoped Elizabeth would change her mind and return home) may have contributed to this very dark and troubled year of her life. Spiritually it was most likely a dark night of the soul.

In any case, in 1903 Elizabeth decided to make her profession of her final vows. On January 20 she made her profession of her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and received the large crucifix, the symbol of a Carmelite's dedication, which is worn under the scapular. Then on January 21<sup>st</sup>, on the feast of St. Agnes, a second ceremony took place in which “she received the black veil, a symbol of her lifelong commitment to Christ”

(Moorcroft, 2001, p. 91). After her profession, Moorcroft states, Elizabeth's peace of mind returned.

Her contentment at Carmel was not to be long lasting, however, for soon she contracted tuberculosis, and in 1903 was diagnosed with Addison's disease, a situation that ultimately left her "scarcely able to eat or drink" (Fanning, 2001, p. 204). Her ordeal was agonizing; however, according to Fanning, throughout her suffering "her interior knowledge of God sustained her" (p. 204).

According to Moorcroft (2001), despite her terrible pain, Elizabeth was radiantly happy, feeling that "the thin veil that separated her from her master was soon to be torn aside" (p. 126). Near the end, she took on the name she said she would use in Heaven, *Laudem Gloriam* or Praise of Glory. Finally at about 6:15 A.M. November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1906, Elizabeth of the Trinity, "already looking at heaven" (p. 178) took her last breath. On November 25, 1985 she was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

According to De Meester in his introduction to her writings, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) was a saint, a mystic, and "a prophet of the presence of God" (p. 24). According to Milord (2002), Elizabeth epitomizes the ideal of the Carmelites: "living in the present moment, loving, contemplating, and serving in silence" (p. 2).

De Meester suggests that Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) enriched, and sometimes surpassed, the spirituality of her time in several ways. First, she had a personal charism (divine gift) from the Holy Spirit of "sound interiority and attention to God" (p. 23). Second, she went beyond the spirituality of the day by her "enthusiastic and loving approach to the Trinity" (p. 25). Third, she was a pioneer in rediscovering the scriptures as a basis of Christian life, as the bible during this time was not well known amongst Catholics. Fourth,

she had a great interest in, and sensitivity to the spirituality of the laity; for Elizabeth, “contemplative does not necessarily mean cloistered” (p. 87). Fifth, she had a charism for intuitively penetrating and understanding the deep meaning of the scriptural writings of Paul and John, in which she found great delight. According to De Meester, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) was greatly influenced by biblical writers St. Paul and St. John and also by non-biblical writers such as the hermit John Ruusbroec, and the Carmelites St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese of Lisieux, and she often quoted them in her writings. According to Moorcroft (2001) however, Elizabeth made these writings “entirely her own, weaving them into her own special gift of expression that came from the depths of her lived experience” (p. 145). The focus here will be primarily on her original writings.

In August of 1906, 3 months before Elizabeth’s death, she began writing her four major treatises. She did not title these works; however, the titles given to her works by her editor Conrad De Meester will be used. Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) wrote her first treatise, “Heaven In Faith,” as a gift to her sister, Guite. It is arranged in ten sections to resemble the retreat of ten days the Carmelites took each year. There are two prayers for each day.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1990/1884) begins this work with a quotation of Christ’s found in John 17:24: “‘Father, I will that where I am they also whom You have given Me may be with Me’” (p. 94). This, according to Elizabeth, was Christ’s last wish before he was crucified. She explains, “He wills that where He is we should be also, not only for eternity, but already in time, which is eternity begun and still in progress” (p. 94). God, she says, is hidden; however, he wants us to live with Him in the unity of love. The Trinity, she insists is our true home, “the Father’s house that we should never leave” (p. 94).

Another quotation follows from John 15:14, "Remain in Me." Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) explains that we must enter more and more deeply into the depths of God. "It is there in the very depths that the divine impact takes place, where the abyss of our nothingness encounters the Abyss of mercy, the immensity of the all of God" (p. 95). It is in this abyss, Elizabeth explains, that we will find the courage to die to our old self and "be changed into love" (p. 95).

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) provides another quotation from Christ, this time from Luke 17:21, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (p. 95). We can remain with God within ourselves she points out. We do not need to go outside ourselves to find the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is our soul! She then presents another quotation from Luke 19.5, "Hurry and come down, for I must stay in Your house today" (p. 96). According to Elizabeth, Christ wants us to enter "more deeply into our interior abyss," a place, she continues, of "detachment from all that is not God" (p. 96). We must let go of the world, Elizabeth explains, and who we think we are. We must seek God alone. We must continue to renounce more and more of ourselves every day; we must die daily so that we can become more like Jesus Christ. Our transformation, she continues, will take place in the fiery furnace of God's love, which consumes all that we are. In order for this transformation to take place, however, we must surrender completely to God's will.

Christ comes, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) explains, asking for everything we have and giving everything He has to us. In return, we must "become Praises of Glory of the most Holy Trinity" (p. 111). She explains what a Praise of Glory is in this soaring, musical passage:



A praise of glory is a soul that lives in God, that loves him with a pure and disinterested love, without seeking itself in the sweetness of this love....

A praise of glory is a soul of silence that remains like a lyre under the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit so that He may draw from its divine harmonies; it knows that suffering is a string that produces still more beautiful sounds; so it loves to see this string on its instrument that it may more delightfully move the Heart of its God.

A praise of glory is a soul that gazes on God in faith and simplicity; it is a reflector of all that He is; it is like a bottomless abyss into which He can flow and expand; it is also like a crystal through which He can radiate and contemplate all His perfections and His own splendor. A soul which thus permits the divine Being to satisfy in itself His need to communicate "all that He is and all that He has," is in reality the praise of glory of all His gifts. . . .

In the heaven of her soul, the praise of glory has already begun her work of eternity. Her song is uninterrupted, for she is under the action of the Holy Spirit who effects everything in her . . . she always sings, she always adores, for she has . . . wholly passed into praise and love in her passion for the glory of her God. . . . One day the veil will fall, we will be introduced into the eternal courts, and there we will sing in the bosom of infinite Love. And God will give us "the new name promised to the Victor." What will it be?

LAUDEM GLORIAE (pp. 112-113)

Her second treatise, "The Last Retreat," is an autobiography and testimony to her interiority (her deep level of consciousness). It includes many quotations, mainly from St. Paul. In this work, she focuses much of her attention on a kind of union with God found through the death of the self and transformation in Christ. According to De Meester in his introduction, the terrible physical suffering Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) is experiencing while writing these treatises "impels [her] to a *pronounced Christocentrism*" (p. 135). Elizabeth writes about the suffering that is necessary to be in the light of God and believes she must become like the crucified Christ. She speaks of the elect "who are wholly bathed in the great light of God" and suggests that they

have had first to pass through the "great tribulation," to know this sorrow "immense as the sea," of which the psalmist sang. Before contemplating "with uncovered face the glory of the Lord," they have shared in the annihilation of His Christ; before being "transformed from brightness to brightness in the

image of the divine Being," they have been conformed to the image of the Word Incarnate, the One crucified by love. (p. 146)

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) then continues her theme of suffering like Christ using several more quotations from St. Paul. Her first quotation is, "the temple of God is holy and you are that temple" and she explains that the soul

that wants to serve God day and night . . . in this inner sanctuary of which St. Paul speaks . . . must be resolved to share *fully* in its Master's passion. It is one of the redeemed who in its turn must redeem other souls, and for that reason it will sing on its lyre: "I glory in the Cross of Jesus Christ." "With Christ I am nailed to the cross." And again, "I suffer in my body what is lacking in the passion of Christ for the sake of His body, which is the Church." (p. 146)

To the soul that follows it, this

sorrowful way . . . seems like the path of Beatitude . . . not only because it leads [to redemption] but also because her holy Master makes her realize that she must go beyond the bitterness in suffering to find in it, as He did, her rest. (p. 147)

The soul that serves God in God's sanctuary within "no longer feels '*hunger or thirst*,' for in spite of her consuming desire for Beatitude, she is satisfied by this food which was her Master's: 'the will of the Father.'" (p. 147). "She no longer suffers from suffering," Elizabeth states.

Then the Lamb can "*lead her to the fountain of life*," where He wills, as He will, for she does not look at the paths on which she is walking; she simply gazes at the Shepherd who is leading her. God bends lovingly over this soul, His adopted daughter, who is so conformed to the image of His Son. . . . And His fatherly heart thrills as He thinks of consummating His work, that is, of "glorifying" her by bringing her into His kingdom, there to sing for ages unending "the praise of His glory." (p. 147)

Elizabeth continues her discussion of the souls that follow Christ "not only on the highways that are broad and easy to travel but down the thorny paths, along the brambly ways" (p. 148). These souls, Elizabeth explains, are "free, set apart, stripped; free from all

save their love, set apart from everything especially themselves" (p. 148). This state, she explains, is the essential going out of oneself or a type of death.

That is the condition: we must be dead! Without that we may be hidden in God at certain moments; but we do not LIVE habitually in this divine Being because all our emotions, self-seekings and the rest come to draw us out of Him. (p.148)

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) is describing a union with God when she says:

"O blessed death in God! O sweet and gentle loss of self in the beloved Being which permits the creature to cry out: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me'" (p. 148). In order to attain this union we must strip away the old self, die to this self, and forget the self. The soul must guard vigilantly against the natural self and be stripped of both "the natural as well as the supernatural gifts of God" (p. 153). The soul must turn its gaze always toward God and be faithful. The Lord says, "O soul, my adopted daughter, look at Me and you will forget yourself; flow entirely into My Being, come die in Me that I may live in you!" (p. 152)

Whether Elizabeth sees this union with God as a union of consciousness or of essence is not clear. A union of consciousness would mean that the individual personality still exists, but has a *sense* of being one with God. A union of essence would mean that the personality is truly destroyed and the individual has actually become God. Also, it is not clear how much of this union Elizabeth thinks can be experienced in this world. In any case, from Elizabeth's point of view, it is apparent that selflessness--the dying of the self--is essential in order to experience the joy in union with God.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) writes her third spiritual treatise, "The Greatness of Our Vocation," in September 1906, to Françoise de Sourdon, a 19-year-old girl from Dijon that Elizabeth has befriended. Elizabeth is only weeks away from her death and is

suffering greatly. In her letter to Françoise, whom Elizabeth teasingly calls Framboise (raspberry in French), she answers a question Framboise has posed to her about humility.

Little Framboise, pride is not something that is destroyed with one good blow of the sword! Doubtless, certain heroic acts of humility, such as we read of in the lives of the saints, give it, if not a mortal blow, at least one that considerably weakens it; but without that grace we must put it to death each day! "Quotidie morior," exclaimed St. Paul, "I die daily"! (p. 124)

Elizabeth then returns to a favorite theme, the death of the self.

Framboise, this doctrine of dying to self is the law for every Christian, for Christ said: "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him take up his cross and deny himself." But this doctrine which seems so austere, takes on a delightful sweetness when we consider the outcome of this death--life in God in place of our life of sin and misery. (p. 125)

Elizabeth continues her advice to Framboise suggesting that the soul that is most free is the one that has forgotten itself the most.

If anyone were to ask me the secret of happiness, I would say it is to no longer think of self, to deny oneself always. That is a good way to kill pride: let it starve to death! You see, pride is love of ourselves; well, love of God must be so strong that it extinguishes all our self-love. (p. 125)

Our love for God destroys our love of self and brings happiness. Elizabeth then brings another prevalent theme in her work into the picture: the suffering of Christ.

It seems to me that the happy ones of this world are those who have enough contempt and forgetfulness of self to choose the Cross as their lot! What delightful peace we experience when we place our joy in suffering. (p. 126)

Elizabeth then tells Framboise that she finds a deep joy in knowing that "God has chosen to associate me in the passion of His Christ" (p. 126). She then goes on to describe her own personal suffering. She feels, she says, like she is being destroyed by death's sickle, and the pain of this sometimes becomes unbearable, but this, she says, is the human point of view.

When she looks at her situation from the spiritual point of view her faith tells her that "it is

love who is destroying me, who is slowly consuming me; then I feel a tremendous joy, and I surrender myself to Him as His prey" (p. 126). Elizabeth finds great joy in her suffering. "As for me, I feel already as if I were almost in heaven here in my little cell, alone with Him alone, bearing my cross with my Master. If you only knew how delicious the dregs are at the bottom of the chalice prepared by my Heavenly Father!" (p. 128) Elizabeth then concludes the last letter she will ever write to Framboise, "A Dieu, beloved Framboise; I cannot go on. . . . I send you a kiss. I love you as a Mother loves her little child. A Dieu my little one" (pp. 128-129). Here again is the theme of finding exquisite joy in suffering.

The 4<sup>th</sup> treatise of Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984), "Let Yourself Be Loved," is a farewell letter to her Prioress, Mother Germaine, to whom she wishes to communicate her deep gratitude. According to De Meester in his introduction to this treatise, for Elizabeth her Prioress has been "God's instrument" (p. 175). De Meester suggests that their relationship had been special. Indeed, Elizabeth was Mother Germaine's first postulant, first novice, first professed, and soon, the first to die. The beauty of Elizabeth's spiritual vision and of her love for her Prioress is penetratingly intense.

In her letter, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) introduces a theme based on a verse from John 21:15 when Christ says to Simon Peter: "Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" In her letter Elizabeth reverses the perspective and tells the Reverend Mother Germaine at many points in the letter: "Mother, let yourself be loved more than these" (p. 180).

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) poignantly begins her letter with a reference to her imminent death, and then suggests that Mother Germaine can trust that Elizabeth is acting as an instrument of God:

My Cherished Mother, My Holy Priest, when you read these lines, your little Praise of Glory will no longer be singing on earth, but will be living in Love's immense furnace; so you can believe her and listen to her as "the voice" of God. (p. 179)

Elizabeth then takes a prophetic role in relation to her Prioress by telling her about the relationship she and Elizabeth will have after Elizabeth's death.

Dear loved Mother, if you knew with what assurance I understand God's plan for your soul; it appears to me as in an immense light, and I understand also that in Heaven I will fulfill in my turn a priesthood over your soul. . . . Mother, *let* yourself be loved more than the others. (p. 179)

Elizabeth continues her description of her mission to dwell with and to teach her Prioress after death.

If you will allow her, your little host will spend her Heaven in the depths of your soul: She will keep you in communion with Love, believing in Love; it will be the sign of her dwelling in you. Oh, in what intimacy we are going to live. . . . I will do nothing before the throne of God without you; You know well that I bear your imprint and that something of yourself appeared with your child before the Face of God. . . . I will come to live in you. This time I will be your little Mother. I will instruct you, so that my vision will benefit you, that you may participate in it, and that you too, may live the life of the blessed! (p. 180)

Elizabeth continues by letting Reverend Mother know God's love for her and His desires for her life:

Mother, the fidelity that the Master asks of you is to remain in communion with Love, flow into, be rooted in this Love who wants to mark your soul with the seal of His power and His grandeur. . . . But in the hours when you feel only oppression and lassitude, you will please him even more if you faithfully *believe* that He is still working, that He is loving you just the same, and *even more*: because His love is *free* and that is how He wants to be *magnified* in you: and you will *let* yourself be loved "*more than these.*" (p. 180)

When Elizabeth urges her Prioress to let herself be loved more than these, it appears as if she is suggesting that she (her Prioress) should accept the idea that God loves her more than God

loves others. Indeed, at the end of her letter Elizabeth writes as if she were the divine Being saying:

Oh! I love you, I love you more than anyone else in this valley! [of Spoleto]. . . . It is "I" who come, and I bring you unknown joy. . . . I will enter into the depths of your being.

O my spouse! I have rested and reposed in you; now possess yourself and repose in Me!

Love Me! All your life will please Me, provided that you love Me! . . . I will do great things in you; I will be made known in you, glorified, and praised in you! . . . (p. 181)

The intense, holy love in Elizabeth's words is arresting. Mother Germaine, according to De Meester, will not read this letter until after Elizabeth's death. In the end, Elizabeth's suffering and her joy in the love of God--hers for God, and God's for her--seems to have transformed her into the divine mystery that resides in us all. If we listen closely we can hear that Elizabeth is inviting us to, "Let Yourself Be Loved" (p. 179).

Elizabeth proposes that the most joy is gained through the death of self. And yet, this dying is very painful. However, when we know that this pain is bringing us closer to joy then this knowledge can bring us an anticipatory joy. Elizabeth is a woman who perhaps can shed some light on the mystery of suffering. Trying to avoid suffering does not bring us closer to true joy. However, when the soul serves God deep within us, Elizabeth states, we no longer suffer while suffering. Perhaps what Elizabeth means by this is that, when one is experiencing the presence of God, joy and suffering work in harmony so one does not experience one's suffering in the usual manner. When one is not aligned with God, then suffering and joy are opposed to each other and one suffers while suffering.

*Faustina Kowalska, (1905-1938), Poland*

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia, and Austria, a situation that had begun in 1772. Since the time of these partitions until World War I (1914-1918), Poland had tried to win her independence through a number of unsuccessful uprisings. The approaching war against Russia encouraged a number of independence movements. Modern political parties--peasant, worker, and national--developed and could act legally in the town of Krakow (A Brief History of Poland, 2002).

World War I began in August of 1914 when Germany declared war on France for encroaching on her territory. Ultimately the conflict was to spread across Europe and the Middle East killing over 8 million people. The Central Powers were Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bavaria. The Allied Powers included Britain, Russia, France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Poland, and the United States, among others. In September of 1914 the Germans launched an offensive against Poland and advanced to Warsaw, but Russian forces pushed them out of Poland completely (Germany During World War One, 2002).

In 1915, Jozef Pilsudski, a Polish patriot, made an alliance with Austria and led the Polish armed forces in successfully driving all Russian forces out of Poland. Pilsudski was the first chief of state, when, in 1918, after the Allies had won the war, an independent Polish Republic was established (Odell, 1998).

In 1918 at the end of the war, President Wilson of the United States called for an independent Poland. On November 11, 1918, The Declaration of Independence of Poland was announced in Warsaw, and the Polish Republic was established. Clashes between Poland and Russian armed forces continued until the Poles defeated the Soviets in the Battle of



Warsaw on August 18, 1920. The Treaty of Riga ended the Russo-Polish War on March 18, 1921 (World War Two Timeline, 2002).

Helena Kowalska was born in 1905 in Glogowiec, a small rural village near the manufacturing city of Lodz in central Poland. Reflecting back upon her childhood in her diary, Sister Faustina (Helena Kowalska) writes that as early as age 7 she “heard God’s voice in my soul; that is an invitation to a more perfect life” (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 6).

Because of the Russian occupation of Poland the Polish schools were closed, and Helena could not attend school. Finally, when the invading armies were driven out she was, at age 12, able to enter school for the first time. However, at age 14, without completing elementary school she went to work as a maid. At age 15 she told her parents she wanted to enter a convent (Odell, 1998). At age 19 Helena went to Warsaw to follow her call to the religious life. A year later she entered the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy (Kosicki, 2001).

According to Jerzy Mrowczynski in his introduction to the diary of Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987), Helena went through her postulancy in Warsaw. She was then sent to the novitiate house in Krakow where she was given the habit, the veil, and the name Sister Mary Faustina. Throughout her religious career she worked as a gardener, cook, and gatekeeper in fourteen different houses in both Poland and Lithuania (Fanning, 2001). On May 1, 1933, she took her perpetual vows; however, within weeks her health began to deteriorate, and she endured much physical suffering. She suffered initially with consumption, and then asthma, and was in 1936 and again in 1937 sent to a sanatorium near Krakow. In 1938 she was sent back to the same hospital where she would spend the last 5

months of her life. She died of tuberculosis at the convent in Krakow on October 5, 1938. On Mercy Sunday, April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Faustina.

In her diary, begun on July 28, 1934, and written retrospectively at first, Sister Faustina reveals the secrets of her interior life and her almost constant awareness of and communication with the divine. Usually she experienced the voice of Jesus communicating with her and saw him in visions, but she also experienced the presence of the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and other saints and angels, especially St. Michael (Fanning, 2001). In the introduction to Faustina's diary Mrowczynski states, "Through the diary we get to know her difficulties and dark nights of soul, as well as her mystical flights, illuminations and interior consolations" (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. xxii). Mrowczynski suggests that the outstanding value of the diary "is in the instruction and encouragement it gives, to live an intensive interior life" (p. xxiii). Faustina's singled-minded love for and devotion to the divine is impressive, and her willingness to suffer for God is immense. One early inkling of the suffering she was to endure came early in her religious life in the convent:

The day I took the [religious] habit, God let me understand how much I was to suffer. I clearly saw to what I was committing myself. I experienced a moment of that suffering. But then God filled my soul again with great consolations. (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 12)

Near the end of the 1st year of her two-year novitiate, Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) enters into a terrifying dark night of the soul:

Toward the end of that first year of my novitiate, darkness began to cast its shadow over my soul. I felt no consolation in prayer. I had to make a great effort to meditate; fear began to sweep over me. Going deeper into myself, I could find nothing but great misery. . . . My soul was in this state for almost six months. (p. 12)

She goes on to describe her feelings of being abandoned by God:

At a certain point, there came to me the very powerful impressions that I am rejected by God. This terrible thought pierced my soul right through; in the midst of the suffering my soul began to experience the agony of death. I wanted to die but could not. (p. 13)

When Faustina told the Directress of Novices about her fears she was told that God had chosen her for a particular holiness and wanted her to be close to God in heaven. She was to trust in Jesus Christ. Sister Faustina describes how she tried to do the things that had worked to comfort her in the past such as repeating the words of trust in Jesus, and asking for mercy, but all to no avail. She could find no consolation. Faustina laments, "That dreadful thought of being rejected by God is the actual torture suffered by the damned" (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 13).

On another day, Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) writes how she felt "overwhelmed by despair" (p. 13), in a "complete darkness of soul" (p. 13), and suffering from "the torments of hell" (p. 14). Finally, approximately six months after the end of her noviate, Faustina tells of a powerful experience that ended her dark night of the soul and opened up her relationship with God in an entirely new way. After this experience she began conversing with Jesus Christ and receiving direct guidance and revelations from Him.

Once, when I was praying, Jesus pervaded all my soul, darkness melted away, and I heard these words within me, *You are My joy; you are My heart's delight*. From that moment I felt the Most Holy Trinity in my heart; that is to say, within myself. I felt that I was inundated with Divine light. Since then, my soul has been in intimate communion with God, like a child with its beloved Father. (pp.15-16; emphasis in original text)

On one occasion after throwing herself in the dust with a broken heart and begging Christ's pardon in despair she says:

But Jesus did not let me remain in this state for long. His divine gaze filled my heart with such joy that I have no words to express it. And Jesus gave me to know that I should ask Him more questions and seek His advice. Truly, how

sweet is the look of my Lord: His eyes penetrate my soul to its most secret depths. My spirit communicates with God without any word being spoken. I am aware that He is living in me and I in Him. (pp. 236-237)

Faustina describes another occasion when she was attempting to know God and contemplating the Holy Trinity. On this occasion she received a powerful vision of Christ and the message that although no one can ever understand God in God's entirety, if Sister Faustina contemplates God's qualities she can become closer to God.

In an instant my spirit was caught up into what seemed to be the next world. I saw an inaccessible light, and in this light what appeared like three sources of light which I could not understand. And out of the light came words in the form of lightening which encircled heaven and earth. Not understanding anything, I was very sad. Suddenly, from this sea of inaccessible light came our dearly beloved Savior, unutterably beautiful with His shining Wounds. And from this light came a voice which said, *Who God is in His Essence, no one will fathom, neither the mind of Angels nor of man. Jesus said to me, Get to know God by contemplating His attributes.* (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 17)

In June of 1930, Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) was sent to a convent in Plock, where she assumed kitchen duties. According to Kosicki (2001), during her 2 ½ years at Plock, Faustina was continually plagued with physical and spiritual suffering. However, when she spoke to Jesus about her sorrows and fears, as she did regularly, he would comfort her: "Do not fear; I am with you" (Kowalska, p. 72). Great suffering and great joy characterize her religious life. Often her experiences of God were so great she found it difficult to describe them: "God descends to the soul and unites it to himself in a way that . . . here, I must be silent, for I cannot describe what the soul experiences" (p. 307).

Saint Faustina's mission began with a revelation on February 22, 1931, while she was in the convent in Plock. She described this revelation in her diary:

In the evening, when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn

aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale. In silence I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe, but also with great joy. After a while, Jesus said to me, *Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in our chapel, and [then] throughout the world.*

*I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own.*  
(Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 24)

When Faustina told her confessor that Jesus wanted her to paint an image of him, he insisted that she was not to take Christ's message literally, but to paint God's image in her soul.

Faustina relates, that when she came out of the confessional she heard these words from Christ:

*My image already is in your soul. I desire that there be a Feast of Mercy. I want this image, which you will paint with a brush, to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy.*  
(Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 24)

Later Faustina directed the picture to be painted.

According to Kosicki (2001),

This was the first major revelation of the Divine Mercy to Sr. Faustina. Through it Jesus made known his great desire that all come to the rays of mercy, all come to His heart pierced for us and flowing with blood and water (Jn 19:34). (p. 28)

When Faustina told her Mother Superior about her vision, she told Faustina she wanted a sign from God. Faustina writes that Jesus told her: *"I will make this all clear to the Superior by means of the graces which I will grant through this image"* (p. 25). On another occasion her spiritual director wanted Faustina to ask Jesus what the two rays in her revelation meant. Later in prayer Sister received her response:

*The two rays note Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. . . .*

*These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when my agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross (p. 139)*

At the end of 1932, Faustina relates that she was asked by Christ to make an offering of herself in atonement for the sins of the world. Faustina describes this occasion in her diary as follows:

Once during an adoration, the Lord demanded that I give myself up to Him as an offering, by bearing a certain suffering in atonement, not only for the sins of the world in general but specifically for transgressions committed in the house. (Kowalska, 1979/1987, p. 103)

Faustina states that Jesus then showed her what she was going to suffer in the future if she consented to take on this role as a "victim soul" (Odell, 1998, p. 79). Faustina explains:

Firstly, my intentions will not be recognized; there will be all kinds of suspicion and distrust as well as various kinds of humiliations and adversities. I will not mention everything here. All these things stood before my soul's eye like a dark storm from which lightning was ready to strike at any moment, waiting only for my consent. (p. 103)

Christ then told Faustina that she was to give her free consent to this new role and that she would not displease him if she chose to say no. Faustina answered him: "Jesus, I accept everything that You wish to send me. I trust in Your goodness" (p. 104). Later Faustina writes that Christ was delighted with her decision. Faustina's faith in Christ and her courage appear to be almost superhuman. Indeed, many of us have a hard enough time facing our own sufferings. It is perplexing why Christ, whose death on the cross was the atonement for the sin of humankind, would want or need a young woman to help him by repeating this atonement. Evidently this was an acceptable idea to the Roman Catholic Church.

In any event, Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) honored her agreement with Christ and writes in her diary that at one point she took on the suffering of a student at the convent who was wrestling with the terrible temptation of suicide. This lasted for 7 excruciating days, until Christ intervened and saved the student. "I often take on," Sister Faustina explains, "the torments of our students. Jesus permits me to do this, and so do my confessors" (p. 104).

In 1933, Sister Faustina was given a newly appointed convent confessor, Father Michael Sopocko. According to Odell (1998), Father Sopocko decided to test the authenticity of Sister Faustina's conversations with the divine. Although after a time he began to believe her, he still wanted to make sure. He questioned Mother Irene Krzyzanowska, the superior of the house in Vilnius in which sister Faustina was staying. Mother Krzyzanowska, vouched for Faustina's mental stability. Father Sopocko then asked Sister Faustina to have a complete physical and psychological examination. Dr. Helena Maciejewska, a psychiatrist for the convent, examined sister Faustina and reported that she was psychologically healthy in every way. This information is interesting because the question of the mental balance of many of the mystics and saints is often raised.

Sister Faustina continued to suffer physically from her illness, and, according to Kosicki (2001), she also experienced agonizing pain from internal stigmata, which recurred often during her life. She also suffered psychologically from the taunts of other sisters, from her own questioning of the validity of her visions, and from her doubts as to her ability to carry out Christ's wishes (Kowalska, 1979/1987).

Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) also experienced spiritual suffering as well. On one occasion Faustina writes: "I am on the cross with Jesus" (p. 578). At another time she

writes: "I spent the whole night with Jesus in Gethsemane. From my breast there escaped one continuous moan" (p. 553). One entry describes her visit to Hell and the kinds of tortures she saw:

Today, I was led by an Angel to the chasms of hell. It is a place of great torture; how awesomely large and extensive it is! Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which it has sinned. (pp. 296-297)

Today we realize that this fear of eternal damnation has the potential of wounding many believers. Some people today wonder if a loving God would punish us like this, because sin is inevitable as we grow. However, Sister Faustina does not question the validity of eternal damnation and finds a higher purpose in all suffering. In her diary she comments on her previous suffering during the dark night of the soul, when she felt abandoned by God:

After such sufferings the soul finds itself in a state of great purity of spirit and very close to God. But I should add that during these spiritual torments it is close to God, but it is blind. The soul's vision is plunged into darkness, and though God is nearer than ever to the soul which is suffering, the whole secret consists in the fact that it knows nothing of this. The soul in fact declares that, not only has God abandoned it, but it is the object of His hatred. . . . Yet despite all, I learned later that God is closer to a soul at such moments than at others, because it would not be able to endure these trials with the help of ordinary grace alone. God's omnipotence and an extraordinary grace must be active here, for otherwise the soul would succumb at the first blow. (Kowalska, 1979/1987, pp. 59-60)

Faustina records a message from Jesus Christ encouraging her to embrace her suffering:

*My child, you please Me most by suffering. In your physical as well as your mental sufferings, My daughter, do not seek sympathy from creatures. I want the fragrance of your suffering to be pure and unadulterated. . . . The more you will come to love suffering, My daughter, the purer your love for Me will be. (p. 133)*

There is no question that Faustina wants to suffer: "Jesus, You know that I love suffering and want to drain the cup of suffering to the last drop" (p. 285). She was also, of course, often



afraid and sometimes tried to avoid or ignore her divine revelations; however, Christ comforted her time and time again. At one point Faustina states that Christ told her: *"My will has not yet been completely accomplished in you; you will suffer much, but I am with you; do not fear"* (pp. 278-279). After these messages from Christ, Faustina would be much consoled and her trust in Christ would be strengthened.

Although the suffering Faustina embraced might seem by some to be excessive, Faustina desired and prayed for all the things she experienced, including becoming a saint. Nothing appears to have happened to her against her will: she was, in effect, a co-creator in everything. Faustina was seeking union with God above all, and was apparently willing, even eager, to surrender to God no matter what the cost. Suffering gave her the opportunity to expiate her sins and grow in love. This was her belief and the belief of the Church.

In one diary entry, Faustina explains how she entered into an ecstatic interlude with God that lasted several days:

When I was set at peace and taught how to follow God's paths, my spirit rejoiced in the Lord, and it seemed to me that I was running, not walking. My wings were spread for flight; I soared into the very heat of the sun, and I will not descend until I rest in Him, in whom my soul has lost itself forever. And I subject myself totally to the action of grace. God stoops very low to my soul. I do not draw back, nor do I resist Him, but I lose myself in Him as my only treasure. I am one with the Lord. It is as if the gulf between us, Creator and creature, disappears. For a few days, my soul was in a state of continuous ecstasy. God's presence did not leave me for a single moment. And my soul remained in a continuous loving union with the Lord. I felt I was transformed into love: I was afire, but without being burned up. I lost myself in God unceasingly: God drew me to himself so strongly and powerfully that sometimes I was not aware of being on earth. (Kowalska, 1979/1987, pp. 78-79)

Interestingly, Faustina explains that this experience of ecstasy did not prevent her from performing her duties at the convent. The experience of being afire is a metaphor Faustina uses often to describe the living power of God's love. It is also used by other mystics as well.

During Holy Mass, I was so enveloped in the great interior fire of God's love and the desire to save souls that I do not know how to express it. I feel I am all aflame. I shall fight all evil with the weapon of mercy. I am being burned up by the desire to save souls. (p. 299)

Faustina, like all authentic mystics, struggles to explain in words what is apparently a vast, heroic, and intense experience of freedom and empowerment that transcends language. Later she tries again to find the words to describe her ineffable union with God.

At that very moment, I felt some kind of fire in my heart. I feel my sense deadening and have no idea of what is going on around me. I feel the Lord's gaze piercing me through and through. I am very much aware of His greatness and my misery. An extraordinary suffering pervades my soul, together with a joy I cannot compare to anything. I feel powerless in the embrace of God. I feel that I am in Him and that I am dissolved in Him like a drop of water in the ocean. I cannot express what takes place within me; after such interior prayers, I feel strength and power to practice the most difficult virtues. I feel dislike for all things the world holds in esteem. With all my soul I desire silence and solitude. (p. 191)

Faustina writes she feels like a drop of water in the ocean. This is a common analogy used to describe the experience of union with God. Her experience of both joy and suffering simultaneously implies a resolution and transcendence of these opposites leading into union with God. She also describes her turning away from the pleasures of the outside world and her intense need for silence. These appear to be vital prerequisites for connection with the divine and joy. In the following diary entry, Sister Faustina eloquently describes her life with God:

The interior of my soul is like a large and magnificent world in which God and I live. Except for God, no one is allowed there. At the beginning of this life with God, I was dazzled and overcome with awe. His radiance blinded

me, and I thought He was not in my heart; and yet those were the moments when God was working in my soul. Love was becoming purer and stronger, and the Lord brought my will into the closest union with His own holy Will. No one will understand what I experience in the splendid palace of my soul where I abide constantly with my Beloved. No exterior thing hinders my union with God. Even if I used the most forceful words, they would not express even a shadow of how my soul revels in happiness and inexplicable love, as great and pure as the spring from which it flows; that is, God himself. My spirit is so pervaded with God that I feel it physically, and the body partakes of these joys. (p. 146)

In this passage Faustina states that she is filled with happiness and love in constant union with God, and yet in many instances she writes in her diary that she is suffering inconsolably mentally, physically, or spiritually. At one point in her diary, Faustina states, "I must become destroyed in order to be useful to the Church and souls, even though exteriorly no one will notice my sacrifice" (p. 266). She then exclaims: "Oh, what joy it is to empty myself for the sake of immortal souls!" (p. 266) Can we perhaps assume that there is joy to be found in deliberately choosing to suffer for a higher cause (i.e., for the good of others and for the sake of the divine will)? This is what Faustina seems to be telling us.

## Chapter 6: Interpretations and Discussion

In this the final chapter we look at the understandings about true joy found in the research data. From the examination and discussion of these truths--through body, mind, and spirit--a more comprehensive picture of true joy is uncovered. In the discussion section this new view of true joy based on the research findings is presented. We also look at why developing the capacity to experience true joy is important for our world. A critique of Intuitive Inquiry, and ideas for future research follow. Finally, at the end of the chapter, some personal highlights of my own path to true joy through my direct experience of emptiness during the dissertation process are shared.

In this section I present my interpretation of the findings from cycle 2 and cycle 3 of my intuitive inquiry research on true joy. To my initial four research questions, I add another question about the role of suffering (question number four). After reading the writings of my first four mystics in cycle 2, I recognized I could no longer ignore the presence of suffering in the lives of the Christian mystics, and I began to question the role of suffering and its relationship to true joy. My suspicion that suffering plays an essential role in the experience of joy emerged at the end of my reading of the writings of Ruusbroec (1985) in my cycle-3 research. At this point I realized that suffering may not be just a matter of an individual mystic's personality or temperament (i.e., some mystics are more histrionic than others), but is an essential component of the joy found in union with God. Ruusbroec does not appear to be a man of an excessive emotional temperament, and yet he describes very high levels of spiritual development that include both suffering and joy. These high levels of suffering and

joy appear, however, to transcend what we might describe as extreme swings of emotion.

Perhaps the joy and suffering experienced on these high levels are different from the joy and suffering found on lower levels of spiritual development. The five research questions are:

1. What is true joy?
2. What are the behaviors, practices, or ways of being that lead toward true joy?
3. What are the behaviors, practices, or ways of being that lead away from true joy?
4. How does suffering relate to true joy?
5. Can true joy be found in this life?

At this stage of my research I don't know what true joy actually is. My new understanding of true joy will evolve out of the interpretation of my research findings and develop out of what intuitively emerges in the discussion section. Therefore, although my research questions are about true joy, in presenting my research findings I will not use the term *true joy* but instead will use the word *joy*, as this is the word used by the mystics to describe their experiences.

### *Interpretations Of Findings From Cycle-2 Research*

#### *What is True Joy?*

Francis of Assisi (1982) perceives joy as love dwelling within. Joy is the eternal enjoyment of the companionship of God. Joy is holy, consoling, beautiful, and wondrous. Joy is loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, and sweet. Joy is equanimity. Joy is true virtue. Joy is the salvation of the soul.

Mechthild of Magdeburg understands joy as ecstatic union with the divine Lover. Joy is also estrangement from and longing for the divine Lover. Joy is the sweetness of love. Joy

is fulfillment of the lovesick soul through Christ.

For Clare of Assisi (1982) joy is the glory of everlasting happiness. Joy is being the Spouse of Jesus Christ. Joy is Holy Poverty. Joy is weeping for Christ's suffering. Joy is the indwelling of Christ in the soul. Joy is sharing the sacred Banquet with Christ. Joy is the graciousness of Christ. Joy is the ineffable delights of Christ. Joy is the happiest kiss of Christ's mouth.

Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) equates joy with practicing the presence of God. Joy is the delight and consolation of God's divine companionship. Joy is a state of soul in union with God in love. Joy is the silent, secret conversation of the soul with God.

*What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being That Lead to True Joy?*

Francis of Assisi (1982) followed the Gospel and its precepts. He devoted himself to the humanity of Jesus Christ, especially the poverty of His birth and death. He renounced the outside world (mental detachment) and lived a life of inner and outer poverty. He practiced chastity (desire for God only), obedience (indifference to pain and pleasure), and humility (putting himself below all others). He advocated directing all one's attention to God, seeking God's glory in everything, loving God with one's whole heart by always thinking of God, and desiring God with one's whole mind. He practiced glorying in his infirmities, hating himself and his body, loving his neighbor as himself, and accepting those people who were hated by the world. Through these practices St. Francis found joy.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) lived a life that was similar to the life the apostles lived, in poverty, chastity, and religious devotion. She focused on the humanity of Christ and resisted the temptation of outside rewards and consolations. She insisted that to be with God

one must go beyond one's self and become nothing; one must die living. She established an intimate and personalized relationship with God by perceiving her soul as the Bride of God the Divine Lover. She surrendered to her divine Lover, and she allowed Him to express Himself through her. She accepted suffering and chose to renounce the consolation of God to praise God. She chose to play the Game of Love with God, allowing her soul to unite with God and then to long for God in his absence. She found joy in these practices and in the interplay of the presence and absence of God.

Clare of Assisi (1982) practiced humility, poverty, chastity, contemplation, and penance. She practiced extreme fasting and mortification. She advocated emptying oneself of everything that keeps one separate from God such as illusions, attractions, and expectations (inward poverty). She left the outside world behind. She focused on Christ's humility and poverty and urged that one cling to Christ and follow in his footsteps. Her relationship with Christ was as virgin bride to a Beloved husband. Clare found joy in extreme asceticism, radical poverty, and devoted contemplation and imitation of Christ.

Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) advocated continuously practicing the presence of God by keeping one's heart and mind always focused on God. He abandoned himself to God as an act of love. He always sought God, for God's sake alone. He renounced everything that was not God and lived as if only he and God existed. Brother Lawrence had intimate conversations with God during which he remembered God, adored God, prayed for God's grace, offered his sufferings to God, praised God, and thanked God. He practiced meekness, humility, and love. He found joy in his dedication to and intimate conversations with God.

*What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being That Lead Away From True Joy?*

For Francis of Assisi (1982) aspects of the individualistic worldly self such as attachments, cravings, likes and dislikes, and preferences prevent the seeker from finding God and joy. Possessive ownership, material possessions, pride, and the desire for power over others are impediments to the experience of joy. Self-love and giving in to the desires of the body lead people away from joy.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) taught that giving in to the temptations of worldly rewards, seeking the consolation of worldly things, and seeking pleasures from the world cut us off from God and joy. Clinging to God can be an impediment to finding joy. Later in her life Mechthild even gave up the consolations of God in order to find joy in her estrangement from God.

Clare of Assisi (1982) renounced all illusions, attractions, and expectations that were not rooted in God. Owning property of any kind, she believed, came between her and God and joy. For Clare, the love of temporal things--be they earthly riches, worldly honors, or even physical comforts--were distractions from union with God and joy.

For Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) turning away from God to the slightest degree prevented him from being in God's presence and experiencing the ground of joy within. The performance of bodily mortifications and other exercises of penance done without love for God prevent the seeker of God from finding joy.

*How Does Suffering Relate to True Joy?*

Francis of Assisi (1982) practiced and advocated enduring daily the holy cross of Jesus Christ and his suffering. He advocated extreme self-denial and living a life of penance



that caused suffering. He sought material and spiritual poverty, which created suffering. But all suffering in the material world apparently brought him joy in the spiritual world. Indeed, for Francis, his suffering was essential in order to find the holy joy of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) lived a life of poverty, chastity, and religious devotion, as Saint Francis did, in order to find a special consciousness of God's presence. She suffered when she denied herself worldly rewards. She endured the pain of a loss of identity so that she might receive God's mystical greetings. She surrendered herself to the Game of Love in which she experienced the agonizing longing for God in God's absence. She believed that the suffering found in the longing for God was as important to love as union. Ultimately she gave up God's consolation so that she might honor God. According to Mechthild the only way to return to God was through suffering, and it is in this suffering that the heart rejoices.

For Clare of Assisi (1982) the suffering she experienced through her practices of mortification, rigorous penance, and asceticism was eagerly desired so that she might become the Perfect Bride of Jesus Christ. Clare believed that suffering was essential to gain the spiritual rewards she was seeking. For everything that Clare renounced in the material world she believed she would receive one hundred-fold in the riches and glory of the spiritual world. Her suffering, she felt, made it possible for her to receive God's joy.

Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) tells us that his faith in God was increased through his suffering. For Brother Lawrence the afflictions of the body healed the sickness of the soul. Consolation could be found in suffering, he said, if we could realize it was a gift from God to show how much God loved us. Brother Lawrence wished for suffering so that he

could show God how much he loved God. He sought suffering because he knew he would find joy in it.

*Can True Joy Be Found in this Life?*

That Francis of Assisi (1982) felt that spiritual joy could be experienced in nature is evident by the delight he gains from the world in "The Canticle of Brother Sun." However, although Francis speaks of coming to God's Kingdom in which there is eternal enjoyment in God, it is not clear how much of God's Kingdom he believes can be experienced in this life. Francis doesn't write about union with God per se. He does write about the joy he has in having a Father in Heaven, Jesus Christ, and a Spouse (Holy Spirit). Joy in this world, he says, is found in not getting angry or upset about anything. In other words joy is found in a state of interior equanimity or peace. It was Christian doctrine that ultimate joy or consistent joy would be found only after death, thus it is probably safe to assume that Francis believed this also.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) states that a permanent state of joy in union with God is not possible in this life. She experiences the joy in union with God, but only for a limited time. Then she is plunged back into despair and longing when God withdraws God's presence. This is the highest state, she insists, one can achieve in this life.

Clare of Assisi (1982) wanted to become the Perfect Bride of Christ, which is, of course another way of saying she wanted to find union with God. She does not explicitly state that this nuptial union ever took place for her. She often speaks of God's promises of everlasting happiness and the Kingdom of Heaven; however, like St. Francis, she does not say if we can find either one in this life. Clare does write about the happiness of all citizens in

the Heavenly Jerusalem but this appears to be a reference to a time after death. Her writings do contain a joyful presence, however.

Brother Lawrence (1895; 1907) found joy in this life in his companionship with God, and although he evidently had ecstatic experiences his overall state of being was a calm continuous happiness and joy. He finds this calm joy, he says, in union with God. Brother Lawrence doesn't discuss joy that might be experienced after death. If one is joyful in this life perhaps there is not the same immediate urgency to contemplate the possible existence of eternal happiness after death, as was the case for Julian of Norwich for instance.

### *Interpretations Of Findings from Cycle 3 Research*

#### *What is True Joy?*

For John Ruusbroec (1985) there are many different kinds of joy based on one's level of spiritual development. There is the joy that is the opposite of fear from which one must detach in order to experience the higher joys. In the interior life there is the spiritual joy of devotion and thanksgiving and the joy characterized by sweetness, delight in the heart, and spiritual inebriation. There is the joy of a wide opening of the heart, and there is the interior joy found in the wound of love and in rejoicing in suffering for God's glory. In the contemplative life there is joy as blissful enjoyment and eternal contemplation. Joy is the delight in the eternal coming of the Bridegroom. The highest state of blessedness is the meeting with God in love in which the soul experiences joy as freedom. Joy is the discovery of a new life, which is eternal. Joy is being entirely in God and entirely in ourselves. Joy is

also the paradoxical state of total satisfaction in love and the simultaneous longing for more. Joy is being blissful love in the embrace of the threefold Unity.

For Julian of Norwich (1885) joy is the soul's finding God. Joy is the overcoming of the Devil. Joy is endless bliss in the Trinity. Joy is the fullness of Christ's love for us. Joy is the power of Christ's Word in the soul.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880/1884) sees joy as becoming love in the abyss of our nothingness. Joy is suffering with Christ. Joy is our blessed death in God. Joy is a delightful sweetness that is found in contemplation of life in God. Joy is love for God. Joy is self-forgetfulness.

For Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1878/1887) joy is intimate communion with God. Joy is the sweetness of the divine gaze of Christ. Joy is being in loving union with God. Joy is being transformed into love. Joy is the experience of one's spirit being pervaded with God.

*What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being That Lead to True Joy?*

Ruusbroec (1885) practiced an ascetic life in nature. He was devoted to the precepts of the Catholic Church but transcended all religion in his higher moments with God. Ruusbroec advocates practicing the important virtues including humility, obedience, the renunciation of self-will for God's will, patience, meekness, kindness, compassion, generosity, zeal, moderation, purity, charity, and righteousness. He recommended the use of penances and austerity to fight against what he perceived as our three powerful adversaries: the devil, the world, and the desires of our body. He believed in balancing love and knowledge, activity and rest, darkness and light, and God's presence and God's absence. Ruusbroec taught that one should offer oneself and everything one does with noble intentions

to the glory of God and then wait to be filled by God. We must be empty of all things, free from images, owning nothing, and cleaving only to God. We must be without attachments and indifferent to life's ups and downs. We must practice good works, resistance to selfish desires, devotion, thanksgiving, praise, fervent prayer, interior fervor, and love for others. We should seek that place within us that is without ground in which we can contemplate the eternal coming of the Bridegroom and life eternal. Ruusbroec gained joy in a very high level of union with God practicing this way of life.

Julian of Norwich (1978) practiced an intense form of contemplative life. Julian believed in a very balanced theology and always found the glory in the suffering. Julian wanted to see Christ's suffering on the cross and feel it herself. She wanted to experience a near fatal illness and then overcome it. She wanted to have a broken heart and a contrite spirit. She wanted to be pierced with a wounded longing for God. Julian received all her wishes, and she used the suffering inherent in them to find joy. We should depend, Julian would advise, on the scriptures and the Church as she did. We should rely on the Church and God for our strength to turn away from Satan. We should find joy in the Church, in our faith in God, in the Trinity, and in our ability to find the good underlying the evil and the joy beneath the sorrow, as she did.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) urged that we must go more deeply into the depths of God so that we might die to our self and become love. This is the path to joy. We must let go of the world and whom we think we are, and we must seek God alone in the abyss within. We must renounce ourselves a little bit more each day: we must die daily. Elizabeth teaches that we must follow the path of Jesus Christ, no matter what the suffering, so that we might become more like Him. We must surrender completely to God's will and

love God selflessly. We must serve God in God's sanctuary within us. Our pride must be destroyed and we must guard against our natural self. Elizabeth found joy in the destruction of self-love through her great love for God.

Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) advocated being in continuous inner communication with Christ. She suggested that we ask questions of Christ and ask Him for advice. We should tell God about our sorrows and fears as she did. We should get to know God by contemplating God's qualities. We should trust in God despite humiliations and adversities. We should turn away from consolation in the outside world and seek it only from Jesus Christ. We should surrender to the action of God's grace. We should seek silence and solitude for the soul. We should be humble and grateful in all things. Sister Faustina found joy in her sacrifice to Christ for the sake of saving souls.

*What are the Behaviors, Practices, or Ways of Being That Lead Away From True Joy?*

Ruusbroec (1985) taught that the seven deadly sins keep an individual from union with God and true joy. These sins are Hatred, Avarice, Gluttony, Unchastity, Pride, Anger, and Sloth. Other negative emotions that prevent joy are self-will, jealousy, and disobedience. The major impediments to joy are the devil, the world, and the flesh. Attachments to worldly outcomes (e.g., loss or gain, exaltation or humiliation, pleasure or pain) and attachment to other humans distract from the joy of union with God.

For Julian of Norwich (1978) sin and succumbing to the temptations of the Devil give us much pain and prevent us from finding God and joy. One of the greatest sins we can commit is not to believe in Christ. This lack of faith prevents us from finding joy. She also

suggests that God wants us to treat our pain lightly and that when we dwell in our pain we prevent connection with Him.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) sees our attachment to anything that is not God, including our worldly identity and our self-will, as an impediment to finding joy. Acting on the inspiration of pride displeases God. The natural self draws us away from God, as does any kind of self-seeking; the soul that keeps something for itself in its inner kingdom cannot find God. A soul that is filled with emotions and useless thoughts cannot listen to God. Being drawn out of the silence of the interior self by empty self-esteem and exterior things prevents the soul from finding God and joy.

Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) teaches when we esteem the things of the world we turn our back on God and joy. Seeking sympathy or consolation from anyone other than God displeases God. Blasphemous thoughts and an active tongue prevent our repose in God. A talkative soul is empty inside. An insecure, secretive soul is not open to joy. Pride keeps the soul in darkness. A disobedient soul exposes itself to great misfortunes. Judgment against others leads to unhappiness. Looking for God outside oneself leads away from God and joy.

### *How Does Suffering Relate to True Joy?*

Ruusbroec (1985) describes very high levels of joy in union with God. He also speaks of the suffering and the darkness the soul must experience in order to know God. In this state of abandonment in which all inner consolations are gone, the person is wretched, frightened, and miserable. However, this suffering, Ruusbroec explains, can be transformed into greater interior joy than has ever been experienced before. This great joy is found through suffering

for God's glory. According to Ruusbroec, even in the highest stages of union with God in which one appears to find ultimate joy, there is also an experience of the separation from God that brings the suffering of longing.

Julian of Norwich (1978) believed that the more we suffer in this world the more rewards we find in Heaven. She asked for a sickness so she could be purified and please God. She asked to suffer with Christ, and she asked for three wounds. Obviously Julian felt that she would benefit through these experiences of suffering. And, indeed, joy emerged from the suffering she experienced in her revelations. In one of her visions she is told that some souls profit from being comforted, and then being abandoned by God. Julian states that right now we are suffering on the cross with Christ but that joy and exaltation will come, presumably in the saved life of the Christian believer in heaven.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) had an interior knowledge of God that sustained her through enormous physical suffering. This knowledge of God was developed and refined, most likely, in her dark night of the soul. Elizabeth insists that we all must enter deeply into our inner abyss of nothingness and die to ourselves in order to find God. This requires a great deal of suffering. Elizabeth shows us, however, how when one finds God one can have radiant joy in the midst of terrible suffering. Elizabeth finds joy in suffering because she believes that suffering moves the Heart of God. We must share in the annihilation of Christ, which brings tribulation and sorrow. But this suffering brings joy because it leads to the soul's redemption and to her rest. When we find joy in suffering our suffering no longer causes us to suffer, but instead brings delightful peace.

Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987), who also suffered enormously, always received great consolations from God. Faustina describes in detail the spiritual agony she



endured during her dark night of the soul. However, she explains that through this suffering she gained a great purity of spirit and became very close to God. She also gained knowledge about God's grace and God's constant presence even though the soul is at times unaware of God. During one of her descriptions of an experience of union with God she states that extraordinary suffering and joy entered her simultaneously. Faustina also took on the suffering of others so that they might be redeemed. The fact that Faustina's confessors encouraged her to do this indicates that this practice was understood and accepted by the Church. By accepting suffering Faustina could prove her abandonment, her devotion, and her faith. Her suffering was an offering of herself to God and brought her joy.

#### *Can True Joy be Found in This Life?*

Ruusbroec (1985) describes a number of different kinds of joy. In the Interior Life one can experience spiritual joy and consolation, Ruusbroec says, and the fullness of joy in the heart. Then there is the joy of wounded love and the joy found in abandonment by God. These joys can all apparently be found in this life. In the Contemplative Life there is another darkness in which one is able to contemplate eternal life. Then there is the joy from the continual coming of the Bridegroom (Christ). Then there is eternal contemplation and blissful enjoyment. Finally there is the high state of joy in which the spirit transcends its creaturely state and meets God in love. Ruusbroec teaches that only contemplatives can experience the higher states of joy found in different types of union with God. Therefore they can be experienced by a select few in this life. Contemplatives are required, as you may recall, to renounce their attachment to material possessions, relationships, beliefs, and

preferences. Without this inner emptiness or inward poverty high states of joy are not possible.

According to Ruusbroec (1985), the ultimate state of union with God occurs when the individual becomes blissful love in the embrace of the threefold Unity. However, even in this high state of joy and Union with God, apparently one must periodically continue to experience the pain of separation from God. While in this life, Ruusbroec explains, we cannot wholly become God and lose our humanness. However, Ruusbroec's detailed descriptions of the different types of joy and the different types of Union with God do seem to indicate that he has experienced them to the degree possible in this life.

Much of the joy experienced by Julian of Norwich (1978) is anticipatory joy; that is, she is anticipating the joy the Church tells her she will find in heaven. She does speak of a joy we can apparently find in this life when God overcomes the Devil and turns his evil into joy. She also says we can find joy in Christ. Julian suggests that we should not dwell on our pain but let it go so that we might be in the endless delight of God. This joy we can evidently experience in this life. However, most of our joy will be experienced in heaven where we will rejoice forever.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (1980/1984) speaks of the abyss of nothingness in which we are to find the joy of dying to the self and the joy of becoming love in union with God. This dying to the old self and the joy that comes from it can evidently be experienced in this life to some degree. The soul that serves God, Elizabeth explains, does not suffer from the pain of suffering and one can seemingly experience this state in this life. Not suffering while suffering has much to do with finding joy, but this ability requires a high state of spiritual

consciousness. Elizabeth suggests that we can find happiness when our love for God destroys our love of self. How much of this can be achieved in this life she does not say.

Sister Faustina (Kowalska, 1979/1987) finds joy in this life through her intimate and continuous relationship with Christ. She also finds ecstatic joy in union with God for periods of time (e.g., several days). At one point Faustina states that she resides continuously with God her Beloved. Even so, her suffering is intense. This is perhaps another example of the duality the soul experiences: feeling completely one with God and then feeling completely separate from God. There does not appear to be a continuous state of joy in this life and perhaps not even in the next.

#### *Discussion*

From joy I come,  
for joy I live,  
in sacred joy I melt. (Yogananda, 1946, p. 147)

Hasidism suggests that we should try to always be joyful and avoid depression (Nachman, 1984). Barth (1951/1960) insists that the Bible forbids us to be anything but merry and cheerful; the Dzokchen Tibetan Buddhist tradition promises the extinguishing of suffering in this life (Dowman, 1994). However, it is my conclusion based on my research on true joy that Life is based on a system of continuous movement between opposing forces, and that although in some very high states of consciousness duality can be transcended for a time, the opposing cosmic energies (actions and equal and opposite reactions) still exist and must be expressed. Life is always being created and recreated; the energies of the universe cannot be destroyed. Therefore, I believe that it is highly unlikely that there is a permanent level of consciousness that can be reached in this life that does not include both union *and*

estrangement from Absolute Reality or God and by necessity the concomitant opposites of joy and suffering, darkness and light. In other words, my research suggests that true joy, as defined in my introduction as a permanent state of consciousness of sustained joy in union with God in this life, does not exist.

At the risk of appearing to beg the question, what does exist is complex, paradoxical, and ultimately unknowable. McGinn (1992) suggests that many mystics believe that it is not the presence of God that is important but the negation (no-thing) or absence of God that is the core of the mystics' journey. The Sufis tell of the Beloved's deep longing for God and the drunken intoxication of union, a condition of duality. Gregory of Nyssa proposes the doctrine of *epektasis* that states that our pursuit of God, both here and in heaven, will always include the perception of God's presence and God's absence (McGinn, 1992). Gregory the Great states that it is impossible for us to find God because God is incomprehensible, but we must nevertheless continue to seek God (McGinn, 1994). John Scottus Eriugene believes that God is both in the world and not in the world simultaneously (McGinn, 1994). Mechthild of Magdeburg (1998) explains that in love, her estrangement from God is just as important as her union with God: in other words, in one's love relationship with God the suffering caused by one's separation from God is just as important as the joy of union.

Many people state that there is a very high state of union with *Brahman*, Ultimate Reality, or God that transcends these opposites. Maslow (1996b) suggests that individuals who have achieved a very high state of actualization have somehow been able to resolve the opposites of pleasure and pain by weaving them together. Washburn (1994) discusses the synthesis of opposites found in the integrated state. Buber (1955/1969) states that in Hasidism the highest state of joy or ecstasy that has been reported is when one's ecstasy has

been transcended, a state of consciousness in which weeping and rapture are somehow worked into one. The Sufi Vaughan-Lee (1996) states that, if we embrace the duality of our union and our separateness, we can reach a state beyond the world and our ego. Dionysus says that through the ecstasy of God we can pass beyond both affirmation and negation. (McGinn, 1992).

Presuming these transcendent states exist, are they permanent? In the Dhammapada, the Buddha (1995) states that we can permanently pass beyond suffering in this world. On the other hand, Otto (1962) suggests that Sankara, the Indian Vedanta mysticism philosopher, believes that the soul's union with Brahman that transcends duality and brings deep endless joy cannot happen in this world. St. Bernard of Clairvaux insists that the joy experienced in the union of the Bride (the soul) with her Divine Lover (God) can only be completed after death (McGinn, 1994). Augustine states that the fullness of knowledge in faith of God can only be experienced in the momentary flashes of consciousness that are given by God to those who earnestly desire God (McGinn, 1992). Ruusbroec (1985) states that there is a paradoxical experience both of being in rest with the sublime unity of God and going out from God in longing, and that this paradoxical state exists not only in this lifetime but continues for all eternity.

It would be very nice to have a definitive answer to all this but it doesn't look like that is going to be possible here. Our quest for true joy, however, is not *just* about determining whether or not there is some exalted, rarefied experience of permanent loss of ego and blissful merging into the ultimate cosmic consciousness that is possible in this life. So let us become more practical. Let us suppose, for the sake of our discussion, that most of us are not going to be able to permanently snuff out suffering and find a continuous state of

ultimate joy in this life, at least not any time soon. Indeed, looking for continuous joy might simply be an attempt to bypass suffering; Kierkegaard (1844/1943) states that looking for joy in this life actually pushes it away. So what is a more realistic expectation?

I think what the mystics have shown us is that there is something that can sustain us through life, can help us overcome the painful challenges that all of us must face, and can give us the momentum to transcend our limitations and move forward. This something is true joy. Of course, the joy that the eight mystics experienced was complex. At the beginning of my research I hypothesized that the spiritual path of the mystics would involve some suffering, but that eventually they would arrive at a permanent state of union with God in which they would transcend their suffering and experience continual joy. However, although most of the mystics talk about experiencing a joyful blissful union with God that contains many of the phenomenological qualities I included in my definition in my introduction (e.g., wholeness, completeness, fulfillment, sweetness, love), the mystics apparently always come out of that state of consciousness and experience periods of intense mystical suffering as well. Some of the mystical suffering is due to the mystics' feelings of sinfulness, and their belief that they were unworthy of God's love. Sometimes they are immersed in the anguished longing for God. At other times they experience the agony of feeling rejected and abandoned by God. And of course, they often experience intense physical suffering.

The treasure the great mystics have is the healing vitality of *true joy*, a joy that sustains them and holds them in their darkest hours and then, like the light of the sun, breaks through the clouds of suffering infusing their lives with new energy and new spiritual power. True joy can bring laughter or it can bring tears. True joy can be ecstatic and take us *out* of ourselves, or it can be contemplative and draw us *in* and show us everything within that is not

joy. True joy can take us up to the heights or escort us down to the depths. In her empirical study of spontaneous and involuntary weeping, Rosemarie Anderson (1996) suggests that weeping can be both transformative and sacred. We, too, are mystics and, we to, can find this true mystical joy--the aspect of the divine within us that gives us the ability and courage to meet and transform our suffering into the enchanted potential within.

I now realize, at the conclusion of my research, that my initial definition of true joy is only partially true, and much too small. My new definition of true joy is as follows: true joy is a shifting, changing, evolving spiritual energy that is experienced in the holy, all consuming, but impermanent state of union with God, a union that changes its nature as it moves through higher and higher levels of Reality. True joy is also found in the falling out of union with God, a change that brings a unique kind of suffering. In the experience of the absence of God this suffering causes a metamorphosis of the soul and propels the soul to a reunion with God on higher levels of consciousness. True joy is a chrysalis that holds, molds, and transforms our suffering into something unique and infinitely beautiful. True joy can be experienced as consolation, equanimity, humility, peacefulness, sweetness, love, ecstasy, devotion, gratitude, delight, spiritual inebriation, freedom, self-forgetfulness, eternal contemplation, and union. It can also be experienced as estrangement, longing, separation, a wound of love, weeping, self-denial, abandonment, and annihilation. True joy is always present and absent, stationary and moving, ascending and descending, creative and destructive. True joy in union with God is the essential healing and transforming energy of the universe.

One of the most universal pieces of wisdom we find in this research is the persistent reminder that in order to find true joy we must stop looking for joy where it is not--in the

rewards, pleasures, and distractions of the outer world. The mystical wisdom of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism demands that we deny the desires of the individualistic self and turn away from the pleasures and consolations of the material world. Many contemporary psychologists agree. Indeed, Fromm (1976), Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Assagioli (1988/1991), Walsh (1999), Johnson (1987), and Vaughan (1995) among others, all discuss, to one degree or another, the futility of looking for happiness from the pleasures in the material world. Some of them warn us of the negative suffering that attachment to satisfying the desires of the ego brings both for the individual and for the world. What we need are psychological and moral treasures. What we want is mystical wealth. What we require is spiritual power. A life predicated upon the unceasing attempt to satisfy the desires of the false self is a life without the healing, solace, and comfort of the love and true joy that are at the core of who we really are and that are of greater value than anything the world can ever provide.

To find true joy all of our mystics insist that we must seek a totally new way of being in the world. We must find freedom from our ego-driven lives. Perhaps this might seem too difficult for us to accomplish, perhaps too frightening. But isn't there something deep within us that calls us to this radical task? In any moment we can make the decision to turn within to the vast emptiness of our interior universe. It is here that we will find the solitude we need for contemplation and discovery. Here we can begin to explore the uncharted roads of our inner geography. Personal growth and meaning for our life are found on this inner path of contemplation where we empty our hearts little by little of everything that is false and come to meet the wild splendor of our true self. In so doing we find what Wayne Teasdale (1999)



calls our “mystic heart” (p. 12), which is at once the deepest part of our true self and the heart we share with the world. It is here that we find true joy.

This path of solitude, contemplation, and self-discovery is not a narrow self-absorbed path that ignores the suffering of others, however. Indeed, according to Maria Jaoudi (1998) in *Christian Mysticism East and West*, “Personal growth according to world mysticisms affects the world from within, moving outward as consecrated action. Thus, the deeper one’s contemplative life, the more profound becomes one’s understanding of peoples, cultures, countries, and religions” (p. 4). Our exploration of our interior world must be balanced through compassionate action in the exterior world. In *The Mystic Heart*, Teasdale (1999) proposes an interspirituality or intermysticism in which each spiritual tradition shares the mystical treasures at its heart. The mystical strength at the heart of each tradition, Teasdale suggests, helps us achieve our goal of a better world. I propose that this mystical strength is the essential healing power of true joy.

We have the ability to shape our interior lives. On the shamanic journey the shamans explore interior worlds they have created. The mystics experience a consciousness of the direct presence of God that seems to reveal things they *want* to know. In the depths of the interior abyss lies the seed of evolution. In this pregnant emptiness there is the potential for creating new life. The abyss is an empty stage. We are the writer and the producer. We are the set designer, the costume maker, and the make-up artist. We are the director. If we can surrender to Life and love fiercely enough, in joy and sorrow, without conditions, we can become who we have always been--a coeternal being with God. It is here and now that the explosive awakening of true joy occurs in every split second of existence. This is the Cosmic Adventure. This is the *big bang theory of true joy*.

### *Critique of Intuitive Inquiry*

My research did not support my hypothesis or what I expected or wanted to find: the existence of a permanent state of wholeness, fulfillment, and joy without suffering in union with God in this lifetime. Life does not seem to work like this. However, I trusted the research method of Intuitive Inquiry to guide me on my quest for true joy, and it led me to a greater Truth. Intuitive Inquiry provided a balance of the objective and the subjective, and of academic rigor and intuitive discovery. It provided a framework in which I could learn and grow. It provided flexible rather than rigid rules of procedure that allowed me to stay true to both my emerging self and my continuously evolving research process.

During my research I surrendered to the inner promptings of body, mind, and spirit. However, while gathering, interpreting, and presenting my data, when there was a conflict between what my mind told me and what my soul or my body wisdom told me, I deferred to the body and soul. I never attempted to force the creative process but always allowed the dissertation to be written through me.

At the very beginning of cycle 1, I accepted the meditation image of the Pieta as a guide to finding my research topic even though intellectually it made no sense to me at all. Even though I doubted that this process would work I spent many months journaling and contemplating this image, and sure enough, little by little, it drew me toward the path my soul wanted me to take--the quest for true joy in union with God.

I was careful to follow the rules of Intuitive Inquiry. People knowledgeable in Christian mysticism recommended many different mystics to me for my cycle-2 and cycle-3 research, as well as recommending most of the secondary sources. A Franciscan monk

suggested to me that the Paulist Press was the publisher of the best translations. A Sufi sheik, a Jewish rabbi, a Hindu professor, and a Buddhist scholar recommended books on the five major wisdom and spiritual traditions. Two Christian ministers provided texts on Christian mysticism. An author and religious studies professor insisted I read all three volumes by Bernard McGinn.

When I began my cycle-2 research I had four or five ideas for my interpretive lenses. When I completed cycle 2, I had 33 lenses. Six lenses then emerged that seemed to capture the essence contained within the 33 lenses. My criteria for choosing the mystics in cycle 3 really did evolve out of my cycle-2 research. What I learned in cycle 2 influenced what I wanted to learn in cycle 3, and this influenced what mystics I chose. For instance, after completing my cycle 2-research, I wanted to learn more about the highest states of union with God and about the role suffering might play in true joy. Ruusbroec is one of the few mystics who describe the very highest states of union with God, and Julian of Norwich is noted for her balanced appreciation of the suffering of Christ's passion and the joy of his resurrection.

What I learned about the four mystics in cycle 2 shook my preconceptions about the Christian mystics, true joy, and union with God to the core. I questioned the mystics and became afraid of union with God. I was deeply troubled and came to the realization that I knew nothing. I had no idea for what to pray. At one point I sought advice from a Catholic priest, which helped to ground me. Finally I was able to enter cycle 3 with some lenses and some ideas about what I wanted to learn. However, the essence of true joy and how it might manifest was still unclear. Then Ruusbroec blew open my mind. There isn't just one union with God, he said, there are many unions with God, and there are many different types of joy.

There is also constant movement and change, and there is darkness, suffering, and longing on the highest levels of consciousness, perhaps even for eternity. Julian of Norwich, Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Faustina Kowalska confirmed that exalted joy is found in the most terrible suffering.

Reading the writings of the mystics in cycle 3 enabled me to see the mystics in cycle 2 from a new perspective. I realized that many of the extreme emotions experienced by the cycle-2 mystics that were initially so distressing to me were apparently part of an orderly spiritual path back to God. Also I could see more clearly that many of the practices the mystics in cycle 2 followed that seemed so bizarre (e.g., wanting and asking to suffer like Christ on the cross) were actually a part of the culture of and sanctioned by the Catholic Church. In other words, in this context these desires were considered normal, and even admirable.

At the end of cycle 3 I didn't know what true joy was but I knew it was going to be different from my original hypothesis and that my new understanding would come as I presented the data and wrote my conclusion. My new relationship with true joy and with the universe, I realized, was to be born out of my inner emptiness, my own suffering, and expressed through my body, mind, and soul--one intuition at a time. The research method of Intuitive Inquiry successfully carried me through my research process. It provided, in effect, the crucible in which I was able to seek wisdom from outside, to let go of my preconceived ideas, to integrate the new ideas, and to be transformed. More joy and a deeper love of life have emerged, as well as a more profound knowledge of the emptiness.

Intuitive Inquiry is a particularly appropriate and useful research method for examining transpersonal experiences. It is not appropriate in an experiment in which

repeatable results are fundamental to the purpose of the inquiry or in which statistical significance is sought. For instance, in an experiment to determine whether faith in God's ability to heal might help reduce pain in cancer patients there would need to be a group of participants who claimed to have faith in God's ability to heal them and a control group of agnostics or atheists. Strict control of variables would be required. Reduction in pain would be determined by measuring the amount of pain medication requested by the patients in each group. Statistical methods would then be used to determine whether there was a statistically significant reduction in pain for the participants in the group who claimed to have faith in God's ability to heal them. The experiment would then need to be able to be duplicated by other researchers.

### *Personal Highlights*

While writing my dissertation I began the process of turning away from the pleasures and distractions of the outside world and turning within to face my emptiness. This decision was inspired by the mystics and by an awareness I had while standing in the middle of the Stanford Shopping Center in Palo Alto, CA. I was thinking about buying some new clothes. I was feeling that frightening gnawing emptiness in my solar plexus, and I began to imagine how I might fill this emptiness by buying a new outfit. It was then that I had the awareness that the pleasure I would receive from buying the new clothes would not fill the emptiness, not even a little bit! I had known intellectually for some time that new clothes did not really bring happiness, but now I *knew* it in my body, and it was this *body knowing* that made all the difference to me. It wasn't just a theory any more; it was Reality. Later this awareness grew to include buying other material possessions. If buying something was not going to fill

my empty longing for love and joy, why bother buying? Most of the time this kind of buying only created guilt and fear for me anyway.

I had already been thinking about leading a more simple life and was wondering what that might look like. I also wanted to begin to face my boredom and loneliness head on with as few distractions as possible. I decided to stop watching television and to stop buying things I didn't need.

During this time I came to realize that I was deeply unhappy, and that I had been deeply unhappy my entire life as I had never found the love for which I was searching. I also came to realize that my life was not God-centered but totally self-centered; my life revolved around satisfying my needs and getting what I wanted. Several times I had the habitual urge to buy something, but I chose to deny these false desires. Once I hoped to revive an old relationship but this was thwarted. Later I felt so grateful for being thrown back into my emptiness. At least this was real!

For many months I stayed in my inner darkness with no hope. I knew there was nothing in the outside world that could make me truly happy. And now, even the hoped-for true joy in union with God was suspect, as my research was indicating that union with God required a level of suffering I wasn't sure I wanted to take on. On one occasion I experienced feeling totally empty. Inside there was nothing: no God, no soul, and no *I*. My body felt hollow. The loneliness was excruciating. I didn't know what to pray for anymore; all I could do was wait.

One day I was sitting on my bed and I sensed a subtle new feeling inside of me. I knew right away that it was joy. From where was this coming, I wondered? When I examined it I realized it had something to do with the fact that, to some degree at least, I had overcome

my compulsion to buy things in order to find joy. It was a beginning. I felt liberated from a losing game. I felt empowered. Several days later while telling my friend about the experience, a new feeling of self-respect arose in me. In spiritual language, I was creating the empty heart that God would fill. On two recent occasions, once walking in my neighborhood and once at the beach, I actually felt the sheer, exuberant joy of just being alive, and an overwhelming gratitude. I don't remember ever feeling this way before. Tonight the words arose within me: "I love my life." Again, this is a new experience for me. Normally I would be too afraid of life to love it, and too defended to feel joy. I am choosing to open to the blessings God has for me.

The path of the contemplative has become appealing to me. I have added ½ hour of contemplation practice in the evening to my ½ hour of daily meditation in the morning. In this period of contemplation I listen to the silence. I am noticing that I seem to fall in love with people more often--as if they were my own mother, child, or brother.

And they seem to reciprocate. It feels good. I want to continue to make radical inward changes that will enable me to shed my false self and become closer to God. By denying myself some of my usual empty pleasures I feel I am moving in this direction. I am also becoming more aware of the false self and its defense mechanisms: justify, attack, and defend. I am learning to allow myself to feel vulnerable and experience what is within me, and to express it. I realize the exploration of my emptiness has just begun and that this can be painful; however, in my better moments I know I am touching the edge of the wide, vast, deep, and unexplainable reality that is True Joy.

At the end of my research experience, as a final act of closure, I am returning to the Pieta to see what wisdom it might hold for me regarding the integration of joy and suffering

in my life. The message from the Pieta that I receive is to judge not by appearances. The appearance depicted in the Pieta is of the epitome of suffering--the crucified Christ. There is no hope; it is finished. However, in John 7:24 Jesus tells us: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." For me, righteous judgment means judging from faith. In Hebrews 11:1, faith is described as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." What is not seen in the Pieta is Christ's resurrection. For me, this means that I should not put my faith in the appearance of suffering and death but in the Truth behind that appearance that is not *yet* seen: in God, and in the joy of my *spiritual resurrection*.

In the Pieta the Divine Mother, or the feminine principle within us, holds the appearance of suffering--the crucified Christ--in peace, acceptance, and serenity until the healing, transforming power of true joy can be realized. This is how I am learning to live with my suffering and my joy.

### *Delimitations*

There are several delimitations in my hermeneutical inquiry. One is that I do not have any live participants with whom to interrelate or who can provide feedback for my interpretation; I cannot interview the mystics about what they meant when they wrote a particular passage. However, even if I could ask them, they would only give an interpretation of something they had written earlier. Regarding accountability for my interpretation, I have read the works of other respected writers who have studied and written about the mystics I have interpreted, and I have compared my interpretations with those of these other writers.

Another delimitation in my study is that I have focused predominantly on Christian mysticism. Although I have included a brief look at joy from the perspective of psychology



and from the wisdom of five major spiritual and wisdom traditions, I have interpreted true joy primarily through the writings of Christian mystics. I have done this because I believe that the Christian mystics I chose to read have attained the state of grace that I call true joy, and that they are able to express it in language with which I, as an individual brought up in the Christian tradition, am familiar and to which I can more easily relate and hopefully understand.

A third delimitation is that I have read translations of the mystics' works even though reading translations can compromise, to some degree, the accuracy of the writings, and therefore theoretically my interpretation of these writings. However, my main purpose is to find meaning in whatever forms it might present itself. According to Gerald Bruns (1992) in *Hermeneutics Ancient & Modern*, "If meaning is anything, it is what survives translation from one language to another"(p. 84).

A fourth delimitation involves historical and cultural context. I realize that the historical and cultural context in which the mystics are writing is important as it influences the meaning of what they are saying, and I am sensitive to this aspect. However, although I recognize the relevance of context, when I read secondary source material about the mystics my primary goal was to learn about each mystic's spiritual path. My secondary goal was to examine the cultural and historical influences on their writings, and this examination was limited in scope and depth.

The purpose of my research was not to determine exactly what each word meant to a particular mystic in a particular culture in a particular time in history, nor was it to attempt to present a rigidly accurate synopsis of the writings. Instead, my earnest intention has been to extract meaning and truth from these writings so that we, living today within our cultural

framework, can experience the beauty, the love, and the joy found in these treasured mystical texts and be enriched, inspired, and hopefully transformed on our journey back to God.

A fifth delimitation is my choice to use a research method that is fundamentally subjective. The meaning of my research rests on the foundation of my personal journey: my questions, my concerns, my fears, my challenges, my insights, my growth, and my change. This research is both an inquiry and an autobiography. Perhaps someone else conducting this same research would have come to a different conclusion. However, one of the values of hermeneutical research is its potential usefulness for the reader, hence its validity. I believe that a reader can gain something very valuable by participating in and being moved by the personal journey of another. My journey can serve as an example for others who wish to walk the path of true joy in union with God.

### *Epilogue*

As mentioned above, the results of this research are based on Christian mysticism. Christianity is based on the incarnation of God as human. The goal in Christianity is to develop one's humanness, not to detach from it or transcend it. In Christianity humanness is never abandoned and suffering is affirmed. Therefore, those of us on the heroic quest for true joy must ask ourselves, "Is the impossibility of a state of sustained joy in union with God or the Absolute unique to Christianity?" We have seen that other traditions such as Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism suggest that we can, in this life, detach from our humanness to the point of complete loss of ego in a blissful and permanent union with Ultimate Reality or Atman-Brahman that entirely eliminates suffering. What is the answer? Perhaps future research might show that our elusive state of joy without suffering in this life can actually be

attained through the practices of a tradition other than Christianity. That possibility cannot be evaluated in this study.

### *Future Research*

One of the avenues future research might take is the exploration of what we know about the highest levels of consciousness that the greatest mystics, prophets, and sages have experienced in this life. What has been written about these ultimate states of consciousness? What is fact? What is legend? One might also wish to explore and compare the highest levels of consciousness in each tradition. Is the ultimate goal the same in each tradition? Are we merely dealing with differences of language or is the ultimate state of consciousness in each tradition unique to that tradition? One of the ways that these ultimate states of consciousness might be explored is through the relatively new research area of social cognitive neuroscience. The new technology of fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) now enables scientists to look deep inside the brain and to observe it functioning. Is it possible to study and compare the brain functioning of individuals in the state of union with God, union with *Atman/Brahman*, or *nirvana*? Could the functioning of the fundamental healing energy of true joy be seen in the brain? Another possibility for research is the further exploration of the mystery of suffering and its transformational potential. And finally, more research can be done on *the big bang theory of true joy*. This might involve learning more about the origins of the universe and about the discovery of quantum physics that the universe consists of waves of probability that are changed into matter when observed. I believe that the outer universe and the inner universe are probably parallel. How does the mind affect our inner universe and the origins of true joy?

## References

- Addison, R. B. (1989). Grounded interpretive research: An investigation of physician socialization. In M. J. Packer & R. B. Addison (Eds.), *Entering the circle* (pp. 39-57). Albany: State University of New York.
- Anderson, R. (1996, April). *Nine psycho-spiritual characteristics of spontaneous and involuntary weeping*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, San Jose, CA.
- Anderson, R. (1998). Intuitive Inquiry: A transpersonal approach. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 69-94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, R. (2000). Intuitive inquiry: Interpreting objective and subjective data. *ReVision*, 22(4), 31-39.
- Anderson, R. (2001). Embodied writing and reflections on embodiment. *Journal Of Transpersonal Psychology*, 33(2), 83-98.
- Assagioli, R. (1991). *Transpersonal development: The dimension beyond psychosynthesis*. London: Crucible. (Original work published 1988)
- Bakhtiar, L. (1976). *Sufi: Expressions of the mystic quest*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Barth, K. (1961). Freedom for life (A. T. Mackay, T. H. Parker, H. Knight, H. Kennedy, & J. Marks, Trans.). In G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (Eds.), *Church dogmatics: Vol. III. The doctrine of creation* (part 4, pp. 324-564). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. (Original work published 1951)
- The Black Death*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 9, 2002, from <http://campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/WestEurope/BlackDeath.Cp.html>
- Bonaventure, St. (1978). The life of St. Francis. In E. Cousins (Vol. Ed. & Trans.), *The classics of western spirituality: Bonaventure* (pp. 179-327). New York: Paulist Press.
- Brief history of Poland*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 3, 2002, from <http://www.poloniatoday.com/history9.htm>.
- Bruns, G. L. (1992). *Hermeneutics ancient & modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Buber, M. (1966a). *Hasidism and modern man* (M. Friedman, Ed. & Trans.). New York: Harper Torchbooks. (Original work published 1958)

- Buber, M. (1966b). *The way of man: According to the teaching of Hasidism*. Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press. (Original work published 1950)
- Buber, M. (1969). *The legend of the Baal-Shem* (M. Friedman, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books. (Original work published 1955)
- Buber, M. (1975). *Tales of the Hasidim: Early masters* (O. Marx, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books. (Original work published 1947)
- Buber, M. (1988). *The tales of Rabbi Nachman* (M. Friedman, Trans.). Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International. (Original work published 1906)
- Buddha (1985). *Dhammapada*. (Dharma Publishing Staff, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: Dharma.
- Bynum, C. W. (1989). Religious women in the later middle ages. In J. Raitt, B. McGinn, & J. Meyendorff (Vol. Eds.), *World spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest: Vol. 17. Christian spirituality: High middle ages and reformation* (pp.121-137). New York: Crossroad.
- Chesterton, G. K. (1960). *St. Francis of Assisi*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Church History. (n.d.). In *Catholic almanac online*. Retrieved on November 28, 2002, from <http://www.osv.com/catholicalmanac/churchhistory.htm>
- Clare of Assisi. (1982). Clare of Assisi: The writings. In R. J. Armstrong & I. C. Brady (Vol. Eds. & Trans.), *The classics of western spirituality: Francis and Clare: The complete works* (pp. 189-234). New York: Paulist Press.
- Cousins, E. (1989). The humanity and the passion of Christ. In J. Raitt, B. McGinn, & J. Meyendorff (Vol. Eds.), *World spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest: Vol. 17. Christian spirituality: High middle ages and reformation* (pp. 375-391). New York: Crossroad.
- Cox, M. (1985). *Handbook of Christian spirituality: A guide to figures and teachings from the biblical era to the twentieth century* (Rev. ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dasgupta, S. N. (1927). *Hindu mysticism*. New York: Frederick Unger.
- Dowman, K. (1994). *The flight of the Garuda* (K. Dowman, Trans.). Boston: Wisdom.
- Drob, A. L. (2000). *Symbols of the Kabbalah*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

- Duchy of Brabant. (2001). In *The Columbia encyclopedia* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Retrieved November 9, 2002, from <http://www.bartleby.com/65/br/BrabntDuc.html>
- Durant, W. (1950). *The story of civilization: (Vol. 3). The age of faith: A history of medieval civilization--Christian, Islamic, and Judaic--from Constantine to Dante: C.E. 325-1300*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Durant, W. (1957). *The story of civilization: (Vol. 4). The reformation: A history of European civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Easwaran, E. (Ed.). (1991). *God makes the rivers to flow* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.
- Eliade, M. (1972). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy* (W. R. Trask, Trans.). NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1951)
- Elizabeth of the Trinity. (1984). *I have found God: Complete works: (Vol.1 ). Major spiritual writings* (A. Kane, Trans.). Washington D.C: ICS Publications. (Original work published 1980)
- Ellis, A. (1975). Creative joy and happiness: The humanistic way. *Humanist*, 35, 11-13.
- Epstein, P. (1979). *Kabbalah: The way of the Jewish mystic*. New York: Samuel Weiser.
- Ernst, C. W. (1997). *Sufism: An essential introduction to the philosophy and practice of the mystical tradition of Islam*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Fanning, S. (2001). *Mystics of the Christian tradition*. London: Routledge.
- Flinders, C. L. (1993). *Enduring grace: Living portraits of seven women mystics*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Forryan, B., & Glover, J. M. (Compilers). (1979). *General index to the collected works of C. G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Frager, R. (1997). Introduction. In J. Fadiman & R. Frager (Eds.), *Essential Sufism* (pp. 1-31). New York: HarperCollins.
- Francis of Assisi. (1982). Saint Francis of Assisi: The writings. In R.J. Armstrong & I. C. Brady (Vol. Eds. & Trans.), *The classics of western spirituality. Francis and Clare: The complete works* (pp. 25-166). New York: Paulist Press.
- Freer, H. W. (1967). *God meets us where we are: An interpretation of Brother Lawrence*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

- French History*. (n.d.). Retrieved on November 27, 2002, from <http://www.france.com/Culture/history/19thcent.html>
- Freud, S. (1961). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton.. (Original work published 1930)
- Freud, S. (1981). Beyond the pleasure principle. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 18, pp. 7-64). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1920)
- Fromm, E. (1966). *Man for himself: An inquiry into the psychology of ethics*. New York: Fawcett World Library. (Original work published 1947)
- Fromm, E. (1976). *To have or be?* (R. A. Anshen, Ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Germany during World War One*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2002, from <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/6916/>
- Ghose, Aurobindo. (1990). *The future evolution of man: The divine life upon earth* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Compiled with a summary and notes by P. B. Saint-Hilaire. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Hafiz. (1999). *The gift: Poems by Hafiz the great Sufi master* (D. Ladinsky, Trans.). New York: Penguin/Arkana.
- Harner, M. (1980). *The way of the shaman: A guide to power and healing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Hass, A. M. (1989). Schools of late medieval mysticism. In J. Raitt, B. McGinn, & J. Meyendorff (Vol. Eds.), *World spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest: Vol. 17. Christian spirituality: High middle ages and reformation* (pp. 140-175). New York: Crossroad.
- Hellman, J. A. (1989). The spirituality of the Franciscans. In J. Raitt, B. McGinn, & J. Meyendorff (Vol. Eds.), *World spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest: Vol. 17. Christian spirituality: High middle ages and reformation* (pp. 31-49). New York: Crossroad.
- Helminski, K. E. (1992). *Living presence: A Sufi way to mindfulness & the essential self*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee.
- The History of Flanders*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 9, 2002, from [http://www.wvc.vlaanderen.be/ccpvlaanderen/engels/history\\_flanders.htm](http://www.wvc.vlaanderen.be/ccpvlaanderen/engels/history_flanders.htm)

- Hollenback, J. B. (1996). *Mysticism: Experience, response, and empowerment*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- The Hundred Years' War*. (1336-1564). (n.d.). Retrieved November 9, 2002, from <http://www.ku.edu/kansas/medieval/108/lectures/hundred-years-war.html>
- Inge, W. R. (1964). *Christian mysticism*. Cleveland, OH: The World.
- Jaoudi, M. (1998). *Christian mysticism east and west: What the masters teach us*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Johnson, R. A. (1987). *Ecstasy: Understanding the psychology of joy*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Judy, D. H. (1996). Transpersonal psychology: Roots in Christian mysticism. In B. W. Scotton, A. B. Chinen, & J. R. Battista (Eds.), *Textbook of transpersonal psychiatry and psychology* (pp. 134-144). New York: BasicBooks.
- Julian of Norwich (1978). *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (E. Colledge & J. Walsh, Trans.). In *The classics of western spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Julian of Norwich (2001). *Julian of Norwich: Journeys into joy* (J. Pischler, Trans.). Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.
- Julian of Norwich (1997). *Revelation of love: Julian of Norwich* (J. Skinner, Trans.). New York: Image Books.
- Jung, C. G. (1961). Some crucial points in psychoanalysis: A correspondence between Dr. Jung and Dr. Loy (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, & W. McGuire (Vol. Eds.), *The collected works of C. J. Jung: Vol. 4. Freud and psychoanalysis* (pp. 252-289). NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1914)
- Jung, C. G. (1968). The initial dreams (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, & W. McGuire (Vol. Eds.), *The collected works of C. J. Jung: Vol. 12. Psychology and alchemy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 47-93). NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1944)
- Jung, C. G. (1976). The relations between the ego and the unconscious (R.F.C. Hull, Trans.). In J. Campbell (Ed.), *The portable Jung* (pp. 70-138). New York: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1928)
- Kabir (1915). *Kabir's poems* (R. Tagore & E. Underhill, Trans.). London: Macmillan.



- Kast, V. (1991). *Joy, inspiration, and hope* (D. Witcher, Trans.). College Station: Texas A & M University.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1943). The expectation of an eternal happiness (D. Swenson & L. Swenson, Trans.). In *Eighteen edifying discourses by Soren Kierkegaard: (Vol. 3). Three edifying discourses, 1844* (pp. 95-120). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg. (Original work published 1844)
- Kierkegaard, S. (1946). Edifying discourses: Every good and every perfect gift is from above. In R. Bretall (Ed.), *A Kierkegaard anthology* (pp. 110-116). NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1843)
- Klepfisz, H. (1986). Joy: the psychological enigma of East European Jewry. *Judaism*, 35(3), 351-360.
- Knowles, D. (1961). *The English mystical tradition*. London: Burns & Oates.
- Kosicki, E. W. (2001). *Meet Sister Faustina: Herald of divine mercy*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant.
- Kowalska, Faustina, Sister M. (1987). *Divine mercy in my soul: The diary of the servant of God: Sister M. Faustina Kowalska* (A. & D. Pasicki, Trans.). Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Lawrence, Brother. (1895). *The practice of the presence of God*. New York: Fleming H. Revell.
- Lawrence, Brother. (1907). *Spiritual maxim: Brother Lawrence*. Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- The Longman dictionary of the English language*. (1984). Essex, England: Longman Group.
- Marcoulesco, I. (1987). Mystical union. In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (Vol. 10, pp. 239-245). New York: Macmillan.
- Maslow, A. H. (1962). Lessons from the peak-experiences. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1(1), 9-18.
- Maslow, A. H. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: The Penguin Group.

- Maslow, A. H. (1996a). The psychology of happiness. In E. Hoffman (Ed.), *Future visions: The unpublished papers of Abraham Maslow* (pp. 21-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maslow, A. H. (1996b). Laughter and tears: Psychology's missing values. In E. Hoffman (Ed.), *Future visions: The unpublished papers of Abraham Maslow* (pp. 99-106). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McGinn, B. (1992). *The presence of God: A history of western Christian mysticism* (Vol. 1). *The foundations of mysticism*. New York: Crossroad.
- McGinn, B. (1994). *The presence of God: A history of western Christian mysticism* (Vol. 2). *The growth of mysticism*. New York: Crossroad.
- McGinn, B. (1998). *The presence of God: A history of western Christian mysticism* (Vol. 3). *The flowering of mysticism: Men and women in the new mysticism (1200-1350)*. New York: Crossroad.
- Meadows, C. M. (1968). Joy in psychological and theological perspective: A constructive Approach. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 38 (06), 2853. (UMI No. 6902034).
- Mechthild of Magdeburg. (1998). *The flowing light of the Godhead* (F. Tobin, Vol. Ed. & Trans.). In *The classics of western spirituality*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Mertens, D. M. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Merton, T. (1967). *Mystics & Zen masters*. New York: Dell.
- Milord, J. E. (n.d.). Elizabeth of the Trinity. In *Secular Order Discalced Carmelites*. Retrieved November 28, 2002, from <http://helpfellowship.org/ocds%20Lessons/Lesson%208.htm>
- Moorcroft, J. (2001). *He is my heaven: The life of Elizabeth of the Trinity*. Washington D.C: ICS.
- Myers, D. (2000). The Funds, Friends, and Faith of Happy People. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 56-67.
- Nachman, Rabbi of Breslov. (1984). *Azamra!* New York: Breslov Research Institute.
- Odell, C. M. (1998). *Faustina: Apostle of divine mercy*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor.
- Otto, R. (1962). *Mysticism east and west*. New York: Collier Books.

- Packer, M. J. (1989). Tracing the hermeneutic circle: Articulating an ontical study of moral conflicts. In M. J. Packer & R. B. Addison (Eds.), *Entering the circle* (pp. 95-117). Albany: State University of New York.
- Packer, M. J., & Addison, R. B. (1989). Evaluating an interpretive account. In M. J. Packer & R. B. Addison (Eds.), *Entering the circle* (pp. 275-292). Albany: State University of New York.
- Pandita, S. U. (1993). *In this very life* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Wisdom.
- Rahula, W. S. (1974). *What the Buddha taught* (Rev. ed.). New York: Grove Press.
- Rasmussen, K. (1976). *Intellectual culture of the Iglulik Eskimo*. (W. Worster, Trans.). (Vol. VII-No. 1). New York: AMS Press. (Original work published 1929)
- Rinbochay, K. S. (1982). *Tantric practice in Nying-ma* (J. Hopkins, Trans.). London: Ride.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Roman Catholic Church. (n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2002, from <http://www.Theotherside.co.uk/tm-heritage/background/church.htm>
- Roman Catholic Church. (2001). In *The Columbia encyclopedia* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Retrieved November 27, 2002, from <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ro/RomanCat.html>
- Rumi. (1995). *The essential Rumi* (C. Barks & J. Moyne, Trans.). San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Ruusbroec, Jan van (1916). *The adornment of the spiritual marriage, The sparkling stone, The book of supreme truth* (C. A. Wynschenk, Trans.). New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Ruusbroec, J. (1985). *John Ruusbroec: The spiritual espousals and other works* (J. A. Wiseman, Trans.). In *The classics of western spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Sacks, O. (1998). *The man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Schroeder, C. S. (1995). *Embodied prayer: Harmonizing body and soul*. Liguori, MO: Triumph Books.
- Secular Order Discalced Carmelites. (n.d.). Retrieved on November 27, 2002, from <http://www.helpfellowship.org/Removed%20Pages/secularorderdiscalcedcarmelit.htm>
- Seligman, M. (1990). *Learned Optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Pocket Books.

- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14.
- Shah, I. (1964). *The Sufis*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Skinner, B. F. (1985). Cognitive science and behaviorism. *British Journal of Psychology*, 76, 191-301.
- Smith, H. (1991). *The world's religions*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Some important events in the fourteenth century*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 9, 2002, from <http://www.siue.edu/CHAUCER/14thcent.html>.
- Steele, R. S. (1989). A critical hermeneutics for psychology: Beyond positivism to an exploration of the textual unconscious. In M. J. Packer & R. B. Addison (Eds.), *Entering the circle* (pp. 223-237). Albany: State University of New York.
- Tavard, G. H. (1989). Apostolic life and church reform. In J. Raitt, B. McGinn, & J. Meyendorff (Vol. Eds.), *World spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest: Vol. 17. Christian spirituality: High middle ages and reformation* (pp. 1-11). New York: Crossroad.
- Teasdale, W. (1999). *The mystic heart*. Novato CA: New World Library.
- Thirty Years War*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2002, from <http://www.pipeline.com/~cwa/TWAHome.htm>
- Underhill, E. (1915). *Ruysbroeck*. London: G. Bell and Sons.
- Underhill, E. (1964). *The mystics of the church*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Underhill, E. (1999). *Mysticism*. Oxford, England: Oneworld.
- Vaughan, F. (1995). *Shadows of the sacred: Seeing through spiritual illusions*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Vaughan-Lee, L. (1996). *The paradoxes of love*. Inverness, CA: The Golden Sufi Center.
- Walsh, R. N. (1990). *The spirit of shamanism*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

- Walsh, R. N. (1999). *Essential spirituality: Exercises from the world's religions to cultivate kindness, love, joy, peace, vision, wisdom, and generosity*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Washburn, M. (1994). *Transpersonal psychology in psychoanalytic perspective*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Wiethaus, U. (1996). *Ecstatic transformation: Transpersonal psychology in the work of Mechthild of Magdeburg*. NY: Syracuse University Press.
- World War Two timeline. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2002, from <http://www.Polandsholocaust.org/1917-1938.html>
- Yogananda, P. (1946). *Autobiography of a yogi*. New York: The Philosophical Library.
- Zaehner, R. C. (1962). *Hinduism*. London: Oxford University Press.