

Mystics of the Church 13

Protestant Mystics

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- Part 1: Puritan and Quaker Mystics
 - Some may express surprise that I list Puritans among the mystics. I do not hesitate to do so, however, for the Puritans had an intense concern for experiential religion. As Owen C. Watkins has pointed out in *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography*, to the Puritans “experience” “was always something personal.” He cited John Rogers’s statement in confirmation: “Now to a poor soule, all such things as are in the soule, are made known by *experiences; experience, we say, proves principles.*” (*Ohel or Bethshemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun*, 1653, 355; Watkins, 15.) One should not be surprised, therefore, to find notable Puritans among the Protestant mystics listed

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- by Anne Fremantle: Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, and David Brainerd. Few writings of the mystics we have considered up to now will surpass *The Diary of David Brainerd* in its graphically personal account of encounters with God. Of all Protestant traditions, the most clearly contemplative one is the Quaker tradition. George Fox was, quite clearly, a mystic. Rufus Jones, in fact, traced the heritage of the Friends to the Rhineland mystics, although it is not likely that Fox drew as much from them as he did from Jacob Boehme.

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- I. John Bunyan
 - John Bunyan (1628-1688) would not qualify as a mystic under the narrow definition of the term, but there is little question that he was conscious of the Presence of God as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. His experience of grace, in fact, liberated him from the virtual determinism of John Calvin and enabled him to set forth a hopeful message for other Puritans similarly trapped by a depressing outlook.
 - A. Life
 - Born at Elstow in the heyday of Puritanism, Bunyan was the son of poor parents. His father worked as a handyman, and Bunyan assumed the same role for a time. Bunyan evidently obtained his knowledge and mastery of the English language by reading the Bible. He enlisted in the Parliamentary Army

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- at age sixteen and served two years (1644-1646). About 1649 he married a devout woman who introduced him to two Puritan classics: Arthur Dent's *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and Bishop Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety*. After a tumultuous spiritual struggle he joined a Baptist congregation at Bedford in 1653. This little band licensed him to preach in 1657. When he refused to stop preaching at the Restoration in 1660, he spent the next twelve years in Bedford jail. During and after his imprisonment, he wrote prolifically. After his release in 1672 he gained great fame and the sobriquet "Bishop Bunyan." Under the Test Act in 1675, however, he was returned to prison for six months. For the rest of his life he worked among Baptists in Bedford and preached throughout England. He died August 31, 1688, from pneumonia contracted on a trip to Reading.

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- B. Writings
 - Altogether John Bunyan wrote eighty books. For our purposes the most significant would be *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, his spiritual autobiography published in 1666. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, probably composed during his brief re-imprisonment in 1675, depicts what Jungian psychologist Esther Harding has characterized as "really an experience in active imagination" on a "quest for individuation and the supreme value of the Self." (*Journey into Self*, 38, 52.) Bunyan himself called it an "allegory" that came to him under inspiration "Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly." ("The Author's Apology," *The Pilgrim's Progress*.) During his long imprisonment, Bunyan composed a treatise on prayer, *I Will Pray with the Spirit, and I Will*

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- *Pray with the Understanding*, that reveals his compatibility with the contemplative tradition in Christian history. In it he stoutly opposed the imposition of the Book of Common Prayer or even set prayers such as the Lord's Prayer. "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or, according to the Word, for the good of the Church, with submission, in Faith, to the Will of God." (*I Will Pray with the Spirit*, edited by Richard L. Greaves, 235.) The experiential emphasis is pronounced.

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- C. Struggle of Soul
 - Serious attention to his spiritual life following his first marriage threw Bunyan into a crisis as he sought to determine whether or not he was among the "elect." The Puritans gave a method for answering the question: Memorize scripture and have it dart into the mind and heart to confirm or deny. Some passages of scripture said yes; some said no. Bunyan pitched up and down like a little boat on a stormy sea. In *Grace Abounding* he tells how he found his way out of the dilemma created by Calvin's double-edged predestination. Typically of Puritan writing, he exaggerated his impieties in order to enhance God's magnificent mercy. He felt that he was a modern Esau who had sold not his natural birthright but his Christian birthright, something far worse. He experienced grace by happening onto the little congregation at Bedford of which he later became pastor. They listened to him. And the teaching of the pastor, John Gifford, was "much for my stability."

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- (GA 117.) Even with their help, however, he still could not come to even keel. Somewhere, in the midst of this trauma, he discovered Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, "which, when I had a little way perused, I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart." (GA 129.) It amazed him. He added later, "I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience." (GA 130.) Even Luther was not enough. He felt like a Judas, denying Christ. In a graphic depiction of his state of soul, he said, "Wherefore, still my life hung in doubt before me, not knowing which way I should tip; only this I found my soul desire, even to cast itself at the foot of grace, by prayer and supplication." (GA 175.) The solution came from God. First, in prayer, "that piece of a sentence darted

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- in upon me, 'My grace is sufficient.'" (GA 204.) Next, one day in a meeting of God's people, "these words did, with great power, suddenly break in upon me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee,' three times together; and, oh! Methought that every word was a mighty word unto me; as *my*, and *grace*, and *sufficient*, and *for thee*; they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be." (GA 206.) No, the agony didn't end there. The volatile saint still bounced up and down—just not as violently. He prayed that the two passages—about Esau and about Grace—might come into his mind and heart and do battle. "Well, about two or three days after, so they did indeed; they bolted both

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- upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strangely in me for a while; at last, that about Esau's birthright began to wax weak, and withdraw, and vanish; and this about the sufficiency of grace prevailed with peace and joy." (GA 213.) Bunyan depicted this in *The Pilgrim's Progress* as the battle of Christian with the Giant Despair at Doubting Castle.
- C. Mystical Experience
 - Bunyan's "dark night" should probably be characterized as mystical experience. Some experiences that followed it fit the pattern more precisely.

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- But one day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; and **methought withal, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand;** there, I say, is my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a-doing, God could not say of me, He wants my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever (Heb. xiii.8). (GA 229.)

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- Bunyan found his answer in Christ. “Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ, my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all; all my wisdom, all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.” (GA 232.) God strengthened his theological foundations.
 - Further, the Lord did also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God, that I was joined to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, and now was that a sweet word to me in Eph. v.30 [“because we are members of his body”]. By this also was my faith in him, as my righteousness, the more confirmed to me; for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person. (GA 233.)

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- The major difference between Bunyan’s experience and those reported in Catholic mystics is greater dependence on scripture, the Word of God, to confirm what he experienced. “The Scriptures now also were wonderful things unto me; I saw that the truth and verity of them were the keys of the kingdom of heaven; . . .” (GA 245.) Yet we must not press that point too hard, for, as we have seen all through this study, the mystics all relied on scriptures. Protestants need to readjust their perceptions regarding the saints’ dependence on scriptures throughout their long journey.

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- II. George Fox
 - George Fox (1624-1691) would fit the more restrictive definition of mystic. He experienced vivid touches by God from young adulthood onward. Strikingly, he possessed a genius for organization as well as deep consciousness of the Power of God at work in his life.
 - A. Life
 - George Fox was born in Drayton-in-the-Clay or Fenny Drayton. His father, Christopher, was a weaver known as “righteous Christer.” His mother, Mary Lago, Fox said, was “of the stock of martyrs.” Fox was apprenticed to a shoemaker. In 1643 a disruptive experience caused him to break family ties and set out in search of enlightenment.

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- In 1646 he began experiencing “openings” as he struggled with various issues and won a victory in learning to rely on “the Inner Light of the Living Christ.” Thereafter he began to preach that the truth is found in the inner voice of God speaking to the soul. He suffered frequent imprisonments, first at Nottingham in 1649, but his sincerity and earnestness soon attracted followers. In 1652 the family of Judge Thomas Fell opened their estate, Swarthmore, to Fox. In 1669 Judge Fell’s widow, Margaret, married Fox. To assure the growth of the nascent movement, Fox undertook missionary journeys—to Ireland in 1669, the West Indies and the American colonies in 1670-1671, and to Holland in 1677 and 1684. He attracted some notable personalities. Besides the Fells, they included Robert Barclay and William Penn. Fox died January 13, 1691.

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- B. Writings
 - Fox corresponded with numerous persons. Although he did not keep a journal in the proper sense, he dictated to Thomas Lower, his stepson-in-law, an autobiography down to 1675. Other materials were appended, and several different versions of the *Journal* created. We can gain much insight into Fox's religious experience through it.
- C. Fox as Mystic
 - It will be useful simply to cite a number of Fox's accounts of his intimacy with God. I will introduce the quotation with the year.

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- 1647—Fox reached a point of serious quandary as to what he should do. He no longer supported the Church of England, but he couldn't identify with dissenters. This message came: "And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy." (Nickalls, 11.)
- And then the Lord did gently lead me along, and did let me see his love, which was endless and eternal, and surpasseth all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books; and that love let me see myself as I was without him. (Nickalls, 11-12.)

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- Christ it was who had enlightened me, that gave me his light to believe in, and gave me hope, which is himself, revealed himself in me, and gave me his spirit and gave me his grace, which I found sufficient in the deeps and in weakness. (Nickalls, 12.)
- And this inward life did spring up in me, to answer all the opposing professors and priests, and did bring Scriptures to my memory to refute them with.
- At another time I saw the great love of God, and I was filled with admiration at the infiniteness of it; and then I saw what was cast out from God, and what entered into God's kingdom, and how by Jesus, the opener of the door by his heavenly key, the entrance was given. (Nickalls, 13.)

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- And one day when I had been walking solitarily abroad and was come home, I was taken up in the love of God, so that I could not but admire the greatness of his love. . . . As the Light appeared, all appeared that is out of the Light, darkness, death, temptations, the unrighteous, the ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the Light.
- Then after this there did a pure fire appear in me; then I saw how he sat as a refiner's fire and as the fuller's soap; and then the spiritual discerning came into me, by which I did discern my own thoughts, groans and sighs, and what it was that did veil me, and what it was that did open me. (Nickalls, 14.)
- I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings. (Nickalls, 19.)
- For I had been brought through the very ocean of darkness and death, and through the power and over the power of Satan, by the eternal glorious power of Christ. (Nickalls, 21.)

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- 1648—Fox experienced rapture. At Leicester he rebuked a priest who forbade a woman to speak in church.
“Whereupon I was rapt up, as in a rapture, in the Lord’s power; and I stepped up in a place and asked the priest, ‘Dost thou call this place a church? Or dost thou call this mixed multitude a church?’” (Nickalls, 24.)
- The Friends experienced much success between 1646 and 1648. Fox commented:
 - And divers meetings of Friends, in several places, were then gathered to God’s teaching, by his light, spirit, and power; for the Lord’s power brake forth more and more wonderfully.
 - Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. (Nickalls, 27.)

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- Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the light of life and became the children of it, but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. (Nickalls, 33.)

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- III. John Woolman
 - No Quaker exemplified the mystical yet practical piety of the Friends better than the American saint and social reformer John Woolman (1720-1772).
 - A. Life
 - Woolman was born in Northampton, Burlington County, West Jersey, on October 19, 1720, the fourth of Samuel and Elizabeth Woolman's six children. His religious sensitivities awakened early. By age seven, he recorded, he "began to be acquainted with the operations of Divine love." Reading Revelation 22 sensitized him "to seek that pure habitation . . . God had prepared for His servants."
 - At age twelve killing a mother robin feeding her young on the nest taught him the price of unthinking acts; he had to kill the baby robins lest they starve. At age twenty employment by a Quaker merchant put him in the uncomfortable position of writing a bill of sale for a black woman slave, a transaction that "so afflicted" his conscience

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- that he had to explain to the owner and the purchaser that slave-keeping was "inconsistent with the Christian religion." From age twenty-six he traveled the American colonies as a "minister" in the Society of Friends. Lest he be caught up in "more outward care and cumber than was required," he gave up a prosperous merchandizing business and earned his living as a tailor. The real concern of life, he concluded, was "so to pass my time that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd." Noticing the awful plight of people living in slavery, he spent about one month out of every year raising the consciousness of Quakers against the practice, until his death of smallpox in England on October 7, 1772.

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- B. Mystical Perceptions
 - 1. Whether we should call Woolman a mystic is debatable, but he clearly thought like many of the mystics. By the time he reached early adulthood he had fashioned a credo worthy of the Rhineland greats:
 - That true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator, and learns to exercise true justice and goodness, not only toward all men, but also toward the brute creatures; that, as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible Being, so, by the same principle, it was moved to love Him in all His manifestations in the visible world; that, as by His breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal sensible creatures, to say we love God as unseen, and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by His life, or by life derived from Him, was a contradiction in itself.

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- 2. Woolman's travels gave him deep insight into the causes of injustices such as slavery. Slave owners usually didn't inflict hurt intentionally; some treated slaves well. Out of a desire to enjoy comforts and conveniences for themselves, they acted unthinkingly. He observed the same in the case of whites breaking treaties they made with Indians, the hurts suffered by young sailors, and the mistreatment of horses and post-boys in the stagecoach traffic in England. In "A Plea for the Poor" he summed up his solution to the problem of exploitation:
 - Our gracious creator cares and provides for all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his

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- workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. *Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable—that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives.* Men of large estates whose hearts are thus enlarged are like fathers to the poor, and in looking over their brethren in distressed circumstances and considering their own more easy condition, find a field for humble meditation and feel the strength of these obligations they are under to be kind and tender-hearted toward them. (Ch 3; *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, edited by Phillips P. Moulton, 241; my italics.)

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- 3. Speaking about the plight of young sailors virtually shanghaied into service, he wrote with heart bursting.
 - O that all may learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly of heart. Then in faithfully following Him He will teach us to be content with food and raiment without respect to the customs or honours of this world. Men thus redeemed will feel a tender concern for their fellow-creatures, and a desire that those in the lowest stations may be assisted and encouraged, and where owners of ships attain to the perfect law of liberty and are doers of the Word, these will be blessed in their deeds.

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- 4. You can see in two treatises he wrote about *The True Harmony of Mankind* that Woolman posited a solution in the same place many of the mystics did—the following of Christ. The harmony of society broken by self-centered pursuit of wealth and power can be restored by following the Golden Rule.
 - Christ being the Light dwells always in the Light, and if our walking be thus, and in every affair and concern we faithfully follow this divine Leader, he preserves from giving just cause for any to quarrel with us. And where this foundation is laid, and mutually kept to by families conversant with each other, the way is open for those comforts in Society which Our Heavenly Father intends as a part of our happiness in this

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- world, and then we may experience the goodness and pleasantness of dwelling together in Unity. But where ways of living take place which tend to oppression, and in the pursuit of wealth, people do that to others which they know would not be acceptable to themselves, either in exercising an absolute power over them, or otherwise laying on the unequitable burdens; here a fear lest that measure should be meted to them which they have measured to others, incites a care to support that by craft and cunning devices which stands not on the firm foundation of Righteousness. Thus the harmony of society is broken; and from hence commotions and wars do frequently arise in the world. (“Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind,” Ch I; in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 444.)

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- Part 2: Modern Mystics
 - Some might think mystics had disappeared entirely in this modern secular era in which we live, but that is far from true either for Catholics or Protestants or Orthodox. The traumatic 20th century, it is true, birthed and nurtured profound pessimism and even nihilism as seen in Nobel prize-winning playwright Samuel Beckett's plays and in "God is dead" theology. In *Waiting for Godot* the main character expresses the despair and hopelessness many felt in the aftermath of two world wars in quick succession. "I've puked my little puke of a life away, I tell ya'" To that his friend comfortingly replied, "To every man his little Cross, till he dies and is forgotten. What is terrible is to have thought." In the "secular sixties" some theologians echoed Friedrich Nietzsche's bold announcement of the death of God. Reflecting on some musings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from*

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- *Prison*, they challenged us to face up to the fact that humankind has "come of age" and no longer needs a God-hypothesis. Modern Christians should let the world "write the agenda for the Church" and focus on being "the man for others." As much fascination as Secular or Radical Theology held for a time, the very same traumas that gave it life seem to have birthed mystics. Curiously, Bonhoeffer, whose musings inspired a whole range of speculations about God's disappearance, made Anne Fremantle's list of Protestant mystics during those secular sixties. Fremantle cited a poem entitled "Christians and Unbelievers" from the same *Letters and Papers from Prison* invoked in support of "religionless Christianity."

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- Men go to God when they are sore bestead,
- Pray to him for succour, for his peace, for bread,
- For mercy for them sick, sinning or dead:
- All men do so, Christian and unbelieving.
- Men go to God when he is sore bestead,
- Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,
- Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead:
- Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.
- God goeth to every man when he is sore bestead,
- Feedeth body and spirit with his bread,
- For Christians, heathens alike he hangeth dead:
- And both alike forgiving. (*The Protestant Mystics*, 357.)

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- I would have cited some other passages in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, but I think Fremantle correctly saw deep personal and experiential piety in Bonhoeffer. In this lecture, however, I would like to speak about two other modern Protestant mystics, about whom there should be less reason for debate—Dag Hammarskjöld and Rufus Jones. Hammarskjöld's death in a plane crash around midnight, September 17, 1961, just a short time before publication of *The Protestant Mystics*, may explain why he did not make Fremantle's list. His journal published as *Markings* was not discovered until after his death.

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- IV. Dag Hammarskjöld
 - Deeply influenced by the Rhineland mystics and John of the Cross, Hammarskjöld combined apophatic and kataphatic mysticism.
 - A. Life
 - Dag Hammarskjöld was born July 29, 1905, shortly before his father left the Swedish cabinet and assumed a two-year appointment as Swedish Minister to Denmark. With his father's appointment as Governor of Uppland in 1907, the family moved to the great Castle of Uppsala. Dag lived at Uppsala for most of the next twenty-five years, even during Hjalmar Hammarskjöld's years as Prime Minister of Sweden (1914-1917). At the time Nathan Söderblom, an outstanding ecumenical leader, was Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden. Dag had a close relationship with the Söderblom children, Jon Olof and Yvonne. Dag Hammarskjöld distinguished himself as a student. He matriculated at the University of Uppsala at seventeen and completed a B.A. in two years, majoring in history of literature, philosophy, French, and political economy. From 1925 to

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- 1930 he did graduate studies at Uppsala, majoring in economics and law. In 1930 he entered government service as secretary of a Royal Commission on Unemployment. Other positions followed. In 1935 he was appointed Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, in which he continued for ten years. During 1941 to 1945 he also served as secretary of the Bank of Sweden. In 1945 he resumed writing meditations he had jotted down in 1941-1942 and continued them to the end of his life. From 1945 to 1950 he headed the Swedish Delegation implementing the Marshall Plan through the Organization for European Economic Cooperation. In 1950 he assumed the role of Secretary-General in the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at forty-five having reached the pinnacle of civic office in Sweden, but the next two years was for him a "dark night of the soul" leading up to a dramatic religious moment. April 1

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- Hammarskjöld was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations and inducted in New York City on April 10. Dating his entry precisely for the first time on April 7, he quoted Thomas Aquinas on doing everything to the glory of God alone and added, "I am the vessel. The draught is God's. And God is the thirsty one. . . . In the last analysis, what does the word 'sacrifice' mean? Or even the word 'gift'? He who has nothing can give nothing. The gift is God's—to God. . . . He who has surrendered himself to it knows that the Way ends on the Cross—even when it is leading him through the jubilation of Geneseret or the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. To be free, to be able to stand up and leave *everything* behind—without looking back. To say *Yes--*." (*Markings*, 88.) He served until his death in a mysterious plane crash near Leopoldville in the Congo about midnight September 17-18, 1961. He was buried in the Castle at Uppsala.

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- B. Was Hammarskjöld a Mystic?
 - Any mystical claims for writings published during the turbulent, secular sixties underwent severe testing. Dag Hammarskjöld had earned a reputation as a consummate public servant during his tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was a native of a secular country (Sweden) and did not wear religion on his sleeve. It is not surprising, therefore, that Henry P. Van Dusen and Gustaf Aulén, interpreters of *Markings*, would spend considerable time answering the question as to whether Hammarskjöld was a mystic. Shortly after his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations he wrote the following for a radio programme conducted by Edward R. Murrow:

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- From generations of soldiers and government officials on my father’s side I inherited a belief that no life was more satisfactory than one of selfless service to your country—or humanity. This service required a sacrifice of all personal interests, but likewise the courage to stand up unflinchingly for your convictions.
- From scholars and clergymen on my mother’s side I inherited a belief that, in the very radical sense of the Gospels, all men were equals as children of God, and should be met and treated by us as our masters.
- Faith is a state of the mind and the soul. . . . The language of religion is a set of formulas which register a basic spiritual experience. It must be regarded as describing in terms to be defined by philosophy, the reality which is accessible to our senses and which we can analyse with the tools of logic. I was late in understanding what this meant. When I finally reached that point, the beliefs in which I was once brought up and which,

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- in fact, had given my life direction even while my intellect still challenged their validity, were recognized by me as mine in their own right and by my free choice. . . . the explanation of how man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom ‘self-surrender’ had been the way to self-realisation, and who in ‘singleness of mind’ and ‘inwardness’ had found strength to say Yes to every demand which the needs of their neighbours made them face, and to say Yes also to every fate life had in store for them. . . . Love—that much misused and misinterpreted word—for them meant simply an overflowing of the strength with which they felt themselves filled when living in true self-oblivion. And this love found natural expression in an unhesitant fulfillment of duty and an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally of toil, suffering—or happiness. (W. H. Auden, “Foreword,” *Markings*, 9-10.)

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- **With his starting point in service Hammarskjöld found exactly what he wanted in the great medieval mystics, particularly Meister Eckhart, who argued that Martha had attained a higher stage than Mary.** In *Markings* “the inner life” is synonymous with faith. Hammarskjöld quoted John of the Cross, “Faith is God’s union with the soul.” Mysticism supplied him with a corrective to the intellectualist view of faith. He frequently refers to God in terms supplied by the mystics: God is Oneness, Unity, Wholeness. Like the Rhineland mystics, Eckhart looked to Jesus as the model, especially Jesus on the way to the Cross. As Gustaf Aulén has observed, “The main perspective here—as at many other points—is, in *imitatio* to follow Jesus on the way of sacrifice.” (*Dag Hammarskjöld’s White Book*, 123.) This not a Christ-mysticism, as in Albert Schweitzer, but a God-mysticism.

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- C. Hammarskjöld’s Mystical Theology
 - 1. In his meditation dated April 7, 1953, he uttered this prayer/confession:
 - Thou who art over us,
 - Thou who art one of us,
 - Thou who *art*—
 - Also within us,
 - May all see Thee—in me also,
 - May I prepare the way for Thee,
 - May I thank Thee for all that shall fall to my lot,
 - May I also not forget the needs of others,
 - Keep me in Thy love
 - As Thou wouldst that all should be kept in mine.
 - May everything in this my being be directed to Thy glory
 - And may I never despair.
 - For I am under Thy hand,
 - And in Thee in all power and goodness.

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- Give me a pure heart—that I may see Thee,
- A humble heart—that I may hear Thee,
- A heart of love—that I may serve Thee,
- A heart of faith—that I may abide in Thee. (*Markings*, 95.)
- 2. Hammarskjöld quoted often from Eckhart. December 25, 1956, he wrote: “Of the Eternal Birth”—to me, this now says everything there is to be said about what I have learned and have still to learn. The soul that would experience this birth must detach herself from all outward things: within herself completely at one with herself. . . . You must have an exalted mind and a *burning* heart in which, nevertheless, reign silence and stillness.” (Meister Eckhart) (*Markings*, 124.)

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- The next day, he wrote:
 - Forward! Thy orders are given in secret. May I always hear them—and obey.
 - Forward! Whatever distance I have covered, it does not give me the right to halt.
 - Forward! It is the attention given to the last steps before the summit which decides the value of all that went before. (*Markings*, 125.)
- At the beginning of 1957, he wrote, “Each morning we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and give back.” Then later, “—Not I, but God in me!” Following up on that February 24, he remarked, “So a living relation to God is the necessary precondition for the self-knowledge which enables us to follow a straight path, and so be victorious over ourselves, forgiven by ourselves.” (*Markings*, 128.) He recognized his humanness. On June 23 he confessed, “The intense blaze of your

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- anxiety reveals to what a great extent you are still fettered, still alienated from the One." (*Markings*, 132.) Self-effacement is critical. "You will know Life and be acknowledged by it according to your degree of transparency, your capacity, that is, to vanish as an end, and remain purely a means." (*Markings*, 133.) On September 3 he asked about forgiving himself. "To forgive yourself"--? No, that doesn't work: we have to *be forgiven*. But we can only believe this is possible if we ourselves can forgive." What a daunting weight he carried. "Your responsibility is indeed terrifying. If you fail, it is God, thanks to your having betrayed Him, who will fail mankind. You fancy you can be responsible *to* God; can you carry the responsibility *for* God?" (*Markings*, 133.) On September 26, he said, "The best and most wonderful thing that can happen to you in this life, is that you should be silent and let God work and

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- speak." (*Markings*, 134.) April 10, 1958, he was thinking, "Only when you descend into yourself and encounter the Other, do you then experience goodness as the ultimate reality—united and living—in Him and *through* you." (*Markings*, 139.)
- 4. On his birthday, July 29, 1959, he reflected on a central virtue in mystical theology. "Humility is just as much the opposite of self-abasement as it is of self-exaltation. To be humble is *not to make comparisons*. . . . It *is*—is nothing, yet at the same time one with everything. It is in this sense that humility is absolute self-abasement." (*Markings*, 147.) Still thinking about humility a week later. On August 4 he wrote, "To have humility is to experience reality, not *in relation to ourselves*, but in its sacred independence. It is to see,

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- judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. Then, how much disappears, and all that remains falls in place.” (*Markings*, 148.)
- 5. Whitsunday, 1961, Hammarskjöld put it all in a thimble:
 - I don’t know Who—or what—put the question, I don’t know when it was put. I don’t even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.
 - From that moment I have known what it means ‘not to look back’, and ‘to take no thought for the morrow.’ (*Markings*, 169.)

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- 6. July 19, 1961, this grand prayer:
 - Give us
 - A pure heart
 - That we may see Thee,
 - A humble heart
 - That we may hear Thee,
 - A heart of love
 - That we may serve Thee,
 - A heart of faith
 - That we may live Thee,

 - Thou
 - Whom I do not know
 - But Whose I am

 - Thou
 - Whom I do not comprehend
 - But Who hast dedicated me
 - To my fate.
 - Thou—

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- V. Rufus Jones
 - Rufus Matthew Jones (1863-1948), a Quaker philosopher, was a strong advocate for mystical religion. Like Hammarskjöld, deeply interested in the Rhineland mystics, especially Eckhart, he combined the apophatic and kataphatic traditions in a remarkable way.
- A. Life
 - The son of Edwin and Mary Hoxie Jones, Rufus was born in South China, Maine, January 25, 1863. He attended the Providence Friends (now Moses Brown) School overlooking Narragansett Bay and Haverford College, entering as a Sophomore in 1882. Majoring in history, he received his B.A. degree in June 1885. Declining a graduate

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- fellowship in history at the University of Pennsylvania, he took a job as a teacher at Oakwood Seminary, a Quaker boarding-school at Union Springs, NY. In 1893 he joined the faculty of Haverford College and taught there until his retirement in 1935. In the meantime he studied philosophy in Europe and at Harvard (1900-1901), but he completed only an M.A. at the latter. During his teaching career, Rufus played a leading role in the American Friends Service Committee and numerous other Quaker activities. He developed a friendship with Herbert Hoover, also a Quaker, when the soon-to-be president headed the Allied governments' organization for the Relief and Reconstruction of Europe. He died at Haverford June 16, 1948.

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– B. Writings

- Rufus Jones was a prolific author, and most of his writing, whether philosophical or historical, focused on the spiritual life. A look at selected titles will illustrate the consistency of his concern for the life of God in the world of today. *Social Law in the Spiritual World. Studies in Human and Divine Inter-Relationship* (1904); *The Double Search. Studies in Atonement and Prayer* (1906); *The Abundant Life* (1908); *The Inner Life* (1916); *The World Within* (1918); *Religion as Reality, Life and Power* (1919); *The Nature and Authority of Conscience* (1920); *Spiritual Energies in Daily Life* (1922); *Fundamental Ends of Life* (1924); *The Life of Christ* (1926);

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- *Religion and Life* (1926); *The New Quest* (1928); *Pathways to the Reality of God* (1931); *A Preface to Christian Faith in a New Age* (1932); *The Testimony of the Soul* (1936); *Some Problems of Life* (1937); *The Eternal Gospel* (1938); *New Eyes for Invisibles* (1943); *The Radiant Life* (1944); *A Call to What Is Vital* (1948). He finished proof-reading the manuscript for the last book just hours before he died. To these books one could add his autobiography completed in installments: *Finding the Trail of Life* (1926), *Trail of Life in College* (1929), *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years* (1934), and *The Luminous Trail* (1947). Several books explored mysticism in Christian history: *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909), *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth*

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- *Centuries* (1914), *The Story of George Fox* (1919), *The Church's Debt to Heretics* (1924), *New Studies in Mystical Religion* (1927), *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion* (1930), *George Fox, Seeker and Friend*, *Mysticism in Democracy in the English Commonwealth* (1932), and *The Flowering of Mysticism; the Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century* (1939).
- C. Mystical Thought
 1. Harry Emerson Fosdick rendered a great service in putting together an anthology of Rufus Jones's thought under the title *Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1951). He raised a series of questions to which he drew answers from the extensive writings of Rufus Jones. The best I can do here is to share a digest of Rufus Jones's most

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- important ideas that I put together in a biography of Douglas Steere. (*Love at the Heart of Things*, 90-94.) Rufus espoused a profoundly personalist philosophy. "The true path [to God]," he insisted, "is through personality." (*Social Law in the Spiritual World*, 44.) Sounding like Dietrich Bonhoeffer a generation later, he urged attention to "a Beyond within ourselves." (*Pathways to the Reality of God*, 199.) Like Bernard of Clairvaux, he emphasized that God takes initiative in the divine-human relationship. "The reason we can hope to find God is that [God] is here, engaged all the time in finding us." (*Pathways*, xi.) In mystical experience God breaks through "like a thrust from beyond . . . like the tides from the Ocean beyond the ocean where we bathe." (*Spirit in Man*, 58.) In line with traditional Quaker thought, he held a high view of human nature and potential. Nothing is truer than that human beings are, by nature,

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- finite-infinite beings and that “some persons at some moments in their lives are carried beyond the usual level of their range of thought and reasoning, and arrive at flashes of truth and insights into the meaning of life and the nature of God, which seem to the recipient like spontaneous gifts of wisdom from above.” (*Pathways*, 149.) He resisted, however, Kierkegaard’s overemphasis on “that solitary individual.” “Personality at every stage involves interrelation,” he insisted (*Social Law*, 58.) “There is no self-realization for any individual who is only a bare individual. [One] can advance toward personality only by being an organic member of a whole.” (*Social Law*, 76-77.) He insisted on the centrality of Jesus in the Quaker tradition. That the universe is “fundamentally spiritual” has become evident in and through Jesus Christ, history’s highest and best revelation of personal life, he said (*The Inner Life*, 178.) Divine love is “at the heart of things”

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- and constantly revealed in personal lives and supremely in the life of Jesus, “a concrete person who is divine enough to show love and grace in consummate degree, and human enough to be identified with us, that we can be assured of love at the heart of things.” (*Pathways*, 144.) Christ and not Adam is the *head* of the human race.
- 2. Rufus emphasized experiential, mystical religion which is as available to us through prayer as it was to the apostles. “The new age cannot *live* on naturalism or on secularism,” he contended. “Life becomes sterile and futile without the depth and power which comes from participation in eternal realities.” (*A Preface to Christian Faith in a New Age*, 42.) Like Teilhard de Chardin, he located the key to life in improvement of human potential to “see” the Eternal in the midst of time. (*New Eyes for Invisibles*, 12-14.) Science, by

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- Itself, is not enough, great though its contributions may be. “Science has not closed, and will never close the soul’s east window of divine surprise. We are built for two kinds of worlds—one a space-time world and one a world of spiritual values—and we can be denizens of either world.” (*A Preface*, 55-56.) The heart of the modern tragedy lies in absolutist claims for scientific method. Yet religion must not seal itself off from the discoveries of science; if it is to be vital, it must accept whatever is true. Neither religion nor science must assume that it holds the only acceptable method of knowing. Something is to be gained both by the spectator method of the scientist and the method of vital experience of the mystic. More persons have mystical

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- experiences than many suppose, for most religious persons possess an “undeveloped and uncultivated form of mystical consciousness.” (*The Inner Life*, 178.) He found in John Woolman the practical justification for contemplative activism, citing Woolman’s *Journal*: “To turn all we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives.” (*New Eyes*, 183.) He considered prayer the central thing in religion and believed it could reach beyond the person who prayed and, reaching out by divine telepathy, could “work extraordinary effects in the lives of others.” (*A Call to What Is Vital*, 138.) Prayer is natural to human beings. “The human heart is sensitive to God as the retina is to light waves,” he wrote. “The soul possesses a native yearning for intercourse and companionship which takes it to God as naturally as the homing instinct of the

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- pigeon takes it to the place of its birth.” (*A Call*, 139.) He believed prayer has power extending even to nature.
 - Prayer releases energy as certainly as the closing of an electric circuit does. It heightens all human capacities. It refreshes and quickens life. It unlocks reservoirs of power. It opens invisible doors into new storehouses of spiritual force for the person to live by, and, as I believe, for others to live by as well. It is effective and operative as surely as are the forces of steam or gravitation. (*The World Within*, 102.)
- He emphasized the importance of corporate prayer or worship and remained steadfast in his appreciation of the Quaker silent meeting.

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- 3. Rufus Jones possessed a gift for inspiring others and challenging them to give an account of the hope that was in them. He reminded his readers that we today have an advantage over the first apostles in “the luminous trail of saints whom Christ has made” and centuries of Christian victories over the world. (*The Luminous Trail*, vi.) He urged people to fuse the contemplative and the active lives. “There are deeps in us all far below our ideas,” he insisted. Sometimes the walls between visible and invisible “grow thin and almost vanish away” and we feel we are in contact with more than ourselves (*New Eyes*, 59, 61.) We must not conform ourselves to the environment, as Herbert Spencer urged, but conform the environment to what it ought to be.

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