

Original transcript in German:
Seelenführerkurs Mystik: July 18-21, 1927

Fr. Joseph Kentenich

Spiritual Direction of the Mystical Graces

*Excerpts from
Seelenführerkurs Mystik: July 18-21, 1927
in: "Texte zur Mystik, 1927/1941"*

*with excerpts from Fr. Günter Niehüser's introduction to
"Unterweisungen über das Gebet" (1992)*

translated by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2005
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Introduction

As the Schoenstatt Movement grew in the 1920s, the core of young diocesan priests in the Federation needed formation in how to deal with fundamental pastoral questions. In 1924, Fr. Joseph Kentenich therefore began an annual course in spiritual direction¹. In the 1927 course he tackled the delicate topic of directing “souls striving for perfection,” especially under the consideration of possible mystical graces. He held the course twice, on July 18-21 and again on August 30-September 3, 1927. Transcripts exist for both dates².

Translated here are excerpts from the July 18-21, 1927 course. What makes the course interesting is not only the discussion of the mystical graces, but also how Fr. Kentenich sets up the topic. As a result, the reader will find extensive passages from the First and Second Conferences which serve as a lengthy introduction. Then follows the actual topic of mysticism with its sometimes difficult terms and concepts.

Because mysticism is a difficult topic, and because Fr. Kentenich returned to the topic at intervals in his priestly life, it is helpful to situate the topic in a larger context. The following text by Fr. Günter Niehüser provides this. It is taken from his introduction to the Sion Patris edition of Fr. Kentenich’s 1944 Dachau study *Unterweisungen über das Gebet* (instructions about prayer)³.

¹ For more, see introduction to J. Kentenich, *Perspectives on the Spiritual Direction of Youth* (1926) (Austin, 2007), p. 3f.

² Both go by the name *Seelenführerkurs Mystik* 1927 and are available in J. Kentenich/Heinrich Hug (ed.), *Texte zur Mystik, 1927/1941* (Mount Sion, 2000).

³ J. Kentenich, *Unterweisungen über das Gebet* (Mount Sion, 1992); introduced by G. Niehüser, “Vorwort: Einführung in den Text der ‘Gebetsstudie,’” p. III-XII.

Aspects of Fr. Kentenich’s Approach to the Mystical Graces

Fr. Günter Niehüser (1992)

1.1 In 1944, in the “hell of Dachau,” our father composed a still scarcely-accessible text on the topic of mystical prayer and the grace of contemplation. Why did he dictate these “*instructions about prayer*”? And why did he go to such trouble in the concentration camp to write a study of such length?

The immediate pretext for the study was a question. One of the Sisters asked if one can live a heroic life of virtue without the grace of mystical contemplation. He could have answered this with a short reply. But apparently he felt it was an inquiry that required him, as founder, to give a thorough response. It was a question, posed to the overall system of Schoenstatt’s spirituality, that very likely would arise again and again after his death. The development of the Blank Check and the Inscriptio¹ meant that Schoenstatt was following paths leading to the highest heights of striving for sanctity. Along with all masters of the spiritual life he knew that such a high degree of striving must be accompanied by a corresponding life of prayer. He therefore wanted to pick up on and answer all questions connected with growth in the higher prayer life.

1.2 It is generally known that our father was very reserved in his teaching and practice about dealing with mystical graces. He totally places the accent on the “ordinary” way to sanctity. But a short *historical contextualization of the “prayer study”* makes it clear that from the beginning he came in contact with mystically gifted persons again and again. One only needs to recall his view that Joseph Engling had been led to the heights of mystical graces of prayer.

After the First World War, a vibrant interest about mysticism developed in Germany. Books on mystical questions were published, chairs of mystical theology were established, and professional journals discussed the issue. It was evident to our father that he had

¹ Especially in the years 1939 to 1941. See J. Kentenich/J. Niehaus (ed.), *Schoenstatt’s Instrument Spirituality* (Waukesha, 1995), Chapter 6.

to publically discuss these issues. One fundamental ascetical theme which he frequently presented in his early workshops was “walking with God”¹ as a way to a lived interior relationship with God.

In 1927 mysticism was the topic of a course on spiritual direction. At this time he already established fundamental positions, the core of which he maintained the rest of his life. The theological debate was stuck on the question: is mystical prayer, properly speaking – that is, infused contemplation – the normal final aim of the development of the spiritual life, and therefore something that all Christians should strive for, or is it a special grace which God gives only to a select few? This was called the “mystical question.”

In his characteristic style, our father leaves the theoretical question open, even though his personal opinion was that the real mystical graces of infused contemplation are something extraordinary. His practical and likewise cautious and yet decisive approach takes a position with something of both theoretical positions. Building on the foundation of healthy everyday sanctity, he wants to go the way of prayer as far as the “prayer of simplicity,” that is, of acquired contemplation. Because this also causes all obstacles to be removed, we are then disposed in a “negative way” for the extraordinary graces of infused contemplation – if God in his goodness wants to grant them to us. His way is therefore that of the so-called *dispositio negativa*.

Our father normally portrays growth in the life of grace as growth in the three divine virtues, more and more perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This also applies to its effects in the prayer life, shaped in an essential way by walking with God (the “warming, consuming light”). In this way he handles important themes of the interior progression of grace and growth in prayer life without directly speaking about “mysticism.” His public reserve is justified by the experience that scarcely any other area of human experience so easily falls prey to possible deception as mystical experience.

As a result of the Nazi persecution the ascetical striving of the Schoenstatt Family grew. In 1939 the book *Organic Asceticism* was

¹ Also known as the practice of the presence of God. Biblical reference point: Psalm 56,13.

published, a kind of handbook of Schoenstatt asceticism. When Schoenstatt celebrated its 25th anniversary, the theme was taking the Founding Document totally seriously. “Perfect conformity with the will of God” came to be described with the term “Blank Check.” Both Blank Check and crowning were offered as a Jubilee gift¹. But the situation continued to intensify. The striving went still deeper and embraced the love of the cross. The term which developed for it in Schoenstatt is “Inscriptio.”

This development can be outwardly described as steps in which persons consciously decide – in consecrations to Mary – to move [a definite way] in their striving for sanctity. At the same time, the question occupied our father: Which ways and experiences of prayer do these consecrations prepare, and to some degree are presuppose? It is not surprising that in January 1941 he gave a workshop for priests on these questions now known by the title “Growth in the higher life of prayer.” There he discusses how the Blank Check corresponds to the way of prayer of acquired contemplation and the Inscriptio to infused contemplation, to the extent that God gives this gift.

¹ The Blank Check of the Schoenstatt Movement was offered on October 18, 1939, and the crowning of the MTA in the Original Shrine took place on December 10, 1939.

First Conference

{16} Last night we already changed the object of our discussion. We want to speak about the mystical graces. I was surprised, but also pleased, at how you accepted the topic. This makes it easy for me to carry out the first line of thought.

First of all, it is my task to create a unified mentality. I want to track down where the threads of our souls are, weaving them together and uniting them with a topic that gathers the interest of us all. This is our custom at these workshops.

I would like to do this more thoroughly than usual this time, not because you are uninterested, but because the subject requires a detachment from everyday life.

I would like to fulfill this task using two groups of thoughts.

First Group of Thought: Starting Points

Let me track down the threads of our souls and unite them with an appropriate topic... I will then try to more precisely define the topic. From this topic I will try to {17} dig more deeply into our souls, in order to find further connecting points.

We must seek the *starting points* in the line of the previous courses on spiritual direction.

May I ask you a question: What expectations did you bring with you? What are you expecting from this course on spiritual direction? What do you expect in general from these courses on spiritual direction?

Most of you expect a personal spiritual enrichment and deepening.

But is this the purpose? No! This is the purpose of a retreat; it should enrich my own spiritual life. But the purpose of these spiritual direction courses is the salvation of the souls of others. This is their first purpose.

Today it is not enough for us to be holy priests; we must also be leaders for others.

Why it is that we nonetheless come expecting something for our own spiritual enrichment? It comes from our present situation. As

young priests we find ourselves in the so-called “mule age”¹, a stage in life when we are very focused on ourselves. And this is justified because one must go through many inner crises.

So, how can we bring our personal needs together with our topic?

We are trying to gain clarity on how to lead souls who are striving for perfection. And based on experience, this proves enriching for our own spiritual life as well.

{18} One Federation brother writes:

“What presently helps me again and again in a time when my spiritual life is rather wobbly, is the fact that I am confessor for Sisters. When I see how they strive, it also motivates me to strive eagerly once more...”

The longing for a deepening of one’s own spiritual life has brought you here. If we discuss the needs of souls striving for perfection, we will not come up too short. It is part of striving for the perfection of my state in life to learn how to fulfill my profession as perfectly as possible. And that is the point of our previous courses.

[And so] the definition of the spiritual director:

A spiritual director is a priest, appointed by God, who in fatherly attitude actively helps a particular soul for a period of time to discover and realize, rapidly and surely, through self-initiative and self-autonomy, his personal ideal².

In the first course³ we discussed three areas:

- a) *The goal of spiritual direction.*
- b) *The way (method) of spiritual direction.*
- c) *The person of the spiritual director.*

Then, when we had clearly defined the goal we said that three

¹ German: *Muluszeit*

² The definition already developed by Fr. Kentenich in the first courses on spiritual direction in 1924 and 1925. Cf. *Seelenführerkurs*, August 15-30, 1924, transcript, p. 12, and *Seelenführerkurs*, August 4-7, 1925, transcript, p. 1. See the repetition of the same definition in the 1926 course in *Perspectives on the Spiritual Direction of Youth*, p. 13.

³ August 24-30, 1924.

kinds of persons are in special need of spiritual direction:

{19} a) *The youth (or beginners).*

b) *Those who are spiritually sick.*

c) *Those who are striving for perfection.*

That course probably offered everyone the most because it laid the foundations for the other courses.

The second course¹ concerned itself with the general way one goes about spiritual direction. We found it indicated, as our definition says, in the words “*in fatherly attitude...*”

In the third course² we applied this fatherly attitude to the spiritual life of young people. How does the fatherly attitude express itself in the service of the souls of the young?

Some would like that we continue this topic.

What speaks in favor? (....)

What speaks against? (....)

[Other wishes...] (....)

{22} *Summary:* All of the individual wishes which you have brought here, can be connected in some way with our topic, that is, the guidance of souls striving for perfection.

Let me formulate the question this way: How does the fatherly attitude express itself when guiding souls striving for perfection?

Second Group of Thoughts: Focus of the Topic

Let me formulate the topic more precisely and try to [capture] the connecting points in your souls...

What ways can I take when striving for perfection?

I can go two ways:

a) *the ordinary way of asceticism*³,

b) *the extraordinary way of mysticism.*

¹ August 24-31, 1925.

² August 30-September 3, 1926.

³ In the overall body of Fr. Kentenich's work the theme of the ordinary way of perfection takes a very prominent place. The classical work in this regard is *Everyday Sanctity*, which is available in English in various editions.

For definite reasons I am choosing this time to focus on the second way, the extraordinary way of mysticism.

The topic is therefore: How does the fatherly attitude express itself when guiding souls striving for perfection, namely on the way of the mystical graces?

{23} [We approach our topic through three preliminary questions:]

1. What interest do we have in this topic?

2. What does “fatherly attitude” mean?

3. What is “mysticism”?

First Preliminary Question:

What Interest Do We Have in This Topic?

{24} First a purely personal reason.

But then also an objective one.

(a) Those who have worked with me for some time will be surprised that I address this topic. I have often had the occasion to speak about it or to direct such souls, but have always refused.

And then one day, before I even realized it, I was in the midst of directing such souls. These were down-to-earth souls that I had already directed for years, but without knowing their gift. And suddenly I saw how they were in the midst of mystical contemplation.

This warmed me up to the topic and removed all obstacles, so that it is now easy for me not only to think clearly about it, but also to speak clearly...

(b) The retreat following this workshop is planned with a liturgical theme. This workshop will go together with the retreat. Whoever has not been at the first will not get much from the second...

But you will tell me: That is not my worry.

{25} I must show you that it is of interest to you. Where might there be starting points for you to have a loving devotion to souls striving for perfection?

Now I must feel my way forward. I must see whether our topic can be joined with your interests, or whether they might even be identical. Many such interests can be found, which we can unite with the mystical currents [alive today].

1. *Your sense for current trends.*
2. *Your sense for practical pastoral questions.*
3. *Your sense for a serious striving for heroism.*
4. *Your sense for recreation.*

I am now connecting with some things that you are feeling.

We will distance ourselves from the periphery of our pastoral thinking and enter the periphery of mysticism. This will serve as the introduction to our topic.

1. *Interest in Current Trends*

This is a more scientific interest. Do we still have this? Anyone who knows the Federation knows that we are interested in everything being discussed.

In other contexts one likes to use the buzzword, “*It is modern!*” to awaken a sense for something of this kind.

But it is not a buzzword when I say that a mighty mystical movement is currently sweeping all of culture, both Catholic and non-Catholic...

{26} Let us start with the Catholics. The expression has generated widespread interest in books and at the universities. And it ought to catch our attention that two chairs for asceticism and mysticism have been established in Rome...

To remain in Germany, just take a look at popular literature. For instance, the official magazine of the C.V.¹ has an article on “The college student and mysticism.” What do students have to do with mysticism?

In other periodicals we find expositions about “Politics and mysticism,” “Expressionism and mysticism;” a Protestant writes about mysticism in the seventeenth century. Even socialist papers are reporting on the reappearance of Catholic mystics. It involves papers in general circulation.

And scientific journals? One says that there was a time when there were more mystics and mystical authors in Germany than in all

¹ Presumably an organization of Catholic university students.

the other nations together. That was before the Reformation, in the thirteenth century. Hurter published a list of mystical authors from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Of a total of 90, only 5 were German. That was after the Reformation. The Spanish mystics surpassed the Germans. Even the Dutch have done much.

It seems that Germany wants to make up for the lack... A great deal is being published today in this area: Zahn, Meschler, Krebs, Grabmann, Lercher, Richstätter¹, Mager, Dimmler² (I warn against him, {27} he is very superficial). All of these are writing on mysticism. In addition there are many translations. Think of Loiusmet³, Poulain⁴, John of the Cross, St. Teresa...

To this we must add the modern mystics: Father Eberschweiler⁵, Lucie Christine⁶, Sr. Emilie Schneider⁷...

With this I want to show that a strong wave of mysticism is sweeping our Catholic people, especially in Germany.

The same can be shown for non-Catholics. I only point out the translations of the old mystics (Tauler, Seuse) by Protestant publishing houses, though admittedly infiltrated with a good dose of pantheism. Even spiritism and occultism are sailing under the banner of mysticism...

From our earliest days it has been our ideal to be a kind of ascetical training school. We wanted to take our position from a distinct standpoint. This is how we have done it so far; this is how we do it

¹ Fr. Karl Richstätter, SJ (1864-1949).

² Fr. Emil Dimmler (1870-1956), priest of the Diocese of Freiburg, Germany and biblical scholar as well as author of various works on mysticism.

³ Dom Savinien Louismet, OSB (1858-1926). Two of his best known works are *Mysticism, True and False* and *Mystical Initiation*

⁴ August Poulain, SJ, author of *The Graces of Interior Prayer* and *Handbook of Mysticism*.

⁵ Fr. William Eberschweiler, SJ (1837-1921), German Jesuit and mystic.

⁶ Pseudonym used by a mystically gifted lay woman (1844-1908). She was married for 22 years and then 21 years a widow, and the mother of five children. See note in J. Kentenich, *Aus dem Glauben leben*, Vol. 9, p. 165.

⁷ Sr. Emilie (Julie) Schneider (1820-1859), German religious (Daughters of the Holy Cross) and mystic. Her letters describing her mystical experiences were published after her death in 1860.

today. We see, from the standpoint of the current trends, that a discussion of mysticism is right and just.

As priests we must delve into this, already as a matter of scientific interest. Unfortunately, many of our priests are deficient in meta-physical foundations, even though they may otherwise be very good priests. Others may say that we are too young to be dealing with this topic, but we must do it nonetheless.

2. Pastoral Interest

We come to the same result when we consider the second point: having a sense for practical pastoral questions.

{28} In order to find a certain starting point, let me remind you of the words of Cardinal Mercier¹: “*What the vows are for the religious, must be care for the entrusted persons for the pastor of souls.*”

What do the vows mean to someone in an order? The care for souls ought to awaken the same in us and much more. What is it?

The member of an order is obligated to strive for the spirit of the vows (poverty, etc.). I should be urged to the same by the care for the souls entrusted to me. What should the care of souls awaken in me? As soon as I find a means which helps souls find their way to God, love will urge me to use these means, exactly as if I had made a vow. It is a totally apostolic attitude.

How important is this apostolic attitude in the Federation!

So, is mysticism also a practical pastoral question? Can it be significant for me? Of course!

In which way? You know enough about mysticism to know that there are currents which maintain that pastoral care must aim for mysticism. (Dimmler makes a strong case for this; Krebs and Louismet do not go so far.)

What would this mean? Take a hardened sinner. He must attain the mystical graces. Every member of the Church – according to this point of view – must attain mystical graces. I would need to take this

seriously in the confessional and in the pulpit. But if it is really true that every soul is called to such a grace, what would my pastoral responsibility be? We are all convinced that the Church of today will not be saved by organizations, but by those who inscribe heroism on their banner. According to this point of view I would need to lead people to mysticism.

{29} But if this is not the case, that is, if mysticism is not the final goal of pastoral care, but is something extraordinary, then it is again necessary that I see this clearly out of love for the souls entrusted to my care. I must at least have enough knowledge to give an answer to these questions.

(...)

¹ Désiré-Félicien-François-Joseph Cardinal Mercier (1851-1926), Belgian churchman. From 1906 Archbishop of Mechelen, and from 1907 Cardinal of the Catholic Church.

Second Conference

{35} How does the fatherly attitude express itself when guiding souls striving for perfection – especially on the way of contemplation? This is our topic.

Four interests should motivate us to study this topic. [We have already considered two of them.]

3. Interest in Heroism

The third is our sense for the heroic. When we first discussed this point two years ago, the current made a big impression on us. But more as a matter of talking. By now the words have died out. But to the extent I am informed, I can reveal that the striving for heroism is still alive. Yes, many of us feel the inward urge to be priests who strive for heroism, heroism in poverty and humility, heroism in love of the cross and defamation.

It does not so much depend on the expression as on the spiritual attitude. And yet, if it depends only on the spiritual attitude, this does not exclude that, here and there, the radicality takes outward form.

[Example...] (...)

{36} We see that striving has not yet died out, striving for heroism. How can this be connected with mysticism? Two words: Heroism is either a preparation for or a fruit of mystical graces.

a. Heroism as a Fruit of Mystical Graces

Let us begin with the second point. Heroism as a fruit of mystical graces. How many who went away from our workshops and retreats full of zeal soon had to admit: You are still the same old person... How often we have told ourselves: Now everything will be different. And yet...

When the light of contemplation shines into the soul, then you should see the effect it has. In Ems a man told me about the devastation caused by a tornado in Lingen. Whole houses were moved about. Something similar happens in the soul when it receives the

grace of contemplation. It produces a powerful urge to heroism. The soul is driven to seek the perfection of selfless service. In this case heroism is a fruit of mystical graces.

When Fr. Eberschweiler (page 229) first became aware that he had the grace of contemplation, it was followed by an urge to heroism... {37} On page 226 he writes:

“Contemplation is a higher, excellent light. It comes and goes, when and as it pleases the Father and for as long as he wishes... The insights it gives are clear and perfect. I see the same things that I otherwise see. The fruit: loyalty in little things, especially in my official duties. It makes me humble and lets me see my dependence on God”

The fruit which must come in the light of contemplation is the most radical separation from the world and from one's self. This is one way that striving for heroism has a connection with mysticism.

b. Heroism as a Preparation for Mystical Graces

Contemplation first begins when the person has already strived for heroism for a longer period of time. I do not want to determine now if self-initiative is the cause or the condition. But all mystics agree that the soul only receives it after resolutely and energetically striving for heroism for a longer period of time...

Application to ourselves: Might we not also expect something like this for ourselves? So many people pray for us. Shouldn't this immerse us in a mighty river of grace? Fr. Eberschweiler says of himself that he was at first surprised when he saw, “You have had the grace of contemplation for five years without even knowing.” He did not consider himself worthy. Then he consoled himself, “If I as a spiritual director do not receive this grace, then who else?”

Are we not all spiritual directors in some sense? Of course, this is not a binding reason that says we must receive the grace. But at the very least we do not want to erect any barriers if God wants to give it to us. And one way to not erect barriers is to separate myself from my own self-will.

{38} Another reason: Marian devotion is the best soil for mystical graces. And of course we have consecrated ourselves totally to her...

4. Interest in Recreation

We seek recreation¹, and this is correct. It is a step forward that in current practice each one has a right to a certain number of vacation days. But there are some dangers connected with this. We should therefore ask the Mother how to best use these times, indeed, as the Song of Songs puts it: “Tell me, where do you live, and where is your camp at midday?”²

We must see to it that we do not begin to become vagabonds in our spiritual life. “...*ne vacari incipiam*” [not wandering about aimlessly]. The danger is real.

Thomas calls proper recreation a moral virtue. Recreation is necessary because the body is an instrument of the soul and it must be restored to strength. This happens through recreation. The body serves the soul. It needs relaxation so that it can continue to serve.

But it must not be at the cost of the harmony between the two. Cicero: *Ne dissolvas harmoniam* [Do not dissolve the harmony]. Not too much, and not too little. If one does not have any recreation, then one sins according to Thomas and Aristotle.

How can we put up a dike against the two extremes? How do we see Our Lady? Always holding the Son of God. {39} Regardless of recreation one must hold fast to the attachment to God. The things which prevent this will not, in the long run, be proper recreation for the soul.

What meaning does the thought about recreation have for mysticism? I cannot imagine any greater recreation than when God gives the grace of contemplation. In the highest degree of contemplation one is said to be so satisfied that the practical mystics cannot understand how heaven could be any lovelier.

Even if God does not give us this grace, it still belongs to our vocation that we dare to enter the higher regions. Is it relaxing and recreative for the soul when it can look out into a distant land? When

¹ German: *Erholung*. It could also mean vacation.

² Song 1,7 is meant: “You, whom my soul loves, tell me: Where do you pasture your flock? Where do you camp at midday? Why should I first wander aimlessly (*ne vacari incipiam*) among the flocks of your companions?”

it can look into the noble garden of mysticism?

All in all, any current which moves us in this direction, allows us to unite with the topic of our discussion... and our topic is:

How does the fatherly attitude express itself when guiding souls striving for perfection, namely on the way of the mystical graces?

Second Preliminary Question:

What Does “Fatherly Attitude” Mean?

{40} We must now continue by giving sober thought to how:

The fatherly attitude expresses itself as fatherly dignity, fatherly wisdom, and fatherly care.

Fatherly dignity is the same with all people in all we do.

Depending on the object, *fatherly wisdom* and *fatherly care* must take their orientation from the corresponding laws of being: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*¹.

We have applied this principle to the psychology of youth²: *Fatherly wisdom* demands that we study the laws which apply to the psychology of youth. *Fatherly care* urges us to apply these laws in a prudent fashion.

The same holds here.

Fatherly wisdom must urge us to study the principles of mysticism. And how can we best study them? How can we best analyze the topic so as to gain a clear understanding? We ask the psychologists and we ask the theologians. We therefore seek a *theological* and *psychological* illumination of the mystical experience. *Fatherly wisdom* – and ultimately the fatherly attitude urges us to do this. Now, we do not presume to always be right on the mark [in these questions], for essential questions remain unclarified.

{41} *Fatherly care* urges us to gain [*pedagogical*] certainty so that we can go the correct way in practical matters, in spite of theoretical uncertainty.

¹ The order of being is the norm for the order of action.

² In the previous year’s spiritual direction course: *Perspectives on the Spiritual Direction of Youth* (1926).

**Third Preliminary Question:
What is Mysticism?**

We must have a starting point. What is it? What is the definition of the term “mysticism”? It is not easy to find one...

We could use the reverse tactic and formulate the definition at the end. But the other way is better – starting with a definition – for then we can shed light on it with a threefold illumination:

theological,
psychological,
and pedagogical.

A clear definition is lacking [in the available literature]. As Denifle, one of the top experts on mediaeval mystical theology said (around 1887): “The term ‘mysticism’ is the most fluid one in all of theology.” So we must blaze our own trail.

Descriptive Definition (Definitio circumscriptiva)

Ask the people. Everyone with a sensitivity for mystical things agrees that one is dealing with *something mysterious*. But defining this “mysteriousness” produces a host of conflicting answers, for there are different orders of the mysterious. {42}

! In the realm of natural science, one speaks of natural mysticism. If one attributes the experiences to influence from the devil, one speaks of demonic mysticism. If it belongs to the supernatural order, it is called supernatural mysticism.

We do not want to join those who use this description.

! Let us ask history. What does history understand mysticism to be? What is its nature? This eliminates natural and demonic mysticism.

! And in the supernatural life – what is mysterious there? Something higher always looks mysterious to those on a lower level. For instance, for someone who only knows rote prayer and no other method will find meditative prayer mysterious. Or higher studies are mysterious to those still on lower levels of studies. But if we pursue this path, mysticism will only be something subjective. Louismet and the Benedictine school associate it with the general life of grace.

! One comes to a different solution if one could define mysticism

as “*that which absolutely surpasses the ordinary life of grace.*” Then we would have a solid concept of mysticism. In other words, that which is extraordinary in the life of grace. It would be an elegant solution. But is that correct? Who would we need to ask? To which source do we turn?

Mysticism is a science of experience. We must therefore distinguish between the *quaestio facti* [“What are the facts?”] – something only practical mystics can answer for us – and {43} the *quaestio juris* [“Is it possible, and how?”], a question reserved to the theologians and philosophers. Their task is to clarify for us that the experiences made by mystics is really possible. But if mysticism is a science of experience, outsiders will have a different interpretation.

We are able to give each point of view its due:

a) *as a practical mystic*. Then it is something which I have experienced. A practical mystic has a delicate sense for what is genuine.

b) *As a theoretical mystic* I can also investigate to the witnesses. [given by the mystics]. An Italian psychologist said: One must accept their statements as true and try to explain them. Teresa [of Avila] once said: How can it be that someone who has not had the experience still explain it so well? ...

c) *The non-mystics*, who reject such things from the outset.

Read in Richstätter¹ how great men of the past have complained that the ranks of “non-mystics” have even included priests and theologians. Why? On page 64 St. Bonaventure says, “*If you want to know how it happens, then ask grace and not science, longing and not understanding, the Groom and not the teacher.*”

We also need to distinguish between mystical writings and writings by mystics. Not everything written by mystics belongs to the realm of mysticism. The *Imitation of Christ* would be an example. Except for perhaps I,3; II,1; III,34, it is {44} mostly not a mystical book, even though its author was mystically gifted.

¹ Karl Richstätter, SJ, *Mystische Gebetsgnaden und ignatianische Exerzitien* (Innsbrück, 1924), one of the main works cited by Fr. Kentenich in this course.

We must therefore ask the mystics themselves if we want to know something about the mystical graces. What answer do they give?

Essential Definition (Definitio essentialis)

According to Bonaventure, the mystical grace is

“*Cognitio experimentalis Dei.*”¹

Mystics and books about mysticism agree on this definition. But it does not yet solve our problem. The words can be interpreted differently. But all are in agreement that it defines the essence of the mystical grace, and that all other features, such as visions or locutions, are only secondary.

If I ask for an essential definition of mysticism, I must also ask for the essential definition of contemplation.

It too is: *Cognitio experimentalis Dei.*

This must therefore be our starting point.

Preview of the Main Body of our Investigation

We will try to illuminate contemplation theologically, psychologically, and pedagogically.

The *psychological illumination* focuses on the act of knowledge.

{45} The *theological illumination* considers the content.

The *pedagogical illumination* will try, in spite of the confusion, to help us do the right thing in practical life.

Because we only have a few days, I can only give very few texts and examples. I only want to offer you the general principles of mysticism...

But do not forget to pray, for this is the most important.

¹ See Bonaventure In 3. dist. 35 q.1. (as cited in *Texte zur Mystik*, p. 174). The word “cognitio” is open to a broad spectrum of interpretation here, from knowing to recognition to perception. Following Richstätter, Fr. Kentenich opts to translate it into German as “Innewerden,” which can approximately be translated as “becoming-aware” or “to perceive.” This choice of German word deliberately creates space between the “cognitio” of the mind (the usual meaning) and a deeper kind of “cognitio” that is more mysterious and beyond the grasp of our usual sense-criteria. The main agent is not ourselves or our faculties, but God.

Third Conference

{46} Again, we start from the definition: *Cognitio experimentalis Dei...*

Part I: Psychological Illumination

The first part is the psychological illumination. I begin here because the core problem is the psychological understanding of the act of insight or knowledge. I also begin here because we must form an opinion right away on the two opposing interpretations which one finds in works on mysticism.

Different in Kind or in Degree?

How is the *cognitio experimentalis Dei* to be viewed? Does it differ from ordinary insight only in degree or also in kind? That is, does mystical insight differ from the insight of ordinary faith in degree or in kind?

We speak of the life of prayer as being ordinary or extraordinary.

If mystical insight differs from ordinary insight *in kind*, then I can never reach it merely by means of the ordinary promptings of grace and my personal effort, nor can I ever positively dispose myself^f for this grace. This would mean that the mystical way of knowing is different in kind from the ordinary way.

If it differs *in degree*, then I can grasp and attain it with the ordinary means of grace and personal effort.

{47} Let us ask ourselves: What is it that distinguishes the ordinary and from the extraordinary life of prayer.

It is generally accepted that the ordinary kinds of prayer include: a) vocal prayer, b) discursive meditation, c) prayer from the heart, d) the prayer of simplicity or of acquired contemplation.

If I work at it, these types of prayer can be attained with the ordinary means of grace. They are only different from one another in degree.

¹ Prepare myself in such a way that the grace will automatically be given.

Now comes the dividing line. On the other side there are also degrees. The different authors use different words for the degrees. Let us start with St. John of the Cross, supplemented by what St. Teresa of Avila has to say.

John of the Cross: 1) union of love with God or the Holy Spirit, 2) mystical betrothal, 3) mystical marriage (*unio mystica*).

Teresa divides the first into 1) the prayer of quiet (not the same as the prayer of simplicity = acquired contemplation), 2) the prayer of simple union, 3) the prayer of mystical betrothal, 4) the prayer of mystical marriage.

What is the core problem? These stages only differ from one another in degree. *The core problem is: Do the prayer of simplicity and the prayer of quiet differ in kind or in degree?* This is the key question.

Depending on the position I take, my interpretation of the definition “*cognitio experimentalis Dei*” will differ.

Two Interpretations of the Definition

{48} Those who say that the prayer of quiet differs from the prayer of simplicity only *in degree* must translate it this way:

***A strongly affective,
supernatural
perception of God.***

According to this view, what distinguishes the two kinds of prayer? A strong interior grippedness by God and things Divine.

The others who suppose a difference *of kind* must say:

***The prayer of quiet is a supernatural,
extraordinary,
immediate
becoming-aware of [God and] things Divine***¹.

¹ German: “Das Gebet der Ruhe ist ein übernatürliches, außergewöhnliches, unmittelbares Innwerden göttlicher Dinge.” Instead of “becoming-aware” one could say “perception,” but because Fr. Kentenich will work heavily with the distinctions involving the German word *Innwerden*, we will use the more literal translation.

The *defining moment* is the “immediate¹ becoming-aware,” for ordinary prayer only becomes aware [of God] in a mediate or indirect fashion.

This cuts deep into life. If contemplation only differs from ordinary prayer in degree, then I must try to strive for the mystical graces with my own effort. That is, I *must* do it.

If that is not the case, then God must first show whether he wants to give me this grace. It would be a lack of humility to strive for it. I can only create the disposition [to receive the gift] but not awaken the corresponding longing.

Hock takes a third position. He says: They probably differ in kind, but everyone must strive for the graces. We must work our way through the different positions.

1. First Possibility: They Differ by Kind

{49} We want to first try to come to a clear understanding of the *difference of kind*. The definition must then be translated:

**(1) Immediate, (2) supernatural, (3) extraordinary
becoming-aware of God and things divine.**

To gain this clarity we must distinguish between *quaestio facti* [What are the facts?] and *quaestio juris* [Is it possible, and how?]. The mystics must answer the first, the theologians the second point.

a. The First Quaestio facti: What are We Discussing?

What do the mystics think?

It seems to me that all enlightened mystics see mystical insight as essentially different from the insight of ordinary faith, indeed, so much so that no amount of human effort will allow one to attain even the slightest degree of contemplation. See Richstätter, page 74, letter of St. Teresa: “We cannot acquire supernatural insight through our own effort, no matter how hard we try.” (She equates supernatural with mystical.) The most we can do is to predispose ourselves for the gift. Father Mager² notes on page 76: “The soul is unable to find a

¹ Or direct.

² Fr. Alois Mager, OSB (1883-1946), German theologian.

way or an image to communicate it. For the insights are very simple and spiritual. This is why the perception of the senses fails to grasp it.” John of the Cross says something similar...

Lucie Christine, page 149 and 229: Those who want to grasp such truths through mental deliberation make themselves blind to such revelations. (...) {50} When someone sees something never seen before, he cannot describe it. How much less in the case of contemplation. After all, the senses cannot perceive any of it and therefore cannot express it.

Two clarifications

Now I must add two clarifications regarding the question: Why is it that different authors interpret the same words [of the definition] differently?

First, because the term *contemplation* is not always used in a uniform manner. This is why there is a tendency today to distinguish between infused and acquired contemplation.

To the scholastics the word contemplation meant both – sometimes one, sometimes the other. The same goes for the Jesuits, such as Lercher¹, who suppose only a difference of degree. He bases his position on Suarez², but only to the extent he finds him useful. When we speak here about contemplation, we should accustom ourselves to meaning only *infused* contemplation.

Second, it is often the case that scholars do not understand what mystics have written. To only give you an idea: Suppose a mystic’s contemplation was devoid of any images. What happens then? The organ is missing which can convey the experience. This is why mystics struggle to express what they have felt. (...)

{51} So far I have shown the testimony of the mystics. From it we can conclude that infused contemplation differs from acquired contemplation in kind. The prayer of quiet differs in kind from the prayer of simplicity...

¹ Fr. Ludwig Lercher, SJ (1864-1937), modern German theologian.

² Fr. Francisco de Suarez, SJ (1548-1617), renowned Spanish theologian of the Counter-reformation.

How is this possible? [This we will deal with when we come to the section on *quaestio juris*.]

Cognitio experimentalis Dei – to repeat our translation: A supernatural, extraordinary, immediate becoming-aware of God. Every word here is carefully weighed. {52} And we are distinguishing between the *quaestio facti* and the *quaestio juris*.

The Term “Becoming-Aware”

We start with the word and term “*becoming-aware*”¹.

Why not just “knowing”? Why don’t I say “*being-aware*” or “*making-aware*”? Why “*becoming-aware*”?

When I use the expression “becoming-aware” I am indicating that contemplation also directly influences the will. In Gerson’s² view “*perceptio*” would be a better word than “*cognitio*”

Becoming-aware, not being-aware. In other words, [there are] many gradations of insight all the way to the beatific vision.

There are theoreticians who say that, formally speaking, the will is the organ of contemplation. See St. Bonaventure and the Franciscans. Others take the position as St. Thomas [Aquinas] does that, formally speaking, it is the intellect. The difference stems from the basic perspective of the two schools. For Thomas the intellect always has pride of place and the savoring of the will comes after. This is also the position of Dionysius the Carthusian.

For us it does not matter where contemplation is rooted. What is essential for us is that it must embrace both the intellect and the will.

{53} Because such a “becoming-aware”-ness cannot be acquired by our own efforts, infused contemplation is also called passive – as opposed to acquired or active – contemplation.

But if we think that the soul is inactive during passive contemplation, then we misunderstand “passive.” While discursive thinking is inactive, this does not mean that the intellect is totally inactive.

So much to the word “becoming-aware.”

[As we will see,] this “becoming-aware” corresponds to being

¹ German: *Innewerden*.

² John Gerson (1363-1429), French theologian.

emptied of self. The becoming-aware of the soul God happens to the extent that it becomes empty of self.

Fourth Conference

Answering Some Difficulties

{54} You have pointed out some difficulties to me: “I would gladly strive for such graces, but wouldn’t that interfere with my pastoral duties?”

Two answers:

a) May I strive for mystical graces? We can only give a definitive answer to this when we have gained clarity about the essence of mysticism.

b) Second answer: If I had them, would they harm my pastoral work? The greatest mystics were the greatest apostles. Hence, you don’t have to worry... After all, you have read about Pallotti, haven’t you? He was a mystical soul *par excellence* and what work did he accomplish!

Now, back to our topic.

Psychological Illumination, recapitulated

We are trying to illumine infused contemplation theologically, psychologically, and pedagogically. We want to start with the psychological illumination, because in this way we can come to the essential definition of the prayer of quiet [and infused contemplation].

The goal of the psychological illumination is to tell us how to classify the *cognitio experimentalis*.

{55} We begin by inquiring of the mystics themselves about their experiences (*quaestio facti*). These experiences must then be systematically investigated (*quaestio juris*), beginning in the forum of psychology.

Contemplation is an extraordinary, supernatural, immediate becoming-aware of God and things divine.

It is a “becoming-aware” and not just a knowing, because the whole person in all its faculties is grasped by God. Hence the expression from Fr. Eberschweiler: *O lux beatissima!* O most blessed light! *Lux* for the intellect, *beatissima* for the will.

(Here Fr. Kentenich read a longer quote from Fr. Eberschweiler...)

Becoming-Aware and Becoming Empty

Becoming-aware, not *being-aware*. There are countless levels of becoming aware, and in the spirit of mysticism the highest is the *visio in caligine*¹ in which one sees the most blessed Trinity; in the levels beneath it one sees the individual attributes of God.

Becoming-aware, not *making-aware*. This is why we speak of passive contemplation, but not in the sense that the soul is not active at all. It is not active in the discursive sense, that is, one disengages the *intellectus agens*²; only the *intellectus possibilis vel passibilis*³ is engaged.

On the other hand, this becoming-aware must correspond to a *becoming empty*. These two life functions must complement each other.

Let me first emphasize
becoming *empty*
and then *becoming empty*.

{56} a) Of what must I become empty? Intellect and will should come into direct contact with God, and so intellect and will must be freed from everything opposed to God.

The specific testing which is involved here is what is called the “*night of the intellect*”. But because our intellect is so dependent on the *appetitus sensibilis*⁴, the purification of the intellect must pass through a purification of the senses. And this testing is called the “*night of the senses*.”

b) *Becoming empty*: We will never be able to say: I am finished, I am completely free from self. It has an infinite number of steps. What are the steps of freedom from self? We do not need to show that purification is necessary in every asceticism. Both the intellect and the appetites must be purified.

¹ The vision in darkness.

² The active intellect.

³ The intellect in possibility or passibility.

⁴ The sensible appetite, that is, desire of the senses for input.

Active and Passive Purification as First Pre-condition – Besides attachment to God – for the Grace of Contemplation

One can differentiate between an active and a passive purification.

a) In *active* purification the soul itself takes the reins in hand. It removes anything in the soul which is contrary to God. Here, too, one can differentiate between an active purification of the intellect and of the senses, a purification of perception and of the appetites.

{57} *Active purification of the senses* includes every kind of concentration, such as meditation, vocal prayer, walking with God...

The *active purification of the appetites* includes every kind of penance.

For us active purification is not superfluous. We ought to bear in this spirit at least the sacrifices demanded of us by our vocation.

b) This transformation of the self is so great that we can never achieve it by our own effort alone, for we are not strict enough with ourselves. Here is where God helps us. He takes the hammer and chisel out of our hands and goes to work himself.

This is *passive purification*.

The hardest thing about it is holding still. And we cannot avoid it if we want to be able to work to even a modest degree in the Kingdom of God.

Many do not know how to correctly interpret it, and they break down.

Passive purification is a process which every soul must go through, including the mystics, even after they begin to receive the mystical graces. But it is not a mystical testing.

What is its purpose? For non-mystics passive purification frees the soul from impurities. The soul must be made receptive for conformity with God. As a result, it must penetrate deep into the soul. The whole person must be worn down. The person must arrive at the awareness that I cannot do it by my own power. God is so good! He wants to make the soul like himself. The soul cannot do it by itself, and so he intervenes. The soul must clearly see this purpose of purification.

{58} This is something we no longer understand today. We have become too soft. But God does it out of love. He does it until the

senses and appetites are purified. But God will not cut longer than is necessary, nor more vigorously than the soul can bear. Just like the potter will place his pottery in the fire only as long as necessary...

What is important in these things is to recognize the will of God and to surrender ourselves to this will. The more quickly I give myself over to his will, the more quickly the testing ends.

Here you can understand how important it is to have a spiritual director. In the midst of testings, he must always make the purpose of purification clear. If he does not, the soul will not arrive at its goal.

What might such purifications look like? Hock makes a list in the *Linzer Quarterly*, 1924, p. 17...: Painful loss of property, business failure, long years of aridity (Teresa endured such for 18 years), loss of loyal followers, disappointments at the hands of confidants, concern for relatives, being disgraced by their bad life, harmful slander which cannot be dissipated for many years, long periods of being treated badly by someone for whom I did something good, a long illness...

God uses all of these means to purify the soul. You must meditate on this more closely for yourselves and see how it applies to your own life...

Especially defamation and temptations against the sixth commandment...

All of these are “*non-mystical*” testings.

Such considerations might make you say to yourself, “O, those poor gifted souls! How will their health bear up under all this? {59} The soul can deal with the graces, for they give strength to one’s health. But how dangerous it must be for those who endure long years of testing!”

Here we must be careful – with our own lives and the lives of others. One must take steps to protect the health. We can derive this from our principle: *Gratia non destruit naturam*... [Grace does not destroy nature...].

This also applies to souls with the mystical graces. The world is quick to speak of hysteria. Therefore take care that the body stays healthy. Then such souls can also fulfill their duties...

Becoming-aware entails both a becoming *empty* and a *becoming* empty.

Nor does this exhaust the range of possibilities, for mystical souls can experience, addition to ordinary mystical testings also extraordinary mystical testings.

Ordinary mystical testings are those which every mystical soul must go through. They are rooted in the essence of mysticism.

The Night of the Senses – the Night of the Intellect

The purpose of the “night of the senses” is to make the life of the drives and the senses conform to the intellect, making the intellect disposed to the first experiences of contemplation.

The purpose of the “night of the intellect” is to purify the mind and the will to a certain degree so that God can pour into the soul the gift of mystical union.

{60} If there were persons who were not affected by the brokenness of the drives, the ordinary mystical testings would not be necessary. (...)

[The rest of the talk discusses the night of the senses and the night of the intellect in detail]

Fifth Conference

(...)

The Two Things Needed for a Strong Attachment to God

{67} What does the interior life demand of us? What is at its heart? It is, in one way or another, what St. Francis used to say, “*Deus meus et omnia*” [My God and my all]. Or, [as St. Teresa put it], “God alone is enough.”

We must seek God in all things. Today’s mistake is this: We might all be giving ourselves to God, but only as one thing among many other. We primarily tend to the service of things. We must learn to see everything from God’s point of view, including how we give ourselves to created things.

Two things characterize a strong attachment to God: {68}

- a) detachment from earthly things,
- b) the constant walk with God.

They are read from the mystical experience.

Detachment from earthly things: We should gradually become indifferent to where we work, whether we meet with success or not, whether we are sick or in good health...

The constant walk with God: It precedes mysticism.

One often thinks that these things are not for us, that they are only for especially chosen souls. But if we have both of these characteristics, then we can say, “We are on the right path.” And if God calls us, we can expect that we will receive infused contemplation. It would be good if we would try already now to become active in these two areas.

Thoughts on Walking with God as the Second Pre-condition for the Grace of Contemplation

Here are some ways that can help enable us to be totally given to God.

1. *A strong longing for total attachment to God.* “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice...” (Mt 5,6). We have opportunities to awaken this longing in the Shrine, on walks, during the

conferences. The longing needs to express itself in short ejaculatory prayers throughout the day. We modern priests do too little in this regard. Spiritual communion also belongs here. “*Quotidiana viles-cunt* – familiarity breeds contempt.” We must therefore create a counterbalance. The attachment to God must become for us a value. If you hear how {69} high some are called, this must also awaken in us a longing for the same.

2. *The practice of meditation.* At our stage in life we are not so much in need of new ideas as in impulses for our heart and will. We must see to it that discursive meditation becomes affective prayer and the prayer of simplicity.

3. *The practice of walking with God.* Think of this today when you are praying the Breviary, the Glory Be... celebrating Mass... Or have we lost interest in this direction? That would be too bad. Those who have not learned how to walk with God cannot expect that the Lord will visit them with special graces.

4. *Custodia cordis* [custody of the heart]. Be vigilant over your heart. We must watch out for emotional impulsiveness and fantasies. Here, too, is a great weakness of modern times. One generally throws everything into a big push and lets things rest. But we pay too little attention to the little things, to the little impulses of the heart. If we ignore this, we cannot make progress. When severe temptations come later, why do they strike? Because I was not vigilant enough.

Our Discussion, recapitulated

That may suffice as a little preparation for what will follow. It may be a consolation for us when we see how much the mystical souls suffer. “God disciplines those whom he loves” (cf Jas 1,2-4).

We are trying to discover the essence of contemplation using St. Bonaventure’s definition: *Contemplatio est cognitio experimentalis Dei.*

We are in the midst of the psychological illumination. We are looking at it from the standpoint of those who view mysticism as different in kind from the ordinary life of prayer. {70} In this spirit we translate the definition thus: An extraordinary, supernatural, immediate becoming-aware of divine things.

If we place this terminology side-by-side with that the view that the difference is only one of degree, then we could omit “extraordinary, supernatural” since both agree on this. Both see this as the summit of the life of grace. But the one view stresses the becoming-aware of God and the other case the strongly *affective* becoming-aware of God.

As we saw, becoming aware of the divine involves a becoming empty of the things of nature and the drives. It takes place through the active and passive purification of the mystical soul. They are in part mystical testings, in part non-mystical.

There are ordinary and extraordinary mystical testings. Why do we call them extraordinary? Because not all mystically gifted souls must go through them. It seems as if they would be reserved only for those who are called to an especially high degree of mystical union.

The Extraordinary Testings

What kinds of extraordinary testings are there?

- a) Suffering from the devil,
- b) suffering with Christ...

1. *First extraordinary testing: suffering from the devil.* Possession and circumsession.

Possession is the condition when the devil holds the body and all its members in his possession. He governs them entirely as he wishes. {71} It is the general view of the mystics that this happens only very rarely and then only in passing.

Circumsession is different. In this case the soul is aware of the devil, who is outside the soul. The devil tries to martyr not only the soul of the mystically gifted person, but also the body.

Let us look at the sufferings which the devil can inflict on body and soul.

Sufferings of the body: Every kind of suffering and torment, blows, injuries. The unusual thing about this is that there are normally no lasting physical wounds. However, with St. Teresa there was a time when her foot was sprained. What is so hard is that the body cannot help itself.

What is God's purpose? First, his normal intent is to purify the soul. But if the soul has already ascended quite high and the *unio mystica* has already been attained, then its intent is atonement (as we find it in the life of St. Alphonse Rodriguez who atoned for his sins and the sins of others for seven years). “I fill up in my body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” (Col 1,24). What a blessing for such mystical souls! A diamond is worth more than a whole mound of rubble. Every country, every parish ought to rejoice if it possesses many such souls.

Sufferings of the soul: Can the devil also cause spiritual suffering in the tested soul? Yes!

The mystics say: It is a great suffering to look upon the devil. The soul also undergoes demonic dialogues, visions. For instance, he may {72} simulate a vision of the Crucified Lord. But the image of the Crucified Jesus fails to radiate any trust or love, only fear and anxiety... The devil speaks to the soul, screams the most hateful blasphemies against God, speaks vulgar impurities. He awakens impure feelings, provokes to anger, hatred against God, etc.

But most of all he tries to seduce the soul into mistrusting God and to despair. He says again and again, “You belong to me and will never be able to escape.” The most gruesome thing is that the soul has the feeling that it cannot escape.

The purpose is the same as before.

2. *Second extraordinary testing: Sharing in the suffering of Christ.*

Every soul that strives for sanctity must make good on what St. Paul says, “Through Christ I have been crucified to the world” (Gal 6,14). Hence every soul striving for perfection must pass through the testings I mentioned yesterday. In this way the soul becomes like Christ. Rejection, ingratitude from those for whom we have sacrificed, ridicule, etc.

Now there are souls who are allowed to become like Christ in a still more special way, namely in his passion. More precisely:

a) *in his physical suffering:*

All the parts of the body which can feel the sufferings of Christ can do so: hands, arms, heart, etc. History knows of some cases

where the body directly received the stigmata of Our Lord. This is no luxury for the soul. In such cases God always has two intentions. The soul is meant to be purified and it is for atonement.

{73} But this kind of physical sharing is also meant to sweep the soul up to a greater love of God.

b) *in his spiritual suffering:*

Christ's greatest suffering was divine abandonment. "My God, my God, what have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27,46). We are inclined to interpret this rather simplistically: This was a momentary lack of consolation. One cannot possibly describe what the soul goes through in such a state. Only a mystic can sense it in an approximate way. [It was rooted] on the one hand in the clear insight [which Christ has in] the beatific vision, on the other hand [in] how greatly the sins [of mankind] shake the soul. This is what makes the God-man so alone. The soul is allowed to share in this. Read the descriptions and the impressions that sharing in divine abandonment leaves on the soul. It is a greater suffering than the night of the intellect. What is the difference between the night of the intellect and divine abandonment? In the night of the intellect the soul is shaken by the weight of its own sinfulness. In divine abandonment it is shaken by the weight of the sins of others.

The purpose: a) purification, b) a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of mankind, especially of religious and priests.

We should therefore be grateful to God when we have such souls in our midst...

All of this is nothing more or less than an elaboration of the term "becoming-aware."

b. Quaestio juris (Is it possible, and how?)

{74} [We now turn to the *quaestio juris*: Is it possible, and how?] The definition speaks of an *immediate becoming-aware*. This requires of us some speculative thought. How is such a thing possible? This is important for coming to a judgment about mystical souls and their experiences.

Clarification of "Becoming Aware" by Comparison with other Ways of Knowing

Preliminary remark: *Status quaestionis*¹.

Hugo of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, and with them the entire scholastic tradition differentiate three kinds of knowing:

a) *Visio beata*² – *in heaven*;

b) *Cognitio discursiva* – *discursive knowledge*³;

c) *Cognitio media* – *a middle-knowledge between the other two*.

Hugo of St. Victor calls it *cognitio angelica*, or – from the human vantage point – how Adam and Eve knew things before the fall.

Thomas examined the essence of Adam and Eve's knowledge of God. First, they had knowledge *per discursionem* [through the intellect]. They saw the creature and could connect to its cause [i.e., the Creator]. Then they had an immediate "becoming-aware" of God.

What is the point of comparison? Is it "immediate" as in the beatific vision or as in discursive knowledge? Only as in the latter.

Our normal way of knowing is through the intellect and the imagination. But the knowing of mystics takes place without such {75} perceptory images. This knowledge is immediate when compared to intellectual knowledge, but not immediate when compared to the beatific vision. Otherwise such persons would already be in heaven. Sanctifying grace could no longer be lost; nor, in Adam and Eve's case, could they have sinned.

¹ The state of the discussion.

² The beatific vision.

³ That is, the usual way of knowing that we associate with the mind: the knowledge that comes from the intellect and the action of reason.

What Organ Receives this Immediate Knowing?

What is the *organ* of immediate knowledge?

It is the soul. But which part of the soul?

I am sure you have often read in mystical works about the spark of the soul, the ground of the soul, the inmost dwelling of the soul (the *apex mentis*). This is the organ of the soul which immediately sees God and God's perfections.

The question receives more attention again today. Even the old scholastic approach differentiated between the corporeal soul and the spiritual soul, which are really two ways of looking at the same thing. It is the corporeal soul inasmuch as it informs the body; as spiritual soul it is viewed as pure spirit. Thomas and Teresa try to illustrate the concept this way: In a fire, the flame is the spiritual soul, the fire – what we see burning – is the corporeal soul. In mystical contemplation, one tries to grasp and penetrate God with the spiritual soul, with the spark of the soul. But one does not directly see the essence [of God], as is the case in the beatific vision...

How is this Immediate Knowing Possible?

Let us go another step in the *quaestio juris*: We inquire as to the possibility of such immediate knowledge.

At one point Gerson says, "*Contemplatio mentis tunc contingit, quando apex mentis ineffabiliter coniungitur Deo ineffabili et ignoto...*"¹ {76} How are we to understand this "*ineffabiliter*," this quality of being "ineffable" or "unspeakable"? In order to determine the possibility, I must define how this immediate knowing is different from discursive knowledge and from the beatific vision.

a. How is it Different from the Usual way of Knowing?

Scholasticism describes mystical knowledge as *sine formis et imaginibus* – without form or image.

We want to first remind ourselves how the act of knowledge

¹ "The contemplation of the mind is then given when the apex of the mind ineffably joins together with the ineffable and unknown God," as cited in Richstätter, *Mystische Gebetsgnaden...*, p. 196.

comes about. We can list several principles:

a) *Omnis cognitio incipit a sensu.*

b) *Omnis cognitio fit per conversionem ad phantasmata.*

c) *Omnis cognitio fit per abstractionem*¹.

However, the knowing of the mystics involves neither abstraction nor the imagination. It works without them.

For theoretical mystics St. Thomas poses a difficulty. After all, he says: *Omnis cognitio fit per conversionem ad phantasmata...* But is this true? Thomas also says, "But if the precise object of the mind is not something of the senses, but an image that exists apart from them, then the imagination is not necessary." In mystical knowing the *recursio ad {77} phantasmata* does not take place... In this case the soul is infused with the attributes of God in a form [separate from the imagination].

Even every act of knowing the faith takes place through abstraction. But Thomas foresees the possibility of visionary seeing. In another place he says: "*Contemplatio fit simplici intuitu Dei ... eo fit, quod homo intelligit ad modum angeli. Quod Angeli natura sunt, homo per gratiam ...*"²

Thus far the differences from the usual way of knowing. It happens without image, without form, as the angels know. The angels do not know by use of an imagination, and yet they can also recognize sentient things. The mystic in vision therefore knows *per speciem intelligibilem, impressum, infusam*...³

This is the kind of knowing that is also ascribed to the soul of Christ, as well as to the Poor Souls.

b. How is it Different from the Beatific Vision?

What is the difference between immediate knowing and the

¹ a) All knowing begins with the senses. b) All knowing happens by turning to the imagination. c) All knowing happens through abstraction.

² "Contemplation happens through a simple glance of God ... it happens when man understands as an angel does. What the angels have by nature is given to man by grace." This is not a verbatim quote, but a summary statement.

³ By a kind of understanding which is impressed and infused.

beatific vision? *Visio fit per essentiam*; there the soul directly sees the essence of God. But the mystic does not directly see the essence of God, instead, the soul receives an infused *species intelligibilis* [kind of understanding] which allows it to directly see God. Just as the intellect must be its own light in the {78} beatific vision, so it must also be for mystical knowing.

With this we have established the scientific parameters for the possibility of an immediate becoming aware of God and divine things, at least from the standpoint of psychology. How things look from the theological standpoint will come later...

Sixth Conference

{79} What we discussed this morning was quite speculative. But you must not skirt around such questions, otherwise you will later never be able to judge rightly. In such discussions it is a good thing to be oriented again on what the various disciplines, such as epistemology¹, have to say.

We are still in the discussion of “immediate aware-becoming.” We have resolved the *quaestio juris*. Is an immediate knowing possible here on earth? The scholastics will say: *Non repugnant* [There is no reason to reject it].

c. The Second Quaestio facti: Does it Really Happen?

{80} Here we must turn to the mystics themselves. They must give us an answer.

Two questions:

1. The evidence,
2. Illumination of the evidence.

i. The Evidence

Here we can again differentiate between

- aa) the evidence as such and
- bb) the critical evaluation of the evidence.

aa) The Evidence as Such

You can read about it yourself in order to see how the individual mystics describe the essence of contemplation.

You can read it in Father Eberschweiler, our founder [Vincent Pallotti] – although the biography does not sufficiently elaborate this point². Or one can read it in Lucie Christine, p. 48, 113, 153 ... “I am sad about coming to the Holy Trinity; Our Lord told me I should not

¹ The study of how we know things, which was heavily used in the previous conference.

² The thorough biography by Fr. Eugene Weber, *Vincent Pallotti: Apostle and Mystic* had just been published in German in 1927.

be afraid.”

In February 1882 [Lucie Christine wrote]:

“In this time I had for the first time the sensation as if my soul were in some way being divided. Through this grace it seems to the praying soul as if {81} its higher part would separate from the rest and find itself immersed in God. The soul, of course, cannot be divided, and yet it can have this sensation and the prayer which takes place in this condition is very fruitful.

“Of course this division does not happen through the soul’s own effort, but is effected by God. I also experienced this at Holy Communion or in prayer, so that I had a passing sensation as if all my physical strength were drained from me and I were fainting, but without losing consciousness. Or I tried in certain moments to speak a vocal prayer and felt how my tongue became very heavy and unresponsive. One time at Holy Communion my soul was flooded with a great inner light and I was penetrated by a deep sense of God’s self-unity... No word was spoken to me, no special feature of God was shown me, but God pulled my poor, insignificant soul into himself and let it see and feel what he is. One cannot express that; it is totally useless to even try. Already what I have said here is certainly full of mistakes, but I could not let this great, incomprehensible grace just pass over me without a report. I had to speak of the interior vision of God which enkindles fervent love in the heart and fills it with the desire to totally consecrate oneself to him.”

Why can she not express it? Because the sensory way of knowing is totally excluded. Hence there is no way to express it. Page 113:

“There are hours when my soul seems like the interior of a ship. Everything is topsy-turvy. Only the vertical height of the will remains focused on God. My {82} God, your radiance and your majesty have illumined my soul.”

Page 153:

“He seems to have taken the place of the soul. The soul no longer recognizes itself. It loses itself even from its own sight. The soul is as if pulled into him. God’s mercy keeps it sheltered from Satan’s cunning, because it has no images, no thoughts. As

a result, Satan can no longer do anything. There is only room for God.”

Richstätter, p. 233, using material from an Ursuline Sister who recently died:

“I was seized by a glowing love for God and my spirit was drawn into God. The senses seemed to be held bound and even the higher powers of the soul were out of service. The intellect was immersed in seeing; will and imagination were unable to reach it, were obstructed in their own activity, and the intellect was in contemplation as long as the will and imagination were held bound.”

Here is some of the evidence. Here you can see in a practical way what we have been discussing today on the theoretical level.

bb) Critical Evaluation of the Evidence

Can one conclude from these examples that there is really such a thing as immediate infused contemplation? Yes! For they all have the following features:

a) The soul which is thus mystically seized finds itself in infinite awe, an awe which keeps increasing, an awe {83} for God’s greatness, beauty, and love such as it has never experienced it before and which it never experiences in normal conditions. This cannot be explained without infused contemplation.

b) In such conditions it is normal that the content of contemplation remains unchanged over a long time, but is seen with fresh clarity again and again. How is this possible? It cannot be discursive thinking. It can only be immediate aware-becoming.

c) Bonaventure says, “*Only those who have experienced it can understand what is seen. One cannot grasp it with the ordinary faculties of knowing.*”

Thomas says, “*The pleasure which it causes absolutely exceeds all human faculties.*” Such seeing cannot be a direct vision like in the beatific vision. But neither is it our ordinary way of knowing. It can therefore only be the middle way of knowing.

ii. *The Illumination of the Evidence*

*** I can now illumine this evidence in contrast to the ordinary way of knowing and also to the act of faith.

aa) *Illumination vis-a-vis the ordinary way of knowing*

Our intellect knows three cognitive acts:

1. *Simplex apprehensio*, the simple apprehension of concepts. This happens through abstraction. Does this happen when one becomes directly aware of God? Yes! Only with the difference that this *simplex apprehensio* takes place without abstraction. It happens through infusion.

2. *Ratiocinium*, the process of reaching a conclusion.

{84} 3. *Judicium*, making a judgment.

Does the intellect which has the light of contemplation also make judgments? Yes! But *sine discursione*, without a discursive train of thought. The intellect receives it through infusion.

Let us take an example. One can be crushed by infusion or by the natural recognition of one's sins and failings. If one is crushed by infusion, then he literally collapses. And this impression will always remain, while someone who recognized it on the natural level can easily forget it again.

Or with the attributes of God. Then he cannot even defend himself.

If you carefully think these thoughts through, you will understand why the mystics can express so little of what they see. Now you will also understand why the old asceticism distinguishes between asceticism and mysticism. Mysticism deals only with *infused* contemplation. In contrast, asceticism only deals with the common exercises and with prayer life inasmuch as it can be increased through self-effort with the aid of grace: vocal prayer, discursive meditation... This is how the old masters made the distinction.

(....)

[*Secondary phenomena that can accompany mysticism, p. 85f*]

bb) *Illumination vis-a-vis the faith*

{87} Does mystical knowing belong to the life of faith? Without a doubt! Supported by the evidence provided by the mystics, one can say: mystical knowing is clearer than the knowledge of faith. (Examples: Lucie Christine, page 180, 317; she gives a lengthy explanation.)

Viewed psychologically, it is an act of faith. Someone was asked: "Can you still believe?" He jokingly gave as answer, "*Non credo, sed cognosco* – I don't believe, I know." Habitually, faith remains. It is therefore also meritorious.

The mystics voice the opinion that one should learn how to pray without form and image. This can be understood in the wrong way. In this way one might educate others to a quietistic form of prayer. I sit down and sleep; God will take care of it.

In the lower regions of one's prayer life we do not want to pray without form or image. We should probably try to cut back the fantasy images which come from the outside. But then draw in other images. When we are in the lower regions, then also pray the prayer forms of this level: vocal prayer, discursive meditation...

This would be the place to discuss the different forms of prayer.

We cannot do without emotions or images of the imagination or discursive thing as long as we have not attained the prayer of simplicity.

Application: As long as we have not yet attained [infused contemplation], we must hold fast to discursive meditation. But it does not have to be the Ignatian form. Even souls in {88} the mystical state experience times when they must turn again to the lower forms of prayer.

Seventh Conference

(...)

Part II: Theological Illumination

{95} Why must we inquire into what theology has to say?

When we discussed the essence of contemplation we said it is *Cognitio Dei experimentalis* – an immediate becoming-aware of God.

Theology must have the last word when it comes to God and the things of God. Mysticism must therefore also be examined in the forum of theology.

What does theology tell us about the content of this insight?

The *formal object* is the God who reveals himself. (He reveals and he acts.) It is precisely in mysticism that the formal object really comes into its own.

In mysticism the *material object* (content) is the same as it is for faith.

We can distinguish between a primary object and a secondary object. The primary object is the most Blessed Trinity. The secondary object is the works of the most Blessed Trinity.

Mysticism experiences and tastes what faith tells us. In the things of faith, the mystic does not see any more than what is contained in the deposit of the faith, whether it be the things that are contained explicitly or implicitly.

At the center of faith is God's fatherhood.

{96} What does theology tell us about this life? The effect of sanctifying grace is the indwelling of the most Blessed Trinity. Mysticism says the same thing, with the only difference that the mystic sees how this process takes place. He sees the individual persons as in himself, not outside of himself. He does not see them in one another, but next to one another, sees them in constant Trinitarian process: how they go forth from one another, beget one another, send out one another.

But he sees how it takes place inside of his own soul, how the Trinity communicates something of its divine life to the soul.

Doesn't theology say the same thing? The essence of sanctifying

grace is sharing in divine life. What does this sharing entail?

For the substance of the soul: the soul becomes more and more like God and is united with God. This is what the mystics also see. They see how they are made like God, how the soul undergoes the Passion. They also see how they are united with God. And this must be something wonderful. They can only express it with stammering.

This union can take place in stages. The preparatory stage is walking with God.

In the first stage, the prayer of quiet, the soul sees God in himself, but is not interiorly totally united with him. The soul has come closer to the God who dwells within.

In mystical betrothal (second stage) the souls feels united with God, but to one another, not in one another.

In the prayer of mystical marriage (third stage) the two overlap and are in one another as much as this is possible. "God is my life." This gives the soul unlimited bliss.

{97} This is nothing more than what dogmatic theology says about the life of grace. The soul can see the entire Blessed Trinity, or the Divine Word, and through the Divine Word the most Blessed Trinity.

But faith also tells us that when we receive the divine life, we also receive infused the supernatural and moral virtues. What do the mystics see in this regard? They see how [their] knowing is a sharing in divine knowing, how [their] love is a sharing in the divine love. Hence the strong expression, "I love God with a divine love." The same can be said of the supernatural moral virtues¹. According to theology, they also bestow the ability or the way to act according to God's way.

What more does faith say about the essence of the life of grace? If the individual capacities are to be translated into action, then actual grace is necessary. The mystical soul sees this divine activity.

¹ Especially the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude.

The Increase of the Life of Grace

Theology says that the life of grace can be increased, in fact, even to an infinite degree. The degree of increase depends on God and on our own cooperation.

The mystically gifted soul sees this increase during mortification, during Holy Communion, [etc.] as an act that now fosters growth more than in the previous year. Here we can differentiate three levels:

- a) the level of the beginning,
- b) the level of the intermediate,
- c) the level of the perfect union of love.

a. The Level of the Beginning Union of Love

{98} It sees that the soul is not yet totally penetrated by the most Blessed Trinity. The actual strength of grace is present, but fades and returns.

b. The Level of the Intermediate Union of Love

The soul feels deeply united with the most Blessed Trinity. The actual strength of grace is constantly active, but has not yet reached the highest degree, not yet the condition of paradise.

c. The Level of the Perfect Union of Love

This condition is like the condition of paradise. The person receives the preternatural graces *secundum quid* [to a certain degree].

Beginning Restoration of the Condition Before Original Sin

These things are restored to the person:

*Immunitas ab errore*¹, by the infusion of grace.

The most important is *immunitas a concupiscentia*². The first spontaneous reactions of our soul are infected. On this level the soul is freed from them. When this wonderfully radiant light enters the

¹ Immunity from error. Of course, all of these graces are received *secundum quid*, that is, only (but also truly) to a certain degree.

² Immunity from concupiscence.

soul, it extinguishes all that is sick.

*Immunitas ab aerumnis*¹. One cannot go through life without suffering (not even Jesus and Mary). But even when suffering the soul is inwardly content, even happy. To some extent it even applies to the body. The bliss of the soul overflows to the body.

{99} How wonderful it would be if we had these blessings, too! We must use the natural means: self-surrender and self-denial. If for no other reason, we must strive for this in order to be able to direct the souls of others, to have understanding for the mystical souls. The supernatural world should become our world. In this way we gain an appreciation for the souls.

¹ Immunity from suffering.

Eighth Conference

(....)

[The special role of the God-man in mysticism:

These 1: Christ's humanity is the leader into the mystical realm.

These 2: Christ's humanity is also companion in the mystical realm.

- a. Christ's humanity as object of contemplation*
- b. Christ's humanity as the object of visions*
- c. Christ's humanity in the Eucharist*

What is the mystics relationship to the Church?]

Ninth Conference

Part III: Pedagogical Illumination

{110} As we see, there is still no scientific agreement. But when directing souls, we as pastors must show others a secure way. It would be good if the pastor is able to adopt an interiorly clear standpoint.

We must distinguish between two classes of persons:

- a) Those who do not have the grace of contemplation,*
- b) Those who have already received it...*

If I now inquire about the pedagogical illumination, then this means: how can I be a positive influence on the one as well as the other?

(....)

Pastoral Conclusions

Don't Encourage Direct Striving for These Graces

{112} One should not encourage souls to long or strive for mystical graces. Instead, one should encourage them to cultivate an interior prayer life and anything else that can prepare for the mystical life of grace.

Don't encourage: Are there many souls with a capacity for the mystical graces? More than we priests imagine, even if we take the position that the difference is one of kind. Yes, there are more than we imagine, as I said at the beginning. But in the face of a contemporary trend like the one today which wants to see mysticism {113} as an everyday occurrence, one must hold fast: There are many fewer than the trend thinks it sees.

Proof: All [the experts] agree that these graces presuppose or flow into an energetic striving for heroism. Are there really so many souls who strive heroically for self-denial and union with God? There are many who want to take their faith seriously, but all of that is no preparation for the mystical life of grace. No heroism!

There are few such souls, especially among priests and religious. One finds them most frequently among the simple faithful.

It is remarkable: what is poured into a form becomes so easily formable.

Make a note to ourselves as Federation that it does not become formable. It is not made up of the masses, but of the elite.

Don't Encourage Direct Longing for These Graces

Such higher paths of prayer are something psychological, interior, of the soul. The danger of self-deception is great, especially for women. One easily self-imagines stages of prayer, attributing to oneself all the things that others have felt. Through self-suggestion one feels the same thing others have experienced. Do not encourage this, for the danger of suggestion is great.

In practical terms: If the soul is truly on the path to mystical graces, then the experience will fill it with humility, since it dares not think of such a thing.

{114} But if it is not on the path and does not take self-denial seriously, then it will never receive such graces.

Those who say the difference is of kind will totally agree with this.

Those who say the difference is of degree must admit that a soul striving [for contemplation] must proceed organically. Even they will say: the soul must proceed by first striving for the next step and not try to reach the highest step right away. Because most do not strive seriously, [their spiritual directors] do not direct them to desire contemplation.

We speak so much of organic growth. I can view it from God's perspective or from man's. In both cases God can suddenly give his grace without preparation. The reason is then God's mercy or my long period of thorough self-abnegation. (...)

Do not forget the step "*make sacrifices for God.*" We must educate [mystically inclined souls] to a spirit of sacrifice.