Mysticism: gift for the church*

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ABSTRACT
Objectivistic philosophy and reductionist theories have contributed to a malaise in society and the church. On the one hand, the fruits of modernity and deconstructive postmodernism have led to a situation where the observable and the empirical are considered the true index of reality. There is a loss of purpose and meaning in life. The church finds itself in a situation of crisis, and needs to admit its own shortcomings in order to be a leaven for society. At the same time, there is an 'outbreak' of interest in issues of spirituality and mysticism throughout the world as the end of the millennium draws near. Mysticism, particularly scriptural mysticism, is an ecclesial charism, and when understood and appropriated can be a source of renewal for the church and society.

The twentieth century has witnessed many and various attempts to come to a greater understanding of the church. Church bodies throughout christendom have taken seriously the call for ecumenical endeavour. Whereas in the past discussions on the church, particularly in Europe, have perhaps concentrated too much on ecclesial structures, nowadays there is increasing interest in explicating the essence of the church. Ecumenical endeavour, whilst not ignoring questions of church structure, concentrates more on the mystery of the church. Biblical language is used to describe the church, in preference to scholastic or juridical categories. Christocentric, pastoral, biblical, historical and eschatological concerns are uppermost; the church as witness, ministry and fellowship is clearly of prime importance (cf Abbott 1972:11). In the New Testament itself there is a plethora of images which attempt to elucidate the nature of the church (cf Preston 1997). Metaphors abound and indeed the very use of imagery is itself an attempt to express in human terms that which is essentially a mystery. Perhaps one of the contributions that Africa and South Africa, in particular, can make towards an understanding of the reality of the church is to provide fresh metaphors unique to the African continent.

* The substance of this essay is a continuation of a conversation held with Professor Roberts, on my first meeting with him, over 20 years ago, shortly after my arrival in South Africa. I would like to dedicate this endeavour to Professor Roberts, in memory of the many years working with him, firstly as a Master’s student, and thereafter as a colleague in the department of New Testament, Unisa.
In addition, many of the African Christian churches are not as hierarchically stratified as the established European Christian communities; they may therefore illustrate elements of the church which have been buried for too long within the cast of ecclesiastical stone. This area of research is gaining ground, although it falls outside the ambit of the present discussion.

The basic premise of this essay is that mysticism is a gift for the church. Mysticism, when rightly understood, can lead to the revitalisation of the church and inspire the body of believers to approach the new millennium with vitality, confidence and hope. In order to elucidate this claim, the following areas will be addressed: firstly, the crisis in society and in the church; secondly a short survey of how mysticism is perceived by the church; thirdly a brief analysis of Pauline Christological mysticism; and finally a short foray into the little understood concept of theosis. Hopefully this essay will help reduce the negativity often found across all denominations concerning the nature and relevance of mysticism, and help restore the pristine purity of the message of Christ. If the aim of this paper is only marginally achieved, then there is hope for a vibrant and positive future across all sectors of the church. Indeed an authentic global renaissance of the dynamic that is the church could well herald in a new era. This would be one in which the inequalities, suspicions, injustices, devalorisation of the body and the material realm, and above all the basic lack of love for fellow human beings, of whatever persuasion, are seen to be a thing of the past. The cogency of this underlying thesis would be greatly enhanced by a reading of scripture and an understanding of the nature of the church that could be termed 'post-critical'. Such a hermeneutic integrates the gains of modern biblical scholarship within a contemplative and ecclesial reading of scripture. This would incorporate insights of the church fathers and mothers, and the spiritual mistresses and masters of ancient and modern church history (Preston 1997:vii). Perhaps a more integrative approach would prevent heuristic distinctions from becoming hardened into mutually exclusive descriptive categories.

1 CRISIS IN SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH

Western society today is clearly characterised by rationalism, technological expertise, strident competition and an ever-increasing desire for material possessions. The observable and the empirical are considered the true index of reality. That which is non-productive in a technological or material sense is denied validity by prevailing rationalism and scientism. Meritocratic society thrives on mendacity and secularisation, with the result that science and achievement is the true measure of the real with a concomitant emphasis on the products of the rational mind. Paul Tillich illustrates this situation cogently, in his description of the lost dimension of depth in contemporary
society: ‘As long as the preliminary, transitory concerns are not silenced, no matter how interesting and valuable and important they may be, the voice of ultimate concern cannot be heard. This is the deepest loss of the dimension of depth in our period—the loss of religion in its basic universal meaning’ (cf Thomas 1988:44). Left-brain analytical, logical and intellectual activities are valued more highly than right brain activities such as the world of feeling, instinct and intuition. The latter are diverted from the mainstream of life, especially in the academy. More often they are relegated to the artist, poet or mystic, and are given subsidiary status. However, a rationalism that connotes the alienating kind of reason epitomised by Descartes, is an almost exclusively cerebral consciousness.\(^1\) Its highly analytical nature effects alienation from the natural rhythms of human existence and provides insulation from the basic secrets of joyous living. Together with the reductionist tendencies of scientific empiricism, such modern philosophies lead to an addictive, work-oriented functional consciousness that is neither psychologically nor spiritually satisfying. The fallacy of attending only to the material surface of life leads to a state of ennui and emptiness, often unrecognised until some or other crisis brings it to the forefront of consciousness.

The shifting sands of anarchism and hopeless nihilism found in many sectors of society have become for many in modernist and postmodernist society the basic reality, resulting in the ‘victory’ of nothingness that engulfs the human person at his or her death.\(^2\) Much of the prevailing malaise is due to has been called the ‘eclipse of the spiritual world-view’ (Lorimer 1990:220). Without discounting the necessity of attending to technological, social and economic welfare, nevertheless the loss of a religious outlook has resulted in a spiritual vacuum. This cannot be filled in spite of attempts at ‘divertissement’\(^3\) and the use of palliatives that temporarily camouflage inner vacuity instead of allowing anguish and boredom to lead to an inner metamorphosis.

Secular modernity is now in state of rapid detumescence, although objectivist philosophy still claims allegiance in certain circles. It is rather interesting to note that the much-discredited doctrine of predestination has been

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1. In folklore, the one who engaged purely in intellectual enterprise is compared to the one who carries the raft on his or her head, instead of using it to cross the river.
2. Sartre’s pessimistic nihilism was a result of his militant atheism. He regarded the idea of God as impossible. His own combination of existentialism and Marxism led to the belief that human striving was futile. See, inter alia, L’Existentialisme est un humanisme (1946).
3. Blaise Pascal’s well-known saying concerning divertissement adds weight to the argument that external confusion and distraction constantly prevent inner integration and maturation (cf Stewart 1950:68).
'...translated in its implications into materialist determinism, but without its metaphysical trappings. It is no longer God who determines, but the material or psychological forces of mechanical philosophy' (Lorimer 1990:237). Such philosophies and impersonal objectivity claim to effect social transformation in which religion has no place. We are reminded of the statement of Marx that 'The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness' (cf Lorimer 1990:250). It is interesting that Marx actually acknowledges the psychological value of religion for dealing with suffering, nevertheless he attacks metaphysical and divine orders. Vestiges of Marxist propaganda are still to be found (mainly in the academy!) and have been instrumental in propagating reductionist or projectional stances towards religion and downplaying its role in human life and history. In spite of its claims to intellectual superiority, nevertheless Marxism and related influences have contributed to the intellectual decadence of the modern era, becoming, as it were, the opium of the intelligentsia. In his treatment of projection theory as for example, expounded by Feuerbach, Freud, and others, Smart (1997:177) offers an alternative theory to these philosophies, namely, the idea that '...core-type religious experiences are intrinsic to the human psyche in some way. They can flourish or not flourish in different conditions. Hence you do not need to suppose that religion itself is an artificial or tangential creation'. Perhaps this has to do with the development of the spiritual and mystical faculties of the human person: just as some people are well-endowed with physical prowess, or intellectual acuity, others may have more finely tuned spiritual faculties. This is not to say that such faculties cannot be developed: just as musical appreciation can improve with practice, so too contemplative and mystical insight may increase so that the Christian mystic '...may come to see the world about her not just as the handiwork of God, but as glowing with the network of mystical illumination' (Smart 1997:180).

The presuppositions of a purely reductionist philosophy which are systematically pumped into a cerebral reservoir eventually result in a heaviness which in turn gives rise to cynicism, and a functionalist grip on daily reality. Not that this state of affairs brings peace; the denial of the metaphysical often leads to worship of the trivial. Much of so-called Western enlightenment therefore gives allegiance to penultimate things. The priority of the spiritual has given way to the primacy of the physical, and has contributed to the lobotomy of the soul. For many the trend away from a living religion has been a path from personal theism through impersonal deism towards a position of explicit agnosticism to explicit or implicit atheism. A loss of a sense of purpose and meaning can result in which there is no legitimate hope or purpose in the universe or of our place in it. A leading question we have to
ask is whether it is possible to address the concerns of both the scientifically
and the spiritually oriented without violating the sensibilities of either, or
surrendering critical enquiry and legitimate scepticism? In order to attempt
an answer to this problematic, it is necessary to reflect on the crisis in the
church. The church is part of society and it is undoubtedly true that the
problems experienced in society will be reflected in one way or another in
the church.

1.1 The institutional church in crisis

Many sociologists of religion point to the fact that particularly in Europe
church structures are evaporating, organised Christianity is in decline, and
the future of religion itself is at stake. In Britain, it is claimed that the
splendour of the established church has diminished and in its place there is a
proliferation of sects and denominations that for the large part are mutually
tolerant but nevertheless politically irrelevant (cf Bruce 1995). This does not
necessarily posit the end of the religious quest and the search for ultimate
truth—on the contrary a glance at any bookstore will show a plethora of
books dealing with spirituality, mysticism and ‘religious’ experience.

Some of the reasons for the decline of the institutional church are as fol­

lows: firstly, a fanatical intolerance among certain church groups who
espouse and are committed to an ideology, with such remorseless zeal that its
absoluteness is maintained at any cost, even to the detriment of purely
humanitarian feeling and ethical behaviour. Such a lack of tolerance for views
other than one’s own occurs not only with respect to ‘outsiders’ but also to
those within a particular church grouping whose ideas are considered less
orthodox or possibly ‘heretical’. Secondly, autocratic systems of church
governance, requiring conservative obedience, together with arrogant
certainties of dogma, do little to encourage honest and critical thought among
members of the community. Thirdly, even the Bible itself is held up as
‘law’ instead of a life giving, sustaining and nourishing text. Fourthly, the
church’s treatment of women leaves much to be desired, although in some
Christian groups this situation is slowly receiving attention. Fifthly, a general
lack of belief in personal survival and immortality, as a result of prevailing
philosophical materialist theories, is also current among Christian
theologians. This is evidenced in a study by a group of theologians, many of

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4 Many ‘religious’ experiences occur outside the framework of the church, cf Cox­
head 1985.

5 See Derrida’s aptly named article, ‘The “mystical foundation of authority” ’, where
he deals with justice and deconstruction. He maintains that the demand of justice itself
necessitates the deconstruction of legitimacy (cf 1992:15).
whom maintain that there is no reason to suppose that life continues beyond the grave. Furthermore, subjective existence after death is proclaimed not be an article of Christian faith (Badham 1978:16). Sixthly, particularly in certain established churches, the legacy of the past is clearly seen in the visible division of the body of believers into two parts, namely, the clergy and the laity, a division which has contributed to the fact that the former are often considered ‘higher’ than the latter. Such a dichotomy has inevitably led, therefore, to elitism. This is currently undergoing revision (cf Flemming 1994). A further criticism is the fact that the church does not takes seriously the pluralist situation that it finds itself in at this point in history. Almost everywhere different religions and Weltanschauungen exist together, and the church needs to adapt and dialogue with its neighbours from different traditions. This could hopefully lead to an alternative to Christian exclusiveness in which there is no obliteration of distinctions, but rather an open dialogue in which each participant can contribute in an atmosphere of creative rapprochement.

A certain ‘allergy provoked by ecclesiastical institutions’ is experienced by a large number of christians. They maintain that ‘...these institutions have fallen into disuse because of their failure to respond to the spiritual hunger that marks the end of our century. This desire seeks immediacy with God...many people think that as a result of their dogmatic or practical intransigence the churches are a source of violence and do not encourage spiritual experience’ (Duquoc & Gutierrez 1994:vii). This perception has indeed led many to leave the church and seek fellowship and understanding elsewhere, or to abandon Christianity or even the spiritual quest for truth in its entirety. In the latter case disbelief and scepticism are applied uncritically to all investigations (except perhaps to the original doubt itself!). Sceptics are rarely sceptical about their scepticism. However, not all christians fall into this camp. In spite of what has been called ‘the dark night of the church’ there is a willingness to remain within the body of believers and help effect a ‘new way of being Church’. Although this may be painful, it is ‘...for the sake of the Church, for community, for new patterns of relating, out of fidelity to the Spirit, who is the very energy of relation, connection and the vitality of all living things’ (Grey 1997:52).

In summary, the crisis in society and its ramifications in the church is perhaps due to the legacy of modernity and also deconstructive postmodern thought, both of which rely on socially produced discourse comprising self-referential concepts. According to this paradigm, language systems determine our only possible mode of existence and thought, consequently there is no ground of meaning outside our language inventions. Kantian strictures on epistemology, foreclosing veridical religious experience, together with a
rationalist appraisal of spiritual perceptions as anomalous quirks have contributed to a rejection of meta-narratives and universal representations of reality. Western culture, prizing functional success over caring communion, stresses having over being, calculative over meditative thought, and rational knowledge over mystical awareness. As a result the depth dimension of reality is bracketed out or forgotten and the world is seen from the perspective of its usefulness. It is therefore necessary that we be liberated from a deterministic and rigidly objective sense of reality as we approach the end of the millennium, so as to comprehend how the physical participates in the metaphysical. We need a heuristic faith that is open and eager and allows the transcendent experience of the divine to become imbedded in daily life. The ultimate goal in life is not merely to adapt to the socio-political and economic environment, but to experience the Spirit in a direct and mystical way. The following analysis of the value of mysticism for the church will hopefully provide guidelines as to how this can be achieved.

2 VALUE OF MYSTICISM FOR THE CHURCH

Postmodernist thought encompasses not only deconstructive or eliminative philosophy, as illustrated in the foregoing analysis, but it can also be seen as constructive or ecological. The latter is clearly a reaction against nihilism, relativism, scientism, positivism, patriarchalism and pure self-interest. There is a breakdown of the dominance of scientific positivism and Enlightenment modes of certitude. This is coupled with the '...disintegration of the two pillars on which the trust of modernity was based, i.e. the certainty of a continuous progress, and "faith" in science, regarded as the dimension of rationality capable of resolving...problems' (Carozzo 1994:17). Atheistic nihilism as well as dualistic supernaturalism are giving way to an organic and ecological spirituality in which the reality of spiritual energy is seen '...to exist within and between all nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections' (Griffin 1990:2). Such spirituality is postpatriarchal and telluric — expressing sensitivity towards and solidarity with the earth, not as an object to be dominated, but as mother, symbol and abode of the divine (Kappen 1994:33). Clearly, the 'strong' and often harsh values of modernism are being pulverised, and there is a new awareness of the world as a place where life can be lived poetically and mystically.

For purposes of the present discussion mysticism can be described as the experience of union with God. In Christian mysticism it is Christ who articulates this union through the Spirit. The problematic concerning definition, etc., of mysticism has been dealt with elsewhere (Kourie 1992); suffice it to say at this stage, that it continues to be a cause of intense debate and controversy, not only in academic and church circles but also in everyday dis-
course. Perhaps one of the reasons that the subject of mysticism is so prevalent today is the fact that it witnesses to a current appetite for access to the divine, a quest for an experience, a dissatisfaction with dogma and a longing to live life in depth. In addition, it is a realisation of panentheism: ‘...the world is in God and God is in the world in a kind of “perichoresis”’ (Carozzo 1994:19).

Although the basic argument of this paper is that mysticism can benefit the church, this does not mean to say that cordial relations have existed and continue to exist between mysticism and the church. On the contrary, there remains a great deal of equivocation as to the value of mysticism. Clearly, the present endeavour is not meant to be a definitive statement concerning the interface of mysticism and the church. At best, it is an attempt to try and clarify some of the latent equivocations and bring the mystical modality to the fore. Lee (1989:105) correctly points out the

...curious contradiction mysticism has historically proved to be for the Church. It has been the wellspring of both saints and schismatics, the hallmark of luminaries and lunatics alike. It has been a force for the active upbuilding of the body of Christ and an impetus to the counter-currents of sectarianism, anti-nomianism and quietism. It has issued in theologies of impeccable trinitarian monotheism and in the heterodoxy of pantheism.

Mystics have more often than not been viewed with distrust as disturbers of the institutional order. Van der Leeuw (1955:494) in his classic phenomenology of religion points out,

For mysticism, every detail, all the particulars, all the historical elements of religion are in the end, a matter of indifference.... Mysticism speaks the language of all the religions, but no religion is essential to it.... The incarnation of God which is the very heartbeat of Christianity can finally become for the mystic no more than a parable which reflects his or her own lot, an eternal generation in the heart of human beings.

Clearly such a controversial statement cannot go unchallenged! Although many mystics may adhere to the foregoing, and are anti-dogmatic and anti-collective nevertheless this is not the full picture. On the contrary, many mystics are actually notable for their defence of tradition against heterodox beliefs and practices. For example, with respect to the interpretation of scripture, it is certainly true to say that mystics are often in the vanguard of those who provide a radical hermeneutic. Nevertheless their adherence to their own tradition, and their claim to having had immediate experience of what that specific scriptural tradition teaches, confirms the authority of the inherited tradition, rather than positing ‘...heretical assertions that threaten the pillars of the regnant orthodoxy’ (Katz 1983:20).
Notwithstanding the foregoing, the fact that mysticism is no longer an esoteric phenomenon, limited to a few marginalised people, has led to further alienation within certain churches. Mysticism has spread so rapidly, and has gained a social significance that was lacking three or four decades ago, that the church is now confronted with a movement that can no longer be ignored. The church can resort to mechanisms of self-defence in order to deal with this situation, for example, ‘rigidity directed inwards’ and ‘suspicion directed outwards’ (Carozzo 1994:20). Complex and rigid orthodoxy can be used to expel the mystically inclined, with the disclaimer that mysticism is syncretistic and leads to relativism, and as such is a danger for the church. On the other hand, the church can react with openness and see mysticism as a divine gift (charism) for the enlightenment of all its members (Lee 1989:105). Mysticism might even be a ‘sign through which the Spirit of Jesus is addressing itself to the churches...postmodernist mysticism is an invitation to change pedagogical key and in particular to put experience of the God of Jesus rather than propositions at the centre of religious education’ (Carozzo 1994:24).

A renewed understanding of scripture can effect a renewal of the church. It is a gift and as such has many layers of meaning to be discovered in order for its codified truths to be illuminated from within. ‘Mystical experience brings to light the life which is contained and hidden in scripture, while the role of the church is to help the reception of scripture in the fullness of its meaning. It is from within itself that mystical experience tends towards assuming a shape which sets it in the church’ (Sagne 1994:59). It is to Paul, as quintessential biblical mystic, that we now turn. His mystical encounter with the Risen Lord radically changed Paul from an arrogant and proud man to one whose life henceforth was characterised by life-giving love and service.

2.1 Christological mysticism in Paul

Modern christological investigation has sadly neglected mystical and cognate experiences as sources of doctrinal tradition. Contemporary anthropological concerns, although praiseworthy, have nevertheless resulted in the humanity of Jesus being the primary source of attention. New Testament minimalist christologies proclaim Jesus as an exemplary human being, but not the incarnate Son of God. Notions such as pre-existence and divine Sonship are considered to be the result of a long and complicated quasi-evolutionary process, involving embellishments in the tradition due to the influence of other cultures and religions. Radical historical-criticism, although notable in its attempts to illuminate the biblical texts by means of source, form, redaction, structural -criticism, et cetera, yet has clearly brought the historicity of the gospel events into question. Liberation theology, concentrating on social contextualisation interprets the mission and function of Jesus in a more
politically, with the result that liberation, instead of reconciliation, becomes the dominant hermeneutic principle (Tavard 1981:561). Recent christologies emphasise the presence of Christ in society, instead of Christus praesens with the self, as a spiritual dynamic of the inner life (see in this connection Du Toit 1993). Few authors turn to the christology of the mystics as ‘a valid and valuable source for the exploration of Christ as the centre of a permanently contemporary experience’ (Tavard 1981:561).

This is particularly true of the mysticism of the apostle Paul. It is my contention, that Paul the mystic, not Paul the moralist, or organiser of the early churches, is the revealer of God’s secret wisdom. He it is who manifests Christ as a radically new facet of the divine personality, thereby making known the possibility of an essentially dynamic union with the risen Jesus (cf Stanley 1977:11). This union has social reference and is inextricably linked to the church. As such it has collective and cosmic meaning. Romans 8:29, in the view of Tabor (1986:9; cf 1984), refers to a mass apotheosis in Paul’s message, and a new cosmic family as a result of the salvific event in Christ. A mystical hermeneutic of major passages in Paul’s letters makes further gradations of mystical illumination possible, and effects credence-generating insights for his readers. New insights are generated in new situations, and surplus meanings are found to well-known texts. Thus, such classic works as the Christian scriptures continue to have vitality and influence in provoking insight, reflection and on-going creativity. This obviates the very real danger of seeing the text as a fixed semantic object separate from and independent of the exegete, whose task it is to extract its meaning. The text is therefore a dynamic medium rather than a static object (see Tracy 1981:108-109 and Ricoeur 1976:45-69).

The problematic concerning mysticism in Paul has gained prominence since the end of the nineteenth century. Much of the discussion has centred on the Pauline formula ‘in-Christ’. It is outside the ambit of the present endeavour to deal with the history of the problem (cf Penna 1996:235ff). The aim of this section is to illustrate as far as possible the fact of christological mysticism in Paul, in as far as it accords with the definition offered above, and to attempt to bring its relevance to light for the church and society. Time does not allow for an exhaustive study of Pauline mysticism and to do justice to the richness and complexity of Paul’s thought, the depth of his intuitions and the quickness and nature of his reasoning processes. For present purposes, it is possible to designate only certain currents of his thought, inter alia, baptism, the Lord’s supper, the mystical imperative and the role of suffering. Furthermore, questions concerning the sources of Pauline mysticism, its historical roots, particularly its provenance in Jewish mysticism, are outside the ambit of this discussion. This has been dealt with elsewhere (cf Lemmer 1996).
Much of the controversy concerning mysticism in Paul revolves around the meaning attributed to the term mysticism. Penna (1996:242) for example, begins his survey with a definition of mysticism that clearly does not describe Christian mysticism: ‘...the concept of the mystical in the strict sense...implies an autonomous tendency independent of history toward the overcoming of self and of the abyss that separates the finite from the infinite, with a concomitant depersonalised submersion of self in the abyss of the divine’. Penna then argues that such a definition does not apply to the Bible in general or to Paul in particular. Contrast this definition with that given by Inge (1947:8), ‘Mysticism means communion with God, that is to say with a being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality.’ Furthermore, Penna’s definition does not accord with the understanding of Christian mysticism as presented earlier. Interestingly enough, Penna’s limited and indeed incorrect definition of mysticism does not preclude his valuable insights regarding aspects of Paul’s mysticism! For example, he correctly points out that much of Paul’s terminology refers to an ‘undeniable semantic of participation’, without implying a basic ‘connaturality or synergeia between the human and the divine’ (1996:245). This concurs with orthodox Christian thought which posits a stringent dualism between the divine and the human. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a move away from a merely juridical, extrinsic idea of salvation towards that of participation and inner experience.6

Clearly, the mystical initiative comes from God: it is both an act of grace, and also effected in the historical actuality of Christ: ‘Human mysticism, as attraction, knowledge, and experience of God, is always preceded...by a divine mysticism as attraction, knowledge, and experience of the human by God... (cf Phil 2:7; Gal 4:9)’ (Penna 1996:249). There is a consciousness of divine action in the Christian, for ‘...in reality Christian light and glory are only aspects of that unique Christian reality which is formulated in ontological mysticism. St Paul implies that the presence of the Christ-life within us is matched by an experimental awareness of the glory of Christ.... This form of experience brings with it a greater or lesser change of nature. Knowledge of

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6 See Smart 1997:184, where he speaks about a ‘loosening up’ of systems and a modern trend toward the experiential: ‘...much of religion as it develops into modern urban living,...has a keen regard for direct encounters with the divine or ultimate. There is abroad a sort of philosophy of religion, not of course acknowledged under that title, which holds that truth is most easily grasped by an encounter. Scriptures compete and become mysteriously entangled, and may seem at a remove from reality. What lies behind them...is the experience of the divine. Doctrines often divide unnecessarily and are not easy to judge, especially in relation to experience. So, there is a nusus towards the poles of experience—towards the divine, conversion, direct knowledge; or else towards inner truth, pure consciousness, awareness’. 

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heavenly things is matched by what in some circles is termed an apotheosis, a divinization' (Cerfaux 1955:41-42). The notion of divinization, or deification is considered extremely suspect (cf Penna 1996:236, 267). This is primarily due to a misunderstanding of the term. This discussion will be taken up below.

Romans 12:2a speaks of a transformation that takes place by the renewing of the mind. The new mind-set or way of thinking is the result of being in Christ and a recipient of his Spirit. There is now a completely new way of understanding life (cf Balge 1995a:85). A new outlook, a new framework of consciousness, leads to a state of 'non-egocentricity' or 'ego-lessness'. This does not refer to the destruction of the ego, on the contrary, it refers to transformation of the ego. Washburn (1995:5-8), in his treatment of the unification of the psychological and spiritual perspectives in transpersonal psychology, divides human development into three main stages: pre-egoic, egoic, and transegoic. The pre-egoic stage is that of early childhood; the egoic encompasses late childhood, adolescence and early adulthood; and the transegoic usually begins at mid-life or later. Of course this is not a rigid demarcation, since the transegoic may begin much earlier in life, or it may never come to fruition. In fact the consolidation of and perpetuation of ego-identity may for many be so entrenched that it is virtually impossible to break out of egoic patterns of thought and behaviour. The transegoic stage is characterised by integration of personality, and is usually preceded by an existential questioning of accepted values, leading to a psycho-spiritual awakening. The transegoic psyche manifests the following characteristics: transcendence of dualisms; empowerment of ego by the Ground; spiritual presence; awakened imaginal, intuitive and contemplative capabilities; rediscovered openness and spontaneity; and an outreaching closeness to and love of the other (Washburn 1995:7). In terms of Pauline mysticism, therefore, not only the vertical relationship to Christ is affected, but also such transformation impacts deeply on the believer's horizontal relations with the community, the church.

It is baptism that initiates the believer into the community of Christ: the mystical being-in-Christ effects communion with each other, the mystical body of Christ. No longer Jew, nor Greek, slave, or free, they now form a new society. This unprecedented dynamic society no longer adheres to the prevailing norms of the time. By the practice of a sacred, sacramental meal, an anticipation of the celestial banquet, experienced mystically in the present, the Christian community is linked together in Christ. Breaking bread and drinking wine in fellowship indicates that social, cultural and economic barriers are abolished in the church. During his earthly ministry, Jesus challenged the societal norms of his day by sharing table fellowship with all kinds of people, including tax collectors, women and Pharisees, thereby indicating
that all are acceptable to God (Thurston 1993: 49-50; cf Houlden 1997:41). In the early church the Christian sacraments were occasions of communal mystical experiences. Baptism was often accompanied by visible outpourings of the Spirit; the celebration of the Eucharist was followed by charismatic utterances. Cerfaux (1955:46) succinctly sums up the mysticism of Paul: 'From his apostolate down to the humblest Christian emotions and including revelations of the mystery and sacramental experiences, St Paul's whole life pre-supposes a profound contact with God.... Paul would remind us that God has revealed his own glory on the face of the risen Christ'. Dunn (1990:637) extends and confirms this point in his statement: 'Experience of the Spirit of God, belief that what they were experiencing was God's eschatologically new outpouring of the Spirit is part of the most basic stratum of Christian faith as attested by the NT writers'. The Spirit is the one who effects the metamorphosis of the Christian.7

Closely linked to the foregoing is what could be called Paul's 'mystical imperative': believers are now free. Their freedom is 'in the spirit' (Rom 8:1-2). However, this does not mean licence. The ethical dimension plays a crucial role in Paul's mysticism. Whilst free, nevertheless the community is now at the service of one another (1 Cor 10:23-24); love is the aim (Gal 5:13-14; 1 Cor 14:1). The moral imperative of the new life is directly opposed to ego-inflation, but rather emphasises becoming more and more conformed to the image of Christ, or Christoform. In the person of Jesus Christ human beings find the image of God and their own destiny most fully revealed. Thus '...the task of psychological and moral development is to move steadily toward a greater understanding of who one is in relation to self and others, identified as a movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence' (Billy & Orsuto 1996:103; cf Houlden 1997:42).

For Paul, mysticism is the basis of the ethical. Therefore the latter has a secondary value with respect to the former. However, the ethical is not accessory, but essential even though derived (Penna 1996:267). Paul's Christ-mysticism effects a higher level of living, an ethic of love that is encapsulated in the poem of 1 Corinthians 13. Christ is now the one living in the believer (Gal 2: 20); the one joined to the Lord is one spirit with him (1 Cor 6:17). Believers are no longer in the 'sphere' of the flesh, but rather in the 'sphere' of the Spirit (cf Du Toit 1971:6—who speaks of the oordragtelik-lokale character of certain cases of Paul's usage of the term 'in the Spirit'). This pertains to

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7 The image of the Holy Spirit as Mother prevailed in certain early christian communities, particularly the Syriac church. Unfortunately it was lost under the influence of the patriarchal empire of Rome. Moltmann (1997:35-37) brings this facet to the fore—perhaps it is time to rediscover this lost description and thus effect some balance in Western Christianity.
all Christians—there are no privileged groups: ‘...all the simple Christians are fundamentally mystics; and Paul insists on this basic reality...against any dangerous tendency to put one’s confidence in oneself and to set up boundaries of inequality within the Church’ (Penna 1996:255). Paul’s mystical being ‘in-Christ’ therefore cannot be separated from daily life. Christ-mysticism for Paul is not characterised by lofty peaks of spiritual excitement and ecstasy, visions and revelations, although these are not absent in his life.\(^8\) The prime obligation of the Christian is to love. For Paul, the love of neighbour lived out in the empirical world, is elicited by way of response to God’s love made known to believers in Christ (Gl 2:20) and poured out into their hearts through the Holy Spirit, the gift of love (Rm 5:5). Paul’s mysticism is typified by self-giving love, by the cross: it is union with Christ in suffering, death and resurrection.

For a follower of Christ, suffering is unavoidable, since the Christian way of life runs counter to the aspirations and ideals of the world. Paul’s message is that spiritual fruition is possible, even amidst immense suffering. Furthermore, human weakness is not an obstacle, on the contrary it provides the ambience for divine activity. This was Paul’s experience in Corinth (2 Cor 11:23–33) and led to his doctrine of power in weakness (2 Cor 4:7–11), namely that all spiritual strength comes from God alone. Paul’s own afflictions are presented as a didactic model in several instances: he carries death in his body so that the life of Jesus can be manifested (2 Cor 4:10); he suffers to bring comfort to the Corinthians in order that they in turn might suffer and share Christ’s sufferings (2 Cor 1:5); he commends the Philippians for suffering as an example to their opponents (Phlp 1:29–30); and the Thessalonians for following his example in suffering (1 Thess 1:5–6). By urging his readers to follow the example of Jesus in his suffering, Paul is calling them into the power of the gospel. Thus the power/weakness paradox was not thought out in an academic, philosophical and detached manner, but resulted from the trials of Paul’s ministry and the consequent realisation of his own utter nothingness and the allness of God. Paul’s Christ-mysticism enables the believer to see that by virtue of Christ’s cross and resurrection, sickness and suffering do not necessarily lead to debilitation. Paul’s ‘...connection of an

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\(^8\) While such experiences (epiphenomena) may well occur in the mystical life, they are not the essence of mysticism. All the major traditions warn against becoming attached or distracted by ecstasies, visions or voices. They are not an integral component of mysticism as such. Thus detachment from spiritual gifts and renunciation of psychic powers is a sound test of authentic mysticism. In Buddhism, such powers, *saddhas*, are not to be sought for themselves. In early Buddhism, the misuse of powers for self-glorification meant expulsion from the community.
extremely negative symbol, execution on the cross, with the most positive symbols of salvation and redemption, makes it possible to reduce avoidance reactions with respect to suffering—a presupposition of help for the weak, ill and those in need of aid and the constructive handling of suffering in themselves’ (Theissen 1987:395). Trials and tribulations, both interior and exterior effect radical purification and are inevitable on the mystical path. The metaphorised logion of Jesus that a disciple take up his cross ‘daily’ points to the fact that whatever the nature of individual suffering, it is in fact a personalisation of the cross of Christ. Jesus manifests the infinite capacity of God to share and bear the cumulative weight of human pain and anguish. We are reminded here of the shamanic principle that wisdom is obtained through suffering; and also the rabbinic idea that he who gladly bears the sufferings encountered in this life brings salvation to the world. Renunciation of volition and abandonment of the desires of the empirical ego, lead to a transfiguration of pain and suffering, leading to higher levels of existence. Humanity is in process of becoming—substantia potentialis—and crises of body and mind help effect maturation, propelling men and women forward to a state beyond the habitual pre-conditioning of sense, to a more elevated state of consciousness. For the Christian mystic the kenosis of God and the kenosis of humanity coincide in Jesus. The dialectic of weakness/strength corresponds to the dialectic of death/resurrection. For the mystic, the kenotic love of God results in his or her own self-effacement. There is a process of dispossession, and a vigorous out-pouring of self. Furthermore, there is an ‘anti-rhetoric’ when it comes to the attempt to put into words the reality of God in the life of the mystic. There is no ‘boasting’ of one’s experience but rather an acknowledgement that all comes from God. Just as Jesus drew attention not to himself, but to the Father, the mystic refuses to make him/herself an object of interest. A characteristic of the pseudo-mystic is a tendency to draw attention to his/her various psychological and spiritual experiences and thus become the centre of attention. This is contrary to authentic mysticism, where the fact of Christ’s hegemony is the criterion of credibility.

It is time to rediscover the true Paul—he has been buried far too long under the talmud of Paulinism, and has been interpreted in a juridical rather than mystical and participationary manner. It is my contention that the heart of Paul’s gospel is union with God in Christ, both at an individual and collective level. ‘In-Christ’ there is one reality (Gl 3: 28), one body (Rm 12:5). Life is lived in a new manner, a manner determined by the Lord, in the radius of his life-giving love, in which believers are empowered (2 Cor: 14) and in which they are already rooted and founded (Eph 3:17). The preposition ‘in’ from the ‘in-Christ’ formula has therefore both mystical and sociative connotations, notwithstanding the fact that each member of the body is a dis-
tinct person.

By way of conclusion, therefore, although a mystical hermeneutic may be unfamiliar and even disconcerting to certain sectors of Christianity, the major thread running through this scriptural excursus is the proposal that the essence of Christian life is divinisation and human authentication. This statement calls for further clarification. To be fully human is the gift of God, and Jesus, for the Christian, is the paradigm, exemplar, and enabler who shows his followers what it means to be the image and likeness of God. Pauline mysticism as cogently expressed in the ‘in-Christ’ formula illustrates what it means to be conformed to Christ. This is the highest aspiration and attainment of human life, and effects what could be called ‘christification’. A mystical interpretation of scripture is a major key to unlock the historical events of Christianity and transmute them into a meta-historical realm. Such contemporising re-enactment transforms the historical founding events of religion into deep mystical experience. Christ’s modality is both temporal and trans-temporal, as he is both the model and also the one who effects salvation. Redemption is a cognitive achievement only because it is primarily an ontological one. Mystical configuration to Christ in his cross and resurrection recasts the elements of life in terms of Jesus’ own existence. The mystic is therefore one who engages in passionate communion with God and neighbour. S/he returns to the market place to an increase of service to society. Transformation in Christ effects practical service to one’s neighbour and weaves into a splendid tapestry both the active and passive dimensions of the Christian life. There is in many cases a reorganisation of belief systems and life-style, coupled with a transmutation of character. This could be called a process of social and cognitive disengagement as a result of the mystical experience of being ‘in-Christ’; to be followed by re-engagement and systematic structuring of the elements of Christian realisation, so as to contemporise the insights gained. The interface of mystical experience and a mystical way of life is therefore of utmost importance, leading to balance in the mind and compassion in the heart: ‘It is because of where believers are (in Christ), empowered by the gift of the Spirit, that human life in accord with God’s holy will ensues’ (Morgan 1995:109). A mystical understanding of christological statements in Paul points to the amazing vocation of the church, namely its ‘deification’. This statement calls for further clarification.

3 THEOSIS

The well known passage in 2 Peter 1:4 is an invitation to Christians to become ‘sharers in the divine nature’. This is a key passage for the doctrine
of deification. The well known words of Athanasius, ‘God made Himself man that man might become God’ express a fundamental teaching of mystics throughout history, namely that of finitum capax infiniti. The Heraclitean adage, ‘Men are gods and gods are men’ is indicative of a deep-rooted aspiration in the hearts of women and men to reach beyond limited temporality and finitude into the arena of transcendence and godliness. In the Christian tradition, the doctrine of deification or divinisation, relates to participation in the very life of the Trinity. The aim of this brief foray is to offer a few thoughts with respect to theosis as the mystical culmination of ‘christification’ and as the means by which the church can find its true meaning and place in the new millennium.

The basic nescience regarding the doctrine of divinisation in the Western church, symptomatic of an anti-mystical or a non-mystical approach to Christianity is a fact sadly to be lamented. However, the concept of deification is not totally lacking in the West. The famous adage of Augustine that man is capax Dei has been an undercurrent of Western mysticism throughout history. Medieval scholasticism, particularly the writings of Thomas Aquinas in his Summa Theologia, attempted to effect a synthesis of data from faith and reason. Yet, although the formal and rigid rules governing style, language and structure of scholasticism seem artificial in today’s religious and theological context, nevertheless, for Thomas the entire life of the Christian is focussed on the ultimate end, the beatific vision or union with God. The well known saying of Thomas, ‘We know God as unknown’ (Deum tamquam ignotum cognoscimus) is an elliptical statement which was borne out in his own life when after a mystical illumination occurring 6 December 1273, Thomas discontinued his theological writing, maintaining, ‘I cannot go on. All that I have written seems to me like so much straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me’ (cf Fahey 1979:20). Thomas died three months later.

Developments following Thomas Aquinas tended to separate moral and spiritual theology, with the former emphasising laws, precepts, et cetera, primarily for the ordinary person; and the latter teaching the necessary dis-

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9 The concept of deification occurs frequently in the patristic texts. Clement of Alexandria states, ‘God’s Logos has become human that humankind might be able to grasp how it can attain to being God’ (Protrepticus 1.9, quoted in Pannikar 1989:193 n 39). Such a central idea in christianity has unfortunately been relegated to obscurity, due to the fear that it might promote pantheism. See also in this connection Inge (1899:356-372) ‘The doctrine of deification’, Appendix C. This excellent article, which is still valid, points out the differences between the Greco-Oriental and the Latin approach to deification. In addition, the article by Meyendorff (1989) ‘Theosis in the Eastern Christian tradition’ brings this doctrine to the fore.
cipline for the élite to attain holiness (O’Keefe 1994:49). Therefore it was commonly held that the ordinary person could hope to become a good, moral and upright person. However, only a few chosen ones could follow the path of perfection. Such was not the case in Orthodox thought. The pristine purity of the doctrine has been maintained to a greater degree in the east. Central to the Orthodox understanding of Christianity is the fact that it is not mere adherence to dogma, nor simple exterior imitation of Christ, that comprises discipleship, but much more, namely a direct union with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory. Thus, the sublime hope is held out to all christians that they are called not only to become good, but to become sharers in the divine!

The foundation of the doctrine of deification elaborated in the writings of Gregory Palamas and the Greek fathers is based on the following three-fold actuality: creation of humanity in the image of God; the incarnation of the Logos of God; and humanity’s communion with God in the Holy Spirit. This does not mean a mechanical commutation of humanity, but ‘...an ontological regeneration of human nature in the hypostasis of the incarnate Logos of God, accessible to every woman and man who participates personally and freely in the life of Christ’ (Mantzaridis 1984:7). The regenerative grace of the Holy Spirit effects the spiritual person, ‘As the man (sic!) is called rational who is endowed with reason, so the man who is enriched by the grace of the Holy Spirit is described as spiritual’ (Mantzaridis 1984:36). The process of deification begins in baptism in which men and women are admitted to the life of the new age, above the senses and the mind, and made sharers in incorruptibility and sinlessness. An essential aspect of the Orthodox teaching on deification is that the entire psychosomatic organism which is the human person is involved. Deification is not merely a matter of the spirit, or mind, or soul. The deifying grace of the Spirit transforms the intellect and in turn communicates this gift to the body. As such the total person is deified.

This corresponds to the synthetic Christian anthropology of Eastern Orthodoxy. However, a necessary caveat needs to be born in mind with respect to the foregoing, namely the fact that although Palamite theology describes the reality of deification in clear and vivid terminology, this does not imply a pantheistic identification of humanity with God. The essence of God remains inaccessible, and transformation in God does not mean total annihilation of the individual. The lines of demarcation existing between the

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10 In contrast to Augustinian theology, Eastern Orthodoxy does not see baptism as releasing humanity from hereditary guilt, but rather from the power of death which entered the world through sin.
infinite Creator and the finite creature, according to Christian doctrine, both eastern and western, cannot be totally obliterated. Furthermore, theosis is not seen as a natural progression or perfection of human nature merely by one’s own effort. Theosis is a gift of God. The incarnation of Christ serves as paradigm and exemplar for his followers: Christ’s transfiguration points to the transfiguration of deified humanity, and thus a process of ‘christification’ is preparatory to theosis. Such christification encompasses not only imitation and following of Christ, but also living the very life of Christ in the Holy Spirit. This effects a complete transformation of one’s entire life; the Christian now realises a ‘politeia’ of theosis, which flows out into every aspect of her or his being (O’Keefe 1994:52). As such, the entire community is involved; the ‘synergy’ between the divine and the human is reflected in the church. The church is seen to be a community in process of deification. ‘In baptism, its members are joined to Christ and initiated on the path of theosis; in chrismation/confirmation, they are sealed by the Holy Spirit for this task; in the eucharist, they are nourished by the encounter with Christ who is the source and hope of deified life’ (O’Keefe 1994:55).

The doctrine of deification can be criticised on the following grounds. Firstly, it can be considered as a contumacious rejection of the teaching of Christianity, when the latter is understood merely in terms of external imitation of Christ. It minimises the historical and emphasises an abstract and timeless truth. Secondly, the non-mystical argue that the language of deification is blasphemous, and disregards the total and utter transcendence of God. Instead of humanity being addressed by God, the inherent potentiality for divinisation is developed in the ascent of humanity to God. Thirdly, such a doctrine can lead to pantheism, and in fact such eminent mystical theologians as Eckhart and Ruysbroeck have not been without their critics in this regard. Furthermore, its biblical roots are questioned, and it is seen to emanate rather from neo-platonic thought. In addition the social ramifications of theosis are often seen to be lacking and the question is asked, does it really address the ethical, political and social problems of society?

However, in reply to such criticisms as the foregoing, it needs to be borne in mind that the word ‘deification’ is not a scientific term, but a metaphor, an artistic expression, ‘...which tries to hint at a transcendent fact utterly beyond the powers of human understanding and therefore without equivalent in human speech...’ (Underhill [1911]/1961:418). The concept of the transformation of the person in God and his or her total apprehension by

11 Certain biblical passages may suggest certain aspects of theosis, viz., Jn 17:21; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 15:52; Eph 1:10; 2 Tim 1:10. The major passage as indicated above is 2 Peter 1:4, that refers to humanity becoming ‘sharers in the divine nature’. 
God can never totally be grasped. In Christian mysticism there is no identification of the individual with God, nor is there annihilation of the individual. The creature, although separate and distinct from the Creator, receives God's most extravagant gift, namely participation in the very being of God, without disintegration or diminution (Von Balthasar 1989:404).

Clearly, the limitations of language are such that the gap between the conceptualisation of the doctrine of deification and its actualisation cannot be bridged. At best an intimation of the true identity of men and women as partakers of infinity, intemporality and immutability can only be offered. A major tenet of this discussion therefore is that temporality cannot be the foundation of personal absoluteness. Deification requires a letting-go of phenomenality, a non-becoming, without implying abolition of individual personality. Although the language used to express this profound state may appear non-dualistic, nevertheless ontological absorption is absent.

A re-examination of the doctrine of deification helps redress the balance with respect to the idea of a totally transcendent and totally other God. God is not an object, but an indwelling Reality. It is time that the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy is seen for what it is, namely an approach which has cramped the intuitive faculties of the Western mind and has left Western thought and education spiritually impoverished. The result of this unfortunate state of affairs is that much of Christian teaching is still in a state of spiritual infancy. Deification and transformation is no ethereum of the privileged 'illuminati', but rather the prerogative of the ordinary Christian. The evolution of the individual, and indeed of humanity, is characterised by an ever deepening unfolding of awareness of the infinite. The perduring and efficacious reality of the action of God effects divinisation and leads to ever more exalted levels of consciousness, which find fruition in eternal life.

3.1 Beauty

Although no adequate conceptual statements can be made about the utterly transcendent, yet it is in the concept of beauty that attempts have been made to understand the mystery of theosis. Beauty draws the participant ineluctably to itself whether it is universal beauty as seen in the physical universe, or the faint 'glimpses' of beauty found in music, art, poetry, architecture, people, et cetera. Just as Beatrice leads Dante into the Empyrean, so too beauty leads the adherent ever deeper into truth. Beauty and truth are part of a united whole: glimpses of the truth are granted in a taste of beauty. Through various spirals of consciousness outer sensate impressions give way to a deeper understanding in which attention is no longer purely focussed on detail, but moves into feeling, thought, intuition, and finally into inner vision and illumination. The fundamental yearning for
primordial beauty has echoes in the religious and philosophical systems of the ancient world. For Plato, ultimate Reality can be contemplated as the Form of the Good and the Form of the Beautiful. Appreciation of beauty is essential for a true understanding of the reality of life. In his *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* Plato portrays Socrates as leading his followers through human physical beauty to beauty of character and then on to heavenly beauty. Contemplation of Absolute Beauty is the highest and most perfect life. Plotinus saw the source of beauty as transcending reason and form, the groundless self-giving Good:

Where is the one who has brought forth such beauty, such boundless life? Where is the Father of being to be found? You see that beauty which is poured out over all manifest forms... but whence do these intelligible forms come? Whence comes their beauty? Their origin cannot be any one among them.... It must be what is formless, not lacking in form, but the source from which all intellectual form comes.... And since it was able to create all things, what magnitude will it possess. (*Enn* 6.7.32, quoted in Von Balthasar 1989:302)

The great sixteenth century Spanish poet, philosopher and mystic, John of the Cross, speaks in glowing terms of the beauty of God. Commenting on Stanza XI of the *Spiritual Canticle*: ‘Let the vision of Thee and Thy beauty slay me’, John explicates: ‘...at that moment when the vision comes to her, she will be rapt away by the same beauty and absorbed in the same beauty, and transformed in the same beauty, and will become beautiful like the same beauty, and will be provisioned and enriched by the same beauty’ (Allison-Peers vol 2, 1974:233). John of the Cross is trying to express in limited human language the participation of the adherent in uncreated Beauty and absolute Goodness, in which the radiance and eternal brilliance of the divine can be experienced and manifested. The exquisite anguish that is experienced in the perception of beauty effects a change in perception. The desire for the truly beautiful grows more pure and detached from self; in cultivating attention to beauty, blind attraction is transformed into an other-centred, other-affirming love. No longer is the desire for the self's own gratification but for the pure existence of the truly beautiful and as such it is an occasion for grace, and a movement towards the ‘decreation’ of the self. Thus ‘desire is gradually transformed into love; and one begins to acquire the faculty of pure and disinterested attention’ (Weil 1962: 29). Beauty such as this leads to an appreciation of the universe which is seen with new eyes as calibrated for life’s existence, an existence permeated by joy.

In summary, although the idea of theosis is not as central in the Western church as in the eastern church, nevertheless the doctrine is regaining prominence in the West. As illustrated above, the mystics of the church have often referred to this sublime theme of the Christian life. With the recent renewal
of interest in the writings of the mystics, the value of theosis is coming more to the fore. In addition, it is seen not as a purely individualistic doctrine, but one that has social and structural implications, and one in which an understanding of the human person as relational comes clearly into focus. Theosis is an ongoing present reality—one which touches on the very raison d'être of existence. Therefore, the church needs to recover this central teaching in order to function effectively and dynamically as the new millennium approaches.

4 CONCLUSION: NEW MILLENNIUM—RENEWED CHURCH

In order for the church to become a living and vibrant community of believers for the new millennium we need to regain a mystical appreciation of scripture. The ideational signals of the text, particularly in Pauline mysticism, need to be accessed so as to effect individual and societal transformation. Karl Rahner (1971:15) states cogently, '...the devout Christian of the future will either be a mystic—one who has experienced something, or he will cease to be anything at all'. A recovery of its mystical heritage will enable the church to be more relevant at several levels. Firstly, the democratisation of structures—with less emphasis on the distinction between clergy and laity—will result in the dismantling of monolithic structures and greater co-operative endeavours among all the members of the body of Christ. Secondly, there will be a greater understanding of the needs of a pluralistic society and a greater openness to the insights of world religions. Thirdly, the role of women will be more readily acknowledged with the result that the androcentric and patriarchal bias of the past will be eliminated. This would result in a mutually supportive relationship of complementarity between women and men, instead of adversarial relationships of difference. Perhaps women would become more assertive and differentiated, and men would become more permeable and connected! A new understanding of gender would also lead to less dichotomies: between mind/body; spiritual/secular; masculinity/femininity; as a result the world could become less violent and the warring factions both within the individual and at a societal level would be diminished. Fourthly, a renewed ecological sensitivity would emerge as the church becomes aware of the fact all is inter-related, and therefore each part of the whole is deserving of respect. Finally, and most important, there will be a much needed revalorization of christification and deification.

12 We are reminded here of the Navajo way, hozzo, which entails harmony with the environment; with self; with open eyes to see the prevailing holiness; devoid of anger; free from anxieties; walking in harmony and peace.
In conclusion, instead of mysticism being viewed with unequivocal scepticism, or as a psychic disorder with no relevance for the larger community of believers, it can rather be seen as a gift and a palladium for the future of the church. A realisation of the coinherence of God in matter and history effects freedom from the fragmentation and lonely atomisation of modernity and draws the church to the deep levels of connectedness in Christ. Therefore, mysticism is an ecclesial charism, and needs to be reclaimed from the mists of ignorance surrounding it for so many decades. In particular, the church needs to see scripture refracted through a mystical lens. A new lucidity and power accrues from a mystical reading of scripture, and thus the church has need of mystics whose proximity to the text allows for a fresh and dynamic hermeneutic. Such a statement also holds true for the academy. For too long many twentieth century biblical scholars have been merely 'curators' whose subject matter is locked up into an all too distant historical realm. The text itself is no longer seen as religious or sacred, but as purely as an object to be analysed, dissected and deconstructed. Clearly this is not to deny the value of historical, sociological, linguistic and other approaches to the text—obviously not! However the point here is that in many sectors of today's world of biblical scholarship everything exists, except the very ground and centre of religion itself! By returning to its mystical roots, the church will once again rediscover the grandeur of its calling and its telos: the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:12).

WORKS CONSULTED


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