

Mystics of the Church 12

French and Protestant Mystics

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- Like the traumatic 14th century for most of Europe, the 17th was an especially rich century for French mystics. This century, too, experienced those times that try human souls—the Thirty Years War, the introduction of scientific method by Bacon in 1610 and by Descartes in 1633, and the advance of secularity. In such circumstances it is interesting to note that Teresa of Avilá and her Carmelite reform stood at the very center of this revitalization of contemplative spirituality and recovery of the Roman Catholic Church. As noted in the preceding lecture, Teresa captured the attention of Madame Acarie and prompted her to push for the establishment of a Carmel in Paris in 1603. She herself eventually took vows, and by the time she died there were seventeen Carmels in France. Although Francis de Sales did not draw deeply from the Carmelite stream, Pierre de Bérulle did, with coaxing from Madame Acarie establishing the French Oratory in 1611. At the other end of the century stood Nicolas Hermann, who, after

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- service in the army during the Thirty Years War, served as a footman for a French family and then, in mid-life, joined a Carmelite monastery as a lay brother. His *Practice of the Presence of God*, of course, swerved away from the more disciplined prayer forms espoused by Saint Teresa, but it fitted the growing trend away from the highly intellectual and methodical spirituality employed by the Jesuits. Both Jansenism and Quietism confronted the Jesuit model even more directly—Jansenism the intellectual by way of a revival of Augustinian theology, Quietism the methodical by way of repudiation of intricate methods. In this lecture I will focus chiefly on Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant French mathematician and philosopher, because of his remarkable mystical experience recorded in “The Memorial” and meditated on in a paper entitled “The Mystery of Jesus.” However, Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) merits attention.

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- I. Pierre de Bérulle
 - Bérulle has been called “the apostle of the incarnate Word.”
 - A. Life
 - Pierre de Bérulle was born into a devout Catholic family at Chateau de Sérilly in the province of Champagne. He received his education at the Jesuit College of Clermont and at the Sorbonne. Ordained a priest in 1599, he founded the French Oratory in 1611. Subsequently he established numerous colleges to upgrade the pastoral service of clergy and to restore the priestly office of the laity, as decreed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). He overcame numerous obstacles to the establishment of Carmelite nuns of Teresa’s reform, and Pope Paul V (1605-1621) appointed him their perpetual visitor. He repeatedly refused offers of prelacies and bishoprics in order to devote himself to spiritual direction, reforming religious communities, and uniting Catholics against the Protestant reformers. Highly influential at the French

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- court, he accepted a cardinalate in 1627. There he often clashed with Cardinal Richelieu, who wanted to banish him from France and did succeed in bringing him into “official disgrace.” Bérulle died about one month after this on October 2, 1629.
- B. Writings
 - Bérulle did not publish extensively, but his theocentric mysticism exerted a powerful influence on French theology. In a treatise written during his days as a student at the Jesuit College of Clermont (1597) he wrote a *Bref discours de l’abnégation intérieure* (*A Brief Discourse on Interior Annihilation*) in which he proposed to guide the soul through successive deprivations to the annihilation of the human self and transforming union with God. In subsequent writing he would shift markedly toward a focus on Incarnation. In a *Traité des Énergumènes* (*Treatise on Energumens*

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- [*the mentally ill*] in 1599 he addressed the issue of possession by the Devil as the Devil’s attempt to ape God’s act in Incarnation. By the time he did the *Spiritual Exercises* at the Jesuit retreat house in Verdun in 1602 Incarnation was assuming a central place in his thinking. Titles of subsequent works as he engaged in work with Carmelites reflected his preoccupation with incarnational spirituality: *Bref discours: Élévation à Jésus sur ses principaux états et mystères* (*A Brief Discourse on Elevation to Jesus in its Chief States and Mysteries*); *Élévation à la très sainte Trinité sur le mystère de l’Incarnation* (*Elevation to the very Holy Trinity in the Mystery of the Incarnation*); *Élévation à Dieu en l’honneur de la part qu’il a voulu donner à Marie dans le mystère de l’Incarnation, l’opérant en elle et par elle* (*Elevation to God in Honor of the Role God Has Wished to*

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- *Give Mary in the Mystery of the Incarnation, the One Working in Her and by Her*); and his classic (1623) *Discours de l'état et des grandeurs de Jésus (Discourse on the State and Majesty of Jesus)*. In these the focus of Bérulle's spirituality had moved from the sanctification of a particular human person to the assumption of the human by the divine, that is, from an anthropocentric to a theocentric focus.

C. Mystical Theology

- 1. The publication of the last work coincided with growing acceptance of the Copernican theory that the earth revolved around the sun. Bérulle seized upon the moment to say,

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- This novel opinion, very little followed in the science of the stars, is useful and ought to be followed in the science of salvation. For Jesus is the sun, immobile in his grandeur and moving all things. Jesus is like his Father, and being seated at God's right hand is immobile just as God and the cause of the movement of all things. Jesus is the true center of the world, and the world ought to be in continual movement towards him. Jesus is the sun of our souls, from whom they receive all graces, lights and influence. And the earth of our hearts ought to be in a continual movement towards Him, in order to receive in all its powers and parts, the favorable aspects and the benign influence of that great star. Let us then bring into action the movements and the affections of our souls towards Jesus. Let us give ourselves in eagerness to the praises of God, on the subject of His only Son and of the mystery of the Incarnation. (*Discourse on the State and Majesty of Jesus*, II. 26-27; cited by Michael J. Buckley, "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality: Three Figures," *Christian Spirituality*, III: 45-46.)

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- Whereas Francis de Sales spoke of love when he talked about unity, Bérulle spoke of the Incarnate Word, an approach dating back to Bonaventure but given a new twist and force. He was by no means innovative. He kept close to tradition and to Thomistic conclusions.
- 2. The appropriate response to God, he insisted, is adoration of the Incarnate Word. "Jesus is at the same time the one who is adored, the means of adoration, and the paradigm of what it is to adore." (Buckley, 48.) Whereas Francis de Sales restored devotion, Bérulle restored adoration to the center of Christian life. In the Incarnate Word we adore God. The best means to express adoration is praise, "the perfect expression of adoration, the surrender to the mystery of God and the utter forgetfulness of self." (Buckley, 49.) "Elevation" served as an appropriate way of thinking about

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- adoration. Praise directs itself to the unities embodied in the Incarnate Word: unity of Jesus with the Father, unity with humanity in his person, and unity with the Eucharist in his body. Through Christ and in Christ we celebrate this Trinitarian life. We actively offer ourselves in daily life and action as well as in formal prayer in adherence to the Incarnate Word. Through adherence we do not seek to honor the Word through a succession of acts but in a "state." In the mystery of the Incarnate Word Bérulle also lodged the surpassing grandeur of Mary. Mary, the mother of Jesus, continues in the present to possess "the special power of giving Jesus to souls." (Cited by Buckley, 53.) He caused a rift with the Carmelites, even Madame Acarie, by insisting on their taking a "vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary." Despite the rift, however, Madame Acarie took the name "Mary of the Incarnation" when she joined the Carmelite Order.

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- II. Blaise Pascal
 - Most of the mystics we have examined up to now have belonged to religious orders or at least devoted themselves to lives of prayer. Blaise Pascal broke the pattern. A brilliant mathematician and philosopher, a severe life crisis opened him to what Douglas Steere called “the besieging love of God.”
 - A. Life
 - Pascal was born in Clermont-Ferrand. His father, Étienne, was President of the local court of exchequer who doted on his children, Gilberte (born in 1620), Pascal (born in 1623), and Jacqueline (born in 1625). Their mother died in 1627. A precocious child, Blaise engaged in various mathematical experiments. At age sixteen he published a learned treatise on conic sections. At age eighteen he invented an adding machine to assist his father and the barometer. In 1646 he came into contact

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- with the Jansenists and experienced a “conversion” from the view that faith is beyond reason. A year later, he secured the condemnation of an ex-Capuchin monk who claimed that reason could comprehend the mysteries of faith. A few months later, he established contact with Port-Royal, the center of the Jansenist movement, but did not accept all of its demands. The family left Rouen in 1648 and moved to Paris in 1650. A crisis developed with the death of Étienne in 1651 followed by Jacqueline’s decision to enter the convent of Port-Royal, which her brother opposed. Soon thereafter he discovered the illness that would claim his life at age thirty-nine. These events evidently unhinged him, for he engaged in what he described as a “wild year.” He continued his scientific pursuits, but he sought certainty of

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- faith akin to the certainty he found in mathematics. The answer to his dilemma came on November 23, 1654 in a “definitive conversion.” God is not the God of philosophers and scholars but the God of Jesus Christ. He recorded his mystical encounter entitled “Memorial” on a scrap of paper found sewn up in the lining of his coat when he died. From this time on, he frequently visited Port-Royal-des-Champs. In 1655 the condemnation of Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694) by the faculty of the University of Paris prompted Pascal to take up the cudgels against the Jesuits in his *Provincial Letters*, eighteen of them (1656-1657). Perhaps from the time of his experience in 1654 Pascal began assembling notes for an apology for Christianity. Discovered in small bundles after his death, his *Pensées* were published first in 1670.

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- B. Writings
 - Pascal published several scientific works which do not reveal anything of interest regarding his mystical experience and thinking. The *Provincial Letters* attacked the Jesuit theories of grace (Molinism) and moral theology (Probabilism). Pascal sought to expose the immoral character of their casuistry and to develop an argument for the rigorist mentality of the Jansenists. He proposed a return to the disciplinary practices and the austerity of the primitive church. The letters were condemned by the Congregation of the Index in 1657, but they continued to roil the waters. Of more lasting importance are the *Pensées*. Although no one has been able to establish a convincing pattern, the notes display the decidedly Augustinian cast of Pascal’s theology. “The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing; we feel it in many things.” (Everyman’s Library 224, p. 59.) The Wager Argument in response to the skeptic: “If there is a God, He is

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- Infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity with us. We are incapable, therefore, of knowing either *what* He is or *if* He is. That being so, who will dare undertake to decide this question? Not we, who have no affinity with Him.” How do we decide? We wager. If I wager that God isn’t and it turns out that God is, I’ve lost everything. If I wager that God is and it turns out that God isn’t, I’ve lost nothing. But if I wager that God is and it turns out that God is, I’ve gained everything. Better to wager that God is! (EL 343.) Yet, Pascal argued, we do not have to rely on reason alone. He echoed his experience. “We know God only through Jesus Christ. Without his mediation there is no communication with God; through Jesus Christ we know God. . . . At the same time, however, we know our wretchedness; for this God is none other than He who repairs our misery.” (EL 380; p. 102.) A syllogism follows:

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- Knowledge of God without knowledge of man’s wretchedness begets pride.
- Knowledge of man’s wretchedness without knowledge of God begets despair.
- Knowledge of Jesus Christ constitutes the middle way, because in Him we find both God and our wretchedness. (EL 383, p. 103.)
- To this, Pascal would add more about what we gain through Jesus Christ. “Not only do we know God through Jesus Christ alone, but we do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ. We understand life and death only through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we know not what is our life, or our death, or God, or what we ourselves are.” (EL 602, p. 172.) Pascal explored the why. Jesus Christ is in everyone—a brother among brothers, poor among poor, rich among rich, teacher and priest among priests, sovereign among princes, etc. Why? “His purpose in assuming this wretched condition was to enable Himself to be present in all persons and the model for all conditions of men.” (EL 741, p. 207.)

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– C. *The Memorial*

- It suffices to quote this statement found in the lining of Pascal's coat at his death.
 - The year of Grace 1654.
- Monday 23 November, feast of St Clement, pope and martyr,
 - And of others in the martyrology,
 - Eve of St Chrysogonus, martyr, and others,
- From about half past ten in the evening to about half an hour
 - After midnight,
 - Fire

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- “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob”
 - not of the philosophers and learned.
- Certitude, Certitude, love, joy, peace.
 - God of Jesus Christ
 - *Deum meum et deum vestrum.*
 - “Thy God shall be my God.”
 - Forgetfulness of the world and of everything outside God.
- He is not found except by the means taught in the Gospel.
 - Greatness of the human soul
- “Holy Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.”
 - Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy.

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- I am separated from Him.
- *Dereliquerunt me fontem aquae vivae.*
- My God, wilt Thou leave me?
- Let me not be eternally separated from Him.
- “This is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God and
- Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”
 - Jesus Christ
 - Jesus Christ

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- I am separated from Him; I have shunned, renounced, crucified Him.
- May I never be separated from Him.
- He is kept only by the means taught in the Gospel.
 - Total and sweet renunciation.
 - Etc.
- Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my director.
- Eternally in joy in return for a day’s striving on earth.
 - *Non obliviscar sermones tuos. Amen.*

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- D. The Mystery of Jesus Christ
 - Soon after the experience recorded in *The Memorial* Pascal did a retreat at Port-Royal des Champs. He recorded on two large sheets of paper his meditation on the agony of Jesus. In the *Mystery* he resumed the prayer he had begun on the night of November 23. Here, however, he concentrated his attention on his own state of mind, as Jean Steinmann has summed it up, “that of a sick man recently converted who was still worried over his ability to persevere.” (*Pascal*, translated by Martin Turnell, 91.) The meditation consists of very short verses. In the first part the same themes recur: the apostles sleeping, abandonment of Jesus, Jesus’ goodness, and the loneliness of his suffering. Pascal only thought of himself once or twice when applying moral conclusions. He was carried away in ecstasy and participated in Jesus’ suffering, especially because he was

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- conscious of Jesus’ moral suffering within himself. Whereas the *Memorial* had produced tears of joy, the *Mystery* makes one aware of Pascal’s anxiety. Jesus tried to ease his anxiety.
 - “Be comforted, thou wouldst not seek Me if thou hadst not found Me.”
 - “I thought of thee in Mine Agony; I sweated such drops of blood for thee.”
 - “It is tempting Me rather than proving thyself, to wonder whether thou wouldst act well in circumstances that have not yet arisen. If they do arise, I will act in thee.”
 - “Let thyself be guided by My rules; see how well I guided the Blessed Virgin and the saints, who allowed Me to act in them.”
 - “The Father loves all that I do.”
 - “Dost thou wish that it for ever cost Me the blood of My humanity, without a tear on thy part?”
 - “Thy conversion is My affair; be not afraid, and pray with confidence as if for Me.”

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- “I am present to thee by My word in Scripture, by My Spirit and by inspiration in the Church, by My power in the priests, by My prayer in the faithful.”
- “Doctors will not heal thee, for thou wilt ultimately die; it is I who heal and make the body immortal.”
- “Endure chains and bodily servitude; for the present I deliver thee only from spiritual bondage.”
- “I am more a friend to thee than is anyone else, for I have done more for thee than have they; they would not suffer what I have suffered at thy hands, and would not die for thee as I have done in days of thine infidelity and cruelty, and as I am ready to do, and do, in Mine elect and in the Blessed Sacrament.”
- “If thou knewest thy sins, thou wouldst lost heart.”
- Pascal was not yet assuaged. “I shall lose heart then, Lord, for I believe their [the sins’] malice on Thine assurance.”

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- “No; for I who tell thee of it can heal them, and what I say to thee is a token that I will to heal thee. Thou wilt recognize them according as thou dost penance for them, and it shall be said to thee: ‘Behold, thy sins are forgiven thee.’ Repent, therefore, for thy hidden sins and for the secret malice of those of which thou art aware.”
- At last he was ready to make the critical act of complete surrender. “Lord, I give Thee all.”
 - “I love thee more ardently than thou hast loved thine abominations, *ut immundus pro luto*.” (Horace, Epistle I.2.)
 - “To Me be the glory, not to thee, worm of the earth.”
 - “Ask thy director whether My words are occasion of evil and vanity, or of curiosity.”

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- The light had dawned. His hope rested in Jesus Christ, not in himself. “I see within myself depths of pride, curiosity and lust. There is no relation between me and God, or Jesus Christ the Righteous. But He has been made sin for me; all Thy scourges are fallen upon Him. He is more abhorred than I; and, far from abhorring me, He considers Himself honoured that I should go and succour Him.
 - But He has healed Himself, and with all the more reason will heal me.
- I must unite my wounds with His and join myself with Him, and in saving Himself He will save me. But I must not put off doing this until some future date.

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- *Eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et malum* (“You will be like gods, knowing good and evil”). Everyone plays the god when he judges that such and such is good or bad, and when he grieves or rejoices excessively at events.
- Do little deeds as though they were great, because of the majesty of Jesus Christ who performs them in us, and who lives our life; and do great deeds as though they were small and easy, because of His omnipotence. (EL739, pp. 204-207.)

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- III. A List of Protestant Mystics
 - The number of Protestant mystics may surprise you. In an anthology of *The Protestant Mystics* Anne Fremantle has listed more than seventy. Some of the persons she has named would raise eyebrows if we adopted a narrow definition of mystic, but they will readily squeeze into the definition adopted by Bernard McGinn, i.e., consciousness of the presence of God. Protestant mystics, except for Anglicans or Episcopalians, differ from Catholic mystics in aligning their outlook and experience with scriptures rather than with tradition. In the main, however, they echo many of the same perspectives. (*The Protestant Mystics*, selected and edited by Anne Fremantle [Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown & Co, 1964]).

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- In this lecture I will focus on Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), in the next on John Bunyan (1628-1688), and George Fox (1624-1691) to illustrate the mystic presence in Lutheran and Puritan traditions, but I think I should list the entire list compiled by Anne Fremantle and add that it could be lengthened by looking at Protestant hymnals.

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- Martin Luther (1483-1546)
- John Donne (1672-1631)
- Jacob Boehme (1575-1624)
- John Amos Komensky (1592-1670)
- George Herbert (1693-1633)
- Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661)
- Jeremy Taylor (1613-1677)
- Richard Baxter (1615-1691)
- Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)
- George Fox (1624-1691)
- John Bunyan (1628-1688)
- Thomas Traherne (1637-1674)
- Charles Marshall (1637-1698)
- Pierre Poiret (1646-1719)

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- Johannes Kelpius (?1673-1708)
- William Law 1686-1761)
- Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)
- Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769)
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
- John Wesley (1709-1791)
- David Brainerd (1718-1747)
- John Woolman (1720-1772)
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)
- William Blake (1757-1827)
- Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843)
- William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
- Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) (1772-1801)
- Jacob Bower (1786-?1857)
- John Keats (1795-1821)

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- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)
- Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)
- Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
- Emily Brontë (1818-1848)
- Walt Whitman (1819-1892)
- Henri Frederic Amiel (1821-1881)
- George Macdonald (1824-1905)
- Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
- Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911)
- W. H. Hudson (1841-1922)
- William James (1842-1910)
- Richard Jeffries (1848-1887)
- Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)
- George Gissing (1857-1903)

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- Rufus Jones (1863-1948)
- William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)
- Forbes Robinson (1867-1904)
- AE (George William Russell) (1867-1935)
- Johannes Anker-Larsen (1874-1957)
- John Masefield (1878-1967)
- Margaret Prescott Montague (1878-1955)
- Stark Young (1881-1963)
- Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)
- Frank C. Laubach (1884-1970)
- Edwin Muir (1887-1959)
- T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)
- Thomas Raymond Kelly (1893-1941)
- Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962)

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- C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)
- Jon Betjeman (1906-1984)
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)
- Helmuth James, Count von Moltke (1907-1945)
- Katharine Trevelyan (1909-?)
- Plus four others not identified. Can you think of some such as Suzanna Wesley (1669-1742) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788), both poets and hymnists, that she may have overlooked?

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- IV. Jacob Boehme
 - Although he had limited formal education, Boehme influenced others profoundly. His marks appear on German philosophers such as G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), F. W. J. von Schelling (1775-1854), and F. X. von Baader (1765-1841). In England he influenced the Cambridge Platonist Peter Sterry (?1613-1672) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727). In the 18th century William Law undertook serious study and absorbed much of Boehme's theosophy. A circle called Boehmenists propagated his teaching. They later united with Quakers.

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– A. Life

- The son of a farmer, Boehme first worked as a shepherd. Apprenticed to a shoemaker, from 1599, when he married, until 1613 he pursued that vocation in Görlitz in Silesia. In later years he took up the linen trade. Inspired by his Lutheran pastor, Martin Moller (d. 1606), who came to Görlitz in 1600, he experienced his first revelation. In 1612 he published *Morgenröte im Aufgang oder Aurora*. When this work came to the attention of Moller's successor, Gregory Richter, a defender of Lutheran orthodoxy, he had Boehme's book confiscated and on July 30, 1613, had him banned from further writing. Boehme ceased writing for several years, but another mystical experience in January 1619 prompted him to break his silence with a treatise *On*

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- *the Three Principles of Divine Being*. He wrote extensively thereafter. In the last years of his life he encountered much conflict as Richter escalated his attacks. The publication of *The Way to Christ* on New Years Day in 1624 evoked angry broadsides and sermons against which Boehme attempted to defend himself. In March the municipal council directed him to move. He lived briefly in Dresden, but illness prompted him to return to his home in Görlitz late in 1624. By this time Richter had died, and his successor heard Boehme's confession and pronounced him orthodox. Boehme died on November 17.

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– B. Writings

- Boehme claimed to write what he received from Divine illumination. In *The Three Principles of Divine Being* he said, “I do not write of my own accord but by the witness of the Spirit which no one can withstand. It stands in its own strength and does not depend on our desire or will.” (24.1; cited by Peter Erb in *Jacob Boehme. Classics of Western Spirituality*, 8.) Despite the hostility of his pastor, in 1618 he began a series of devotional treatises published as *The Way to Christ* in 1624. He wrote prolifically from 1618 on, although most writings were published posthumously. In 1620 he wrote *On the Threefold Life of Man, Forty Questions on the Soul, On the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Six Theosophical Points*, and *Six Mystical Points*. In 1622 he ended his probing of the nature of the universe with a treatise *De signatura rerum, or Concerning the Birth and*

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- *Designation of All Being*. Thereafter he turned to more common themes and images of traditional Christianity: *On Election to Grace, On Christ’s Testaments*, and a commentary on Genesis entitled *Mysterium Magnum*, his largest opus and the key to his chief teachings.
- ### – C. Boehme’s Confession
- Since Egan’s *Anthology* does not include selections from Boehme, I will quote the extract from *The Confessions of Jakob Boehme* included in Fremantle’s anthology. (*The Protestant Mystics*, 44-49.)
 - Men have always been of the opinion that heaven is many hundred, nay, many thousand, miles distant from the face of the earth, and that God dwells only in that heaven.

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- Some have undertaken to measure this height and distance, and have produced many strange and monstrous devices. Indeed, before my knowledge and revelation of God, I held that only to be the true heaven which, in a round circumference, very azure of a light blue color, extends itself above the stars; supposing that God had therein his peculiar Being, and did rule only in the power of his Holy Spirit in this world.
- But when this had given me many a hard blow and repulse, doubtless from the Spirit, which had a great longing yearning towards me, at last I fell into a very deep melancholy and heavy sadness, when I beheld and contemplated the great Deep of this world, also the sun and stars, the clouds, rain and snow, and considered in my spirit the whole creation of the world.

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- Wherein then I found, in all things, evil and good, love and anger; in the inanimate creatures, in wood, stones, earth and the elements, as also in men and beasts.
- Moreover I considered the little spark of light, man, what he should be esteemed for with God, in comparison of this great work and fabric of heaven and earth.
- And finding that in all things there was evil and good, as well in the elements as in the creatures, and that it went as well in this world with the wicked as with the virtuous, honest and godly; also that the barbarous people had the best countries in their possession, and that they had more prosperity in their ways than the virtuous, honest and godly had; I was thereupon very melancholy, perplexed and exceedingly troubled, no Scripture could comfort or satisfy me though I was well acquainted with it and versed therein; at which time the Devil would by no means stand idle, but was often beating into me many heathenish thoughts which I will here be silent in.

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- Yet when in this affliction and trouble I elevated my spirit (which then I understood very little or nothing at all what it was), I earnestly raised it up into God, as with a great storm or onset, wrapping up my whole heart and mind, as also my thoughts and whole will and resolution, incessantly to wrestle with the Love and Mercy of God, and not to give over unless he blessed me, that is, unless he enlightened me with his Holy Spirit, whereby I might understand his will and be rid of my sadness. And then the Spirit did break through.
- But when in my resolved zeal I gave so hard an assault, storm, and onset upon God and upon all the gates of hell, as if I had more reserves of virtue and power ready, with a resolution to hazard my life upon it (which assuredly were not in my ability without the assistance of the Spirit of God), suddenly my spirit did break through the gates of hell, even into the innermost moving of the Deity, and there I was embraced in love as a bridegroom embraces his dearly beloved bride.

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- The greatness of the triumphing that was in my spirit I cannot express either in speaking or writing; neither can it be compared to any thing but that wherein life is generated in the midst of death. It is like the resurrection from the dead.
- In this light my spirit suddenly saw through all, and in and by all, the creatures; even in herbs and grass it knew God, who he is and how he is and what his will is. And suddenly in that light my will was set on by a mighty impulse to describe the Being of God.
- But because I could not presently apprehend the deepest movings of God and comprehend them in my reason, there passed almost twelve years before the exact understanding thereof was given me.

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- And it was with me as with a young tree, which is planted in the ground and at first is young and tender, and flourishing to the eye, especially if it comes on lustily in its growing; but does not bear fruit presently, and though it has blossoms they fall off: also frost and snow and many a cold wind beat upon it before it comes to any growth and bearing of fruit.
- So also it went with my spirit: the first fire was but a beginning and not a constant and lasting light; since that time many a cold wind blew upon it, yet never extinguished it.
- The tree was also often tempted to try whether it could bear fruit, and showed itself with blossoms; but the blossoms were struck off till this very time, wherein it stands in its fruit.
- From this light now it is that I have my knowledge, as also my will, impulse and driving; and therefore I will set down the knowledge in writing according to my gift, and let God work his will. Though I should enrage the whole world, the Devil, and all the gates of hell, I will look on and wait what the Lord intends with it.

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- For I am too, too weak to know his purpose; and though the Spirit affords in the light some things to be known which are to come, yet according to the outward man I am too weak to comprehend them.
- The animated or soulish spirit, which unfolds its powers and unites with God, comprehends it well; but the animal body attains only a glimpse thereof; just as by a lightning flash. This is the state of the innermost moving of the soul, when it breaks through the outermost in an elevation by the Holy Ghost. But the outermost presently closes again, for the wrath of God is stirred up there as fire is struck from the stone, and holds it captive in its power.
- Then the knowledge of the outward man is gone, and he walks up and down, afflicted and anxious, as a woman with child who is in her travail, and would willingly bring forth, but cannot and is full of throes.

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- Thus it goes also with the animal body when it has once tasted of the sweetness of God. Then it continually hungers and thirsts after it; but the Devil in the power of God's wrath opposes exceedingly, and so a man in such a course must continually be anxious; and there is nothing but fighting and warring for him.
- I write not this for my own glory, but for a comfort to the reader, so that if perhaps he be minded to walk with me upon my narrow bridge, he should not suddenly be discouraged, dismayed, and distrustful, when the gates of hell and God's wrath meet him and present themselves before him.
- When we shall come together, over this narrow bridge of the fleshly working, to be in yonder green meadow to which the wrath of God does not reach, then we shall be fully requited for all our damages and hurts we have sustained; though indeed at present the world accounts us for fools, and we must suffer the Devil to domineer rush, and roar over us.

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- Now observe: if thou fixest thy thoughts concerning heaven, and wouldst willingly conceive in thy mind what it is and where it is and how it is, thou needst not to cast thy thoughts many thousand miles off, for that place, that heaven, is not thy heaven.
- And though indeed that is united with thy heaven as one body, and so together is but the one body of God, yet thou art not become a creature in that very place which is above many hundred thousand miles off, but thou art in the heaven of this world, which contains also in it such a Deep as is not of any human numbering.
- The true heaven is everywhere, even in that very place where thou standest and goest; and so when thy spirit presses through the astral and the fleshly, and apprehends the innermost moving of God, then it is clearly in heaven.

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- But that there is assuredly a pure glorious heaven in all the three movings aloft above the deep of this world, in which God's Being together with that of the holy angels springs up very purely, brightly, beauteously, and joyfully, is undeniable. And he is not born of God that denies it.
- Thou must know that this world in its innermost unfolds its properties and powers in union with the heavens aloft above us, and so there is one Heart, one Being, one Will, one God, all in all.
- The outermost moving of this world cannot comprehend the outermost moving of heaven aloft above this world, for they are one to the other as life and death, or as a man and a stone are one to the other.
- There is a strong firmament dividing the outermost of this world from the outermost of the upper heavens; and that firmament is Death, which rules and reigns everywhere in the outermost in this world, and sets a great gulf between them.

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- The second moving of this world is in the life; it is the astral, out of which is generated the third and holy moving; and therein love and wrath strive one with the other.
- For the second moving stands in the seven fountain spirits of this world, and is in all places and in all the creatures as in man. But the Holy Ghost also rules and reigns in that second, and helps to generate the third, the holy moving.
- This, the third, is the clear and holy heaven which unites with the Heart of God, distinct from and above all heavens, as one heart.
- Therefore, thou child of man, be not discouraged, be not so timorous and pusillanimous; if thou in thy zeal and earnest sincerity sowest the seed of thy tears, thou dost not sow it in earth but in heaven; for in thy astral moving thou sowest, and in thy soulish moving thou reapest, and in the kingdom of heaven thou possessest and enjoyest it.
- If man's eyes were but opened he should see God everywhere in his heaven; for heaven stands in the innermost moving everywhere.

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– D. Mystical Theology

- 1. Boehme drew heavily from Paracelsus, the mystics, alchemy, and astrology. Scholars have debated whether he was a pantheist or a dualist. From childhood he evidently felt a calling to penetrate the deepest mysteries about God, man, and nature. In his understanding, God the Father is the “*Ungrund*,” the indefinable matter of the universe. This “abyss” knows itself in the Son, who is light and wisdom, and expands and expresses itself in the Holy Spirit. The Godhead has both good and evil wills, love and wrath, that drove it to create nature. Nature unfolds itself in seven *Quellgeister* (“source spirits”): (1) the desire to resist, (2) the tendency to expand, (3) the struggle between these two, (4) the transition from the inorganic to the organic world, (5) the

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- vegetative life of the plants, (6) the animal life, and (7) humankind. Although evil, since it is part of God, is necessary, humankind can avoid hell by uniting themselves with Christ by faith. Ultimately they will prevail on earth and replace Lucifer, the fallen angel, in the heavenly city.
- 2. One of the most difficult of Boehme’s concepts to grasp is the role of Sophia (Wisdom). “In Sophia is revealed what God is in His depth. Wisdom is God’s revelation and the Holy Spirit’s corporeality; the body of the Holy Trinity.” (*Antistefelius* II, 253; cited by Erb, 9.) Boehme spoke of Sophia always by analogy. As the revelation of God, she is related to all three persons of the Trinity. The way to Christ is the way back to Paradise and union with the Virgin Sophia. Despite his reliance on alchemy, Boehme

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- depended on Lutheran theology. Luther himself did not wish to set aside mystical literature but to warn against theological and spiritual dangers of involvement in speculations about mystical union. He wanted to clarify the role of faith in Christian life. He found some concepts such as *ecstasis* and *excessus* helpful, but he took care to distinguish his teaching from that of medieval writers. Boehme did much the same thing Luther did to emphasize faith when he used Sophia imagery in *The Way of the Spirit*. He differed from Luther, however, in two major ways. (1) He had a much higher view of human activity, tending toward Semi-Pelagianism, than Luther did. (2) He emphasized the mystical experience of union as possible for the believer in language Luther would not have used. He also thought of a progression toward mystical union which Luther would not have countenanced.

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- 3. In Boehme's view humankind are both fire and light. The human soul began as fire and was designed to stream back to its source as light, love, or the spiritual water of new life that would temper the fiery source. Without that water the soul would be consumed in its own fiery root. Although Adam chose the fiery origin, God, being merciful, did not let humankind remain fallen; God provided a way for them again to become holy. Reason (philosophy) and revelation (prophecy) were given to guide them. In Christ light-love was finally and fully revealed. In the new man, Christ, humankind now live in harmony and unity with the Virgin Sophia.
- 4. Boehme summed up his perspective under four headings:

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– The whole Christian religion consists in this: [firstly] that we learn to know ourselves, what we are, whence we have come, how we have gone from unity into disunity, evil and unrighteousness that we have awakened in ourselves; secondly, where we were in unity when we were the children of God; thirdly, how we now are in disunity, in strife and antagonism; fourthly, where we are to go out of this fragile life (being); where we wish to go both with the immortal and with the mortal. (*The Way to Christ* 8.1; Erb, 167.)

- V. A Word from Thomas Merton

– Genuine contemplation involves no tension. There is no reason why it should affect anyone's nerves: on the contrary, it relaxes them. It leaves you rested and refreshed in your whole being. There is no strain in real contemplation, because when the gift is real, you do not depend on it, you are not enslaved by the "need"

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– to experience anything. The contemplative does not seek reassurance in himself, in his virtue, in his state, in his "prayer". His trust is in God, not in himself. The peace and "rest" of contemplation is the fruit of a living faith in the action of divine grace. The contemplative is able to let go of himself and everything else, knowing that everything that matters in his life is in God's hands, and that he does not have to "take thought for the morrow." He fully realizes the meaning of the Gospel message of salvation by the grace of God and not by dependence on human ingenuity. (*The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (2003), 113.

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