**Christian Mysticism?**

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Gregory Collins was born in Belfast in 1960. He studied at Queen’s University Belfast, gaining a doctorate in Byzantine Studies in 1991. He made Solemn Profession at Glenstal Abbey in 1994. Following ordination as priest in 1995, he studied Depth Psychology at the Jung Institute in Zurich. Between 1998 and 2002 Father Gregory was Headmaster of Glenstal Abbey School, after which he spent six years teaching Orthodox Theology and the History of Theology at the Benedictine university of Sant’ Anselmo in Rome. Since returning to Glenstal, Father Gregory has had a varied ministry of writing and preaching retreats. Among his publications are The Glenstal Book of Icons (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002) and Meeting Christ in His Mysteries: A Benedictine Vision of the Spiritual Life (Dublin: Columba Press, 2011)

1. Introduction to Christian Mysticism.
2. Tarot cards, Hindu texts (Bhagavad Gita), Sufi texts, Healing Crystals – all can be found in bookstores, promising a “mystical experience.” What about the “mystical benefits of foot massage”? That differs from Jesus washing the disciple’s feet. “Relax with God in a warm atmosphere,” says a retreat center.
3. Christian Mysticism: are we reading Matthew Fox or Meister Eckhardt? Not all Christian theologians accept “Christian mysticism.” Major Protestant thinkers, such as Karl Barth, have denied the reality of mysticism.
4. Collins’ thesis: there *is* such a thing as Christian mysticism. It is the way that God communicates to us.
5. Mysticism.
6. Etymology. It is a recent word from France in the 17th century. The Church Fathers speak of “mystical theology.”
7. Theology. Mysticism is supposed to be connected to it.
8. Contemplation. This is a traditional term for experience of God.
9. New Testament Roots.
10. The mystery of Jesus Christ (Rom 16:25-27). Paul said that Christian revelation *is* “of the mystery” of Jesus Christ.
11. How is Christ’s cross a “mystery” for St. Paul?
12. Mystery Cults.
13. Eleusis in Athens. The mystery cults are older than philosophy, stemming from Egypt. Near Elepsis (Eleusis) in Athens there was the procession of the Eleusinian mysteries. Today Eleusis is an industrial area.
14. Eleusinian liturgies. There were initiations and special liturgies (not orgiastic rituals). People practiced these, for they were connected to the dying and rising of nature.
15. Paul’s Understanding.
16. In First Corinthians, Paul speaks of the cross of Christ as the “mystery,” the supreme paradox, foolishness to the Greeks, a scandal to the Jews. See the modern book *Apostles of the Crucified Messiah*.
17. To speak of the crucified Jesus as the “final revelation of God” was a scandal. Paul and the early Christian writers (the authors of Ephesians and Colossians) were influenced by this “mystery” insight.
18. Revelation of the Mystery. Ephesians speaks of Jesus as the revelation of the mystery. “The mystery is first and foremost God’s hidden plan.” The Greek *to mysterion* is something hidden, not an “experience,” but a “secret.” God manifests it as *apokulypsis*, as the hidden secret. Paul is saying that God’s hidden secret is revealed in Jesus.
19. Revelation. Colossians says that all the treasures of wisdom (*Sophia*) and knowledge (*Gnosis*) are revealed, so that all things might be brought together under Christ, *anakephaliosis*. God emerges from his hiddenness, manifests himself in Jesus, and reveals his wisdom, i.e., that all is to be brought together in Jesus Christ.
20. Pastoral Epistles. The epiphany of God is the revelation of the mystery. Ephesians says: “The mystery hidden to earlier ages is now made clear.” It hasn’t ceased to be a mystery, but the mystery – the hiddenness – is now brought forth. The mystery comes from God, and leads us back to the unimaginable, indescribable, ineffable God.
21. Why a Mystery?
22. Why should the unimaginable God condescend to join us as a man, to be born and to be crucified? That is the mystery that the NT is proclaiming.
23. The mysteriousness has disappeared in evangelical theology. Evangelicals emphasis justification, sin and grace. But they miss the key concept of mystery, just as the Orthodox overlook justification and overemphasize mystery.
24. The NT meaning of *mysterion* means: The hidden becoming manifest.
25. Taken up to the heavens (2 Corinthians 12). Paul knew “a man” who was brought up to heaven, but to prevent the man from being puffed up, he was afflicted with a weakness. I know someone in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven. 3And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) 4was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter.**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12" \l "55012004-a)** 5About this person**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12" \l "55012005-1)** I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, except about my weaknesses. 6Although if I should wish to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be telling the truth. But I refrain, so that no one may think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me 7because of the abundance of the revelations. Therefore, that I might not become too elated,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12" \l "55012007-1)** a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.[**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12#55012007-b) 8Three times**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12" \l "55012008-1)** I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,[**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12#55012008-c) 9**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12" \l "55012009-1)** but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12#55012009-2) in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.[**d**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2corinthians/12#55012009-d)
26. Being taken up into heaven. Elijah was taken up. Muhammad was taken up. Mystical journeys to heaven are common *topoi* in the Middle East.
27. Guruism. Paul is speaking about himself. No one knows what the “thorn in the flesh” was.
28. Collins’ point: the mystery is the theology of the cross and justification. We do not climb up to heaven on our own power. We are thrown to the ground, we meet our weakness. Beware the spiritual inflatedness of someone who says, “I have a special relationship with God that enables me to speak of God.”
29. The cross is the revelation of God’s *Sophia*. What we call “glorification” may not be God’s idea.
30. *Mysterion* in John. The word “mystery” does not appear in John, but the gospel is full of everything that later became Christian mystical theology.
31. The Word has appeared, become flesh, lived among us.
32. The blind think they see, but they don’t.
33. The glory that has been concealed has been revealed in the cross.
34. The glory is not just the resurrection, but includes the crucifixion.
35. Paradox. What really is, is not apparent. Contemporary culture says, “What you see is what you get.” But that’s misleading. What you see is a crucified man. What you get is the revelation of God’s mystery.
36. The Apocalypse.
37. There is a revelation of a lamb. The “mystery” appears under various signs.
38. What became mystical theology came from the New Testament.
39. Contacting the Mystery.
40. The Christian Church has seen the Scriptures as revelation.
41. There are two levels of meaning: the apparent meaning (literal) and the hidden meaning (allegory).
42. Greek readers read Homer and Odysseus as an allegory. Odysseus left home, encountered the world, and came back wiser. His was the journey of life.
43. Judaism’s Philo of Alexandria read things this way as well. He interpreted Moses on Sinai or Horeb and interpreted him allegorically. When Moses climbs the mountain, it is an allegory for the self, the Hebrew soul, experiencing God in the darkness of the mountaintop clouds, and then returnig from the mountain.
44. Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures.
45. The Hellenization of the Gospel is not a bad thing (as Historicism claims), but an inevitable process of inculturating the Gospel.
46. The Christian Church took over the allegorical exegesis, then added typology. There is a type (King David) and an antitype (Jesus Christ). The Jewish Scriptures were “hijacked” by the Christian Church. Are the psalms “Christian” prayers? Originally, they were Jewish.
47. So the Jewish Scriptures are *really* about, not Jewish history, but *hidden* or mystical truths that came to fruition in Christian times.
48. Example: Isaiah 53 (the suffering servant). Jewish exegetes cannot agree on who the servant is. They ask whether there is a “priestly” messiah and a “kingly” one. Christians read Isaiah 53 and they see Christ. The early Church looked for the presence of Christ, mystically concealed in the Jewish text. Exegesis brought out the hidden meaning.
49. Levels of Meaning.
50. First level (literal): Jerusalem temple is in a city in the land of Israel.
51. Second level (allegorical): Jesus “cleanses” the Temple. He means the “temple” of the body.
52. Third level (historical?). “You are the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit has been engrafted onto you.”
53. Fourth level (anagogical?). Some scholars say that patristic exegesis is supercessionist. But Collins disagrees. God has given the OT revelation to us as a mystery to be explored.
54. Christian Exegesis.
55. The Exodus is a type of the Church, which leads us “out” of this world and “into” the next. “I saw the holy sister, the New Jerusalem, coming out of God, bedecked like a bride.”
56. The first Jerusalem was David and Solomon. The “second” temple is the body of Jesus Christ, united with the body of the Church. “In that city, there is no Temple, because the lamb is the temple.”
57. Lectio divina. We are the body of Christ. “When you were baptized, you went down into the waters with Christ, just as he was baptized into death.” In the Orthodox tradition, there is immersion baptism. That is a symbol. You are dipped in water. But in reality you are crucified in Christ. The mystery gets expressed in the liturgy
58. Liturgy as the Revelation. Today we buy a Bible in a bookstore. But before the Reformation, Christians encountered the Scripture in worship. It is the revelation of the mystery, the hidden dimension of Jesus Christ.
59. The Mystical Tradition of the Jews.
60. Similarities.
61. You can’t understand the NT without understanding Second Temple Judaism. Older books talk about the Greek inheritance in philosophy. But they neglect the mystical tradition in Jewish theology.
62. There are journeys to the throne in Judaism. In Christianity, Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of the Father.
63. Differences.
64. Hidden meaning of Letters and Numbers. In Hebrew, the letters themselves have a hidden meaning. There are correspondences between the letters and the numbers. But no one says that the Greek alphabet has a secret meaning.
65. The Song of Songs. The Christian tradition emphasized that this is Christ and the Church.
66. Septuagint. The Jews dropped the Deuterocanonical books in part because Christians celebrated them.
67. Historical Criticism.
68. In the 17th Century, the Reformers criticized “hidden” meanings. To be sure, the allegorical meaning often was exaggeratedly speculative.
69. The Letter to the Hebrews is unintelligible without typological meaning.
70. What was concealed in the old was revealed in the new.
71. It is a mistake to say that the ancients “misread” the texts. The ancients read the texts with an eye toward the *sensus plenior*.
72. Consider the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*. The Song of Songs receives ruthless historical criticism. It is a love song, not a revelation of God’s love for his people. But what does it have to do with the Temple or the Church?
73. The Psalms have hidden mystical meanings. Psalm 21: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Is it about the “sons of Koreh”? Or is it about Jesus Christ in facing his agony?
74. Allegorical Meaning in Post-Modernism. Every text has context, and there is no purely “literal” meaning. Even “People Magazine” has a meaning and a subtext. In “People Magazine,” people are not “baptized” but “Christened.” Netanyahu says that a Mufti is responsible for the holocaust. The deeper meaning: the Palestinians want to eliminate the Jews.
75. Irish missionaries burned the effigies of Nigerians, but the Nigerians regarded their “effigies” as today we regard icons.
76. Historicism means, “Only my culture knows how to rightly interpret things.”
77. Why does Christianity matter?
78. Jesus died “for us,” just as the 300 Spartans died for their compatriots.
79. One famous professor asked, “How do I get from the first century messiah to here?” He replied, “I do it by making the Ignatian exercises.” But he did not see the importance of the liturgy. That takes us to mystical theology, for in the liturgy we “prepare to celebrate the sacred mysteries.”

Coffee Break

1. Liturgy as the Encounter with Mystery.
2. NT does not use the word “mystery” to describe acts of worship; it describes the revelation of what is hidden. The word “mystery” as a word for sacrament emerged with the Fathers.
3. The word “mystery” was too much connected with mystery cults.
4. Romans 6. What’s “going on” is a ritual action. But what “really happens” is that you’re being plunged into the death of Christ.
5. The Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. “Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord.” You *perform* an action, and by it, you *communicate* the bloody death of Jesus.
6. Mystagogy. It is to Liturgy what allegorical exegesis is to Scripture.
7. Jerusalem in the Fourth Century.
8. In the fourth century, Constantine began to adopt Christianity as the official religion.
9. People were flocking into the church. In Russia, it’s now respectable to be a Christian, and Putin has capitalized on this.
10. Under Constantine, priests got exemption from taxation.
11. Norman Bains: “Constantine sitting with his Christian bishops is the beginning of the Middle Ages.”
12. The “Wisdom” of Being a Christian in the Fourth Century.
13. Mystagogy was about heightening the experience of becoming a Christian.
14. Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catecheses* to catechumens before Lent (to those getting baptized) and after Lent to the new Christians (mystagogic catechesis).
15. First you did the ritual, then you explained it. Today we explain first, then do the ritual. If you google “catechumenate,” you know what’s going to happen to you. But in ancient times, initiation was a surprise.
16. The Church surrounded the sacraments with actions to heighten the sacredness of the mystery. Awesome, spine-chilling mysteries.
17. It happened at night. They were plunged into the water, lifted out, brought into the darkened church, given a candle, and presented them with the mysteries of Christ.
18. Mystagogical catechesis. “What you see is bread and wine; what you encounter is the body and blood of the risen Christ,” said Cyril of Jerusalem. People didn’t even see the Eucharist until they received it.
19. Mystagogy was to the liturgy what allegorical exegesis was to the Scripture.
20. Christ. He is the mystery.
21. Scripture. In it we seek the hidden meaning.
22. Liturgy. In it we participate in the mystery.
23. Liturgy. The mystery is the *hapax* (or uniqueness) of Christ. What you repeat are the ritual actions that communicate it. Christ reactivates the mystery through the liturgy until he comes in glory. This is the emergence of a theology of experience
24. Pseudo-Dionysius. His book on mystical theology. *De mystica theologia*.
25. Bibliography of Pseudo-Dionysus.
26. The Divine Names.
27. Celestial Hierarchy.
28. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.
29. The Mystical Theology.
30. Content of *The Mystical Theology*. God reveals himself from the splendor of heaven, where the angels celebrate, and manifests himself in the sacraments, then leads us to an experience of the mystery.
31. God is the first theologian. He speaks first out of his incomprehensible silence. He speaks his divine Word, recorded in Scripture, the original source of all that is about God. We draw from Scripture our words about God. Most of Scripture is normal human words, taken up by God.
32. Two ways of using Scripture.
33. Images. God is an everlasting rock, a consuming fire, a light, a fire.
34. Concepts. God is justice, peace, truth, love, and power.
35. For Dionysus, the images are less dangerous than concepts.
36. Everyone knows that God is not a rock. God simply has the stability and firmness of a rock. Or he warms us like fire.
37. But not everyone understands concepts. What does it mean to say that God is “powerful”? [Schindler to the SS officer: “Real power is being able to say, ‘I let you go.’”] We think we know what “justice” is, but what do we mean when we say that God is justice. Is justice “retribution”? Does justice mean, “I pay you back what you gave me”?
38. Luther saw that justice is not about God paying me back, but about God letting me off.
39. Dionysus: God’s revelation contradicts the way we understand God.
40. The Ways of Affirmation (*kataphasis*) and Negation (*apophasis*).
41. Affirmation. We speak of God “talking,” but the language of God “speaking” doesn’t capture the mystery of God.
42. Negation. We say that God is not a rock in the way that a rock is a rock. God is love, but not love in the way we understand it (erotic, the satisfaction of my needs). God doesn’t have any needs. God yearns, not for love, but to give us love. [Luther: the driving energy of love is not getting, but giving.]
43. God is always God, and cannot be captured in human terms. We have to be brought beyond language, beyond space. [“Sein, dass verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache.” – Hans-Georg Gadamer]
44. The Transcendence of God. We have to negate the affirmations, but hold ourselves empty, and not try to control it. We can also make the mistake of thinking that the emptiness is God. So we must negate the negation, which is a form of affirmation.
45. Affirmation. God is light. “I am the light of the world.” “The Lord is my light and my help.”
46. Negation. God cannot be reduced to the image of light. God comes to us in the dark night of the soul.
47. Negation of the negation. Dionysus: “God is not like any light that we know of, a transcendent light.” Wittgenstein spoke of language as a game. But for Dionysus, language is not a game; he is pushing language to let the transcendent, the other, the “mystical majesty of God,” come to us.
48. Consequences.
49. Politics. I may not invoke God to justify my notion of power. Constantine sitting with his bishops is not God, it is Christendom. Calvin’s Geneva. Barth said, “Calvin’s God was a larger version of Calvin.” Did God run the world the way Calvin ran Geneva? Is the Islamic State blowing up archaeological finds in the name of God? God cannot be controlled – but ISIS does not understand this. They affirm God as power and might, and that means you can behead your enemies. There is no negation.
50. Is God a “father”? St Thomas Aquinas reflected on this. Yes, I know God as a father – if I had a good father. But if my father beat me or beat my mother, it is not obvious to me that God is a Father. I have to negate that image of God. Or if we replace God the “Father” with God the “Mother,” we may also have problems. Mothers can be oppressive. They can be “Mommy Dearest.” God has to be filtered through a theological critique. If you don’t push beyond, you make God in your own image: idolatry.
51. Meister Eckhardt: “I pray God to rid me of ‘god.’” I ask God, in other words, to free me from false gods. The most dangerous idolatries are not relics, but conceptual idolatry is more dangerous. That is the root of fundamentalism.
52. Edith Stein took John of the Cross seriously. If you seriously practiced it, said Collins, it would scare you.
53. Summary of Dionysian Theology.
54. Steps.
55. You begin with images and tactile experiences.
56. You move to the celestial liturgy in which you have real knowledge and contact of God, at the level of affirmation and negation.
57. Culmination. The Mystical Theology culminates in the Orthodox Tradition. In the Latin tradition, people read the “mystical theology” of Dionysus without reading his other works. So people didn’t realize that mystical theology is connected to the liturgy.
58. Against Individualism. A mystic is not an individual. He is someone who celebrates the liturgy.
59. Mystical theology brings you to the top of Mount Sinai. You should see yourself as ascending the mountain. When you get to the “top,” you can only speak of poetic metaphors. Even Freud said, “To speak of the soul, one must speak in paradox.”
60. The Dark Night of the Soul.
61. The phrase has become ubiquitous. But there is a divine darkness. Cardinal Newman said: “What is theology? It is saying and unsaying to a positive effect.” The point is not to leave you in emptiness.
62. What is the positive effect? What is it to say that you have had an “experience” of God?

Break for Lunch

1. John of the Cross (1542-1591). It was the time of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).
2. Biography.
3. Translated into English. The first translation was by Alison Peers, and the newer by Cavanaugh, in the series Carmelite Publications. There are many translations of the poems. The most famous is by Roy Campbell. The older editions offer the famous treatises first, *Living Flame of Love*, *Spiritual Canticle*, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Dark Night of the Soul*; and then the poems. Now we read the poems first.
4. Church in 16th Century Spain. It was a vibrant Catholicism, with studies of philosophy and Aquinas in Salamanca. Counterreformation Spain is a vibrant humanist culture. The unification of the culture was achieved (unfortunately) by the expulsion of the Jews and the prohibition of Islam.
5. Sources of John of the Cross.
6. The Vulgate Bible and the Spanish Liturgy (reformed according to Trent). John of the Cross translated the Psalms according to the Vulgate.
7. Tradition of Thomas Aquinas. He was not yet, in the 16th century, a “domineering” figure (as, in the 20th Century, he was the Church’s “answer” to modern philosophy). John of the Cross read Aquinas as a theologian.
8. Augustine influenced John as a Carmelite friar.
9. Gregory the Great’s emphasis on “desire,” especially desire for heaven.
10. Bernard of Clairvaux. This great reformer spoke of the Bridal-mysticism (*Brautmysticizmus*; the Germans also speak of *Wesensmystik*, the mysticism of being).
11. Other influences: Pseudo-Dionysus, the Rhineland mystics, Eckhart and Tauler.
12. Anthropology of St. Augustine.
13. “More people have criticized St. Augustine than have read him.” But he saw that God is Trinity (*De Trinitate*) and the soul is *imago Dei*. The human person’s image resembles the divine image. If God is the Trinity of three persons, then the human person is a trinity as well.
14. The human soul has three parts:
    1. Self-awareness or *memoria*. It is the ability to see myself in history; self-awareness or self-consciousness.
    2. Understanding or *intellectus*. It is my ability to grasp reality, the ability to answer the question “why” and to seek meaning. When a tragedy occurs in my life, I want to understand and integrate it.
    3. Desire or *voluntas*. “You have made us for yourself, and we are restless until we rest in you.” Collins jokes that “Obey your thirst” is the best way to understand Augustine. “My soul is thirsting for you, the God of my life.” If I want to go to Tenerife, then I am *impelled* by an act of will.
15. Relevance of Augustine. He is still read in philosophy departments, in part because his analysis of remembering, thinking, and desiring is still relevant. Only an infinite understanding will satisfy us. We want to be consciously aware of our lives. We are remembering, thinking, desiring subjects oriented to God as Trinity.
16. Trinity for John of the Cross and Augustine.
17. Trinitarian Correlations.
    1. The Father corresponds to memory or self.
    2. The Word corresponds to Understanding or *logos*.
    3. Desire is connected to Holy Spirit.
18. The Western Catholic mystical tradition is “the return of the Triune self to the Trinitarian God” (Bernard McGinn). Augustine’s goal is to remember God (*memoria Dei* or unbroken awareness of God), to understand (to have the “mind” of Christ and to understand in him), and to align my will with the desire of God.
19. “Issues from the hand of God the simple soul” (T. S. Eliot). We are fallen creatures, and Augustine was (along with Freud) one of the great realists. Human beings are “darkened” images of God. For Augustine, we must align our lives with the Trinitarian source.
20. Forgetfulness of God. That’s another word for atheism. For Augustine, memory is to be purified by the virtue of hope (as practiced in prayer). The goal is to forget limited objects and focus on God. This is *memoria Dei*. The Orthodox say that we should recall God as often as we breathe.
21. Misunderstanding. We judge by our own lights, not governed by the light of Christ.
22. Broken Communion. We try to satisfy our limitless desire with things, rather than with God. We are *curvatum in se*, turned in on ourselves.
23. “Issues from the hand of God the simple soul” (T. S. Eliot). We are fallen creatures, and Augustine who was (along with Freud) one of the great realists. Human beings are “darkened” image of God. For Augustine, we must align our lives with the Trinitarian source.
24. Return of the Self. For John of the Cross, the memory is meant to return to the father, the understanding is meant to return to the logos, and the will and desire are to return to the Holy Spirit.
25. The Father.
26. We start the process. God completes it. John of the Cross lacked the pessimism of Luther. Limited freedom remains, even after the fall.
27. In fantasy, there is the danger of slipping into unreality and becoming imprisoned by it. Fantasy thrives in affluent societies. What is considered beautiful is unattainable by almost everybody.
28. John wanted to bring the memory back from fantasy and focus it on God.
29. Understanding and the Son.
30. How do we “put on the mind of Christ”? For John, we practice *lectio divina*.
31. I have to consult the Scriptures, where God reveals the divine self.
32. Faith is not knowledge. Faith is more complex, because it is about darkness, because God cannot be controlled. The deeper one is able to understand, the more clearly one sees that God cannot be controlled. It is knowledge of the heart –a “dark knowledge.”
33. The Spirit. We have to learn to desire God’s world.
34. The will needs redemption. Gethsemane is where redemption began: “Not your will, but my will be done.”
35. The question is not, “What do I want?” but rather, “What does God want of me?” Most of the time, I don’t want what God wants. “Take God, my memory” – Ignatius’ prayer reflects John of the Cross.
36. For John of the Cross, the “active night” means practicing self-discipline. If you don’t pray three or four times a day, you don’t pray. Prayer gives a structure to one’s life.
37. The Active and the Passive Night.
    * 1. What are they?
         1. What is the Active Night? We must take the initiative. We cannot just wait for God to enter our lives. We must seek God.
38. The addiction of work. When the work is over, we feel empty.
39. John said that we must actively take the step of emptying ourselves.
    * + 1. What is the Passive Night? It is about emptying oneself out.
40. God the absolute “other,” the mystery, flows into the self that has attempted to practice purifications.
41. When God flows in, God sweeps away the blockages. We have to work to break the chains, but at a point, God flows in to “cut” the chains.
42. God has to clear away the junk from memory, understanding, and desire – that is “passive purification.”
    * 1. What Is Desire for God?
         1. It is the first enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is a good thing. But eventually God has to sweep away our self-congratulatory experiences.
         2. Then we move to the next stage. Collins recalls the words of Don McLean: “The Father, Son and Holy Ghost – they took the last train to the coast.”
         3. Baptized people enter the active night, but then experience difficulty. It is like being in the London tube when the lights go out. We ask God: “Are you actually there, or am I imagining things?” John says, “The withdrawal of consolations” is *not* the withdrawal of God.
         4. In *The Spiritual Canticle* John imagines the spiritual experience of going out into the night in search of God. We are not to pursue God as the one who can be tamed as a source of *consolatio*. John says, “Stay in the dark, and the dark will teach you everything.” A life without consolation is impossible. Mother Teresa spent years in “suspended animation,” close to atheism. Therese of Lisieux got “theology” when she realized that “faith has become a wall that blocks out the light of the stars.” She was called, “The little atheist” because she had no conscious experience of God. She waited in the darkness with no understanding. See Thomas Merton’s book on *Contemplative Prayer.* T.S. Eliot says, in the *Four Quartets*, that faith lies in the “waiting” for God.
43. Edith Stein’s *Der Kreuzeswissenschaft* was about John of the Cross.
44. There is purification that can take place, not just in contemplation, but in everyday things.
    * + 1. This does not mean that God “caused” cancer. But it means that cancer can bring us face-to-face with God.
        2. In the bad event, God is present, with his support, concealed in the negativity.
        3. God revealed infinite saving love on Golgotha. When did Jesus most effectively redeem the world? “When he was fixed on the cross in a position where he could not move.”
45. Rowan Williams said, that when we are born, a label should be affixed to us: “Caution: Breakable.”

Coffee Break

1. The Dark Night.
2. What is the “purification of the senses”?
   * + 1. Is it an emptiness like that to which the Buddhists aspire?
       2. No: we have to read the poetry, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*.
       3. We have to enter into, and submit to, a process of transformation.
3. John was imprisoned and suffered at the hands of his fellow Carmelites.
   * + 1. God did not bring people into the desert to die in the wilderness; he led them out so that they might arrive at the promised land.
       2. The spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage describe the transformation.
4. The Spiritual Betrothal.
   * + 1. This is a stage to which people can aspire. The darkness begins to turn into light. One begins to have new forms of experience that are not superficial. They are not visions, auditions, illuminations, etc.
          1. Faith alone is the only authentic experience of God. It is “dark knowledge.”
          2. It is anti-experiential. We have to purify ourselves of the desire for the experience of God.
          3. If faith is “dark knowledge,” it plunges the mind into darkness – but not total obscurity, but rather “the cloud of unknowing.”
          4. Why is God darkness? Don’t we know that “God is light”? John of the Cross takes an image from Pseudo-Dionysus. When you walk from a darkened room into the sunlight, you will be blinded. Darkness comes from our incapacity to receive the light of faith. John of the Cross says, “Stay in the darkness, and the darkness itself becomes the light.” See Eliot’s *Four Quartets*.
          5. How can the cross be glory? The only language that can function is the language of paradox.
       2. Spiritual Senses.
          1. There is a blind monk in Munich, who has become a therapeutic masseur. He used to be a monk in Jerusalem, but Jerusalem has too many stairs. When he lost his sight, he developed new senses.
          2. The Sensorium of the Divine. For John of the Cross, it is not “sight” but “sense” by which we encounter God. It is “a sensation of a certain presence.” A presence of certainty.
          3. John of the Cross speaks of the paradox of being plunged into the dark, but knowing that there is someone “there.” The 16th century used erotic language. This contact with God is connected with the marriage bed.

[Note: in the Indian culture there are supposedly “pornographic” images that have been decried by the West; but the West cannot understand eros that has been purified.]

Basil Hume has spoken about being plunged into pitch darkness. It is dizzying and horrifying. But then God extends a hand.

1. The Spiritual Marriage. This is the second stage for the John of the Cross, complete intimacy with God, unattainable for most.
2. How Do We Communicate Mysticism?
3. Collins’ Experience. He stood at the Taghba church after it had been torched. Can he explain it? Can he explain what it means to lose one’s mother?
   * + 1. A mystic tells us the mystic’s experience. But we connect it to our own experience. We resonate with the common human experience.
       2. It is not enough to think that the mystic’s experience can be our experience.
          1. John of the Cross wrote to the Carmelite mother general, who had written to him about a sister who was having mystical visions. He wrote back, “This is complete nonsense.”
          2. He didn’t believe in manipulative cultures of spirituality. See Merton’s book on *Contemplative Prayer*. Merton says, “Only speak about experience after you have gone through the dark night – after your experience had been purified.”
4. The great authors: John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. They wrote because they were “captivated” by their experiences.
   * + 1. The map is not the journey, and the journey is not the goal.
       2. *Die Kreuzeswissenschaft*. Stein said that the “dark night” corresponds to Golgotha. The “Spiritual Canticle” corresponds to Easter.
5. Discussion.
6. Michael Flattery’s question. Collins says: beware of spiritual snobbery. We should tolerate popular religion, if it doesn’t present a false understanding of God. We should move people’s so-called “mystical” experience toward a more faith-centered experience. Julian of Norwich sensed the crucified Christ. Would John of the Cross have criticized it? Women’s mysticism is more concrete and body-based. Beware of “new revelations.”
7. Anne Jordan’s question. Collins says, “What is the most ‘mystical’ passage in the NT?” There are the Johannine passage and St. Paul’s, “I know a man taken up into heaven.” But look at the last judgment, Matthew 25. All are gathered for the last judgment. The judge gathers people, and the tribunal is open. “When I was naked, did you clothe me?” They didn’t recognize Jesus, because he was hidden. When we minister to the poor, we are ministering to the *mysterion* – to the mystery that lies behind them. God became human in Jesus Christ, and all human beings share in his human nature. Christ is hidden everywhere. We have to awaken people to a transforming union with Christ. Ignatius of Loyola also understood the intense spiritual atmosphere of Spain. He had a vision, but God does not come in glorious, technical, Wagnerian visions. John Chapman said, “Carmelites are mountain climbers, Benedictines like a ramble in the hills.” We are all “going up,” not on our own steam.

**En una noche oscura**

Juan de la Cruz

En una noche escura,

con ansias en amores inflamada,

¡oh dichosa ventura!,

salí sin ser notada,

estando ya mi casa sosegada.

A escuras y segura

por la secreta escala, disfrazada,

¡oh dichosa ventura!,

a escuras y en celada,

estando ya mi casa sosegada.

En la noche dichosa,

en secreto, que nadie me veía

ni yo miraba cosa,

sin otra luz y guía

sino la que en el corazón ardía.

Aquesta me guiaba

más cierto que la luz del mediodía,

adonde me esperaba

quien yo bien me sabía,

en parte donde nadie parecía.

¡Oh noche, que guiaste;

oh noche amable más que el alborada;

oh noche que juntaste

Amado con amada,

amada, con el Amado transformada!

En mi pecho florido,

que entero para él solo se guardaba,

allí quedó dormido,

y yo le regalaba

y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.

El aire del almena,

cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía,

con su mano serena

en mi cuello hería

y todos mis sentidos suspendía.

Quedéme y olvidéme,

el rostro recliné sobre el Amado;

cesó todo y dejéme,

dejando mi cuidado

entre las azucenas olvidado.

1. Discussion. Where is John of the Cross taking us? He is taking us on a journey. Start with the poetry, then move to the commentary. See “On the Centre of the Soul,” from *The Living Flame of Love*.
2. The center of the soul is God.
3. Love unites the soul with God.
4. “In this state the soul is like the crystal that is clear and pure; the more degrees of light it receives, the greater concentration of light there is in it.” This is deification, says Collins, or the beatific vision.