

The Evelyn Underhill Association Newsletter

2019-2020

www.evelynunderhill.org

“We mostly spend [our] lives conjugating three verbs: to Want, to Have, and to Do... forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in, the fundamental verb, to Be.”

~ *Evelyn Underhill*



ANNUAL QUIET DAY OF REFLECTION, 2020 Where Do We Go From Here?

We've read her books, we've attended quiet days, we've studied her life...so what on earth happens next? What do we do with the great wisdom and spiritual counsel of Evelyn Underhill? This quiet day we will hear The Rev. Susan Dean's story of Underhill House, a quiet place to pause for prayer in Seattle, something done in the tradition of Evelyn Underhill. Come listen, reflect, sit quietly in the silence, and see where the Spirit might be leading you.

The Rev. Susan Dean, Founder and Executive Director of Underhill House and spiritual director, is an Associate Priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Renton, WA. Evelyn Underhill inspired, and continues to inspire, her ministry.



Rev. Susan Dean

Saturday, June 13, 2020, 9:30am-3:30pm

Nourse Hall, St. Albans Parish*
Next door to the Washington National Cathedral
3001 Wisconsin Ave NW
Washington DC 20016

**Please note change of venue*
Please bring a sack lunch

Registration opens: May 1, 2020

[Download Registration Form](#)

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International Conference on Jacopone da Todi

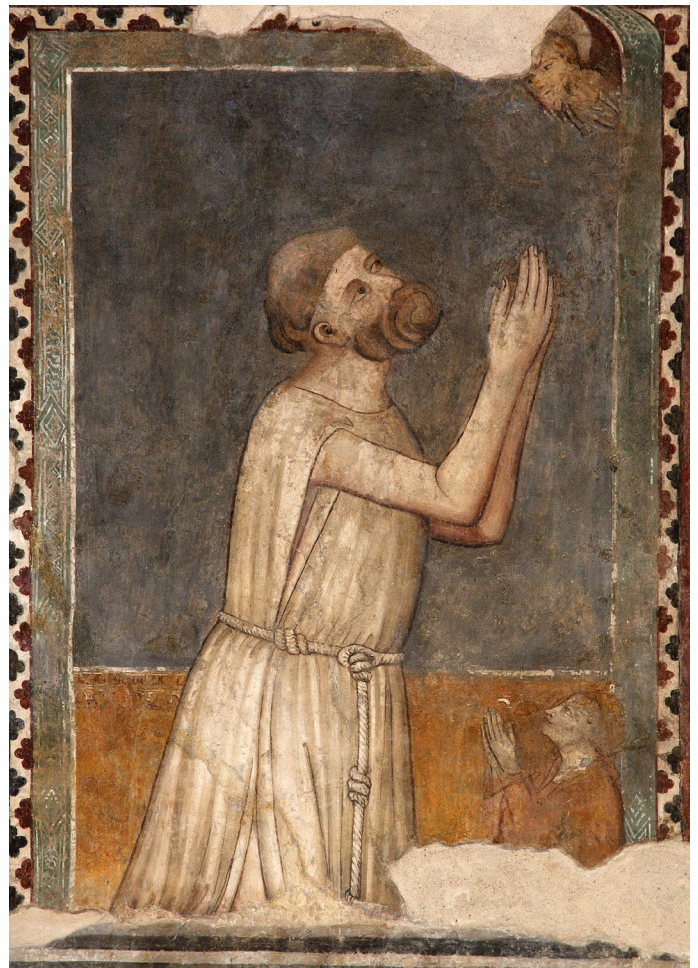
May 4, 2019, Todi, Italy

Sponsored by the Stabat Mater Association

stabatmaterassociation@gmail.com

This conference was a celebration of the centennial of the 1919 publication of a biography of Jacopone da Todi written by Evelyn Underhill. It consisted in academic conference, the presentation of the biography translated into Italian by Claudio and Massimo Peri, and a concert of Gioachino Rossini's Stabat Mater, a poem/prayer by Jacopone da Todi. The concert was conducted by Ezio Bosso and featured the European Philharmonic Orchestra and the chorus Filarmonico Rossini di Pesaro. Two additional concerts of the music of Bach were offered by Raphael Wallfisch. The conference included the following presentations:

- Dana Greene, "Evelyn Underhill: Recovering Mysticism, Remembering Jacopone"
- Aindrias ó hAilpin "Medicinal to the Soul: Italy and Umbria in the Life of Evelyn Underhill"
- Enrico Menestò, "The Feminine Mysticism in Umbria in the 13th Century"
- Laura Dalla Ragione, "The Body's Theme in the Holy Women of the XIII Century: Between Mysticism and Anorexia."
- Marin W. M. Franken, "The Modern Psychology Point of View on Medieval Mystics and Jacopone da Todi in Particular."
- Claudio Peri, "Peculiar Characteristics of Jacopone's Mysticism."
- Massimo Peri, "Homage to Evelyn Underhill: In the Midst of Our Life Journey."



Selections from Presentations:

“Evelyn Underhill: Recovering Mysticism, Remembering Jacopone”

By Dana Greene

In 1919 Evelyn Underhill, well-known author of “Mysticism” and many other books on this subject, published a biography of Jacopone da Todi, a thirteenth century Franciscan mystic and poet, one of the earliest to write in the vernacular and probably the author of the famous *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*. 2019 marks the centennial of Underhill’s publication the first and until 1980 the only biography in English of this important literary personality. Born into a noble family as Jacopo dei Benedetti he studied law and married. On the tragic death of his wife he left his profession and became a wandering ascetic and penitent. His strange behavior won him a name of derision, Jacopone. He ultimately entered the Franciscans as a lay brother who allied himself with that group within the Order who argued for greater poverty and penance. His criticism of Pope Boniface VIII led to his imprisonment and excommunication until a few years prior to his death. During his life of suffering he wrote some one hundred laudi.

Underhill wrote the Jacopone biography in the years after World War I, probably during 1918. It is important to note that it was precisely during the time that she later cryptically mentions that she “went to pieces.” As a very private woman, Underhill gives no further indication of the nature of her psychological anxiety. What is known is that this period from about 1918 through 1921 is a vocational turning point for her. Previously she functioned principally as a scholar of mysticism, but beginning in 1921 she becomes increasingly oriented toward both living attuned to the spirit and helping others to do likewise. In about 1920 she reconnected with the Anglican tradition into which she had been baptize, and in 1921 she made her first retreat at the Anglican retreat house in Pleshey. She also began regular interaction with a spiritual director, in this case the leading Catholic theologian Baron Friedrich von Hugel. Evidence of Underhill’s vocational reorientation is already evident in a series of lectures she gave in 1921 at Manchester College, Oxford. In their published form, “The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today,” she suggests the need to nurture the spiritual life among her contemporaries. By 1924 she offered her own retreat at Pleshey, and subsequently every year for the next decade she gave several retreats at various English retreat houses. She was the first woman to give a retreat to Anglican clergy in 1925, and the first one to give a retreat in Canterbury Cathedral in 1927.

The three years between 1918 and 1921 were an axial period for Underhill. Although she never divulges why she undertook the Jacopone biography, I think it is possible to piece together an answer. There were a number of practical reasons which made her effort possible. Underhill was already familiar with Jacopone having included brief references to him in her big book on mysticism and she was increasingly interested in the Franciscan tradition having written on Angela of Foligno as early as 1912. She was also attracted to the genre of poetry having published two books of her own poems (not very good poetry I might add). She had friends who could help her as well. J. A. Herbert, Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum, had introduced her to the Umbrian manuscripts housed in the Museum’s collections, and in 1910 Dr. Giovanni Ferri, who had published a partial edition of Jacopone’s poems

in Italian, agreed to look over the English translation of the poems done by Mrs. Theodore Beck. Dr. Edmund Gardner, who had written on Jacopone in 1914, agreed to offer his advice too. Underhill already had a publisher, J. M. Dent, who had published six of her previous volumes, including one on Ruysbroeck which Mrs. Beck had provided translations from the Flemish. Finally Underhill had previously used the format of a translated mystic text preceded by a long biographical introduction. J. M. Dent agreed to use that same format to illuminate the work of Jacopone. I suspect that the joy for Underhill was that this research and writing would re-immense her in the Italy she loved. Earlier in her life she had visited many of the towns and cities of Italy, including Todi, and had fallen in love with their art, architecture and religious rituals. As she said, some people have to go to Italy, a place which is “medicinal” to the soul.

One could suspect that there might have been other reasons she was drawn to Jacopone. In the period during the war she supported the national war effort which dragged on with great brutality and cost many lives including that of a nephew. Her dearest friend Ethel Ross Barker died an untimely death, and Underhill was living outside any religious community. She described herself as a “white-hot Neo-Platonist.” The world affirming incarnational tradition of the Franciscans offered an alternative to her abstractionism. Furthermore Jacopone embodied her understanding of the mystic life, one not of visions and voices but overflowing with the joy of being loved by God.

Everything seemed to be in place for Underhill to bring the contribution of this second generation Franciscan to light. In her preface to the biography Underhill writes that the volume should be of interest to those attracted to mysticism, poetry, and the Franciscan tradition. In describing Jacopone she reveals her own admiration for him. As a lawyer, a man of the world, a poet, a reformer, a politician, and contemplative friar, she claims he is a vigorous human with ardent feelings, a keen intellect, and although unstable and eccentric, grounded by love and wonder. For her, Jacopone not only embodied the Franciscan ideals of poverty, penitence and joy, but he reconciled these three disparate responses to God’s love.

Although Underhill described Jacopone as a libertine, penitent and ecstatic, she conceived of him above all as a gifted, natural poet who transmitted his experience through vernacular poetic form. As such he stood in the tradition of mediator, one who conveyed to others the joy of the spiritual world. Jacopone, like Underhill herself, was one who stood between the overwhelming love of God, that “vision splendid,” and those who were open to receive it. They both were artists of the infinite life.

Medicinal to the Soul: Italy and Umbria in the Life of Evelyn Underhill

By Aindrias ó hAilpin

Evelyn Underhill’s biography of Jacopone da Todi is the fruit of a relationship with Italy – and particularly Umbria – that lasted for most of Evelyn’s adult life. But not only was this a long-lasting relationship, it was also a deeply transforming one. Perhaps Evelyn was such a good biographer of Jacopone because her own life shared some features

with his, although of course it was very different in most respects. He was a lawyer; she was the daughter and the wife of lawyers. Both were poets. Both were raised, nominally, as Christians but showed little interest in faith before experiencing a form of 'conversion' in their fourth decade. After this both were attracted to a mystical expression of faith and – perhaps because of this – both had, at times, an uneasy relationship with the institutional church.

When Evelyn first visited Italy in 1898, at the age of twenty-two, she was by her own admission either an agnostic or an atheist. But this was beginning to change. She later wrote that around this time “philosophy brought me round to an intelligent and irresponsible sort of theism which I enjoyed thoroughly but which did not last long. Gradually the net closed in on me and I was driven nearer and nearer to Christianity, half of me wishing it were true and half resisting violently.” Evelyn was deeply influenced by the Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus (AD 205-270), from whom she learned to see beauty and art as reflecting transcendent Beauty. This helped her to a gradual acceptance of spiritual reality and, ultimately, of God.

In Italy Evelyn was exposed to a great wealth of beautiful art and architecture – most of which was religious – and it affected her deeply. She first encountered Italian religious art in 1898 when she went to see Bernardino Luini's frescos of the Passion of Christ in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Lugano, which is technically in Switzerland but culturally is Italian. She described the frescoes as 'superb' and added that “I spent all my odd minutes in that church whilst we were at Lugano”. This is all Evelyn tells us directly but in her 1904 novel *The Grey World*, she describes a fictional character entering a Catholic church for the first time. His sense that “there were mysteries very near” and that “it was evident that great matters happened in this building” may well reflect Evelyn's own experience. Also in 1898 Evelyn visited Florence for the first time, viewing Fra Angelico's frescoes in the Convent of San Marco, as well as other churches. At the end of her time in Florence she wrote that “this place has taught me more than I can tell you: a sort of gradual unconscious growing into an understanding of things”. Clearly there was more happening than simply appreciation of great art.

In the churches and art of Italy Evelyn had a profound experience of transcendent Reality, presented mainly in the forms of Catholicism. It is no wonder that in 1904 she described Italy as “the holy land of Europe – the only place left, I suppose, that is really medicinal to the soul”. When she added that “there is a type of Mind which must go there to find itself”, she was clearly speaking of herself. Dana Greene has written, “Italy changed her life; it taught her that beauty was a way to the infinite life for which she longed”.

In 1902 Evelyn came to Umbria for the first time. Over the next twenty-two years she returned many times, visiting Perugia, Assisi, Spello, Gubbio, Orvieto, Spoleto and, of course, Todi – and no doubt other towns and places of which she has left no record. It was Assisi that had the greatest impact on her. In 1902 she wrote in her diary that “Assisi is well called La Beata for its soul is more manifest than any other city that I have ever known”. Five years later she wrote that “Assisi has a quality which distinguishes her from any other city in the world, as S. Francis has a quality which distinguishes him from all others but the King of Saints Himself”. Like many others before and since,

Evelyn was quickly attracted by the figure of Francis. In 1908 she wrote “I do not believe anyone ever lived a more perfectly Christian life than he did”. Francis figures in her great work on Mysticism, perhaps more often than any other individual. She also wrote about a distinctive tradition of Franciscan mysticism, inspired by Francis himself, in which the two greatest figures were also Umbrian, Jacopone da Todi and Angela da Foligno.

Evelyn’s experiences in Italy led to a growing interest in Catholicism although arguably, the attraction was more aesthetic – perhaps even romantic – than theological. For a woman who still thought of herself, technically, as an agnostic, it is remarkable how easily she accepted and adopted the language of spirituality and devotion. By 1907, when Evelyn considered herself to have definitively ‘converted’ from agnosticism to Christianity, she was seriously contemplating becoming a Catholic. Undoubtedly, this was largely due to her experiences in Italy. Ultimately Evelyn never became a Catholic, but had no interest in joining any other church. So, while she directed her energies to the production of her great work on Mysticism, she herself remained disconnected from any Christian denomination.

Her ideas of mysticism at this point owed more to Plotinus and Neo-Platonism than to orthodox Christianity and tended towards individualism, excessive intellectualism and an other-worldly dualism. But Umbria had given her a deep attraction to Francis and Franciscan spirituality which would challenge this Neo-Platonic thinking.

The war years from 1914 to 1918 brought Evelyn to a spiritual crisis and forced her to confront both the limitations of her Neo-Platonic view of spirituality and her isolation from institutional Christianity. It was just at this point that she began work on her biography of Jacopone and this had a profound influence on her personally. Jacopone’s humanity and passion contrasted with the austere, other-worldly mysticism of Plotinus. In Jacopone “she saw the world-denying tendency of the Neo-Platonist overcome by the world-affirming orientation of the Franciscan”. Jacopone’s faithfulness to both the Catholic church and the Franciscan order, despite his struggles with both institutions, may also have been significant in the development of Evelyn’s thinking about her own relationship with institutional Christianity.

Whether coincidentally or not, another Umbrian and Franciscan connection also became very important for Evelyn at this time. Around 1919 or 1920 Evelyn came into contact with Sorella Maria of Campello, a Franciscan nun who was establishing a small and radically unusual community of women living together in the spirit of Francis. Evelyn and Sorella Maria became regular correspondents and confidantes, although they did not actually meet until 1924, at her Rifugio near Campello sul Clitunno in Umbria. Through Sorella Maria, Evelyn became part of the ‘Spiritual Entente’ an informal ecumenical network of people from different backgrounds who were committed to seeking God within their own Christian traditions and to praying for each other and for Christian unity. This was perhaps Evelyn’s first real experience of committed Christian fellowship and it may have helped her to take another decisive step in her journey. Sometime around 1920, Evelyn decided to become an active member of the Church of England – the church into which she had been born but which had never, until then, played any part in her life. Evelyn’s career changed radically after 1920. In spite of the great achievement of her work on mysticism, her more pastoral ministry in the last twenty years of her life is probably her greatest achievement and her greatest legacy.

Curiously, it seems that Italy no longer figured in her life in these final years and her final visit to Italy appears to have been in 1925. Perhaps by then Italy and Umbria had served their purpose in her life – she had learned what she needed to learn from Italy and as a result, her spirituality and her career had changed profoundly. Ironically, it is on her last visit to Umbria, in September 1924, that she finally came to Todi, to see the tomb of Jacopone. Sadly, she was unable to do this as the crypt of the church of San Fortunato was closed. She had to be content with looking at a picture of Jacopone, “very chubby and curly and holding his heart” which she described as “simply detestable”. Of Todi itself she had only a few words to say, but I will leave you with these: “We drove to Todi yesterday. What a place!”



IN MEMORIAM

Milo Coerper, co-founder of the Evelyn Underhill Association (EUA), died at age ninety-four. Born in Milwaukee, WI he graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy, served in the navy, and in 1954 received a law degree from the University of Michigan. Later he was awarded a Ph.D. in Political Science and Philosophy from Georgetown University and joined the international law firm of Coudert Brothers serving as the managing partner of its Washington, D.C. office. While practicing law he was ordained as an Episcopal priest. He served as priest for a small parish and as a volunteer chaplain at the Washington National Cathedral where he helped establish the Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage. In addition to founding the EUA and serving as its treasurer for many years, he was also active in the World Community of Christian Meditators and the Canterbury Cathedral Trust. Milo Coerper, who deeply admired Evelyn Underhill, will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Work for the Soul: Medievalism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the Development of a Practical Spirituality in Evelyn Underhill's Novel *The Gray World*

by Carla Arnell, Lake Forest College

This essay suggests that a deeper understanding of the relationship between artistry and spirituality in Evelyn Underhill's work depends upon examining how the Arts and Crafts movement, as a vehicle for translating and modernizing idealized aspects of medieval culture, shaped Underhill's novels and, ultimately, her unique spiritual ethos. Her fiction is everywhere marked by medievalism and, more specifically, by the Arts and Crafts movement's distinctive reception of medieval culture. A study of Underhill's complex response to the Arts and Crafts movement illuminates why she sees God as a tool maker and the human soul as a craftsman for whom the material things of this world – architecture, stained glass, jewelry, books – can become vehicles for making this life meaningful and for practically accessing the beauty of a divine Reality beyond. I argue, therefore, that key aspects of the Arts and Crafts movement's moral aesthetic define the practical spirituality in Underhill's novels, prefiguring the sacramental turn of her later writings.

Published in *Studies in Medievalism XXVIII: Medievalism and Discrimination*, Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019, pp. 53-76.

Beyond the Fringe of Speech: The Spirituality of Evelyn Underhill and Art

by M. T. Crowley

2008 Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University

The written works of the English religious writer, spiritual director and exponent of Christian spirituality, Evelyn Underhill (1875 - 1941), contain numerous references to visual art and church architecture. This thesis explores the influence of art on her spirituality by examining her interpretation and understanding of various works of religious art, cathedrals, churches and chapels. The controlling methodology of the thesis is within the discipline of spirituality. This hermeneutical approach, which seeks to investigate and understand the phenomena of the Christian spiritual life as experience, is structured on three processes: observation and description of the phenomena under investigation, critical analysis of the data, and constructive interpretation of its transformative and integrational character. The study presents Underhill's early life, reading and education within the Anglican tradition as the backdrop against which her appreciation for art and knowledge of Christianity developed. This knowledge came to life through the experience of Continental Europe and in particular the galleries and churches of Italy and France. While there her sensitive and intuitive personality enabled Underhill to be drawn into the beauty and mystery of visual art and church buildings. In that experience, she came to a new awareness of God. The thesis traces Underhill's encounter with fourteen works of art, one cathedral and several churches and chapels. It follows the process of how these shaped her experience, stirred her imagination and informed her thinking so that they gradually became a foundation on which she established her particular understanding of God and the spiritual life. The investigation approaches her encounters with art by examining their influence on her concept of God, on her perception of Jesus Christ and on her understanding of the Holy Spirit. This leads her to a personal understanding of God as the Creative Spirit. This particular perception, together with her experience of art, enables Underhill to recognise a structure within the spiritual life of grace and desire that is enabled by the gifts of the Creative Spirit and expressed through adoration, communion and cooperation. Integral to this progression in Underhill's spirituality is the gradual process of life integration through self-transcendence evident in her spiritual journey and which this thesis traces and develops. Informed by intuition and experience rather than by theological concepts, doctrinal statements or scripture, Underhill never developed a systematic theological structure. The thesis investigates the implications of this on Underhill's spirituality, particularly in reference to her understanding of the Trinity. The thesis argues that although she was aware of the more formal aspects of Christian teaching, in her understanding of the spiritual life Underhill placed more emphasis on image and place. While the focus of the thesis is the influence

of art on Underhill's spirituality, this inquiry draws also on those determining aspects of her life, of the circumstances and events of the times and of religion in general which were formative of her spirituality. Thus at times throughout the project there is an overlap of philosophy, theology, anthropology, epistemology and aesthetics - all of which are at the service of the overarching methodology of spirituality. The thesis concludes with the contention that while visual art was not the only guiding inspiration in Underhill's spirituality, it was a major influence on her spiritual development, on her understanding of the spiritual life and on her teaching.

New and Noteworthy

Michael Stoeber "Mystical Concepts, Artistic Contexts" in *Mystical Landscapes from Vincent Van Gogh to Emily Carr*. Ed. Katherine Lochnan. NY: Del Monico Books, 2016. This article contains extensive consideration of Underhill's understanding of mysticism.

Evelyn Underhill's *The Spiritual Life* has been translated into Dutch as *Spirituele Leven. Mystiek voor het dagelijks bestaan*. KokBoekencentrum, Translated by Renata Barnard and Marga Haas. 2019. € 15,99. E-book: € 9,99.

Jacopone Da Todi, Poet and Mystic, 1228-1306 has been translated into Italian as *Jacopone Da Todi, Poeta E Mistico, 1228-1306* by Claudio e Massimo Peri, Todi: TAU Editrice, 2019.

Ann Loades, "Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941): Mysticism in Fiction," eds. Judith Maltby and Alison Shell. *Anglican Women Novelists. Charlotte Bronte to P. D. James*. London: New T & T Clark) 2019, 73-84.

Sr. Mary O'Connor, *The Reluctant Anglican? Evelyn Underhill, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, and Institutional Religion*. M.A. thesis. Monash University, Australia, 1997.

On Saturday, December 14th, Hampstead Parish Church, London, will sponsor a symposium on Evelyn Underhill and Anglicanism. The symposium is a direct response to the community's growing interest in Underhill's work and life. Contact: Ayla@hampsteadparishchurch.org.uk for details.

"Plunging into Reality: Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair and Adventures in Practical Mysticism" by Alice Theobald. <https://maysinclair society.com/?s=EVELYN+UNDERHILL>

The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill by Robyn Wrigley-Carr, SPCK Publishing, UK. Forthcoming, Mar. 2020.

Hampstead Parish Church is renovating the grave of Evelyn Underhill. If you would like to contribute to this important project, please make checks payable to Hampstead Parish Church, % Rev. Ayla Lepine, Church Row, London NW3 6UU. Check in dollars are acceptable.

Mystic Moderns: Agency and Enchantment in Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair, and Mary Webb by James Thrall. Forthcoming from Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2019.

A Different Kind of Christmas List

Catherine Ann Lombard

Most of us are familiar with writing Christmas Lists. As children we might have been encouraged by our parents to write to Santa Claus, sending him our list of desired gifts. We might have also been told that Santa Claus kept his own “list of who’s naughty and nice.” As we became adults enmeshed in the frenetic holiday craziness, our Christmas lists probably became more numerous and less imaginative – lists of things to do, presents to buy, and greeting cards to send.

Recently, with the help of my friend and colleague Georgie, I discovered that the Christian mystic and writer Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) also wrote a Christmas list – but a kind I had never seen before. In the archives of King’s College London, you can read three pages of her own notes which she entitled “Rule. Christmas 1921.” Her handwriting is evenly spaced and full of sensuous loops and curves. She occasionally underlines, and even double underlines words for emphasis. Underhill’s Christmas list contains her spiritual goals for leading a Christian life, to be tested and practiced by herself for six months – “quietly and steadily, with a disposition to find them true even where uncongenial.”

I have transcribed her Rule for you. Underhill wrote this list ten years after her best-selling book *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* had been published. She had just returned to practicing her Anglican faith and was starting to conduct retreats. In all likelihood, Underhill wrote the list under the guidance of her own spiritual director Baron Friedrich von Hügel, whom she said was “the most wonderful personality ... so saintly, truthful, sane and tolerant.” He encouraged her to engage in more charitable, down-to-earth activities, which is evident in her list where she dedicates two days a week to working with the poor (#2 in the list) and fixes a time for “daily, deliberate prayer” (#5).

Upon studying this Rule more closely, I was impressed with a number of things. First of all, it has inspired me to write my own “Rule. Christmas 2018.” I sat down with writing paper and pen and came up with a list of items to be “dealt with”, as Underhill writes, “not by direct fighting but by gently turning to God or thoughts of serenely loving Saints.” This makes me smile as I know myself well enough. Inevitably, a part of me inside will end up kicking and screaming in protest, while another part gently and serenely turns to God and those loving Saints for help. (I hope this blog might also inspire you to write your own list.)

The second thing that I noticed is that Underhill called her list a “Rule.” Not a list of “rules” but a Rule, similarly to what is known as The Rule of Saint Benedict. When she visited Sorella Maria in Italy, she referred to the community as:

“... a little group of women who are trying to bring back to modern existence the homely, deeply supernatural and

quite unmonastic ideal of the Primitive Rule.”

This use of the word “Rule” instead of “rules” seems to be a more open, discriminatory way of dealing with life as opposed to hard, fast rules that don’t allow for unforeseen conditions and our human frailty.

Finally, I would like to zoom in on just one of the items in Underhill’s list because it strikes me as particularly relevant to the Christmas message. Keep in mind that these are notes written for one, possibly two, readers only – herself and perhaps von Hügel, so her thoughts are not as fully developed as they might be otherwise.

“Keep in mind the fact that since spiritual perception without some sense of stimulation is a psychological impossibility, there is no exclusively spiritual apprehension of spiritual reality. Human and historical contacts are essential to its fullness. Entirely mystical and purely non-successive religion is a dangerous abstraction from reality.”

Further religiously, the human soul requires God’s own descent to and into it – the whole way – in human and homely forms and ways, rather than its ascent to Him. This alone gives a religion sufficiently homely and humbling. This means God manifested in history, grades of Divine self-revelation. At the apex, difference of degree issuing in difference of kind, we reach the deepest and fullest self-abasement of God as expressed in the Incarnation and the Cross. Full religion demands a temper of mind able to grasp and assimilate this.”

In this passage, Underhill longs to reinforce within her own soul the essential fact that one can only really know God through the material world. Our “soul requires God’s own descent to and into it – the whole way.” Mysticism alone “is a dangerous abstraction from reality.” For us to really touch the Divine Essence of God and our own divine being, God’s spirit must flood our lives and all that exists around us. When we strive only to ascend to God, we are left ungrounded, spiritually hungry and floating in an abstract world that denies our “homely” and vulnerable humanness. Spirit is always searching for matter. As human beings, we need stories, myth, ritual, our bodies, and matter to truly integrate and manifest our spiritual nature. We must allow God’s Light and Love to enter “to and into” our bodies and our hearts, as well as our souls.

This incarnation is essentially the Christmas story. The story of God’s descent in and into the woman called Maryam, the child called Jesus, the world called Earth. The Christmas story promises that – in the muck of the manger, in the homely and humblest of places, in the glory of all our human vulnerability and powerlessness – God does descend to and into us all.

<https://loveandwill.com/2018/12/28/a-different-kind-of-christmas-list/>

Mystical Concepts, Artistic Contexts

Michael Stoeber, Regis College and the University of Toronto
m.stoeber@utoronto.ca

Mysticism, like *spirituality*, is a vague word in contemporary culture, used in multiple ways in diverse settings. It can stand for anything esoteric, mysterious, otherworldly or occult-like, and is often used in reference to exceptionally strong aesthetic and religious feelings. This usage has been the norm in modern times. In 1911 Evelyn Underhill, an influential British scholar of mysticism, noted this ambiguity and described mysticism as “the science or art of the spiritual life,” suggesting this to be its older, traditional meaning.¹ However, even this characterization is not very helpful in and of itself, insofar as it is a general one and does not draw a clear distinction between mysticism and other aspects of the spiritual life.

I will clarify Underhill’s more specific understandings of mysticism below. However, in the earlier modern development of the term, *mysticism* had pejorative connotations in some circles in eighteenth-century England, where it was used in reference to the devotional fervour or enthusiasm of some rather unorthodox contemplatives, which diverged from the more acceptable worship and feelings associated with traditional religion. Perhaps the most prominent aspect of mysticism in its modern sense is that it is a spiritual experience that can stand apart from institutional religion. Indeed, the noun *mysticism* was coined only in seventeenth-century France. Prior to this time, there existed just an adjectival form, drawn from the Greek *mystikos*, meaning “secret,” “hidden” or “private,” which qualified certain scriptures, rituals and theology of the Christian religion as “mystical.” These various contexts of religion functioned to engage an adherent in an unusually intimate (“mystical”) relationship with and awareness of the Christian God.

Scholars tend to think that the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century most influenced the modern development of mysticism. He located it outside of any specific religion, suggesting that mysticism is the essence of all religions, as an immediate consciousness of “the infinite world” that underlies normal sensory experience, cognition and natural phenomena.² Mysticism came to be understood as a special kind of intuitive or transcendent spiritual experience that is relatively uncommon but open to everyone (not just to monks and nuns), and can stand quite apart from institutional religion and the normal mediums of religious experience—such as scripture, ritual, liturgy—even if it is also found in relation to these traditional aspects of religion. The historian Michel de Certeau has noted that the modern meaning of mysticism indicates a resistance on the part of laypeople to sacred institutions and clerical authorities, while Don Cupitt, a theologian and philosopher, claims that mysticism has always been “a subversive and transgressive kind of writing.”³

Despite the acknowledgement of an orthodox mysticism that develops out of and in conformity with traditional religions, scholars have paid much attention to what was perceived as the tendency of mysticism to involve excesses and distortions, such as the overstressing of special revelation, self-effort, individual insight and authority, spiritual

elitism, non-rational emotionalism and quietism. This is true of Robert Alfred Vaughan's 1856 two-volume survey-dialogue, *Hours with the Mystics*, in which he gives some criticism of mystical traditions, while proposing one of the earliest classifications of these spiritual movements. Vaughan, an English Congregationalist minister, thought that all major religions included mystics, atypical people who experience religious sentiment in a special way, as a more direct or immediate relationship with the divine than occurs in normal religious encounters. Vaughan describes a common mystical core across traditions, despite the variations in doctrine and belief, and a wide variety of types: Greek, Neoplatonist, Latin, English, Oriental, quietist, Spanish, German, Persian, theosophist and Swedenborgian.⁴ The 1858 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives a similar classification system.⁵

Sources of Mysticism

A modern sense of mysticism was therefore already developing by the 1850s, even if there was no agreement on exactly what mysticism comprised. It was thought that the phenomenon could be found throughout history, within diverse religious traditions and spiritual movements, and that mystics were independent spirits who mistrusted institutional authority and tended to flirt with heterodoxy in their claims of intuitive spiritual insight and unusual inspiration. This understanding of mysticism as beyond and apart from traditional religious institutions was highlighted in the nineteenth century by the developments of transcendentalism and the Theosophical Society.

The New England transcendental movement highlighted a pantheistic nature mysticism that was influenced by the American writers Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us," observes Emerson, emphasizing both the potential redemptive divinity of humanity and the presence of spirit in the natural world.⁶ Familiar with certain Hindu traditions as well as with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Emanuel Swedenborg and other sources, Emerson writes about an "over-soul" of humanity that corresponds to an eternal "One," within which everything is mystically interconnected. Beauty holds a special place in Emerson's teachings, which advocate self-reliance, improvement and spiritual transformation while striving to impart an intuitive perception that would allow his readers to appreciate nature's connection to its source in spirit.

One can see why Emerson's aesthetic vision would appeal to mystically inclined landscape artists. He writes, for example, of his own transfigured perception of the natural world:

Nature satisfies the soul purely by its loveliness, and without any mixture of corporeal benefit. I have seen the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from day-break to sun-rise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements!⁷

For Emerson, creation is intimately and ontologically linked with its creator: the human person is a microcosm of macrocosmic divinity, and nature "is faithful to the cause whence it had its origin. It always speaks of Spirit.

It suggests the absolute. It is a perpetual effect. It is a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us.”⁸ Great landscape painters give provocative voice to this spiritual source or reality.

Some themes explored by the Theosophical Society paralleled transcendentalist ideas in significant respects, but involved more systematic speculation. Modern theosophists also more explicitly examined the topic of art in their spirituality. Like transcendentalism, theosophy is not really a religion but a discipline or school of thought, one that was perhaps even more syncretic in origin, drawing on Buddhist, hermetic, occult and Hindu sources. Although it shows some affinities with general aspects of spiritualism—a movement that focused on the communication of spiritual mediums with special guides who were thought to inhabit a complex and rather dynamic spiritual world—the Theosophical Society’s leaders were critical of the spiritualist movement. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, C.W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant were important theosophical figures and writers. In their well-known book *Thought-Forms*, Leadbeater and Besant clarify the diverse emotions, affections and thought-forms (such as high spirituality, love, fear, depression, intellect and so on) associated with specific colours and simple forms. They assert that these thought-forms are not dependent on the environmental contexts or subjective preferences of individuals, but rather derive from subtle, objective vibrations of spiritual energy that clairvoyants can literally see and that the rest of us can feel.

Influenced by the Theosophical Society, the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky proposed a similar type of charting of objective colour-meanings, which he thought to be dependent on underlying planes of reality. He claimed that in their creative endeavours, perceptive artists intuitively access these deeper spiritual levels, which then inform their work. Colours, he writes, “produce a correspondent spiritual vibration, and it is only as a step towards this spiritual vibration that the physical impression is of importance.”⁹ Kandinsky saw the colour blue as having special capacities with respect to awakening a person to his or her spiritual source and transformation; blue is “the typical heavenly color,” through which “a call to the infinite, a desire for purity and transcendence” becomes “more intense and characteristic” the deeper the tonal qualities of the hue.¹⁰

Besant and Leadbeater also proposed that certain kinds of blues, blue/red mixtures and soft reds denote high spirituality and devotional and positive religious feelings, and even Goethe, who was more concerned with “moral” effects when he developed his theories of colour about a century earlier, noticed how blue always seems to retreat from us, drawing the observer toward it: “It has an extraordinary, almost indescribable effect on the eye. As colour, it is a force; but it is on the negative side, and in its greatest purity is comparable to a stimulating nothingness. It gives the impression at one and the same time, of stimulation and calm.”¹¹ In contrast, Goethe and the theosophists believed that brown, dull brown-grey, scarlet red and lurid red colours betoken negative, disquieting or even disturbing emotions, thoughts and attitudes. However, insofar as different colours and varied tonal qualities affect one another in formal relation and contrast, the dynamics of colour theory are extremely complex, and as such, allow for a tremendous variety of spiritual vibrations (and their concomitant affects) to be represented in different paintings, depending on the synthetic mix of colour and its form of presentation.

The significant point here for theosophists is that artists in their creative synthesis of colour and form-composition

draw on the tools of this sensory-material plane or level of existence in representing other, underlying spiritual planes of reality. These include a “vital” realm of feelings, desires and life-energies or force (Astral); the spiritual “forms” that structure and make intelligible the material-sensory world, either sensory/intellectual (Mental) or archetypal (Buddhi); and the even more refined spiritual levels associated with the creative spirit (Atma-Nirvana), to which one is spiritually linked at the deepest level of her or his being.¹² Great artists are able to tap intuitively into these underlying spiritual planes, to transform and communicate their content creatively in their art, revealing in profound sensory-material ways these powerful and enchanting realities.

In theosophy, the human person is conceived as an amalgam of these various planes of reality, and the religious ideal is to realize one’s personal core, united with the spiritual source, in creative integration with the rest of reality. According to theosophists, artists play a significant role in stimulating people spiritually, through their ability to represent higher reality in a captivating and inspiring manner. C. Jinarajadasa, a prolific theosophical writer, describes this aesthetic dynamic: “Whenever there is a soaring to the Buddhist plane, there is at once a return, and a flood of Buddhi descends on the consciousness. It is this descent which always characterises art in its true manifestations.”¹³ Similarly, the Canadian painter Lawren Harris believed art to be the “high training of the soul, essential to its growth, to its unfoldment,” while Kandinsky remarks, “The spiritual life, to which art belongs, and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex but definite and easily definable movement above and beyond.” Art “must be directed to the development and refinement of the human soul, to raising the triangle of the spirit.”¹⁴

Themes of the Theosophical Society were of interest to a number of artists, including Paul Gauguin, Fernand Khnopff, Hilma af Klint and Paul Sérusier, while aspects of both theosophy and transcendentalism influenced Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, Jock Macdonald, Arthur Dove and Georgia O’Keeffe. Theosophists and transcendentalists, then, draw non-Christian religious ideas into their spiritual context, some of which support the very possibility of a “mystical” landscape painting in the West. Prior to this period, Christianity had been dominated by the doctrine of the primordial “fall” of nature, which, with some exceptions, such as one finds with Franciscan spirituality, tended to de-spiritualize and even condemn the natural world as defective and corrupt. Indigenous religions and Asian religious traditions, meanwhile, generally took a much more positive stance toward nature. Preliterate primal traditions presumed a fundamental interdependence among all aspects of the natural world, which led to a pronounced reverence for and intimacy with nature, while Taoism and Chan Buddhism in China, for example, for a thousand years celebrated a kind of spiritual naturalism in their art. As the English author and philosopher Aldous Huxley writes, “In their art not less than in their religion, the Taoists and Zen Buddhists looked beyond visions to the Void, and through the Void at ‘the ten thousand things’ of objective reality.” Huxley describes the “Suchness” (*tathatā*) of the dharma body in Chan/Zen Buddhism: the experience of aspects of the natural world as they really are fundamentally, in their paradoxical, essential impermanence—the eternal reality of the Buddha’s nature that is the origin of the natural world and becomes present to those who have realized enlightened consciousness. The artistic genius is able to appreciate “the glory and wonder of pure existence”; she or he finds “the vision that sees the Dharma-body as the hedge at the bottom of the garden,” as Huxley puts it:¹⁵ “Knowing that he can never create anything on his own account, out of the top layers, so to speak, of his personal consciousness, [the great artist] submits obediently to the workings of ‘inspiration.’”¹⁶

A number of Western artists were significantly affected by Buddhist and primal religious ideas. For example, Marsden Hartley, Frederick Varley, Jock Macdonald and Claude Monet were influenced by Buddhist themes, while Emily Carr was interested in the indigenous religions of the Northwest Coast, and Georgia O’Keeffe in Navajo spirituality. Paul Gauguin studied Peruvian and Polynesian culture, and Paul Sérusier explored Druidism. However, the key point here is that by the end of the nineteenth century the concept of “mysticism” drew on diverse historical threads from a number of traditions and spiritual movements, including religions of the East (Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism), transcendentalism, the Theosophical Society, indigenous primal religions, Judaism and Christianity. Moreover, in their effect on the modern development of mysticism, these latter two religious traditions feature traces of esoteric spirituality (Merkabah mysticism, Kabbalah, hermeticism, alchemy and the occult), as well as the more orthodox sources in the history of Christian spirituality, such as the writings of Saint Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of Saint Victor, Saint Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, Blessed Jan van Ruusbroec, Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa of Ávila, Saint John of the Cross, Jakob Böhme and George Fox, to name just a few of the more prominent figures.

The Marks, Experiences and Processes of Mysticism

Evelyn Underhill had some knowledge of these diverse sources, having even participated for at least a few years in a secret hermetic society that dabbled in an esoteric spirituality coloured by Christian interests emphasizing spiritual transformation.¹⁷ She also wrote an introduction to and helped to translate a book of poetry by the fifteenth-century North Indian mystic Kabīr, and provided an introduction for the autobiography of the nineteenth-century Hindu philosopher and reformer Maharshi Devendranath Tagore.¹⁸ Underhill thus brought a dynamic and eclectic background in spirituality to bear on her many influential books on the topic of mysticism.¹⁹ Other significant scholars writing about mysticism in the early twentieth century included Rufus Jones, a Quaker; Friedrich von Hügel, a lay Roman Catholic; Edward Cuthbert Butler, a Benedictine monk; and William Ralph Inge, an Anglican priest.²⁰ But none of these authors was as popular as Underhill, a lay Anglican scholar who herself almost converted to Roman Catholicism at the beginning of her immersion in Christian mysticism. Underhill was especially attracted to the liturgical ritual of the Catholic faith, as well as to its rich tradition of contemplative spirituality, which she tended to interpret in the light of her understanding of mysticism. She was also very interested in art and wrote a substantial essay on art and mysticism.²¹

In clarifying the stages of development for the person who undergoes the transformative processes associated with mysticism, Underhill tended to focus on psychological dynamics. She was influenced by many mystics and theorists of mysticism, including the philosopher and psychologist William James, and his famous account of the common characteristics or “marks” of mysticism. Mystical experiences are analogous to feeling-sensations, in that they must be directly felt in order to be known, and are thus not easily or properly describable. Nevertheless, these experiences are characterized by a “noetic” quality that includes intuitive insights or illuminations that are authoritative for the mystic, even if they remain largely inexpressible and associated with structural paradoxes and oppositions. Mystical experiences are “transient”: altered states of consciousness that are intermittent and of limited duration, wherein

a person is not involved in normal intentional and social contexts. And, finally, although they require a profound “passivity”—a radical self-surrender—they are markedly affective: the personal will becomes opened, inspired and directed by a higher power.²²

Underhill added to James’s marks of mysticism, emphasizing its personal and experiential qualities—its practical focus on the transcendental and spiritual world rather than on the sensory, social and material aspects of life. She also insisted that true mysticism tends to accentuate love in its relation to this spiritual absolute, and is oriented toward a total transformation or transmutation of the self in union with it.²³ In her writing, Underhill focuses on individuals who perceive mysticism to be a life vocation rather than an unusual spiritual experience that happens occasionally.

Significantly, Underhill distinguishes five major phases of a transformative mystical dynamic, which include specific processes and experiences that converge and overlap but that might be elaborated as in the section that follows here. According to Underhill, a person typically experiences an “awakening” to the mystic life in a conversion experience that includes a radical sense of “God immanent in the universe,” as well as an awareness of her or his own inhibitions and distortions that hamper such a profound consciousness of spirit in nature. She or he then undertakes moral and ascetic disciplines (“purgation”) and engages in practices such as yoga or prayer postures and movements, petitionary prayer, visionary reflections or disciplined contemplative prayer or meditation. The person works to cultivate attitudes and states of mind that support an inward movement of consciousness, especially humility, simplicity and radical passivity. The goal is egoic detachment from conflicting interests, passions and desires, allowing a receptivity to non-sensory and non-cognitive realizations of a higher underlying self and its relation to spiritual reality.

Depending on the intentions, openness and level of spiritual progress of the person, the contemplative “illumination” identified by Underhill as the third of her five stages, can take a variety of forms, including these:

Contemplative awareness. A “joyous apprehension of the Absolute” in contemplative, inward-oriented or introvertive realizations.²⁴ This is typically accompanied by what Donald Evans, a Canadian philosopher and mystic, calls an “appreciative awareness” that everything is “wondrous and radiant and harmonious and good—in an ultimate sense of ‘good’ which transcends our usual dichotomy between good and evil.” So, Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century English anchoress, claims with the authority of such contemplative awareness, that “all things shall be well... You shall see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well.”²⁵

Visionary experiences. The play of imagination in contemplative reflection. These are unusual or paranormal kinds of experiences that come in the form of images or voices in dreams, prayer or meditative repose. They might include visions of popular religious figures or narrative stories; various kinds of spiritual presences; or automatic writings. Saint Augustine influentially proposed *visio* as a basic mystical category and *visio spiritualis* (imagination) as a key medium for both mystical experience and art. Julian of Norwich’s famous “Showings” highlight especially her visions of Jesus

in his passion and redemption, while Saint Hildegard of Bingen is noted especially for her thematic visions, such as the Universe, Universal Man, Motherhood, and the Choirs of Angels, which she described and interpreted in detail and which were subsequently illuminated.²⁶

Nature mysticism or cosmic consciousness. The heightening of an outward-oriented sensory awareness, which includes a sense of unitive spirit in nature, along with a sense of one's higher self permeating the natural world. Underhill writes, "In [William] Blake's words 'the doors of perception are cleansed' so that everything appears to [humanity] as it *is*, infinite." The thirteenth-century Franciscan theologian Saint Bonaventure insists that all creatures possess "a refulgence of the divine exemplar," which can transport the mystic who becomes aware of this underlying essence out of darkness into the light of God.²⁷ So Pope Francis writes, "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things."²⁸

Contemplative quiet. Silent, static and radically passive contemplative states of "quiet" involving the "almost complete suspension of the reflective faculties," which have become "recollected" or gathered into the higher self. Madame Guyon, a late-seventeenth-century French authority on contemplative prayer, was unjustly imprisoned in the Bastille for over seven years for her teachings on this experience. She spoke influentially of a radically passive and tranquil form of consciousness: the mystic retreats deeply inward, to rest in openness and silence in God's enfolding and rejuvenating presence.²⁹

According to Underhill and other writers, beyond these conditions of illuminated consciousness (the four outlined above), which are largely within the means of the mystics' own powers and resources, are higher stages of infused contemplation and the unitive life, where the absolute is "apprehended by way of participation, not by way of observation," in experiences that are *given* to the mystic through grace rather than *attained* via her or his own efforts. At this point, Underhill distinguishes further types of experiences:

Rapture. Abnormal trance-states of consciousness that include highly charged and fantastic ecstatic components of vitally invigorating and enlivening "joyous exaltation." Underhill calls this unitive condition the "inebriation of the Infinite"—a "spiritual storm" that in its most extreme form can involve highly pronounced feelings of levitation and can leave the mystic extremely disoriented and distracted for days. Describing these experiences, Saint Teresa of Ávila wrote about passionately ecstatic mystical transports or forceful movements beyond oneself, realizations of numinous light, and even painful mystical affliction—an "enraptured" torment that eventually finds its compensation in renewing consolation.³⁰

The dark night. Spiritual desolation, wherein the mystic loses all sense of intimate support, relation

or unity with the spiritual reality that she or he previously enjoyed. She or he succumbs to profound feelings of inadequacy and isolation characterized by deep depression, dread, anxiety, darkness, deprivation, chaos and misery that can last for months or even years. Saint John of the Cross—a close friend of Saint Teresa of Ávila’s—who was imprisoned and brutally punished by his Carmelite brothers for his reforming work, is a primary source on this difficult dynamic. He distinguishes between trials in the purification of the senses and the harsher struggles of the dark night of the soul—where the mystic feels wholly lost and utterly abandoned by the spirit she or he had previously known in mystical rapture and communion.³¹ Underhill interprets this as an extreme aspect of the mystic’s ongoing struggle to renounce and overcome her or his inherent self-centredness.

Contemplative unity. Wherein the purgative features of the experience of the dark night find their transformative fruition in a spiritual unification with the absolute that is much more stable and continuous than the union that occurs in rapture. According to Underhill, the account of this experience can take two major forms, depending on the person’s theological interpretive framework: *cataphatic*, a personal and theistic imagery of self-fulfillment in beloved union with a divine being; or *apophatic*, a language of absorption in a non-personal transcendent absolute or divine essence. So Richard of Saint Victor, the thirteenth-century prior and theologian of the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris, characterizes the contemplative unity in passionate, sensual terms, as a romance between Jesus and the mystic (betrothal, marriage, wedlock, and conjugal fruitfulness). In contrast, Jan van Ruusbroec, a fourteenth-century Flemish mystic, describes a dark and unconditioned “waylessness of God” that “swallows” the mystic up in an “essential unity.”³²

Theopathic life. The person in an authentic mystical union “submits to the inflow of its supernal vitality,” giving creative and individual expression to spiritual reality in her or his daily active life.³³ The unitive dynamic involves a harmonious sharing of the qualities and powers of the divine. Meister Eckhart, the early-fourteenth-century German theologian, philosopher and mystic, for example, stressed the inherent creativity, compassion and justice of God, which find their unique manifestation or outflow in our world in the life and actions of people who identify with these qualities of the Godhead in a radically open and unitive fashion.³⁴

Issues and Topics of Concern

Underhill’s theoretical account has been influential and helpful in giving a coherent voice to key features of mysticism, although some readers have taken issue with what they perceive to be its lack of attention to the socio-cultural context of the mystics on whom she drew, as well as its bias toward Christian and theistic mysticism. For example, Huxley agreed with Underhill’s “essentialist” perspective—that mysticism is a common core of religions across cultures and history even though there are major interpretive differences that arise from divergent socio-religious accounts. He developed a thesis of “perennial philosophy” in a popular anthology that illustrates parallels of doctrine, experiential phenomenology, psychology, personal transformation, symbols and practice across a

much wider variety of religions than Underhill.³⁵ Huxley also tended to conceive of ultimate reality as a kind of absolute non-dual oneness or unity, without personal and moral referents, which is more in line with certain Hindu conceptions of nirguna (qualityless) Brahman and differs considerably from Underhill's Christian perspective.

The philosopher W.T. Stace takes this perspective of mysticism even further, suggesting in the 1950s that “the central characteristic in which all *fully developed* mystical experiences agree...is that they involve the apprehension of *an ultimate nonsensuous unity of all things*, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate.” He argues provocatively that mysticism is “not a religious phenomenon at all and...its connection with religions is subsequent and even adventitious.”³⁶ At the core of the phenomenon is a common monistic experience, although descriptive accounts can diverge considerably owing to the socio-cultural differences between religious traditions.

Given the apparent distinction between mystical experience and religion, Stace's and Huxley's conceptions of mysticism also raise questions about the moral status of mystics and their relation to social action, especially as there are controversial claims by some mystics that their enlightened consciousness of higher unitive reality transcends the normal moral responsibilities and obligations associated with this differentiated and mutable social world. Some mystics speak of moving beyond good and evil (and the norms and obligations these entail) and identifying with a non-dual reality that is non-moral and static.³⁷

Some theorists and mystics have also claimed provocatively that mystical consciousness can be stimulated by the consumption of drugs. In 1925 James Leuba, an American psychologist, explored in some detail the dynamics of mystical ecstasy in relation to such physical sources.³⁸ Huxley's famous account of his mescaline experiences in his 1954 book *The Doors of Perception* further supported claims by some mystics and scholars that hallucinogenic substances such as LSD, mescaline, psilocybin mushrooms, peyote and ayahuasca open a person up to a range of significant unconscious materials and perhaps even to trans- or inter-subjective spiritual realities through the bypassing of normal sensory/cognitive filters.³⁹ Such psychotropic drugs—called entheogens (“mind-altering substances that ‘generate’ a sense of sacredness within”)—are thought to function in the manner of traditional techniques of mysticism, such as disciplined meditation, yoga postures and movements, visionary and contemplative prayer, and ascetic practices.⁴⁰

In the area of cognitive theory, some researchers have explored the electro-chemical brain states associated with mystical contemplation, finding evidence that they claim may demonstrate the existence of a mystical neurological substrate. Studies using neuroimaging techniques such as electroencephalogram (EEG) testing, single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have shown that specific regions and pathways of the brain seem to be directly related to mystical experience, as Andrew Baines writes (see page XX). The question remains whether mystical experience arises from the human encounter with spiritual realities independent of the person, or is a strictly subjective and purely natural phenomenon. Some theorists in the area of psychology presume an atheistic mysticism while others bracket questions related to an objective source of experience, where these wholly subjective dynamics are interpreted to be either regressive and pathological or healing and therapeutic, within a strictly naturalistic framework.⁴¹

The skeptical view is that mystics either open themselves up solely to previously unconscious contents and powers or energies (which may be repressed personal elements, autonomous complexes or instincts, or archetypes of the collective unconscious unrelated to a spiritual source) or become aware of a fundamental but purely natural condition of ontological unity with the essence of other phenomena, or perhaps even the ultimate impermanence of things. Cupitt suggests that the mystic comes to experience the wholly relative and contingent nature of reality: as the “I” blissfully dissolves in meditation, “everything slowly subsides and flattens out into a depthless continuum of flowing meanings,” where there “is no pure datum, no primary substance, no ‘absolute,’ nothing that is always ontologically prior.”⁴² Similarly, Leuba argues that the transcendental ground and authority that mystics tend to ascribe to their mystical revelations are illusory. In exploring phenomena common to religious mysticism and drug-induced mysticism, he echoes the view of the philosopher George A. Coe: that mystics’ “certainty of spiritual things is self-produced.” Leuba writes, “For the psychologist who remains within the province of science, religious mysticism is a revelation not of God but of man.”⁴³

Numinous Experience and the Contextualist Critique

Most mystics would disagree with the reductive view that *all* mysticism is naturally based, even if some would claim that self-effort is sufficient for mystical experience and would acknowledge that some mystical experiences are purely subjective and natural. Critiques such as Leuba’s, along with theories such as those of Stace and Huxley, have helped to stimulate questions related to typologies of mystical experience and the connections of mysticism to religious theologies. Are there different mystical experiences among different religious traditions? Are some experiences religious while others are strictly natural? What is their relative status? Is there a hierarchy of mystical experience? What is the relationship of mysticism to other religious experiences?

In the 1920s, the German philosopher Rudolf Otto explored the phenomenology of encounters with or realizations of the “Holy Other” that appeared to differ somewhat from mystical experience. Otto’s sense of “holy” points to a supernatural reality of tremendous power and will (*numen*) beyond the moral and rational connotations that developed around the concept. Otto describes the reality of these “numinous” experiences of the holy in analogical ideograms that characterize it as enchanting and attractive (*fascinans*) yet also awesome and dreadful (*tremendum*). Such experiences stimulate a heightened sense of creature-consciousness on the part of the subject. The holy naturally elicits worship and adoration (*majestas*) while remaining extraordinary, unfamiliar, uncanny and beyond comprehension (*mysterium*).⁴⁴

Numinous experience, as described by Otto, has become a prominent category of religious experience. Although some theorists of religious experience tend to classify the numinous experience as mystical, it seems to differ significantly in its focus on divine power (versus love) and its emphasis on the radical distinction between the subject and the Other (versus mystical union). For many contemporary theorists of mysticism, these and other apparent major differences between mystical experiences bring into serious question the claim of a common, core mystical experience among religions. These “contextualist” theorists criticize essentialist views of mysticism for reading

mystics out of their historical and religious contexts, and argue that mystical experiences are determined by the expectations, beliefs and concepts that a person brings to the mystical experience, rendering it impossible to separate the content of mystical consciousness from its socio-cultural context. As Cupitt writes, “There is no such thing as ‘experience,’ outside of and prior to language,”⁴⁵ which means that all mystical experiences differ between traditions. Jess Byron Hollenback claims that contextualism, as a theory with advantages over essentialist perspectives, better explains the wide diversity of doctrine and practice between mystical traditions, and tends to regard the cultural, historical and socio-political aspects of mysticism as just as relevant to or even more significant than the subject’s account of mystical consciousness or of spiritual reality.⁴⁶

Some of these contextualist theorists of mysticism have highlighted effectively the way in which traditional essentialist theories have tended to favour in their hierarchical perspectives a disembodied ideal that focuses on psychology, epistemology and socio-moral transcendence, while generally neglecting or even disparaging religious experiences that involve bodily and visionary phenomena and social-justice concerns. Such issues are of special interest to feminist theorists, who focus in their critiques on the ways in which in Western mysticism patriarchal structures of experience have coloured or even determined the nature of mysticism in a distortedly narrow fashion. They show how some religious authorities have downplayed, belittled or even persecuted the more embodied and socio-political visionary and immanentist experiences of women, even if some of these women have been able to resist creatively and push back against the male-defined boundaries of mysticism.⁴⁷ This turn to contextualism has also led scholars of depth psychology, philosophy and history to focus on the nature and significance of elements of embodiment in the comparative study of mysticism.

This contemporary shift of interest to “somatic mysticism” or “embodied mysticism” has led scholars to examine a wide variety of themes, paying special attention to socio-historical and cultural contexts and issues, including the awakening of spiritual senses and energy centres; visionary experiences; enhanced bodily feelings and associated physical phenomena; transformative healing, deification and empowerment; deity-visualization and internalization; social and ecological consciousness and transformation; the erotic and sexuality; the gendering of mystical poetics; and—significantly, for our current purposes—the connections between mysticism and art.⁴⁸

Mysticism and Art

In her 1914 book, *Practical Mysticism*, Underhill defines mysticism as the “*art of union with Reality*.” She writes, “*The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.*”⁴⁹ This general definition demonstrates Underhill’s stress on the importance of subjective experience in her exposition of mysticism. Still, she insists that these encounters are “governed by” the “temperament” of the mystic, who has been moulded by the “influences of environment and heredity, Church and State,” and thus the mystic brings her or his own unique socio-cultural interpretive framework to the experience.⁵⁰ Moreover, Underhill insists that mystics are never wholly disconnected from the natural social world: she speaks of them as “ambassadors” to and “explorers” of the “supersensual world.” Like a religious prophet, the mystic “finds and feels” “the landscape of Eternity,” and is

then under “obligation of exhibiting it,” if she or he can, to others: “The mystic... is an artist of a special and exalted kind, who tries to express something of the revelation he has received, mediates between Reality and the race.”⁵¹

In a 1912 essay titled “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” Underhill defines mysticism as a special kind of art form; as “art,” mysticism includes a kind of creative and intuitive openness, rather than a rigidly structured discipline and path. Art involves practice, skill and creativity, so there are various possible methods of mystical practice and senses of progressive movement and learning, as well as an acknowledgement of individual differences, emphases and perspectives. Moreover, art involves teachers, and cross-culturally one finds masters, elders, gurus, exemplars and spiritual directors of the mystical path and ideal. But art especially involves an unusual kind of vision of, or insight into, an underlying reality, to which the artist gives voice and expression. Similarly, the mystic who describes her or his experience creates a uniquely personal “artistic world; a self-consistent and spiritually expressive world of imaginative concepts, like the world of music or the world of color and form.”⁵²

In addition to characterizing mysticism as a form of art, Underhill claims that great art possesses mystical qualities and that all true artists are mystics. She notes that in the view of the philosophers G.W. Hegel and Henri Bergson, great artists mediate the spiritual truth and beauty of “essential and transcendent Being”: “The artist is the [person] who sees things in their native purity,” where the veil between natural life and spiritual consciousness becomes “thin, almost transparent,” she writes. The artist is able to achieve a state of “absolute sensation,” “pure receptivity” or “self simplification,” which allows her or him to contemplate the underlying form or essence of things, “freed from all meanings which the mind has draped and disguised.”⁵³

Here Underhill parallels and perhaps even influences the ideas of the Bloomsbury Group members Clive Bell and Roger Fry about what they called “aesthetic emotion.”⁵⁴ Fry speaks of the source of great art as “the depths of mysticism,” while Bell locates it in “religious spirit.”⁵⁵ Bell writes that the “significant form” (“arrangements and combinations that move us in a particular way”)⁵⁶ of an art object conveys aesthetic emotion. Fry claims that great artists are able to communicate this form, provoking aesthetic emotion in others and even exalting the viewer to “ecstasy”: the sympathetic observer can become aware of the “essential reality” of the work of art, what Bell calls “the God in everything, of the universal in the particular, of the all-pervading rhythm.”⁵⁷ Somewhat similarly, Rudolf Otto describes the “sublime” as “the most effective means of representing the numinous” in the arts.⁵⁸ The impression of sublimity suggests an experience of something that in its magnitude, force and mystery surpasses our understanding, even as it magnetically draws us in, all the while stimulating wonder and dread. Otto writes, “It humbles and at the same time exalts us, circumscribes and extends us beyond ourselves, on the one hand releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear, and on the other rejoicing us.”⁵⁹

Great mystical writers create a language that, like the atmosphere conveyed by certain music, is apophatic—reflects no positive images whatsoever—yet draws its audience toward what mystics have called, among other metaphors, formless visions of the Fathomless Abyss, the Divine Darkness, the Cloud of Unknowing, the Divine Ignorance or the Desert of Godhead. The historian Michael Sells suggests that these negative accounts of ultimate reality can lead

a reader of mystical texts to a “meaning event” that “effects a semantic union that recreates or imitates the mystical union.”⁶⁰ Underhill writes, “Here words suggest, they do not tell; entice, but do not describe.”⁶¹ Otto confirms this point of view, arguing that the most direct means of representing the mystical is darkness, silence and emptiness. He writes that the “‘mystical’ effect begins with semidarkness” that “glimmers in vaulted halls, or beneath the branches of a lofty forest glade, strangely quickened and stirred by the half-lights, has always spoken eloquently to the soul...” For Otto, nature potentially evokes the sublime, in stimulating numinous experience: “The wide-stretching desert, the boundless uniformity of the steppe, have real sublimity, and even in us westerners they set vibrating chords of the numinous along with the note of the sublime, according to the principle of the association of feelings.”⁶²

Some artists are more inclined to employ positive visualizations in their accounts of mystical reality, and are led to express it either involuntarily, as a direct consequence of the immediate affect of their experience, or more deliberately and conceptually. They tend to draw on pictorial imagery in presenting to others their mystical intuitions and insights, using, in Underhill’s words, “the methods of the painter, the descriptive writer, sometimes of the dramatist, rather than those of the musician or the lyric poet.”⁶³ So Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov in this volume describes Edvard Munch’s sense of rapture in his awakening to what he felt was eternity in nature, and of Vincent van Gogh’s experience of “cosmic harmony in the Dutch countryside,” which he characterizes as a mystical musical symphony (see *Mystical Landscapes*, page 279). Katharine Lochnan represents Claude Monet’s articulation of a meditative state of mind in his *Nymphéas* (Water Lilies), where he found himself becoming absorbed within an impermanent and continuously changing creation (see *Mystical Landscapes*, page 133), while Roald Nasgaard refers to Emily Carr’s deep sense of spirit that inspired her work—her attempt to rise “to the real of eternal reality” and to express “God in all life, in all growth” (see *Mystical Landscapes*, page 241).

Similarly, Underhill identifies the painters Jean-Antoine Watteau, J.M.W. Turner, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas and Paul Cézanne as examples of artists who “enjoyed direct communion” with “a visible natural order” beyond the ken of normal experience.⁶⁴ According to Underhill, these painters were able to develop an “artistic world”—“a self-consistent and spiritually expressive world of imaginative concepts, like the world of music or the world of color and form. They are always trying to give us the key to it, to induct us into its mysterious delights.”⁶⁵ Such a painterly mysticism can indeed stimulate a contemplative response, drawing the viewer deeply into the mystical landscapes and evoking a sense of mysterious life and wondrous power.

Notes

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The essay is influenced by two of my previous publications: Michael Stoeber, “Re-imagining Theosophy through Canadian Art: Theosophical Influences on the Painting and Writing of Lawren Harris,” in *Re-Imagining South Asian Religions: Essays in Honour of Professors Harold G. Coward and Ronald W. Neufeldt*, ed. Michael Hawley and Pashaura Singh (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013) (and in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 28, no. 1 (2012): 81–103); and Michael Stoeber, “The Comparative Study of Mysticism” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2015) at <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/>.

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1 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1990 [1911]), xxi.

2 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. and ed. Richard Crouter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32.

3 Michel de Certeau, “Mysticism,” trans. Marsanne Brammer, in *Diacritics* 22, no. 2 (1992 [1968]): 23; [11–25]; Don Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 3.

4 Robert Alfred Vaughan, *Hours with the Mystics: A Contribution to the History of Religious Opinion*, vols. 1–2 (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1856).

5 Quoted in Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Making of Modern ‘Mysticism,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (June 2003): 282–83.

6 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145.

7 *Ibid.*, 130.

8 *Ibid.*, 150. Emerson also writes, “The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty, is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye” (155).

9 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Michael Sadler, Francis Golffing, Michael Harrison and Ferdinand Ostertag (New York: George Wittenborn, 1947 [1914]), 44.

10 *Ibid.*, 58.

11 Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1971 [1902]), frontispiece; Maria Schindler, *Pure Colour, Part III: Goethe’s Theory of Colour Applied (An Illustrated Text-book)* (Denmark: Rudolph Steiner Press, 1989 [1946]), 74–75.

12 C.W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1971 [1902]), see esp. plate 4.

13 C. Jinarajadasa, *Art as Will and Idea* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1954 [1927]), 73.

14 Lawren Harris, “Theosophy and Art,” *Canadian Theosophist* 14, nos. 5–6 (1933), 130 (129–32, 161–66); Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 26, 74.

15 Aldous Huxley, “On Art, Sanity, and Mysticism,” in *On Art and Artists*, ed. Morris Philipson (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), 110, 102, 105.

16 Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1970 [1945]), 117.

17 Michael Stoeber, “Evelyn Underhill on Magic, Sacrament, and Spiritual Transformation,” *Worship* 77, no. 2 (March 2003): 135–36 (132–51).

18 Evelyn Underhill, introduction, *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, trans. Rabindranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1915); Evelyn Underhill, introduction, *The Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore*, trans. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi (London: Macmillan, 1914).

19 Underhill’s most important books on mysticism are *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) and *Practical Mysticism* (Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1942 [1914]).

20 Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1923 [1909]); Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2nd ed. (London: J.M. Dent, 1923 [1908]); Edward Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Saints Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923); W.R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (New York: Living Age, 1956 [1899]).

21 Evelyn Underhill, “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” in Richard Woods, *Understanding Mysticism* (New York: Image Books, 1980), 400–14. This essay was originally published in the journal *The Quest* around 1912. It is reprinted in Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1920), 64–85.

22 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Macmillan/Collier Books, 1961 [1902]), chap. 16–17.

23 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 81–91.

24 *Ibid.*, 179, 241.

25 Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 221; Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, trans. John Skinner (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1996), 62–63.

26 Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John H. Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982); Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Coumba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

27 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 240 (italics in the original); *The Journey of the Mind to God: The Works of St. Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck, vol. 1 (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), chap. 2, par. 12.

28 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (The Holy See), 2015, par. 233.

29 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 317, 264; Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte, *Jean Guyon: Selected Writings*, trans. Dianne Guenin-Lelle and Ronney Mourad (New York, Paulist Press, 2012).

30 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 333, 314, 358, 378; Saint Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. Mirabai Starr (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 126–203.

31 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. Mirabai Starr (London: Rider, 2002).

32 *Selected Writings on Contemplation / Richard of Saint-Victor*, trans. Clare Kirchberger (London: Faber and Faber, 1957); Jan van Ruusbroec, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage and Other Works*, trans. C.A. Wynschenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002 [1916]), book 4, chap. 4, 59.

33 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 418–33.

34 *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart’s Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, ed. Matthew Fox (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980), 420–22, 433, 435, 442, 466.

35 Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.

36 W.T. Stace, ed., *The Teachings of the Mystics: Being Selections of the Great Mystics and Mystical Writings of the World* (New York: New

American Library, 1960), 14–15, 23 (italics in the original).

37 See, for example, Michael Stoeber, “Amoral Trickster or Mystic-Saint: Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, ed. G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), 381–405.

38 James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972 [1925]), especially 8–36.

39 Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2004 [1954]), 73.

40 G. William Barnard, “The Potential Relevance of Entheogens,” *Zygon* 49, no. 3 (September 2014): 666, 667–73.

41 William B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109–39.

42 Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity*, 132, 129, 7.

43 Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, 318.

44 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978 [1923]).

45 Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity*, 74, 11. For influential developments of the contextualist theory of mysticism, see Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism, Experience, Response and Empowerment* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), especially chap. 1; Steven Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 22–74; and Certeau, “Mysticism,” 11–21.

46 Hollenback, *Mysticism*, 8–12.

47 For example, Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg and other Beguines; Julian of Norwich; and Hildegard of Bingen. For clear and well-developed feminist critiques, see Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 128–37; Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 328; Melissa Raphael, “Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience,” in *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (December 1994), 511–26.

48 See, for example, Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakely, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Spirituality* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Thomas Cattoi and June McDaniel, eds., *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Senses: Mystical Sensuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Gananath Obeyesekere, *Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Janet K. Ruffing, ed., *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2001); Bina Gupta, ed., *Sexual Archetypes, East and West* (New York: Paragon House, 1987); Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Beverly Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992)

49 Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 23 (italics in the original).

50 Underhill, *Mysticism*, 252–53.

51 Underhill, “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” 400–401; Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 48.

52 Underhill, “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” 402.

53 Ibid., 401; Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 43, 42, 52.

54 Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Capricorn Books/G.P. Putnam Sons, 1957 [1914]), chap. 1. “That there is a particular kind of emotion provoked by works of visual art, and that this emotion is provoked by every kind of visual art, by pictures, sculptures, buildings, pots, carvings, textiles, etc., etc., is not disputed, I think, by anyone capable of feeling it. This emotion is called the aesthetic emotion; and if we

can discover some quality common and peculiar to all the objects that provoke it, we shall have solved what I take to be the central problem of aesthetics.”

55 Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1961 [1920]), 237; Bell, *Art*, 63.

56 Bell, *Art*, chap. 1.

57 *Ibid.*, 14.

58 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 65.

59 *Ibid.*, 41–42.

60 Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 9.

61 Underhill, “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” 407.

62 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 68, 69.

63 Underhill, “The Mystic as Creative Artist,” 407–408.

64 *Ibid.*, 402.

65 *Ibid.*

