



ONTOLOGICAL AND EXPERIENTIAL TRANSCENDENCE AND THE LOVE OF GOD

Transcendência ontológica e experiencial e o amor de Deus

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Abstract: This paper examines two types of transcendence and their relation to love. Ontological transcendence is a feature of metaphysical traditions such as Plotinus's or Shankara's that sharply distinguish ultimate reality from the space-time world. Experiential transcendence is a feature of cognitive experiences whose object (if any) is neither the space-time world as a whole or anything in it. Paul Tillich's discussion of Being itself provides my primary example of the first and Walter Stace's account of introvertive mysticism is my main example of the second. Both have difficulty accommodating the sort of love prized by Christians and other theists. I shall argue, however, that Jan Ruysbroeck and other members of the medieval Western affective Dionysian apophatic tradition succeeded in doing so.

Keywords: Ontological and experiential transcendence. P. Tillich. W. Stace. The medieval Western mystic tradition.

Resumo: O artigo examina dois tipos de transcendência e suas relações com o amor. A transcendência ontológica é uma característica das tradições metafísicas como a de Plotino ou de Shankara que distingue rigidamente a realidade suprema do mundo espaço-temporal. A transcendência experiencial é uma característica de experiências cognitivas cujo objeto (se há) não é o mundo espaço-temporal como um todo nem algo nele. A discussão de Paul Tillich sobre o Ser em si mesmo provê meu primeiro exemplo da primeira e a descrição de Walter Stace

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do misticismo introverso é meu exemplo da segunda. Ambos têm dificuldade de adaptar-se à espécie de amor valorizado pelos cristãos e outros teístas. Pretendo mostrar, contudo, que Jan Ruysbroeck e outros membros da tradição afetiva apofática do Ocidente medieval conseguiram fazer tal integração.

Palavras-chave: Transcendência ontológica e transcendental. P. Tillich. W. Stace. Tradição mística medieval ocidental.

This paper examines two types of transcendence and their relation to love. Ontological transcendence is a feature of metaphysical systems such as Plotinus's or Shankara's that sharply distinguish ultimate reality from the space-time world. Experiential transcendence is a feature of cognitive experiences whose object (if any) is neither the space-time world as a whole nor anything in it. My principal examples are drawn from two highly influential thinkers of the mid-twentieth century. Paul Tillich's discussion of Being itself provides my primary example of the first and Walter Stace's account of introvertive mysticism is my main example of the second.

Ontological and experiential transcendence are often intimately related of course. Plotinus, for example, appears to have been a monistic mystic as well as a brilliant metaphysician. But both forms of transcendence, or so I shall argue, have difficulty accommodating the sort of love valued by Christians and other theists.¹

Paul Tillich: Ontological Transcendence and Love

According to Paul Tillich, God is being itself. Being itself is unconditioned, beyond limitation, and thus not a particular being. Since all beings participate in it, however, they can express or (more accurately) symbolize it. While many *negative* statements about God are literally true, however, the only literally true *positive* God statement is "God is Being itself."²

¹ Madhva, Ramanuja, many of the Sufis, and so on.

² In *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Tillich says that the meaning of "God" is expressed by "being itself," "the ground of being," or "the power of being" but later rejects their literal equivalency, claiming that the latter two are no more than symbols of the first. Although this remained Tillich's dominant view he occasionally expressed an even more radical position, namely, that the only true non-symbolic statement we can make about God is that everything we can truly say about him---including presumably "God is Being itself" ---is symbolic. However, as William Rowe pointed out (in *Religious Symbols and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1968), while, strictly speaking, this statement isn't about God but about the language used to describe him, it does indirectly tell us something about him, namely, that he is "ineffable" or "incomprehensible," that is, can't be caught in our conceptual webs.

Yet while Being itself isn't a particular, it isn't a universal either. For Tillich insists that he does not regard it as "as a genus to which all other genera are subordinate" in the sense that "they are less universal than being" and are "less abstract than being." Rather, Being itself is "the power of being in everything that has being" (Rowe 56-57).³ It is thus, in Rowe's view, strikingly like Plotinus's One.

The One precedes the emergence of duality in its first emanation---Nous or intelligence, the inseparable unity of knowing mind and known object. As such the One contains no duality. But it is not one "in the mathematical sense, i.e., as the first of a series or as the monad and point are reached by a division of many. 'It is only [one] in a negative sense and by analogy'" (Rowe: 65) Even so, we can indicate the One "by what in ourselves is like it. For we also participate in being: nay, nothing ripe for participation can be [altogether] void of it" (*Ennead* 3: 8, 9). Moreover, as the source of all that flows from it, we can also describe the One as the Good, that is, as "that on which all else depends, toward which all existences aspire as their source and their need while itself is without need, sufficient to itself, aspiring to no other" (*Ennead* 1: 8, 2).

There *are* significant similarities between the Neo-Platonists and Tillich. But given that the latter regards himself as a *Christian* theologian, a more appropriate comparison would appear to be with Christian rather than non-Christian Neo-Platonists. The Pseudo-Dionysius's Platonism, for example, differs from that of Plotinus and other pagan Neo-Platonists in three important ways.

For one thing, Dionysius does not accept Plotinus's doctrine of emanation. In his view, God creates out of nothing. "We do not receive our being from creatures higher than us in the hierarchies," who in turn, "receive their being from creatures at a still higher level." Dionysius appears to think that, on the contrary, an implication of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is that each creature is *immediately* created by God. "Emanation," for Dionysius is "ultimately a matter of light, illumination, and revelation, not of being." The higher levels mediate light or illumination and purifying knowledge to the lower levels but they do not mediate being.⁴

³ Tillich asserts that universals like *tree* are powers of being. "A tree stands out and exists only because it participates in the power which is treehood, the power which makes a tree a tree and nothing else" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 21). Similarly, "the concept of being as being or being itself points to the power in everything, the power of resisting non-being" (ST I: 254). Tillich's universals are thus analogous to Plato's forms. Platonic forms aren't mere universals in the modern sense but causes and models of the particulars that participate in them (and models not only of what those particulars are but of what they should be).

⁴ LOUTH, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 176.

In the second place, there are rather clear indications that Dionysius believes that salvation is ultimately a consequence of grace. The sensible “symbols” (Baptism, Eucharist, and Anointing) that the Christian initiate uses to purify herself and begin her ascent to God owe their power to divine institution or decisions, not to inherent fitness or natural sympathy as they do for pagan Neo-Platonic theurgists. Furthermore, in the ascent’s final stage. The Christian’s soul is essentially passive, doing little or nothing other than holding herself open to the action of the divine energies. Plotinus’s ontological system, on the other hand, can’t accommodate the concept of grace. For first, the One is not a person.⁵ And second, union for Plotinus isn’t an unmerited gift but a “natural” occurrence. It is not a consequence of supernatural intervention but of the soul’s own efforts and the ontological structure of reality that makes union possible.⁶

Finally, and perhaps most important, the Dionysian contemplative experiences God’s love for her as well as her love for God. The soul unites with God in an ecstasy of love (*eros*) which Dionysius defines as “a power to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling of the Beautiful and the Good.” The experience is ecstatic because one who is possessed by this love “belongs not to self but to the beloved.” Thus “the great Paul swept along by his yearning for God, and seized of its ecstatic power,” said “it is no longer I who love but Christ who lives in me.” He “was truly a lover...and beside himself for God, possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned.” Similar language can be found in Plotinus. But what is inconceivable in Plotinus or any other pagan Neo-Platonist is that, in ecstasy, the soul encounters the divine power *which comes to meet it*. Dionysius, on the other hand, believed that the soul’s ecstatic love *is met by the ecstatic love* of God. For “it must be said too that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside himself in the loving care he has for all. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.”⁷ Plotinus, on the other hand, denies that the One has any love or care for what proceeds

⁵ Even though Plotinus sometimes uses personal as well as impersonal pronouns to refer to the One, and even though ultimately for Dionysius “God is a person” and “God is not a person” must both be negated. Just as, according to Dionysius, God transcends and is more than being and goodness (is “superbeing” and “supergoodness”) so presumably God transcends and is more than personal (is “superpersonal”).

⁶ The fact that the soul is in permanent contact with the “intellect” (the world of “intelligences or forms”) which, in turn, is in permanent contact with the One, and that everything tends to revert to it.

⁷ DIONYSIUS. “The Divine Names,” Chapter 4, sections 12-14, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Mahwah, N. J., Paulist Press, 1987.

from it. While love (a kind of “drunken” loving ecstasy) does appear to be a feature of the pagan Neo-Platonic mystic’s experience of union, the love in question is the love of *the mystic for the One*; there is no indication that the mystic has a sense of *being loved by* the One. Dionysius thought that God transcends and is more than being and goodness (is “superbeing” and “supergoodness”). Although to the best of my knowledge he never explicitly says so, it seems that he is also committed to the claim that God transcends and is more than love as ordinarily understood (is “superloving”). There is nothing clearly comparable in pagan Neo-Platonism.

Dionysius’s emphasis on love was developed further by his Western disciples. His *Celestial Hierarchy* “had...noted that...‘seraphim’ means ‘fire makers or carriers of warmth’ while ‘cherubim’ means ‘fullness of knowledge or carriers of wisdom’ but he never identified the seraphic fire as the fire of love.” Both John the Scot⁸ and Hugh of St. Victor do. While John doesn’t add “any references to charity or love” to his translation of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, his commentary on it “explains warmth as the warmth of charity, and fire as the ardor of love.” The motion of the Seraphim around the One is “‘super-burning’ because the first hierarch of celestial powers burn above all who come after them in the love of the highest good.” And Hugh agrees.⁹

Hugh’s most important contribution to the Western affective Dionysian tradition, however, is his association of seraphic love with the bridal imagery of the *Song of Songs*. According to Hugh, the beloved of the Song “is loved more than understood...Love (*dilectio*) surpasses knowledge, and is greater than intelligence.” In the divine bridal chamber, “mortals and angels surround by desire what they do not penetrate by intellect” (Hugh). Because “the bridal chamber of love is beyond the realm of knowing... later authors¹⁰ can associate it with the darkness of unknowing, whether this be the cloud of Mt. Sinai or the dark night of the lovers’ embrace” (Rorem 78-81).

For example, the anonymous author of the enormously influential *Cloud of Unknowing* says¹¹ that “by passing beyond yourself...you shall be carried up in your affection, and above your understanding, to the substance beyond all substances, the radiance of the divine darkness,” and he

⁸ The author of the first (and highly influential) Latin translation of the Dionysian corpus.

⁹ There is “a long tradition in Latin exegesis” which prepares for this. Gregory the Great, for example, claims that “Love itself is knowledge” (COLEMAN, Boyd Taylor. “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” in COAKLEY, Sarah and STANG, Charles M. [eds.]. *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009], p. 89), and refers to the Seraphim and their fiery love as an exegetical commonplace” although he never claims that Dionysius himself understood the Seraphim in this way (ROREM, Paul. “The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor,” in Coakley and Stang, p. 78-79).

¹⁰ Such as Bonaventure.

¹¹ In his middle English paraphrase of the *Mystical Theology*, entitled *Denis’s Hidden Theology*.

exhorts the reader to “enter by affection into the darkness” which Moses entered through “exercising his affection alone” (Coolman 86-87). And similarly, “the last of the great Victorines,” Thomas Gallus, claimed that Moses was “united to the intellectually unknown God through a union of love, which is affective or true cognition, a much better cognition than intellectual cognition” (Coolman 90f.). “For Gallus, while Dionysius offered a theoretical account of the soul’s ascent to God,” Solomon (in the *Song of Songs*) “gives us the *practice* of the same mystical theology.” The “ecstatic climax” of the soul’s ascent merges “the love-sick night” of the *Song of Songs*, “and the apophatic darkness of Dionysius’s Moses” (Coolman 94).¹²

The affective Dionysian tradition not only infused the thought and practice of some of the great Rhineland mystics such as Suso, Tauler, and Ruysbroeck but also deeply influenced Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism more generally,¹³ as well as many later Roman Catholic mystics. What is less commonly noted is the deep impact that a number of these mystics had on Protestant spiritual traditions. Luther was a great admirer of the *Theologica Germanica*,¹⁴ for example. Johann Arndt was deeply influenced by Tauler, and Miguel de Molinos and Madame de Guyon were widely read by Pietists and other Protestants who emphasized the centrality of the interior life.¹⁵

Does Tillich’s theology as a whole resemble the Christian Neo-Platonism of such figures as the Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, John the Scott and other apophatic Christian Neo-Platonists more than the pagan Neo-Platonism of figures like Plotinus? While the answer may not be entirely clear, I strongly suspect that it does not, and that this should prove problematic for a professed Christian theologian such as Tillich.

The concept of love is central to Christian theism.¹⁶ Christians not only speak of friendship between God and human beings but of spiritual

¹² It is worth noting that, for Gallus, while “in the darkness of seraphic union [with God] ... the soul lacks ‘mental eyes,’ that is reason and understanding,” it is able to touch and taste the beloved. “This refreshment does not occur through a *mirror*, but through the experience of divine sweetness, because touch and taste are not accomplished through a mirror... though vision is.” And while Gallus notes that Scripture says that no one can see God and live, it does not say that no one can touch or taste God and live (Coolman, *op. cit.*, p. 94-95).

¹³ See Luis M. Giron-Negron, “Dionysian Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spanish Mystical Theology,” in Coakley and Stang, *op. cit.* p. 163-76.

¹⁴ An Anonymous fourteenth century product of Rhineland mysticism.

¹⁵ See, e.g., WARD, W. R. *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 48 and elsewhere.

¹⁶ It also plays a central role in non-Western forms of theism. Hindu bhakti traditions, for example, encourage us to assume the roles of God’s servants, friends, and lovers.

marriage, and employ the language of romantic love to express their longing for God and their intimacy with him. Love of this sort involves two things, however---a personal object and reciprocity---as Tillich himself clearly recognized.

Biblical religion is personalistic. Its God is a *Thou* whose claim on those he addresses is unconditional. (The God of the Bible “is unconditional in power, demand, and promise.”¹⁷) Moreover, any genuine relation between persons (and hence between men and women, on the one hand, and the Biblical God, on the other) involves reciprocity---“a personal action on the one side provokes a personal reaction on the other side” (ibid., p. 29). Biblical men and women respond to God and God responds to them.

But if this is the so, it is hard to see how Being itself could be love’s object, or how our relation to Being itself could be genuinely reciprocal. For if Being itself was (literally) a person, it would be *a* being rather than the *ground* of being and therefore---like all beings---conditioned and finite. Nor could our relation to Being itself be genuinely reciprocal. The Biblical God acts on us and we act on him.¹⁸ But a being can’t “influence the ground of being in which and out of which it lives” (*Ibid* 31).¹⁹ How, then, should we understand the Bible’s talk of divine personhood?

Well, in the first place according to Tillich, Being itself is the *ground* of personal being. Furthermore, persons are the fullest or most adequate concrete expressions or symbols of Being itself because they display more dimensions of being than light or fire or space or other non-personal images which have been used to symbolize it. In the second place, Being itself can be encountered *through* the deployment of stories of Yahweh, Jesus, Vishnu, Buddha, and other personal figures. The encounter with the Biblical God as a person, for example, “includes [my emphasis] the encounter with God who is the ground of everything personal and as such is not *a* person” (*Ibid* 83). As a consequence, while the Biblical experience has an “I-Thou character, it “never darkens the transpersonal power and mystery of the divine” (or “vice versa” (*Ibid* 84).

But even if we can love or desire Being itself via images of personhood, does Being itself *love us*? If it doesn’t, there is no real reciprocity. And this is highly problematic. For a love that reaches out to us is an *essential* feature of the ultimate reality worshiped by Christians and adherents of other

¹⁷ TILLICH, Paul. *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, p. 29.

¹⁸ By requesting and receiving forgiveness, for example.

¹⁹ The idea appears to be that since Being itself is ontologically *prior* to beings they can’t act on it.

theistic traditions.²⁰ Bonaventure and the early Franciscans, for example, *identified* God's essence or nature with a love of that sort.²¹

In spite of these problems, however, Tillich does *not* want to exclude love from the divine nature. God is love. And since God is being itself, we must say that Being itself is love. "Love is an ontological concept" (ST I: 279). But like all ontological concepts of the divine, love is also a symbol. There are several kinds of love, though, and God's love is most appropriately symbolized as *agape*---"the longing for" the "ultimate fulfillment" of the other. Even so, "Christian symbolism" has often employed other types of love "to make the divine love concrete" ---*libido*, *philia*, and *eros*, that is, "the movement of the needy toward that which fulfills the need," "the movement of the equal toward union with the equal," and the movement of the "lower in power and meaning toward that which is higher" (ST I: 280-81). (None of the three can be literally ascribed to God of course, for God isn't needy, nothing is higher than him in power and meaning, and nothing is his equal.)

Tillich believed that symbols are typically arranged hierarchically. For example, while all religious symbols point to Being itself some do so more directly than others. The crucifix, for instance, points to the crucifixion on Golgotha, and the latter "to the redemptive activity of God, which is itself a symbolic expression of what concerns us ultimately," namely Being itself.²² Then again, some symbolic statements are explained by others. Thus religious statements about God such as "God is omnipotent" or "God is living" are explained by ontological statements such as "God is the power of being which resists non-being in all its expressions" or "God is the ground of life."

Similarly here. While *agape*, *libido*, *philia* and *eros* can *all* be applied symbolically to God, Tillich clearly thought that "God is *agape*" is closer to the truth than "God is *libido*, *philia*, or *eros*." Yet in the last analysis *agape* itself is nothing more than a symbol of the ontological reality it points to.²³

²⁰ Not only of Judaism and Islam but also of theistic Vedanta and Shaiva Siddhanta, for example.

²¹ Tillich was suspicious of this development, however. He argued that Duns Scotus transformed the early Franciscans' love into pure will, and that Ockham and his followers transformed Scotus's "pure will" into "irrational" or arbitrary will, a "sheer will with no limits" (TILLICH, Paul. *Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Theology*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, p. 194). Tillich thought that the effect of this development on both Protestant and Roman Catholic theology was disastrous. Its radical separation of will and intellect encouraged an "extreme heteronomy" that sacrificed reason to the authority of the Bible or the Church. Tillich's suspicion is unconvincing, however. The movement from Bonaventure and the early Franciscans to Ockham is neither necessary nor inevitable, nor is it necessarily a-rational, let alone irrational.

²² TILLICH, Paul. "The Religious Symbol," in HOOK, Sidney (ed.). *Religious Experience and Truth*, New York: New York University Press, 1961 p. 301.

²³ Remember that, for Tillich, all ontological concepts that are applied to the divine---including the concept of love---are also symbols.

So what ontological reality ultimately underlies the assertion that God is love (*agape*)? The fact that as the power of being overcoming non-being, “God works toward the fulfillment of every creature and toward the bringing into the unity of his life all who are separated and disrupted” (ST I: 181). How, though, should this be understood? Tillich points out that God’s love and grace are often treated as synonyms, and at the very least as nothing more than two aspects of a single reality. But what, then, is grace? Grace, like love, is an ontological reality that is more or less identified with the fact that Being itself is the ground of the world’s existence, of the possibility of our overcoming our existential anxiety and estrangement, and the various realizations of that possibility (ST I: 279-81).

Whether this is an adequate analysis of the peculiarly *theistic* understanding of love and grace, is highly doubtful, however. For Shankara, for instance, or Plotinus could say something similar, namely, that the nirguna Brahman or the One is the ultimate ground of the world, of the possibility of our overcoming our estrangement, and of every realization of that possibility. For Advaita Vedanta, for example, the illusion of the space-time world is a joint product of the existence of the nirguna (propertyless) Brahman and our ignorance (*avidya*). Just as one can mistake a rope for a snake in the dark, so those entrapped in ignorance misperceive the Brahman without attributes as the space-time world. Furthermore, the existence of the nirguna Brahman underlies both the possibility of our dispelling the ignorance which binds us to the illusion of the space-time world and of every realization of that possibility. But just as neither the nirguna Brahman nor the One loves us in any non-Pickwickian sense, so too it would seem neither does Being itself.

Tillich’s ontological love bears little resemblance to the images of marital love, romantic love, and friendship which theists have deployed to express their relation to the religious ultimate. Tillich believes that it is dangerously false “to define love by its emotional side,” however. For “this necessarily leads to sentimental misinterpretations of love” as a “chaotic self-surrender or a chaotic self-imposition” which is characteristic of much romantic love and, by failing to respect the otherness of the beloved “calls into question its application to the divine life” (ST I; 279 and 282). Yet Tillich’s own “abstract” characterization of ontological love is itself inadequate since it provides, at best, no more than a pale shadow of what we value in the most intense human love relationships and, by extension, in the love relationship between ourselves and God.

Walter Stace: Experiential Transcendence and Love

The most influential typology of mysticism appearing in the years immediately following World War II was Walter Stace’s. Stace thought that mystical consciousness takes two forms. The extrovertive mystic perceives

all things as one. Ordinary objects appear to be identical with each other and/or as rooted in some unity which lies behind them. The world is also experienced as alive or conscious or as rooted in life and consciousness. It is a “living presence.” The mind of the introvertive mystic, on the other hand, is empty of ordinary contents. Awareness of the phenomenal world vanishes, and space and time are no longer experienced. Ordinary mental activity is suspended and one’s mind is stripped of abstract concepts and sensuous images. Having purified her consciousness, the introvertive mystic becomes aware of a “One” with which she experiences union or identity. (Stace’s introvertive mysticism appears to be identical with what others have called monistic mysticism and identified with pure consciousness---a state in which the mystic is conscious but not conscious of anything.²⁴) Stace thought that introvertive mystics penetrate more deeply into reality than extrovertive mystics do. He also believed that their experiences were essentially the same. The experiences of Meister Eckhart, Jan Ruysbroeck, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and other introvertive Christian mystics are in principle no different than those of the non-theistic introvertive mystics of East Asia.²⁵ Stace thinks that any apparent evidence to the contrary is explained by the former, imposing Christian interpretations on the same experience of undifferentiated unity that is enjoyed by Advaitins, Jains, and other non-theistic East Asian mystics.²⁶

The principal weakness of Stace’s typology is its failure to accord a central role to love. This is extraordinary in view of the essential role love plays in the accounts of Eastern as well as Western theistic mystics. R. C. Zaehner hardly overstates the case when he concludes that Stace’s “failure to mention love²⁷ can only be due to an obvious anti-Christian [or more accurately anti-theistic] bias reinforced by a massive ignorance of the whole tradition of love mysticism within Hinduism itself.”²⁸ (

Zaehner distinguishes nature mysticism (or cosmic consciousness) and monistic (or soul) mysticism from theistic mysticism. Nature mysticism and monistic mysticism are roughly identical with Stace’s extrovertive and

²⁴ Cf. FORMAN, Robert K. C. “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,” in FORMAN, Robert K. C. (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 3-49.

²⁵ In this respect it resembles the so-called “perennial philosophy” of Aldous Huxley and the neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishnan and Shri Aurobindo which are like it in many ways.

²⁶ STACE, Walter T. *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1960, p. 94-104. Stace adds that the apparent dualism of Christian mystics is to be explained by their “no doubt perfectly sincere submission...to [the authority of] the church,” and by the “non- intellectual” and unreflective character of a number of them such as Teresa of Avila (sic!). (STACE, *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York: The New American Library, 1960, p. 124-32.)

²⁷ This isn’t strictly accurate since Stace does “mention” love---although when he does he either denigrates it or downplays its importance.”

²⁸ ZAEHNER, R. C. *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 200.

introvertive mysticism, respectively. Theistic mysticism, on the other hand, cannot be accommodated within Stace's categories. It does involve introversion. The theistic mystic empties her mind of percepts, images, and all but a few of the most general and abstract concepts (such as "being," "presence", and "love"). But unlike monistic experiences, theistic mystical consciousness has an object or content which is distinct from the self. But that object is neither identical with an object in the space-time world nor with the space-time world as a whole. (The experience is, in this sense, dualistic.) Yet what most clearly differentiates theistic mystical consciousness from other forms of mystical experience is the fact that the nature of the relation between the mystic and the object of her experience is best indicated by the fact that she typically expresses it by using the language of mutual love. Christian mystics, for example, speak of spiritual marriage, and have interpreted the *Song of Songs*, as an allegory of the love relationship between God and the soul. Bernard of Clairvaux referred to the highest union as the "kiss of the mouth." John of the Cross and some Sufi mystics wrote lyrics to express their experience which can be read as ordinary love poetry. Hymns and songs from the Hindu *bhakti* traditions provide yet other examples.

So far forth, Zaehner is right. But he, too, is guilty of oversimplification. The uniqueness of Buddhist experience is misrepresented, for example.²⁹ Most significant, however, is Zahner's comparative denigration of monistic mysticism. Zaehner argues that several Eastern and Western theistic mystics (Ruysbroeck, Ramanuja, and possibly Richard of St. Victor and al-Junayd) create the impression that they have themselves experienced two types of introvertive consciousness, that they know what monistic experiences are like because they have had them, but that there is a clearly distinct introvertive experience which is theistic in character that they have also experienced that is not to be confused with them and is clearly superior to them.³⁰ The Roman Catholic theologian, Jacques Maritain implicitly suggested something similar discussing "experimental" (i.e., experiential) perceptions of God in *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge* and "soul mysticism" in "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void." While the former involves a loving union with God, the latter consists in

²⁹ Zaehner, like Stace, identifies it with cosmic consciousness or nature mysticism. But this is a mistake. Buddhists cultivate an experience in which spatio-temporal reality is perceived as "empty"---a conceptually unstructured flow of "dharma"s (momentary physical or psychological events or states which resist further analysis). The object of the Buddhist's experience is not some permanent substance or force or "One" underlying things. It is the process of becoming itself---but viewed without attachment and without attempting to conceptualize it. This isn't a form of introvertive mystical consciousness for the "object" of the mystic's experience is the phenomenal world. But neither is the experience extrovertive in Stace's or in Zaehner's sense. Viewing things as a conceptually unstructured flow, and without attachment, appears to be phenomenologically distinct from perceiving their identity or seeing them as rooted in some larger life or unity.

³⁰ See ZAEHNER, R. C. *Hindu and Christian Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

a non-conceptual apprehension of the soul's substantial existence or being through the medium of the act by which it empties itself of ordinary contents and suspends all normal mental activity.³¹ But while this distinction may be roughly correct, it pays insufficient attention to the fact that love mysticism sometimes *incorporates* monistic moments.

In Western Christendom, "full union" and "rapture" are often described as the penultimate goal of the Christian mystic's spiritual labors.³² In both experiences, God and the soul penetrate each other, are held in mutual embrace³³. And both sometimes culminate in "union without distinction," a state in which the mystic momentarily ceases to distinguish between herself and God. Although the mystic believes that "metaphysically there is duality," "phenomenologically there is identity." Neson Pike has argued that union without distinction should "not be thought of as a distinct kind of mystical experience as Zaehner rather clearly does but as "the climax moment...of Full Union and Rapture" (Pike: 32, 37, 40). Although Pike's interpretation may be controversial, a careful reading of Rhineland and a number of other Western Christian mystics supports it.

Consider Jan Ruysbroeck. In *The Spiritual Espousals*, Ruysbroeck "speaks... of a threefold division in the Christian life," namely, "the active, interior, and contemplative."³⁴ In the Christian life's second division, "God's interior stirring and touch make us hunger and strive...[And] the more there is of the touch, the more there is of the hunger and striving. This is a life of love at the highest level of [the soul's] activity. God inclines himself toward us and we are thereby touched in love; our spirit by God's activity and amorous power, impels and inclines itself toward God, and thereby *God* is touched [my emphasis]. From these two movements there arises the struggle [or "storm"] of love, for in this most profound meeting...spirit is wounded by love...[O]ur spirit and God's spirit cast a radiant light upon one another, and each reveals to the other its countenance...Each

³¹ MARITAIN, Jacques. *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959; "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," in Maritain, Jacques. *Ransoming the Time*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. Republished by Gordian Press (New York, 1969).

³² The ultimate goal of course is a permanent loving union with God.

³³ Nelson Pike suggests that the distinction between full union and rapture is essentially one of "place," of just "where" the mutual penetration or embrace occurs. Full Union transpires "within the soul." In Rapture the soul is transported "out of itself." (PIKE, Nelson. *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 20, 35.

³⁴ WISEMAN, James A. "Introduction," to John Ruysbroec: *The Spiritual Espousals and other Works* [namely, *The Sparkling Stone*, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, and *The Little Book of Clarification*], introduction and translation by James A. Wiseman, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985. The active life includes repentance, penitence, obedience to "God, the holy Church, and [one's] own conscience in all things," and---most importantly---intending "God's glory in all [one's] works" (*Stone* 1985: 156). While all three are crucial my primary focus will be on the second and third lives.

demands of the other what it is, and each offers to the other and invites it to accept what it is. This makes these loving spirits lose themselves in one another. God's touch and his giving of himself, together with our striving in loving and our giving ourselves in return...sets love on a firm foundation" (*Espousals* 1985: 114-15).

The interior life is an expression of "active" love. But active love "prepares [us] for an 'essential love' that is above all activity...[Here] the spirit becomes love itself...that is essential love in the ground of its unity."³⁵ As long as the spirit burns in love (as it does in the second stage) "it will be aware of distinction and difference between itself and God" when it examines itself. "But [where] it is *burnt up* [my emphasis], it is onefold and without distinction and accordingly feels nothing but unity, for the measureless flame of God's love consumes and devours all that it can enfold in its own self" (*Stone* 1885: 159). Here (at the contemplative stage) "God's touch and our striving in love becomes a single love. Here a person becomes so possessed by love that he must forget both himself and God, and know nothing but love. In this way the spirit is consumed by the fire of love...and itself becomes love above all" works and "exercises of devotion" (*Espousals* 1985: 165). Or again, "the lover [at the contemplative stage] is overcome and possessed by his Beloved in bare essential love. Here the lover is lovingly immersed in his beloved, so that each is entirely the other's, both in possession and in rest. There follows" what "is called falling asleep in God...where the spirit sinks away from itself without knowing how or where this takes place. Then there follows the...last thing which can be expressed in words. It takes place when the spirit sees a darkness it cannot enter by means of the power of reason. In this state a person feels that he has died and lost his way and that he has become one with God without difference. When he feels himself to be one with God, then God himself is his peace, his enjoyment, and his rest" (*Stone* 1985: 183). Here God envelopes "us in fathomless love," and makes us lose ourselves "and flow forth into the wild darkness of the Godhead" where we "are able to meet God with God and endlessly possess our eternal blessedness with him and in him" (*Espousals* 1985: 132). At this point it is no longer "a matter of loving God with 'our love' but rather of our allowing ourselves to be embraced in God's own love, which is in fact the Holy Spirit enfolding the contemplative in the same divine bond of love that unites Father and Son in the Spirit" (*Wiseman* 1985: 30)

What are we to make of this? Ruysbroeck sometimes says things that sound heretical. For example: "It is to be God with God, without intermediary or any element of otherness which could constitute an obstacle

³⁵ MOMMAERS, Paul. "Mystically One with God," in MOMMAERS, Paul and VAN BRAGT, Jan. *Mysticism, Buddhist and Christian: Encounters with Jan van Ruusbroec*, New York: Crossroad, 1995, p. 16. The internal quotes are from Ruysbroeck's *The Tabernacle*.

or impediment" (*Espousals* 1985: 146); "The soul ceaselessly becomes the very resplendence which it receives" (*Espousals* 1985: 147)---"a resplendence which he later identifies with the Son" (Wiseman 1985: 20); "Contemplatives are transformed and become one with the same light with which they see and are seen" (*Espousals* 1985:150); "They are made one with the spirit of God" (*Espousals* 1985: 151). But these statements of identity are phenomenological, not ontological. The "loving contemplative" temporarily loses awareness of his own separate identity. He "neither sees nor feels in the ground of his being, in which he is at rest, anything other than an incomprehensible light" (*Espousals* 1985: 147). There is no ontological identity, however, and those "who say that they themselves are Christ or God" are "foolish and perverse" (*Mirror* 1985: 229-30).

Precisely how, though, should union "without difference or distinction" be understood? Ruysbroeck describes it as "an 'eternal rest.' Such rest...is no longer in the contemplative's own deepest or 'essential' being," however, "but rather in God's being (*wesen*) which is the superessential being (*overwesen*) of *all*" beings, including the being of the contemplative herself (Wiseman 1985: 30, my emphases). "There all exalted spirits are, in their superessential being, one enjoyment and one beatitude with God, without difference" (*Clarification* 1985: 266).³⁶ Ruysbroeck's exemplarism helps explain this.

Colossians 1: 15-16 where Christ is spoken of as "the image of the invisible God, in whom, through whom, and for whom all things have been created," and John 1: 1-4 which declares that "all things came to be through him," and that "all that came to be was alive with his life" provide the background for a doctrine of exemplarism that was developed by the Greek Fathers, by Augustine, and by such later theologians as Anselm and Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, for example, says that "all things 'are in God through their own intelligible natures, which in God is the same as the divine essence. Hence things that exist in God in that way *are* [my emphasis] the divine essence.'" Thus "creatures have not only their created being in the temporal order but also an eternal being in God, a being identical with God himself" (Wiseman 1985: 19). Aquinas's idea is this: The Logos or Word includes the eternal exemplars of every temporal being. But given the divine simplicity, and the fact that the Logos or Word *is* God, my eternal or "intelligible being," too, is God. Ruysbroeck can thus say that "in this divine image [or intelligible being] all creatures have an eternal life apart from themselves in their eternal Exemplar...It is to this eternal image and likeness that the Holy Trinity has created us. God therefore wills that we go out from ourselves into this divine light, supernaturally pursuing this image which is our own life and possessing it with him both actively and blissfully in a state of eternal blessedness" (*Espousals* 1985:149). For even

³⁶ Note that Ruysbroeck says one in enjoyment and beatitude, not in ontological being. As he said in the *Mirror* (1985: 247), "whenever I write that we are one with God, this is to be understood as a oneness in love and not in being or nature."

though “all creatures have this eternal life in God,” contemplatives alone are able to “‘behold’ or experience it” (Wiseman 1985: 20).³⁷

Yet whatever merits Ruysbroeck’s metaphysico-theological explanation of union without distinction may have, an important question remains. Precisely how are we to understand the experience (as distinguished from the explanation) of union without distinction? As we have seen, Pike thinks that it shouldn’t “be thought of as a distinct kind of mystical experience. It is rather the climax moment---seldom achieved” of the contemplative’s experience of his and God’s mutual love (Pike 1992: 40).

There is no question, I think, but that Ruysbroeck’s union without distinction is an integral part of an interconnected series of experiences which, when taken as a whole, are “phenomenologically theistic.” Considerably more controversial is Pike’s claim that even though union without distinction is “a monistic interval lacking subject-object structure as well as all sensory and sensory-like content,” *it too*, is “phenomenologically theistic” (Pike 1992: 160, 162). Union without distinction is “empty.” Yet in virtue of its phenomenological ancestry, it can be described as, phenomenologically, “an awareness of God-soul identity... ‘God-soul identity’ expresses a lack of experiential content. But...it is a very specific lack,” namely, a lack of the previously “felt distinction between oneself and God” (Pike 1992: 164-65). Pike concludes that whether a monistic experience is or isn’t phenomenologically theistic is determined by its phenomenological history. Both Jains and Advaita Vedantins, for example, and some orthodox Christians such as Ruysbroeck, have monistic experiences. But the Jain’s and Advaitin’s monistic experiences, on the one hand, and the Christians’ monistic experiences, on the other, differ phenomenologically because their phenomenological ancestries are different.

Pike employs two analogies to explain how union without distinction can be “phenomenologically theistic” even though “it is a monistic interval lacking subject-object structure as well as all sensory and sensory-like content.” The first analogy is this. Imagine two cases. In the first, “I am sitting on a park bench reading a magazine when I am unexpectedly hit on the forehead with a baseball. Upon awakening” I describe my experience as “stun-stars and fading consciousness...I am later told what happened” and “thereafter...describe the experience as one of being hit on the head by a baseball.” In the second, I am playing second base, follow the ball as it leaves the plate, and move under it “but...I misjudge the catch and

³⁷ In the *Mirror*, Ruysbroeck “writes that the image of God which we have received in the depths of our being [namely, our eternal being or exemplar] is God’s Son in which we all live and are imaged forth. So intimate is this union that God’s image fills the mirror of our soul to overflowing so that no other light or image can enter there’ [Mirror 1985: 239]. But...however intimate the union there is nevertheless no strict identity. ‘The image is not the mirror, For God does not become a creature’ [Mirror 1985: 239]” (WISEMAN, 1985: 27).

the ball hits me on the forehead. Again, I experience stun-stars and fading consciousness. Upon awakening I do not have to be told what happened. I describe the experience as one of being hit on the head with a baseball." "Being hit with baseball" describes something I perceive in the second case but not in the first. Because of its phenomenological ancestry, stun-stars and fading consciousness in case two is "phenomenologically [an experience of] being hit with a ball." While the two occurrences of stun-stars and fading consciousness are "phenomenologically indistinguishable in that they involve the same kind of stun, the same kind of stars, [etc.], they are phenomenologically distinct. 'Hit with a baseball' describes the phenomenological content of the second experience. It does not do so with respect to the first" (Pike 1992: 160-63)

The second analogy is this. Again imagine two cases. In the first, a spot of light is projected on a screen. In the second, two spots are projected and "come closer and closer until they merge into a single spot" "having the same spatial dimensions, brightness, and so on." My awareness in the second case "is not just a perception of *unity* but a perception of *identity*---not just a perception of *one* but of *two* that have become one...With respect to this final moment of awareness...Its phenomenological ancestry has survived as an ingredient in its phenomenological content" (Pike 1993: 164).

The implication is clear. Union without distinction is "empty." But in virtue of its phenomenological ancestry, it can be described as, phenomenologically, "an awareness of God-soul identity...'God-soul identity' expresses a lack of experiential content. But...it is a very specific lack," namely, a lack of the previously "felt distinction between oneself and God." Notice, however, that both of the two analogies to the monistic moment in the theistic mystic's experience have phenomenological content while the so-called "climax moment" of the theist's experience, according to Pike, does not. The analogies thus break down.

There seem to me only two ways in which the phenomenology of the Christian's monistic experience could differ from the phenomenology of the Jain's or Advaitin's. The first would be if an awareness of the climax moment's phenomenological ancestry were included in the climax moment. The second would be if the climax moment's phenomenological ancestry affected its feeling tone.

The first is a non-starter. If an awareness of union without distinction's phenomenological ancestry is part of it, then (*pace* Pike) it can't be identical with the monistic experiences of non-theistic mystics, for the latter don't include it. Moreover, if the climax moment *did* include such an awareness it would have "experiential content," and so (again contrary to Pike) not be empty.

Non-theistic and theistic monistic experiences might differ in feeling tone, however. It is possible in other words, that while both experiences are devoid of intentional content (that is, lack an object phenomenologically distinct

from their subject) they differ with respect to their affective coloring, and that this difference in their affective coloring is a consequence of a difference in their phenomenological history. (Something like this difference in feeling tone does sometimes occur. The empty consciousness experience is typically joyful. But not always. J. A. Symonds had it and disliked it, a difference which can probably be accounted for by features of Symonds' personal history---his inability to categorize it or assimilate it to the rest of his experience, for example. If the feeling tone of the theistic mystic's "climax moment" is colored by the feelings and emotions that are features of his love experiences, then there would be a phenomenological difference between his monistic experiences and those of his non-theistic counterparts although the difference would not be one of phenomenological content or object but rather of emotional tone.

In at least one place, Stace acknowledges that Christian introvertive mystical experiences are characterized by a distinctive "emotional tone" that he believes to be the referent of such terms as "'flaming love' and the like."³⁸ He argues, though, that the feelings or emotions that these terms express or refer to are the causal consequences of Christian beliefs and are ancillary to their monistic experiences. I am suggesting that, on the contrary, their distinctive emotional tone is an *intrinsic* feature of them. Moreover, in my view, the affective tone of the theistic mystic's monistic moments is more like a mood than like the distinct feelings or emotions that Stace appears to have in mind (that is, it is more like e.g. dread than fear). Think, for example, of how life is infused with an aura of radiance when we are deeply in love.

I do not think that this suggestion should be rejected out of hand. Advaitins and other non-theistic monistic mystics find their experience infused with joy (*satchitananda*). Why, then, couldn't the monistic moments that Christian mystics sometimes experience be suffused with the emotional tone of states of theistic consciousness analogous to Kierkegaard's "first love," or romantic love, or marital love? I, for one, see no reason why they couldn't.

Transcendence and God's Mystery

Ontological and experiential transcendence are different but related aspects of the divine mystery. For God is an epistemological *and* ontological mystery who exceeds our grasp of in two ways. Mysteries are epistemological when they are a function of the relation between God's nature or being on the one hand, and the limitations of created intellects on the other. They are ontological when they are an intrinsic aspect of God's own being or

³⁸ STACE, *Teachings of the Mystics*, *op. cit.*, p. 130-32.

nature rather than a consequence of the limitations of human or angelic knowledge of it. Both types of mystery elude conceptualization but they do so in very different ways and for very different reasons. Epistemological mysteries elude it in cases where while adequate concepts may be in principle available (if only to God), they are *not* fully available to finite intellects. Ontological mysteries elude conceptualization because *no* concepts can fully express it. Symbols, images, songs, and perhaps ultimately the silence of mystical prayer, alone can do so.

Karl Rahner points out that in postmedieval scholastic theology (and I would add in much if not most of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion), mystery is a property that statements have when they exceed our reason or cannot be fully understood. This conception of mystery has three noteworthy features. First, while it is admitted that the mystery of doctrinal statements is rooted in features of their object, the *focus* of scholastic theology's discussion of mystery is on the statements rather than on what those statements are about. Second, mystery is regarded as a function of the relation of the propositions in question to human reason. Third, reason is construed in the modern sense of ratiocination or "calculation," and thus sharply distinguished from the will and affections. Rahner thinks that each of these features is a mistake. In the first place, mystery is primarily a feature of the deep things of God---not of the doctrinal statements that express them. In the second, mystery is not (in the first instance, at least) a function of the relation between certain propositions about God and finite intellects, but rather an intrinsic feature of God himself. Finally, we can only cognize mystery by faith, and faith is an expression of our will and affections as well as of our intellects. To recognize mystery is not just to acknowledge that certain propositions about God exceed our grasp; it is to prostrate ourselves in loving wonder before something that can't be comprehended by any sort of propositional cognition.³⁹

The beatific "vision of God face to face" does remove many mysteries, "but this only means that *what* [the mysteries] express is manifested in its own being and substance, is experienced therefore in itself and must no longer rely for its manifestation" on scriptures, creeds, and theological interpretations that do "duty for it....Nonetheless, these mysteries [that is, what one now directly beholds⁴⁰] remain mysterious and incomprehen-

³⁹ RAHNER, Karl. "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 41.

⁴⁰ In the beatific vision, and by anticipation in advanced stages of mystical contemplation. High Christian mystics invariably claim that the knowledge they have acquired is "something radically different from any knowledge we can capture in our concepts or modes of thinking and speech." It is a sight "without seeing," a knowledge "without knowing... for in contemplation we know by 'unknowing.'" Or, better, we know *beyond* all knowing or 'unknowing'... The closer we get to God, the less is our faith diluted with the half-light of created images and concepts...[for] it is then that our minds are most truly liberated from the weak, created lights that are darkness in comparison to him; it is then that we are filled

sible." The Greek fathers are thus right when they speak of "the highest stage of life and knowledge" as entering "into the darkness which God is" (Pseudo-Dionysius) or a not-knowing that is the "supra-rational knowledge" (Maximus the Confessor), or tell us that "to enter the holy of holies is to be encompassed by the divine darkness" (Gregory of Nyssa).⁴¹

But this, if correct, has a potentially startling consequence. For if mystery is not, in the first instance, a function of the relation between God and finite intellects, but rather an intrinsic property of God's own nature, then God's complete and perfect knowledge of himself must include a recognition of it. "The absolutely clear self-awareness of God" may thus include "something positive which does not appertain to the [propositional] intellect but to the mystery in contradistinction from such an intellect." If this is so, then mystery "appertains to God's knowledge [of himself] essentially, in a preeminent and analogous sense."⁴² There may thus be a sense in which God himself can't fully comprehend his own essence⁴³ but must enter into the "divine darkness," knowing himself or aspects of himself through a not-knowing which is at one and the same time a supreme "supra-rational" knowledge of the deep things of his own being.

So in precisely what sense does mystery "appertain to God's knowledge" of himself? God, I suggest, knows everything that can be propositionally known about himself (that he is good, say, or omnipotent) through an analogue of propositional cognition. But other aspects of God's being (those that are mysteries in Rahner's sense) can't be grasped in this way even in principle, and God knows these by an analogue of appreciation or knowledge by acquaintance.⁴⁴ Nothing about God is thus unknown to God. He is neither "baffled" nor "puzzled" by his own being. Nevertheless, God's nature is for him not only an object of a kind of conceptual cognition but also of something akin to the amazement, wonder, and awe that are the felt aspects, as it were, his perfect experiential acquaintance with depths of his own being that necessarily elude even God's own complete *conceptual* comprehension.

Appendix: Tillich on Mysticism

Tillich claims that Christian love mysticism is exemplified by Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard's mysticism is both a participation in Christ that is "concrete," "dynamic," and "active," and a "presupposition of the second

with his infinite light which seems pure darkness to our reason." (MERTON, Thomas. *Seeds of Contemplation* [New York: New Directions, 1963], p. 1-2, 135.)

⁴¹ RAHNER, *op. cit.*, p. 56, 58.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 48f.

⁴³ That is, he doesn't know every aspect of his being by analogues of propositional knowledge.

⁴⁴ For a defense of this see my *Reason, Revelation, and Devotion: Inference and Argument in Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 145-47.

type of content in Bernard's mysticism" which abstracts from anything "concrete." The latter, unlike the former, is a "mysticism of the abyss of the divine."⁴⁵ In spite of his alleged paradigmatic status, however, Tillich's remarks on Bernard are quickly followed by a brief discussion of Meister Eckhart whose very *different* mysticism is then more or less identified with Christian mysticism *tout court*. Eckhart's "mysticism unites the most abstract scholastic concepts---especially that of being---with a burning soul, with the warmth of religious feeling, and the love power of religious acting." Being itself, for Eckhart, is "not static, but living, dynamic." He distinguishes, though, between the divine as "desert," "the simple ground," and God, "the principle of the good and true" (History 1968: 201-03). Eckhart's mysticism is very different from Bernard's. The latter is primarily a love mysticism but the former is not. Bernard's mysticism focuses on a mystical marriage between God and the soul. Eckhart's focuses on the desert or ground. It is difficult to see how they can both be paradigmatic of Christian mysticism.⁴⁶

Whereas the Christian love mysticism of Bernard and his followers is focused on the most adequate concrete *symbol* of Being itself, namely, Christ, Tillich thinks that mysticism's "abstract element" is focused on the ultimate *object* of that symbol, that is, on Being itself. Moreover, Tillich also believes that Christian mystics have *this* side of their experience "in common with all other forms of mysticism." This universally shared "abstract element," however, appears to be more or less identical with a universal *monistic* moment in the manner of Stace, Aldous Huxley, Ramakrishnan, and other neo-Vedantins and, like them, Tillich appears to regard this as a deeper or truer experience of the ultimate. The trouble with this is that it doesn't comport well with the emphasis that Christian and other theistic love mystics place on the role of love. For as Tillich says, "when we come to the ultimate we cannot think simply in terms of separated individuals [the soul and God] though we must still think in terms of love. And this is no easy task [sic!]." Or more strongly, because so-called "abstract mysticism is apersonal, it makes love in eternity" impossible (History 1968: 173-75).

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⁴⁵ TILLICH, Paul. *The History of Christian Thought*, New York; Harper and Row, 1968, p. 173-75.

⁴⁶ Though not impossible. I have argued above that Ruysbroeck successfully managed to wed the two. I also believe that Suso, Tauler, and John of the Cross among others have succeeded in doing so.