

ment of the message implicit in the Gospel narrative; in the nature of the Gospel as a narrative, a description of the life, death and resurrection of the 'word made flesh'. The gospels describe a God who shared the experiences of a particular generation of men and women, lived in a particular place, at a particular time, was subject to a very specific set of social, political, religious and economic circumstances. At the same time, Jesus the man passed through every vitally significant stage which characterises the process of human growth and development. As with every other human being, it was precisely this journeying through life that constituted his essential nature as a person. Without this he could not have been human – for humanness is manifested in time and in change, in the dynamic processes of existence. This being so, the ideal theophany for the people of God, the true sacrament of the Body of Christ, can be no other than the establishment and perfecting of men and women as creatures who are continually changing, as they must always be growing and learning. This fact in itself establishes the nature of the sacraments as rites of passage in which the time-bound nature of human life is recognised and established in the very process which transforms it. This fundamental message of the sacramental rite of passage needs no words, is implicit in the actual form of the ritual itself. It is the shape of the rite – the shape it *possesses* and that it *allows* – that speaks.<sup>3</sup>

1 Chomsky, N. *Language and Mind*, Harcourt Brace, 1968.

2 Levi-Strauss, C. *The Raw and the Cooked*, Jonathan Cape, 1970, p 240.

3 Grainger, R. *The Language of the Rite*, DLT, 1974.

## The Prophetic and the Mystical: Heiler Revisited

### Rowan Williams

Friedrich Heiler's Classic essay on prayer – *Das Gebet* – first appeared in 1919: several times reprinted and revised, with an abbreviated translation into English published in 1931, this vastly influential work helped to popularize and to fix in the theological mind a sharp distinction between two antithetical styles of spirituality, the 'mystical' and the 'prophetic'. The distinction owed something to William James, something to a group of Lutheran scholars interested in the history and phenomenology of religion, of whom the most significant is probably the great Nathan Söderblom (whose general influence upon Heiler is very considerable).

Heiler<sup>1</sup> enumerates a variety of ways in which what he and his teachers thought of as a basic polarity in religion might be characterized – as a tension between the healthy and the diseased, the active and the passive, or (with Soderblom) between a mysticism of the affirmation of personality and a mysticism of the denial of personality. For Söderblom, this ran parallel to the distinction between ‘salvation-religions’, with the notion of escape or release at their centre, and religions of revelation and prophecy. For Seeberg, working in the same tradition, it was the gulf between the ‘contemplative’ and the ‘voluntarist’ approaches. Heiler, understandably, sees no point in speaking of two kinds of *mysticism* here, and so frames his own version of the confrontation in terms simply of the mystical in general (understood as involving ‘radical denial of the world and the ego’)<sup>2</sup> and the ‘prophetic’; and he proceeds to develop a detailed and intriguing typology of spiritualities, which has remained probably the most influential section of his work.

The antitheses are (from our present vantage point) fairly predictable. Mysticism quenches the will, prophecy affirms it; and so mysticism is ethically indifferent, while prophecy is fundamentally moral. Prophecy is to do with creative action, the conquest of uncertainty by the will to life,<sup>3</sup> thus too it is positive in its approach to history and society, whereas mysticism is essentially individualistic.<sup>4</sup> The prophetic, which, naturally, finds its fullest expression in the spirituality of Luther, makes possible the development of that ‘modern Protestantism’ (represented by Lessing, Hegel, Carlyle and Ritschl) which interprets all cultural achievement as ‘a contribution towards the realizing of the divine level of existence’.<sup>5</sup> What is more, mysticism is feminine, prophecy masculine: Stau-pitz’ dictum, ‘A man must become a woman if he wants to bring forth the fruits of eternal life’, is opposed to Zwingli’s ‘God requires of us bold and manly duties’. Prophecy is unremittingly a matter of struggle, because it is aware of the difference between heaven and earth, while mysticism dreams of a marriage between them.<sup>6</sup> Mysticism rests in the perceptible presence of God,<sup>7</sup> prophecy is aware of the presence of God in the everyday world, and experiences that presence in terms of God’s holy will, calling us to witness to and to realize God’s goodness throughout the world.<sup>8</sup> And because prophetic prayer is so deeply bound up with the nature of the will, with the idea of two agents, God and myself, expressing their personalities freely and spontaneously to each other, prophetic spirituality is suspicious of liturgical forms.<sup>9</sup>

Heiler makes it quite clear where his sympathies lie. Prophetic spirituality arises from the deepest human needs,<sup>10</sup> it is more ‘natural’ than mysticism, less a matter of art, technique, cultivation.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, of course, the history of the essentially prophetic religious traditions shows a considerable admixture of aesthetic, contemplative elements; in practice, the opposition is not always total and exclusive. But it is important, for Heiler, to be quite clear that mysticism is not at the heart of Christianity; for the mystic to be a practitioner of Christian prayer at all, he or she needs the basic data of historical revelation, the Christian concern with will and personality.<sup>12</sup> Christian prayer is most pure when most 'primitive' – emotional, spontaneous, uninhibitedly expressing even apparently unacceptable or blasphemous feelings,<sup>13</sup> confident in its power to attain its ends.<sup>14</sup> Mysticism, in short, is over-sophisticated. Whereas the prophetic impulse comes from primitive, nomadic monotheism, the sons of the desert, hardy and bold, mysticism arises in the decadence of overdeveloped civilizations and in reaction to the universal formalism of *Kulturreligion*,<sup>15</sup> which is why it is so pessimistic, inimical to the healthy instincts of humanity.

Nowhere in Heiler's study do we find any discussion of the kind of theoretical problems sometimes raised by so powerfully personalist and 'dramatic' a concept of prayer. This gap was pointed out in a politely astonished review (of the English translation) by Dean Inge,<sup>16</sup> who – at least in some respects – represents quite the opposite pole to Heiler in his understanding of spirituality (an extended comparison between Heiler's book and Inge's own *Christian Mysticism* would be instructive); but this observation leads Inge to a very perceptive judgment on Heiler's whole method and goal. If we take as the model of prayer a rhetoric of bending divine power to our needs, willing a greater will into action, then *either* we are opening ourselves to the cold possibility of empirical checks on its efficacy, *or* we are doing no more than recommend a set of images helpful in generating a certain frame of mind which has a certain social or psychological value.<sup>17</sup> Inge has no doubt that Heiler's aim is the latter – 'he is not interested in anything except the state of the petitioner's mind'. The repeated insistence in Heiler upon the nature of prophetic prayer as the *expression* of 'the deep needs of heart and consciousness'<sup>18</sup> is the key to understanding a great deal of the book.

At first sight, this is paradoxical. Heiler is eloquent on the subject of the mystic's private religious world, the acosmism and individualism which, in his view, characterize all mysticism. Furthermore, he is obviously sympathetic to Söderblom's distinction between revelation-orientated and salvation-orientated religions; the stress on revelation seems to argue against any such subjectivism as Inge sees it in the work. Closer examination, however, bears out Inge's accusation. It is not so much that Heiler objects to mysti-

cism as individualistic as that he deplores its implied solipsism: it is an individualism which fails to provide grounds for *action*, which does not, in fact, establish the solidity of the individual's consciousness and will. Conversely, 'revelation' in Heiler's discussion is so much the manifestation of God in historical happening as a psychological category: it is connected to the sense of encounter with personal will 'in nature as in the destiny of an individual or a nation'.<sup>19</sup> Heiler shows no sense of what might be involved in a *theological* account of specific religious experience in one tradition or another as response to a concrete historical form, a lived spiritual paradigm seen as authoritative. Jesus is for him an *exemplification* of the general typology of prophetic religion (along with Paul and Kierkegaard)<sup>20</sup> rather than the embodiment of a revolutionary 'given' paradigm or structure of living and understanding. The definition of styles of piety is a non-historical question; and so 'revelation' is that experience in which we, because we sense ourselves confronted with personal will, become aware of our own nature and willing as beings. We are taken seriously as *agents*: we grasp what it might mean to make history and nature the expressions of will. We are affirmed as subjects. The subjectivity of God is the condition for the establishment (through 'spirituality') of our own subjectivity, and the question of what God may or may not actually 'do' is secondary to this concern – part of that 'speculative' activity which a particular mind of Lutheran/Kantian tradition regards as the enemy of faith.

Heiler, in fact, is presenting us with a powerful essay in propaganda for the classical North-Atlantic-Protestant understanding of human nature. There is a close correlation between value and creative action, the capacity for attainment of goals and production of effects. There is also a correlation between value and 'masculinity', with a more than fugitive hint of the 'feminine' as less personal, less intrinsically volitional: the deepest springs of human nature are 'masculine' qualities of will and dominance, and the female is thus somehow closer to non-human nature.<sup>22</sup> Again, social life is interpreted as essentially a matter of the product of individual wills: the prophetic personality is called to revolutionary creativity, the restructuring of social order by the spiritually empowered moral will. 'Prophetic personalities know that they are singled out by God . . . for concrete and positive tasks'<sup>23</sup> in society.

In this light, it is all too easy to dismiss Heiler as typical of an 'unfallen' age in religious studies, before the sociology of knowledge and the philosophy of language seduced us from our epistemological innocence. Heiler is little concerned with the precise language and context of his countless examples, uninterested in the role of tradition in religious utterance and religious experience.

Neither prophecy nor mysticism appears to him as an irreducibly social phenomenon, despite his passing remarks on the kind of societies out of which they emerge. The idea of the communal/social function of styles of religious culture is subordinate to that of the psychological reaction of individuals to moments in the history of civilization.

But how far on are we from Heiler? The study of 'mysticism' as a psychological phenomenon is in quite a flourishing state (witness, for instance, the publications of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Oxford),<sup>24</sup> and several valuable anthologies and symposia of studies have appeared in the past fifteen to twenty years.<sup>25</sup> Yet only occasionally do we find anything approaching a sophisticated analysis of how accounts of extraordinary 'religious' states of perception are related to and function in particular traditions.<sup>26</sup> One of our problems, in fact, is that 'mysticism' is a word more at home in European academic study of religion than in the actual language of any religious community. Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, remotely borrowing from the vocabulary of the Hellenistic mysteries, have become used to speaking of 'mystical theology', but the concepts of being *a* mystic' or having 'mystical experiences' are later and unsurer growths.<sup>27</sup> And it is a moot point how this whole network of ideas should be translated into the terminology of the great Asian traditions. What on earth does it mean to say that Buddhism, for instance, is a fundamentally 'mystical' tradition? Buddhists do not have (as Christians do) a sort of canon of persons whose religious psychology is unusually interesting or even exemplary. The role of a Bodhisattva may look a bit like this, but to assimilate such a figure to the Western 'mystic' would be utterly to misunderstand how the idea works for the Northern Buddhist world. And is Zen 'mystical'? In an important sense, it is profoundly anti-mystical. Some aspects of the Buddhist speculative tradition, northern and southern, represent one or another kind of critique (explicit or not) of the 'mystical' philosophy of the Vedanta,<sup>28</sup> which so many students of religion take as paradigmatic for the understanding of mystical religion. What, even in the Vedanta, *really* corresponds to our concept of mysticism?

As long as these questions remain undealt with in modern religious studies, we should be unwise to look too patronizingly at Heiler and his like. It is essential, I believe, to realize that our academic typologies, however unavoidable and however fruitful they may turn out to be, are themselves provisional and culture-dependent. Sometimes it may be useful to say, 'There are no Buddhist mystics', or something like that, in order to remind ourselves of the risks of importing ambiguous and loaded categories and

attempting to squeeze individual cases into them; or we may generalize local and limited phenomena into universal patterns. If the noun 'mystic' is an abstraction, awkwardly linked to the realities of particular traditions, then 'prophet', as normally understood, is a very specific term for a specific (chiefly Near Eastern) religious role; and it shows something of the same awkwardness when generalized, even when extended into the Christian context.<sup>29</sup> However, at least 'prophet' designates a role within a community, a tradition: despite all the vagueness with which the word is often used (to refer to Nietzsche, Gandhi, Barth, Schumacher – anyone with a claim to some kind of spiritual genius or any social critic with a genuinely revolutionary imagination), nonetheless it is possible to give some kind of account of its 'home' usage in concrete terms. Heiler, interestingly, does not do this, but is content throughout with a stipulative definition of 'the prophetic'.

Does this mean that 'the prophetic' and 'the mystical' are such artificial categories that there can be no point in bracketing them together? If we take the terms in Heiler's sense, the answer must be yes: there is nothing to be gained in the parcelling out of religious traditions into sharply-polarized pairs of this kind (mystical-prophetic, impersonal-personal, cosmic-historical, intellectualist-voluntarist, or whatever). There are conflicts, of course, between religious systems, but they may not be best characterized in this way. And even on the most favourable interpretation, 'prophetic' and 'mystical' are (if the preceding discussion is on the right lines) not really commensurable, insofar as 'prophet' and 'mystic' are different sorts of word, one designating a distinct role, the other a rather loosely-defined psychological phenomenon. I should perhaps add at this point that I am not in the least concerned to rule out psychological treatments of allegedly 'mystical' phenomena or even to question their interest and importance; but I want to resist the notion that we have anything approaching an uncontroversial, neutral and abstract concept of 'the mystic' and 'the mystical' in psychological terms which we can usefully *start from* in the study of religious language and institutions.

However, something may yet be salvaged from all this. In the remainder of this paper, I intend to suggest another way of relating the prophet and the 'mystic', as part of a wider reflection on the nature of religious awareness or perception in general (I have tried to avoid too much use of 'religious experience' or even 'religious consciousness', both difficult and question-begging terms). In doing so, of course, I run the risk of that abstraction and generalization which I have myself deplored; yet so long as we continue to think of religion itself as a transcultural reality, we are bound to take some such risks; occasionally, even in religious

studies, there is a faint possibility that the generalizations may illuminate and not obscure the particularities.

Why then might it be worthwhile to bring together prophecy and this amorphous thing called mysticism? Let me try to answer this question by first examining more closely the *essence* of the prophet's communal role. We have noted already that the prophet has such a role in Near Eastern and especially Jewish religion, a role suggestively characterized by Pedersen as 'upholder of holiness' – 'in the various ways that answered to the actual needs of that society', adds Professor J. R. Porter,<sup>31</sup> presumably so as to avoid reinforcing a naive opposition between 'moral' and 'cultic' holiness in Old Testament literature. 'Holiness' in this sense has to do with the area or dimension of human living where decisive meaning and transforming power are to be found: the 'holy' place, person, act, thing is that which represents the ultimate structuring context of social or individual life, unconditional in the sense that there can be no appeal to other sorts of standards, other sources of significance and interpretation. Here we are already deeply embroiled in cross-cultural generalizations; but it is probably fair to say that what we mean by calling practices or forms of life 'religious' is bound up with their reference to and concern with a context which provides the resources for interpreting phenomena in such non-contingent terms, a context of living which claims unsurpassably 'important', 'deep' or 'decisive' interpretative and imaginative resourcefulness. And what it is in religious forms of life which manifests the overarching context in the form of particular facts (places, persons, acts) is what we call 'holy', 'sacred', infused with 'spirit' or 'presence', or whatever words a particular culture may supply.

When the Levitical God enjoins the so-called 'Holiness Code' upon Israel with the words, 'You shall be holy even as I am holy' (Lev 19), the sense is presumably that Israel is called on to endow the whole of its life with *significance*, so that it mirrors the pure meaningfulness of God. The Holiness Code (like the whole Torah) is one dimension of the religious protest against 'forgetfulness' – against contingent, uninterpreted, casual behaviour; by saturating all aspects of individual and social behaviour with meaning, with the recollection of what another discipline would call 'overdetermined' significance, the religious culture guarantees both that we are present to ourselves in all we do, and that *we* are present to the source of final and all-inclusive interpretation and *it* (or He) is present to us. Ritual-governed religious behaviour is a way of occasioning and of perceiving manifestations of meaning, in a way of making the world and our responses to it 'epiphanic'.

Israel's prophets, as 'upholders of holiness', proclaim that for-

getfulness has invaded the holy people. Their appeal to law and covenant on behalf of an inclusive justice is a protest about the fact that people have ceased to see their social and economic and diplomatic relations as epiphanic: these dimensions of life have become governed by selfish expediency, greed or the lust for domination, and so have become religiously meaningless. The wealthy, the political adventurers, and the professionally religious in Israel are no longer acting mindfully, significantly; and because forgetfulness has overtaken these areas of life, ritual behaviour itself becomes empty and contingent. It has its meaning only when the whole social system, every act and every relationship in it, has meaning. Paradoxically, no place or act is holy unless all are holy: the sacredness of worship and sacrifice only makes sense if it is a place where people may come to express and to renew their comprehensive personal and social repudiation of forgetfulness.

So the prophet, rather than being the enemy of the cult,<sup>32</sup> is the one who insists that cult and sacrament do the job they are designed for. When ritual behaviour fails to recall people from forgetfulness, personal and experiential witness must supplement it. Behind this lies the very central religious problem of securing access to the holy as a source of transforming energy. 'Sacraments', in the widest sense, festival, sacrifice, and so on, are means of regular access of this kind; but practically all religious traditions require more than this. There must be those who in their very consciousness experience, and so manifest to the rest of us, a fulness of presence or significance, and most religious traditions have conventions for the 'ministry' of such people. The holy *person* represents access in the most concrete and vivid form. The religious community 'demands' (an ambiguous word, since what is in question, in the Old Testament and elsewhere, is clearly not to do simply with the needs *consciously identified* by a community at any particular moment, which may be precisely what are challenged by the 'upholder of holiness') that there be some who experience things at that level of depth and authoritativeness which is fundamentally creative and recreative, and so it generates traditions of what it is to be a holy person. The actual felt importance of the holy person in a culture may vary a good deal in response to historical vicissitude. Peter Brown, for instance, has argued<sup>33</sup> that the social conditions of late antiquity favoured an increasing dependence on the holy man, as the secure structure of classical civic piety decayed. The stability of classical (pre-Mongol) Chinese culture seems generally to have been able to dispense with institutionalized holy persons: 'the rites' were enough. But societies conscious of their own vulnerability will treasure (even if sometimes only retrospectively) the sacrament of a person who manifests the sacred. They

will look to someone who assures them that the accidents of time and the corruptions and imperfections of language have not sealed off sacred power and vision – that history and speech have not buried truth.<sup>34</sup>

Much might be said about the degree to which religious traditions are suspicious of history and language while also ascribing meaningfulness to them and treating them ‘sacramentally’ (i.e. we should not define the sacred as bound to a ‘terreur de l’histoire’); but that would need at least another paper. For our present purposes, all I wish to do is to underline the point that the extraordinary religious figure, the holy person, does not emerge in a religion simply because certain individuals feel a need to experience the matter of their creed more intensely, but because the *community* needs a door to the sources of holiness in a person like the rest of them. Degrees of institutionalization vary, and so do degrees of cultic involvement: the holiness of a brahmin, the holiness of the *Sangha* in Buddhism (especially Theravada) do not depend upon their being primarily custodians of sacramental rites; the relation of Israel’s prophets to Israel’s cult remains a painfully complex question; and there is a very important imaginative shift in the Christian (especially the *Western* Christian) mind when, in the early Middle Ages, it comes to be universally assumed that all monks in solemn vows should be priests. But these are secondary matters. The essential thing is that traditions nurture an expectation that there will be those who represent the holy, the source of significance for action and relations, in their form of life and of speech, and provide disciplines, words and images for such people to express their ‘holiness’.

Two points need to be cleared up briefly here. Firstly, to say that traditions expect or require the extraordinary and even provide techniques and conventions for its manifestation is to pass no judgment on the validity or ‘objective’ force of the vocation of the holy person, shaman, prophet, visionary or contemplative; nor is it to dismiss elements of individual choice, individual imagination, pressures of personal integrity and factors related to personal growth and maturity. The fact that a tradition is provided certainly does not mean that it is impossible to use it to speak the truth. But this again raises wider issues than can be dealt with here. The second point is that the ‘holiness’ of such persons is not necessarily to be identified (despite all the prevailing Christian clichés on this subject) with individual psychological health or ‘wholeness’. The holiness, the mindfulness, which the holy person manifests is the potential integration of his or her religious community.

I remember Matsúwa, at the end of the second night of the *Wima’kwari* (drum ceremony), fiercely beckoning individuals

from disparate social factions to the sacralized ground before him. He touched his prayer feathers (*muviéri*) to objects that had become infused with life energy force (*kupiéri*) and transferred the precious substance to those who were in need of it . . . By doing this, Matsúwa was equalizing or balancing a social situation that was obviously a problem in the community. He also brought his people into the real field of power, a power that would enable them to see and understand the true meaning of their own lives.<sup>35</sup>

The activity of this Mexican Indian holy man illustrates remarkably clearly one form of the relation of the holy person to the community at large and its 'holiness': tensions are to be resolved by entering 'the real field of power'. At another level, the holiness of the Old Testament prophet is in his function of reminding Israel that the *whole* of their existence as a people is potentially a 'field of power', because all of it is sacralized by Torah and covenant; and there are at least the beginnings of a sense that Israel may become a sort of 'corporate sacrament', a sanctuary for the whole of humanity, and so a focus for reconciliation. Here the Gentiles will find comprehensive images of shared meaning.

But one implication of this is that the individual holy person cannot be guaranteed 'wholeness' as we normally understand it. Recalling a religious community to its 'mindfulness' by one's own exposure to the presence of God and oneself may involve a massive dislocation of ordinary language and experience. The dreams and visions surrounding shamanic initiation portray not only death but, often, dismemberment: in central Asian shamanism, the crucial image is regularly of being dismembered and cooked by the spirits.<sup>36</sup> Tibetan Tantric Buddhism likewise instructs the novice to visualize being dismembered and devoured.<sup>37</sup> All this speaks eloquently of the cost of reconstituted vision, and may help us to put into context the whole immensely variegated range of accounts of how the holy person is seen as marginal or even mad by the very religious culture which demands his or her presence and activity. If perception is really reconstituted for such persons, this is liable to be in itself an intensely painful process, even a loss of the ordinary sense of self, and liable also to expose the subject to the risk of equally painful crises in relationship with the language and practice of the community – while also, of course, in some sense providing the resource for resisting the consequent pressures. Thus traditions of initiation into this sort of vision may quite deliberately set out to break down conventional perception of self and world, whether by the more 'primitive' means of a controlled use of hallucinogens,<sup>38</sup> or by the highly sophisticated techniques of Zen, especially the use of the *koan*<sup>39</sup> – or, in the prosaic Christian

fashion, by instructing people to see the endemic humiliations and tensions of corporate living as an attrition of 'unreconstructed', ordinary awareness, leading gradually to the emotional and spiritual brick wall of the 'dark night'.

The line between this and the uninvited experience of mental breakdown is not easy to draw; it may not even be worth drawing with too much precision. Of course we need to be cautious about a Laingian romanticizing of schizophrenia and so on; but it is beyond question true that people who have endured even relatively mild psychic disorders will speak of their experience as a drawing closer to the sources of ultimate meaning, an opening of the gates of perception. For many shamanic traditions, especially of the sub-arctic areas and central Asia, proneness to hysteria or other disorders is accepted as a sign of aptitude for becoming a shaman,<sup>40</sup> more widely still, having come close to death through physical – or psychosomatic? – illness, and experiencing this in a certain way, can be a sign of the same order (what might we say of Julian of Norwich in this light?). The point is that those whose normal human security is drastically interrupted, physically or mentally, and whose perceptions and self-awareness are modified thereby are obviously close to the condition of reconstituted or revisionary perception characteristic of the 'holy' person. And in a society which *sees* this closeness, there will be means of making the connection effective for at least some; in a society which regards mental 'disorder' as uniformly disastrous and meaningless, there are few ways of understanding mental or psychic dislocation and suffering as a means of *perception*, and both individual and society suffer further as a consequence. As it happens, we have the misfortune to live in such a society; there is no need to list examples of people whose lives have been distorted and diminished as a result, but it may be worth alluding at least to the exceptionally moving and searching portrayals of mental 'illness' as revisionary and sacred perception in some of the fiction of Doris Lessing,<sup>41</sup> with her attendant protest at the agonizing gulf in communication between the 'seer' and – not only in society in general – the medical profession in particular. Vision is not *allowed* to serve corporate wholeness and imaginative integration.

It has sometimes been said – by Eliade among others<sup>42</sup> – that in our time the unconscious is the last refuge of the sacred; and so, for many of our contemporaries, access to truth and vision does indeed come only through the confrontation with the unconscious involved in the pathological disorders of the processes of perception which we think of as insanity, and in the therapeutic disciplines designed to interpret them.<sup>43</sup> This connects with an intriguing suggestion made by Caroline Humphrey in her study of

the psychology of shamanism. 'The "spirits" which the Buryats understand to exist in the further reality may in some way represent experiences which are denied or fragmented in ordinary language – that is, in conscious life.'<sup>44</sup> This model rests explicitly on Lacan's view that language can manifest truth only obliquely: it is not that there might be some way other than language of showing or communicating truth, but that language carries in it the distorting image of a 'unified controllable body' – or self. Access to a reality in which the self is seen truthfully, as a part of a whole linguistic system or world, can only come through the unconscious, what lies beyond ordinary 'meaning' and control – the endless stream of echoes, puns, displacements and allusions which constitutes our dreaming. Truth is told in a language which *shows* rather than attempts to *state* the relations of the elements of thought and awareness – primarily, for Lacan, the language of the analytic 'conversation', with its free associations, its improvisatory character.

Evidently, however (given that the analytic session depends on a tradition too), there may be degrees of control over how such a language is enabled and uttered. Charismatics in ecstasy will often follow conventions in glossolalia – not in any sense fraudulently, but because there is an unavoidable element of learned behaviour in *any* linguistic activity; Buryat shamans have certain recognizable characteristic cries to signal their entrance into ecstasy.<sup>45</sup> Here conscious control is low. It is markedly higher in what we normally think of as prophetic utterance, higher again in 'mystical' poetry (and *literary* prophetic utterance – such as Deutero-Isaiah, perhaps – falls somewhere between the two). But throughout, something of the same process is apparent – a yielding of ordinary control, even a kind of regression, in order to *let* the world of experience recompose itself in patterns not dominated by the ego. Odd Nordland describes the shaman as having the 'possibility of regression for meaningful purposes . . . readier access to all levels of development as an individual'<sup>46</sup> . . . unusual capacities for contact with his own stock of experiences, down to the non-verbal level, a power of untraceable combination at such levels'.<sup>47</sup> This is a helpful formulation for understanding other kinds of holy or epiphanic language. They are the product of a dismembering of ordinary awareness, ordinary description, a condition in which conventions and customary images are compelled to give way, so that the language which is finally re-membered (the pun is from Alan Watts)<sup>48</sup> will show something other than the perceptions of day-to-day experience.

Nordland's analysis is a secularist and rationalist one: ultimately what is remembered and recomposed is simply the contents

of an individual mind, shaken up so as to induce 'intuitive problem-solving'.<sup>49</sup> But for a religious tradition, the connections perceived in this revisionary consciousness and the speech generated by it are realities of a comprehensive and deep order – God's world, God's will, the *dharma* of things, the Logos, however it is expressed. Perception of this order is the vision from which meaning and value originate. This should not commit us to the naive (and disastrous) belief that all ecstasy is revelatory (or that all revelation is ecstatic), though it does presuppose (i) that 'ordinary' language and awareness, so-called literal speech and sense perception of simple discrete objects, are not the fixed and final canons of truthfulness (the very phenomenon of metaphor and paradox in language suggests this), and (ii) that 'extra-ordinary' states of perception, ranging from ecstasy in the strict sense to the recomposing intuition of the artist, or what Kuhn called 'revolutionary science',<sup>50</sup> may (though they do not necessarily) offer access to more than the sum of individual experiences. What a religious tradition offers to do is to provide conventions whereby the ordinary and the extra-ordinary are kept in touch, means whereby revisionary consciousness can act as a critique of existing orders of action and relation, while itself being tested and criticised by a continuous *tradition* of 'extra-ordinary' utterance and imagery.

As we have seen, this critical role for the holy operated in a specially sharp and distinctive way in those traditions in which the holy *person* has a prominent communal role. What happens, though, when religions become increasingly privatized, or when their ritual structures and their role-definitions become looser? The need for access to the holy does not necessarily diminish, so that pressure is still felt for some people to experience the primal world directly; but training for such experience, and the provision of a language for sharing it, have virtually disappeared. What will remain is a deposit of records of unusual experiences, valued and preserved for their unusualness: a set of case-histories, from a variety of contexts, with a varying degree of dependence upon traditional forms and images. And this, I would argue, is what 'mysticism' is as a religious phenomenon. I suggested earlier that there might be some truth in saying 'There are no Buddhist mystics'. Of course there are exceptional figures, visionaries, contemplatives experiencing union with God; but you don't need the category of 'mystic' to describe them in their own context because they are part of a system which assumes that access to the ground of the sacred is a basic necessity of society and religious community alike. And this access is secured in several ways, sacramentally, hierarchically *and* by the training of those who will question symbol and hierarchy in the name of what they themselves claim to represent. Normally

this takes place in connection with the visible and institutional phenomenon of the monastic enclosure, but not invariably. The interaction of the holy person with the religious community will take various forms – from the ‘holy fool’ of Russian Orthodoxy<sup>51</sup> to the charismatic preaching friar of the later Middle Ages (Bernardine of Siena, Savonarola) to the silent criticism of the major contemplative orders, the Carthusians in particular (*stat crux dum volvitur orbis*), and the reformed Carmel of Teresa and John of the Cross in the Counter-Reformation period. But what matters is less the psychology of such persons (interesting as that may be), more the nature of their presence to and for the community at large. To be interested in them primarily as mystics is to misconceive the character of their religious identity as they and their church saw it; and the same applies to the attempt to isolate ‘the mystic’ in other religions.

Now of course religious studies as a discipline is unlikely to avoid such misconception; indeed, in a sense it is part of any such discipline to make its material strange, to look at it from fresh viewpoints. But what is not conducive to understanding in this field is the absolutizing of a dichotomy in ‘religious experience’ based on the imposition from outside of problematic psychological categories, irrespective of the relation of the outstanding religious genius (to use a rather Heiler-esque phrase)<sup>52</sup> to his or her linguistic and communal heritage and function. What this paper has tried to show is that ‘the mystical’ in experience and literature either belongs with prophecy and shamanism in a general typology of the personally-embodied sacred, or else is no more than a heavily culturally-conditioned psychological category of limited use in interpreting the forms and images of traditional religion. If we forget for a moment the fragmented and individualistic forms of religious practice in our own culture, it should be clear that there is a fairly wide spectrum of styles and expressions of reconstituted perception, ‘sacred’ readings of the world of experience, in persons whose role is defined with varying degrees of institutional precision and exclusivity of function (a shaman is more ‘full-time’ a manifester of the holy order than even the professed contemplative in other contexts); but they share the task of recalling to remembrance their community’s commitment to holiness, significant and integrated social life. In the Judaeo-Christian world, with its cluster of doctrines and myths about the transfiguration of the *whole* material and social environment, the way in which the sacred criticizes the realm of worldly forgetfulness (of institutionalized injustice, economic selfishness, fear of the stranger and so on) can be, and regularly has been markedly far-reaching and politically unsettling, reconstitutive of a whole corporate order. This is

not of course, the exclusive preserve of one tradition – though there may be (and I believe there are) special features of this particular set of symbols which produce an exceptionally acute level of self-critical activity. There is a common impulse towards some convention which enables the ambiguity of history and language to be, not annihilated, but at least suggestively reorganized; something which allows transforming power to flow more freely into a chancy, vulnerable and self-protective ‘ordinariness’; an impulse to find and keep open a place of presence, a ‘space’ for healing, operative in relation to a person who is both within and without the everyday world.

I have not raised the question which arises out of this almost at once, the problem of the various meanings of ‘incarnation’: God in Christ, the living Buddha, the Vaishnavite *avatar* and the Shaivite *guru* – manifestations of an authoritative, a classical kind. I am not here primarily engaged in theology, even ‘comparative’ theology. Perhaps, though, this discussion may help us to approach that set of issues with a slightly altered perspective: it may be that what the *Gloria* implies in addressing Christ Jesus as *solus sanctus* is a claim that there is a single ultimate focus of epiphany in the world, one place of ‘presence’ in relation to which *any* human being, of any culture, could find him or herself restored or recalled, made present to themselves – a sacred space of unrestricted access and availability, a promise of some universally shared human meaning. I shall content myself with suggesting this only, postponing the harder work of working out what this claim involves and what it might mean to try to justify it.<sup>53</sup> But if this is a possible or an attractive proposal, it would be of one human being in a particularly intense sense that Joan Halifax’s powerful words describing the shaman would be true:

The shaman [or, we might add, the holy person generally, as defined in this essay] is a healed healer who has retrieved the broken pieces of his or her psyche and, through a personal rite of transformation, has integrated many planes of life experience: the body and the spirit, the ordinary and the non-ordinary, the individual and the community, nature and supernature, the mythic and the historical, the past, the present and the future;<sup>54</sup>

an Alpha and Omega in whose hands are the keys of death and hell.

1 *Das Gebet. Eine Religionsgeschichtliche und Religionspsychologische Untersuchung*. 5th edition, Munich, 1923, pp 248-50. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

- 2 Ibid. p 249.
- 3 Pp 255-6.
- 4 Pp 262-5, 272-9.
- 5 P 279.
- 6 P 282.
- 7 P 318.
- 8 P 396.
- 9 Pp 404-7.
- 10 P 408 (cf. p 245).
- 11 P 269.
- 12 P 491.
- 13 P 359-60.
- 14 P 400.
- 15 P 250.
- 16 *Church of England Newspaper*, 2 September 1932.
- 17 See Heiler, pp 369-72.
- 18 Ibid. p 245.
- 19 P 263.
- 20 P 283.
- 21 E.g. pp 350-1.
- 22 This perception has been developed by several feminist writers – recently and very powerfully by Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, London, Women's Press, 1981.
- 23 P 272.
- 24 See Edward Robinson (ed.), *The Original Vision* (Oxford, Religious Experience Research Unit, 1977); *This Time-Bound Ladder. Ten Dialogues on Religious Experience* (Oxford, RERU 1977); *Living the Questions* (Oxford, RERU, 1978).
- 25 E.g. Sven S. Hartmann and Carl-Martin Edsman (eds.), *Mysticism* (Stockholm, 1970), Stephen Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (OUP, 1978), Richard Woods (ed.), *Understanding Mysticism* (London, Athlone Press, 1981).
- 26 Good examples of such analysis can be found in Hjalmar Sundén's paper ('Meditation and Perception. Some Notes on the Psychology of Religious Mysticism') in Hartmann and Edsman, op. cit. and Robert T. Gimello, 'Mysticism and Meditation', in Katz, op.cit.
- 27 See e.g. Louis Bouyer's seminal study, 'Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word', reproduced in Woods, op. cit, for details of late antique and early Christian usage.
- 28 For an important example, see H. Guenther, *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice*, Penguin Books, 1972, p 87, and n. 11, p 219.
- 29 Thus, when we speak of 'prophet churches' in contemporary Africa, for instance, however sharply defined the term is in its context, it is fairly clear that 'prophet' does not mean precisely what it means as applied to Amos or Isaiah, or even as applied to the 'prophets' of the New Testament or the early Church. See Bengt Sundkler's classic study, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (2nd edition, OUP, 1961), pp 109-117, and Appendix A pp 350-3, for characterizations of 'prophetic' leadership in this tradition. Points worth noting are the importance of certain shamanic-type features (derived from Zulu sources) in call and initiation, and the interpretation of an initial 'prophetic' experience as a call to found or assemble a new community.
- 30 I have in mind here, for example, certain of the weighty criticisms levelled against Eliade for unduly homogenizing diverse patterns of ritual and myth. See the excellent monograph by John A. Saliba, *'Homo Religiosus' in Mircea Eliade* (Leiden, Brill, 1976), and the still more critical study by Ivan Strenski, 'Mircea Eliade: Some

- Theoretical Problems', in A Cunningham (ed), *The Theory of Myth. Six Studies* (London, Sheed & Ward, 1973).
- 31 Quoting Pedersen in 'The origins of prophecy in Israel', *Israel's Prophetic Tradition. Essays in Honour of Peter Ackroyd*, ed R. Coggins, A. Phillips and Michael Knibb, CUP, 1982, p 18, and cf. p 25.
  - 32 For a survey of recent views on the relation of the prophets to cultic institutions, see Robert Murray, 'Prophecy and the cult', in Coggins, Phillips and Knibb, op. cit.
  - 33 His classical essay is 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Mass in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1971, pp 80-101. The theme is developed in *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, 1978, and several studies in this area (including the JRS article) are collected in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Faber, 1982.
  - 34 Thus apocalyptic develops in such contexts (as in intertestamental Judaism), as a promise of the restoration of true vision and free access to the holy at the end of history. Insofar as it sees this as partly realizable in the present, apocalyptic provides a seedbed for ecstatic/'mystical' techniques and conventions of visionary imagery. See the magisterial survey by C.C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven. A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, London, SPCK, 1982.
  - 35 Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices. A Survey of Visionary Narratives*, Penguin Books, 1980, pp 21-2. This volume contains a rich assortment of source material, with vivid and sympathetic commentaries tending perhaps to over-systematize the reports presented.
  - 36 See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, London, RKP, 1964, pp 34, 36-8; see also Caroline Humphrey, 'Shamans and the Trance: an ethnographic study from Buryat shamanism', I, *Theoria to Theory*, vol V, no 4, and II, vol VI, no I esp II, pp 52, 54.
  - 37 Eliade, op. cit. pp 436-7; cf. Alexandra David-Néel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, London, Souvenir Press, 1967, for accounts of the *chöd* ritual.
  - 38 Note the marked difference in convention here between sub-Arctic and Central Asian shamanism on the one hand and the very widespread dependence on hallucinogens in Central and Southern American practice. This is amply illustrated in Halifax, op. cit.
  - 39 On the *koan* in this connection and its relation to other reconstitutive mental/contemplative disciplines, including Christian contemplation, see Margaret Masterman 'Theism as a Scientific Hypothesis II The Relevance of Apophatic Theology', *Theoria to Theory*, vol I, no 2.
  - 40 Humphrey, art. cit. II, 49-51.
  - 41 See especially *The Four Gated City*, London, MacGibbon and Key, 1969 *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1971, *Shikasta*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1979.
  - 42 E.g. in *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, New York, 1959, pp 209ff. Compare some of his remarks on Freud in *No Souvenirs. Journal, 1957-1969*, London, RKP, 1978, esp p 95.
  - 43 Cf the discussion of Janov's 'primal therapy'. 'The Primal Scream', *Theoria to Theory*, vol VI, no 4, esp pp 28-32.
  - 44 Humphrey, art. cit. I, p 42.
  - 45 Ibid. II, pp 49-50.
  - 46 'Shamanism as an Experiencing of the "Unreal"', Carl-Martin Edsman (ed), *Studies in Shamanism*, Stockholm, 1967, pp 181-2.
  - 47 Ibid. p 184.
  - 48 Quoted in Halifax, op. cit. p 15.
  - 49 Art. cit. p 178.
  - 50 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1962, esp chapter 10.

- 51 See chap 2 of John Saward, *Perfect Fools. Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality*, OUP, 1980, pp 21-4.
- 52 Pp 220-47 of Heiler are devoted to prayer in the experience of the 'religious genius' (Jesus, Luther, Tersteegen . . .).
- 53 I have tried to develop some of these themes a little further in *Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Roots of a Metaphor*, Grove Liturgical Study, No 31, Nottingham, 1982, esp pp 13-20, 27-32.
- 54 Op. cit. p 18.

## Reviews

**EIGHTY-THREE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS** by St Augustine, translated by David L Mosher: *The Fathers of the Church, A New Translation, Vol 70. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D C 1982.*

Peter Brown observed that for Augustine, "a good book was a series of 'knots of problems'. His Late Roman readers appreciated this 'knotty' quality of his own books more than we do". (*Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, London, 1969, p 275). I think even his Late Roman readers would have drawn the line at *Eighty-Three Different Questions*. The title says it all. With two exceptions, what we have here are Augustine's answers to questions posed to him by members of his community at Thagaste and Hippo between 388 and 396. The questions cover a wide range of topics and the answers vary in length from a few lines to several pages. To be fair to Augustine, he never intended this book to be taken up and read through. He tells us in the *Retractationes* that after he had been made bishop he directed that the questions, which until then had been scattered on stray pieces of paper, should be gathered together in one book and numbered "so that anyone could easily find what he wanted to read". In view of this, David Mosher's laborious attempt to show that this is a "genuine book", "a member of a clearly defined literary genre", a "tolerable literary unit" (pp 3, 7, 9-10), seems to me inappropriate.

The collection is nevertheless an interesting historical document, not only be-

cause of what it tells us of Augustine's thought on a range of issues at this period of his life, but also because of what it reveals about the philosophical, theological and exegetical interests and concerns of his community. The publication of this first English translation of the work is therefore to be welcomed.

Though not very elegant, the translation is generally competent. Question 47 begins: "It is usual to ask how, after the resurrection and transformation of the body which are promised to the saints, we can see our thoughts". I think that unlikely to have been the case, even in a community whose members "pelted (Augustine) with questions whenever they had the chance" (p 3). *Quaeri solet* would be more recognisable as "I am often asked ..."

It is unfortunate that more use was not made of Almut Mutzenbecher's edition (*Corpus Christianorum*, 1975), but the translator may well have finished his work before this was published. We are told (p 1) that the Introduction, which deals with literary form, chronology and doctrinal content, was submitted for publication in the Spring of 1973. One would have thought that the publishers had ample time to do something about the misprints.

DENIS MINNS O P