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In The Name Of Allah The Beneficent The Merciful

I

SUFISM[1]**.** One of the truly creative manifestations of religious life in Islam is the mystical tradition, known as Sufism. The term derives most probably from the Arabic word for wool (suf), since the early ascetics of Islam (Sufis) are said to have worn coarse woolen garments to symbolize their rejection of the world.

Origins.

Muslim mystical writers such as Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990/5) and `Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1071/2?), nonetheless, have proposed a number of etymologies for Sufi: saff, "rank," implying that Sufis are an elite group among Muslims; suffah, "bench," alluding to the People of the Bench, the intimates of the prophet Muhammad who gathered at the first mosque in Medina; safa', "purity," focusing on the moral uprightness essential to the Sufi way of life. The resolution of the etymological debate is less critical than the recognition that the terms Sufi and Sufism evoke complex layers of meaning in Islam, including the denial of the world, close association with the Prophet and his message, and a spiritual attainment that raises one to a rank of unique intimacy with God.

Some earlier Western scholars of Sufism concluded that mysticism is incompatible with the Muslim perception of an almighty, transcendent God with whom one shares little intimacy. In their opinion Sufi mysticism was born of Islam's contact with other major world religions, especially Christianity and Buddhism. This theory is no longer considered viable for two reasons: first, the Qur'anic perception of the relationship of the individual to God is quite complex, highlighting both immanence and transcendence, and second, while no one denies that Islam evolved in a religiously pluralistic environment, one need not conclude that phenomena common to both Islam and other traditions are therefore derivative.

The vision of the God-man relationship in the Qur'an offers a study in contrasts. On the one hand God is the almighty creator and lord of the cosmos who sustains the universe at every moment (Qur'an 10:3 ff.); men and women are but servants—finite, vulnerable, and prone to evil (2:30 ff. and 15:26 ff.). God is both lawgiver and judge (surahs 81 and 82); whatever he wills comes to be (2:142; 3:47; 3:129; 5:40; 13:27). Servants of God are

[1]. Peter J. Awn, *SUFISM*, Encyclopedia of ReligionVol.14, p.104 -122 (Second Edition: Vol 13, P. 8809- 8825)

enjoined to embrace his will, not question its import, for men and women will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds. To breach the lord-servant (rabb-`abd) relationship leads easily to the cardinal sin of shirk, substituting some other power for that of God.

On the other hand the inaccessibility of the transcendent Lord must be understood in the context of those Qur'anic verses that speak of his abiding presence both in the world and in the hearts of the faithful. For did he not actually breathe his own spirit into Adam at creation (Qur'an 15:29, 38:72)? And is he not closer to humankind than his own jugular vein (50:16)? God's presence is all-pervasive, for to him belong the East and the West, the whole of creation,

> *. . .and wherever you turn, there is God's face. Truly God is omnipresent, omniscient.* (2:115)

The Qur'an enjoins on every Muslim the practice of recollecting God (33:41), for the peaceful heart is one in which the remembrance of God has become second nature (13:28-29). The most crucial Qur'anic verse for Sufis, however, describes the establishment of the primordial covenant between God and the souls of men and women in a time before the creation of the cosmos:

> *And when your Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam their d and made them testify about themselves (by saying), "Am I not your Lord?" They replied, "Yes, truly, we testify!"* (7:172)

This unique event, which confirms the union between God and the souls of all men and women, has become known in Sufi literature as the "Day of Alast," the day when God asked "Alastu bi-rabbikum" ("Am I not your Lord?"). The goal of every Muslim mystic is to recapture this experience of loving intimacy with the Lord of the Worlds.

The experience of mystical union need not, therefore, be n as foreign to Islam. On the contrary, interior spiritual development becomes a concern at a relatively early date in the writings of important Qur'an commentators. Of the two traditional methods of Qur'anic exegesis predominating in Islam, tafsir emphasizes the exoteric elements of the text: grammar, philology, history, dogma, and the like, while ta'wil stresses the search for hidden meanings, the esoteric dimensions of the Qur'anic text. It is among Sufis (and Shi`i Muslims) that ta'wil has found special favor.

Early commentators such as Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 767) often combined literalist and allegorical methods depending on the nature of the verse in question. More important is the contribution of the sixth imam of the Shi`ah, Ja`far al-Sadiq (d. 765), who stressed not only the formal learning of the commentator but also his spiritual development. An individual's access to the deeper meanings of the Qur'an is dependent, therefore, on his or her personal spiritual development. Since text and commentator interact dynamically as living realities, the Qur'an reveals more of itself to the extent that the Muslim makes progress in the spiritual life. The power of the text is such that for many later Sufi commentators such as Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896) simply hearing the recitation of the sacred text could induce ecstatic states in the soul of the listener.

The Ascetic Movement. The early catalysts for the development of mysticism in Islam, however, were not all spiritual in nature. The dramatic social and political changes brought about by the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty in the mid-seventh century also played a pivotal role. The capital of the empire was moved from Medina to the more opulent and cosmopolitan Damascus, and the rapid spread of Islam introduced enormous wealth and ethnic diversity into what had originally been a spartan, Arab movement. In reaction to the

worldliness of the Umayyads, individual ascetics arose to preach a return to the heroic values of the Qur'an through the abandonment of both riches and the trappings of earthly power. The three major centers of the ascetic movement in the eighth and ninth centuries were Iraq, especially the cities of Basra, Kufa, and Baghdad; the province of Khorasan, especially the city of Balkh; and Egypt.

Hasan al-Basri. A leading figure of the period was Hasan al-Basri, who was born in Medina in 642 but settled in Basra, where he died in 728. Hasan was renowned for his almost puritanical piety and exceptional eloquence. At the heart of his preaching was the rejection of the world (al-dunya), which he described in a letter to the Umayyad caliph `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz (r. 717-720) as a venomous snake, smooth to the touch, but deadly. Hasan contrasts this world of transiency and corruption with the next world, which alone is a realm of permanence and fulfillment.

The extreme to which Hasan's anti-worldly stance led him is reflected most vividly in this same letter where he implies that the creation of the world was a mistake. From the moment God first looked on his handiwork, Hasan insists, God hated it. Such a theological position runs counter to the basic understanding of the value of creation that Islam shares with Judasim and Christianity. As Genesis 1:31 affirms, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." To speculate on the origins of Hasan's gnosticlike condemnation of the material world would take us beyond the objectives of this present article; suffice it to say that ambivalence toward materiality remained a significant aspect of later Islamic mysticism. The impact of gnostic ideas, however, continued to mold later Sufism, especially in the eastern provinces of the empire. The work of Henry Corbin has done much to open for the student of Sufism this complex world of Sufi, and especially Isma`ili, gnosis.

Hasan al-Basri's asceticism, although world-denying, did not entail the total abandonment of society or social structures. On the contrary, Hasan functioned as the moral conscience of the state and fearlessly criticized the power structures when he felt they overstepped moral bounds. He eschewed the role of the revolutionary and refused to sanction movements designed to overthrow irreligious politicians. In Socratic fashion, Hasan preferred to work for the ruler's change of heart through persuasion, not violence. Hasan's dedication to ascetic ideals did not, moreover, lead him to forsake family life. He married and raised a family, albeit in straitened circumstances. While Hasan al-Basri is considered a pivotal figure in the early development of Sufism, he is also noted as a transmitter of traditions (hadith) and as a defender of human freedom in the early theological debates of Islam.

Ibrahim ibn Adham. While there are some extant written materials attributable to Hasan al-Basri, textual sources for the lives and teachings of many early ascetics are of questionable value. Often the dearth of authentic historical sources makes it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between facts and pious embellishments. A prime example is the life of the famous ascetic Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 770?). Ibrahim was said to be a prince of the formerly Buddhist city of Balkh; he gave up his throne in order to pursue the path of asceticism. Some Western commentators have pointed to the possible parallel between his life story and the Buddha legend.

The fables about Ibrahim highlight his generosity, altruism, and, most important, his complete trust in God (tawakkul). Ibrahim's quietism, however, did not lead him to depend on others for his subsistence. He preferred to work and scorned those who relied on begging. It would m to be fact that he served in two naval battles against the Byzantines; while fighting in the second, he lost his life.

Many tales of Ibrahim's life stand out because of the ascetic practices they describe. He cherished ridicule and humiliation; more startling is his joyous acceptance of physical

abuse—bloody beatings, being dragged by a rope tied round his neck, being urinated upon, and the like. Clearly such stories are later additions by hagiographers. Nonetheless these grotesque, mingly masochistic acts are accepted as integral elements of his life history by many Sufi writers. And such tales have helped to shape later authors' understandings of asceticism in this early period of Sufism.

Rabi`ah al-`Adawiyah. The actual transition from asceticism to true love mysticism in Islam is documented in the spiritual theory of one of the first great female Sufis, Rabi`ah al-`Adawiyah (d. 801). Sold into slavery as a child, she was eventually freed because of the depth of her piety. Rabi`ah's focus was not on asceticism as an end in itself, but rather on its ability to help foster a loving relationship with God. Asceticism was only one of the means necessary for the attainment of union; to make ascetic practices themselves the goal, and not intimacy with the Beloved, was, in her estimation, a distortion of the Sufi path.

The love Rabi`ah nurtured was completely altruistic; neither fear of Hell nor desire for Paradise were allowed to divert her gaze from the Beloved.

Rabi`ah's vision of altruistic love (mahabbah) and mystical intimacy (uns) are preserved in beautiful prayers and poems attributed to her. These represent some of the earliest aesthetic expressions of mystical experience in Islam.

One particularly vivid body of fables scattered throughout the Muslim sources centers on the spiritual rivalry between Rabi`ah al-`Adawiyah and Hasan al-Basri. The problem with these tales, however, is that they describe a relationship that was historically improbable. Hasan died in 728, when Rabi`ah was at best in her early teens. Despite its questionable historicity, the Hasan-Rabi`ah cycle provides a valuable insight into male-female relationships in early Sufi circles.

In the vast majority of these didactic tales Rabi`ah's spiritual insight and emotional maturity set her far above her male rival, Hasan, whose naiveté and presumptuous self-confidence are held up to ridicule. On occasion the conflict is described in actual male-female terms, with Hasan and his male Sufi companions insisting that no woman has the ability to match a man's spiritual perfection. While Rabi`ah proves them wrong beyond the shadow of a doubt, there remains the fact that her success is due partially to the abandonment of the traditional female role and the assumption of more male characteristics. For example, she is said to have repeatedly refused Hasan's marriage proposals and remained celibate and childless throughout her life.

Dhu al-Nun al-Misri. A number of early Sufis such as Rabi`ah evinced a sophistication of esthetic expression and theoretical speculation that laid a solid foundation for later work by Sufi mystics. Pivotal figures such as Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. 859) were both poetic stylists and theoreticians. Although no complete text of his mystical writings has survived, many of his logia, prayers, and poems have been preserved by later writers. He was master of the epigram and an accomplished poetic stylist in Arabic. The full force of his literary talent comes to light, however, in his prayers.

The child of Nubian parents, Dhu al-Nun was born in Upper Egypt at the end of the eighth century. While many of the factual details of his life are often indistinguishable from pious fiction, a reliable kernel of historical data emerges. Although he lived in Cairo, Dhu al-Nun traveled extensively, and during one of his sojourns in Baghdad, he ran afoul of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861). The confrontation was sparked by his refusal to accept the Mu`tazili doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an. For this act of defiance, Dhu al-Nun was imprisoned; during his heresy trial, however, he so affected the caliph with his apologia for the Sufi life that al-Mutawakkil released him unharmed.

The preserved sayings of Dhu al-Nun attest to the profundity of his mystical insight and to the skill with which he developed terminology and structures to analyze the mystical life. He excelled at elucidating the nuances of the various stages (maqamat) and states (ahwal) encountered by the mystic along the Sufi path. To him is attributed the first construction of a coherent theory of ma`rifah, spiritual gnosis, which he contrasts with `ilm, the more traditional path of discursive reason.

A pivotal aspect of Dhu al-Nun's mysticism is the coincidentia oppositorum, the "conjunction of opposites." The God who pours out his love upon the faithful Sufi wayfarer is, in Dhu al-Nun's view, the same God who afflicts his lover with pain and torment. God is, at one and the same time, al-muhyi, "the giver of life," and al-mumit, "the one who kills." Legend has it that at his death the following words were found inscribed on his forehead:

This is the beloved of God,
who died in God's love.
This is the slain of God,
who died by God's sword.

Mystical Ecstasy. The evolution of ascetic and theoretical principles to guide the Sufi wayfarer, and the growing sophistication of aesthetic expressions of love mysticism were not the only signs of a maturing mystical tradition in Islam. An additional area of creative exploration by a number of ninth- and tenth-century Sufis centered on refining the understanding of what actually constitutes the goal of mystical experience.

Rabi`ah's articulation of the primacy of love in mystical union provided a general framework for discussion; it did not, however, resolve the most vexing question. Does union entail the complete obliteration of the lover's soul in the Beloved or is the object of mysticism a loving relationship in which both lover and Beloved preserve their independence? Expressed more technically, of what do the experiences of mystical annihilation (fana') and persistence in union (baqa') consist?

Abu Yazid al-Bistami. The debate was brought to a head in dramatic fashion by a number of mystics whose ecstatic utterances provoked and scandalized the traditional elements both within and without the Sufi movement. One of the earliest ecstatics was Abu Yazid (known also as Bayazid) Tayfur ibn `Isa al-Bistami (d. 874), who lived in seclusion at Bistam in the province of Qumis. Few details of his life are known, but it is said that he was initiated into the subtleties of mystical union by one Abu `Ali al-Sindi and that he developed a friendship with Dhu al-Nun.

Muslim hagiographers and spiritual writers have preserved, nevertheless, many of the ecstatic utterances (shatahat) attributed to Abu Yazid. These sayings differ from earlier Sufi expressions of union because of their ming affirmation of the total identification of lover and Beloved. Cries of "Subhani!" ("Glory be to me!") and "Ma a`zama sha'ni!" ("How great is my majesty!") shocked the uninitiated because they smacked of shirk, associationism, and aroused many Muslims' suspicions that Sufism was a heretical movement.

In a famous text, considered spurious but existing in several versions, Abu Yazid vividly describes his reenactment of the Prophet's night journey (mi`raj) as a mystical ascent during which his "I" is gradually absorbed into the "He" of the Beloved. Eventually "He" and "I" become interchangeable, for in reality the attributes of Abu Yazid's essence have been subsumed into God.

This particular understanding of mystical annihilation (fana') is characteristic of Abu Yazid's mystical theory. Complete fana' is attained only after the most arduous stripping away of one's attributes. Nothing is spared, neither personality nor spiritual attainments. Abu

Yazid compares the process to the snake's struggle to slough off its skin, or to the blacksmith's violent manipulation of red-hot iron. The mystic experiences the most dramatic shifts of emotion and spiritual experience; the soul vacillates between the expansive rapture of bast, in which the self appears literally to fill a room, and the implosion of qabd, in which the self ms reduced to the size of the tiniest sparrow.

Because of the apparent extremism of his ecstatic utterances, al-Bistami was revered by later Sufis as the advocate of the path of intoxication (sukr) in contrast with the path of sobriety (sahw) associated with the famous Baghdad Sufi Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910). The division between sober and intoxicated Sufis was to remain an important one throughout the history of Islamic mysticism.

Al-Hallaj. Despite their dramatic power, the ecstatic utterances of Abu Yazid al-Bistami are overshadowed by those of the most famous of the Baghdad mystics, Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj. He was born in 857 at al-Tur, in the Iranian province of Fars. His initiation into Sufism began early in life, while he was still a teenager. For over twenty years he lived in seculsion and was trained by a number of the great Sufi masters of the period: Sahl al-Tustari, `Amr al-Makki, and al-Junayd.

Eventually, however, al-Hallaj broke away from his teachers and became an itinerant preacher. His wanderings led him through Arabia and Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. He came into contact with sages and mystics from a number of other religious traditions who expanded the horizons of his own religious experience. As he continued to mature spiritually al-Hallaj attracted increasingly larger numbers of disciples. He became known as hallaj al-asrar, "the carder of consciences," a play on the family name al-Hallaj, which meant "cotton carder".

The core of al-Hallaj's preaching was a call to moral reform and to the experience of intense union with the Beloved. Among al-Hallaj's poetic and prose writings, one phrase stands out as the paradigmatic expression of mystical ecstasy, his famous "Ana al-Haqq!" ("I am the divine Truth!"). To the ears of non-Sufis and of more sober elements in Sufism, al-Hallaj's self-divinizing cry was tantamount to shirk, if not a bald rephrasing of the Christian notion of incarnation (hulul.)

It is very doubtful that al-Hallaj wished to be considered primarily a metaphysician. Consequently the charges leveled against him were due to misperceptions of the intent of his mystical expressions. It would remain for later Sufis to articulate philosophically a doctrine of identity between God and creation. Al-Hallaj's expressions of ecstasy, on the contrary, are part of a tradition whose main goal was to celebrate the transforming power of the experience of mystical union with the Beloved; secondarily the concern was to contribute to the growing body of technical terminology and theoretical speculation about the nature of mysticism.

Many scholars have considered al-Hallaj's proclamation of unique intimacy with the divine to be one of the main causes of his eventual imprisonment and execution at the hands of the Abbasid authorities. There is no doubt that al-Hallaj's ecstatic utterances and his reinterpretation of certain elements of Islamic ritual practice were objects of violent criticism by many of the religious hierarcy. His execution, however, was as much the result of politics as of mysticism.

Al-Hallaj's insistence on announcing publicly his vision of mystical union transgressed a cardinal principle of the great Sufi masters of his generation. The accomplished mystic was never to divulge to the uninitiated experiences that were beyond their comprehension; the true nature of union was to be discussed only with one's fellow adepts or not at all. Such elitism did not conform to al-Hallaj's more populist notion of mysticism. For his lack of prudence he was ostracized by his former teacher al-Junayd and was branded a political threat and rabble-rouser by the secular authorities.

Finally, al-Hallaj found himself embroiled in caliphal politics during the reign of al-Muqtadir (908-932). He was lionized and defended by one vizier and condemned by the next, protected by the caliph's mother, but finally sentenced to death by the son. Al-Hallaj spent about eight years in prison before he was eventually executed in 922. The gruesome details have been recorded by his disciples: al-Hallaj was flogged, mutilated, exposed on a gibbet, and finally decapitated. The body was then burned. For al-Hallaj, however, death was not a defeat; on the contrary, he desired fervently to become a martyr of love. Al-Hallaj was convinced that it was the duty of the religious authorities to put him to death, just as it was his duty to continue to preach aloud the unique intimacy he shared with the divine:

Kill me, my trusted friends,
for in my death is my life!
Death for me is in living, and
life for me is in dying.
The obliteration of my essence
is the noblest of blessings.
My perdurance in human attributes,
the vilest of evils.

The creativity of al-Hallaj's work is reflected perhaps most strikingly in his ingenious use of the science of opposites. In his Kitab al-tawasin al-Hallaj describes his two role models in mysticism as Iblis (the devil) and Pharaoh. Both suffered condemnation at the hands of God, al-Hallaj attests, yet neither swerved from his appointed course. The Qur'anic text affirms on several occasions that Iblis, who was chief of the angels and the most dedicated of monotheists, was commanded by God to bow to the newly created Adam. He refused, despite God's threat to condemn him forever, and chose, like al-Hallaj, to become a martyr of love.

My refusal is the cry, "Holy are you"!
My reason is madness, madness for you.
What is Adam, other than you?
And who is Iblis to set apart one from the other?

All three are outcasts who have transgressed the law to attain a higher goal. Yet the reason for the transgression is each one's love relationship with God, which functions as a higher law for the perfected Sufi.

> My friend and my teacher are Iblis and Pharaoh. Iblis was threatened with the fire, but he did not go back on his preaching. And Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea, but he did not acknowledge any mediator at all. . . . And if I were killed, or crucified, or if my hands and feet were cut off, I would not go back on my preaching.

**`Ayn al-Qudat.** An even more subtle treatment of the science of opposites (coincidentia oppositorum) is evident in the work of another martyr-mystic of Islam, `Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani, who was born in western Iran in 1098. He proved himself a brilliant student as a young man, mastering the traditional Islamic religious sciences. He was also recognized for the quality of his literary style in both Arabic and Persian. The most influential Sufi master in his spiritual formation was Ah-mad al-Ghazali (d. 1128), a preeminent teacher and the brother of the most famous mystic-theologian in Islam, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111). Ahmad's own contribution to Sufism is considerable, especially his classic treatise on mystical love, Sawanih.

As `Ayn al-Qudat's fame grew, his disciples increased and, like al-Hallaj, he soon incurred the wrath of the religious and political authorities. He was accused of a number of

heretical ideas, the most serious being the claim that there was a complete identity between the Creator and his creation. Imprisoned in Baghdad, `Ayn al-Qudat was later transferred to his native city of Hamadhan where he was put to death in grisly fashion in 1131; He was only thirty-three years of age.

The conjunction of opposites, according to `Ayn al-Qudat, is reflected in the very notion of the God of Islam. One need look only to the Muslim confession of faith (Shahadah) for confirmation: "La ilaha illa Allah" ("There is no god but God!"). La ilaha ("there is no god") is the realm of the malevolent divine attributes, which spawn falsehood and which seduce the soul of the mystic away from the truth.

To pass from la ilaha to the realm of illa Allah ("but God") requires that the Sufi wayfarer confront God's chamberlain, who stands guard at the threshold of illa Allah. Who is this chamberlain? None other than the devil Iblis.

In the same way that al-Hallaj in his Kitab al-tawasin purports that the devil Iblis is a model of piety, `Ayn al-Qudat employs this paradoxical motif to dramatize the tension of opposites in God. He links Iblis with Muhammad, claiming that both are but different aspects of the same divine reality. Iblis is described as the black light of straying while Muhammad is the white light of truth and gnosis; both spring, however, from the same attribute of God, namely his power. Muhammad is the guiding light of God's power while Iblis is its destructive fire.

Perhaps the most creative symbols employed by `Ayn al-Qudat to capture the conflict within God are those of the curl and the mole that lay upon the face of the Beloved. The lock of hair that hangs in an arrogant curl over the cheek of the Beloved enjoys a privileged state of intimacy. Instead of driving away the ker from the threshold of illa Allah with the sword of divine power, or deceiving the soul with black light, the Iblis-curl distracts and seduces the Sufi with the amorous gestures of the coquette, thus entangling the soul in lesser spiritual attainments.

The image of the Iblis-curl must, of course, have its Muhammad counterpart. In addition to the curl, the mistress possesses another mark of beauty, a black mole on the cheek that is equated with Muhammad. Both curl and mole, however, spring from the face of God; the curl is seducer while the mole is the guide to Truth.

All of the paradoxical images used by `Ayn al-Qudat—the tension between curl and mole, black light and white light, between la ilaha and illa Allah—point to the fact that God himself is the source of paradoxes. Moreover `Ayn al-Qudat is convinced that both poles of the paradox must be experienced if one is to attain true spiritual gnosis:

> *Unbelief and faith are two veils beyond the throne between God and the servant, because man must be neither unbeliever nor Muslim.*

Mystical Literature

The science of opposites, with its rich symbolism and provocative speculation, appealed only to a small number of Sufis because of the level of intellectual sophistication it demanded and because of its esoteric quality. In contrast, beginning in the late ninth century, a number of texts began to appear that were aimed at a broader spectrum of the Muslim faithful and functioned as training guides for men and women interested in cultivating mystical experience.

The Manual Tradition. The emphasis of the manuals was not on the arcane dimensions of Sufism, but on its accessibility and its conformity with Islamic orthodoxy.

One of the earliest manuals addressed to a Sufi novice is the Kitab al-ri`ayah (Book of Consideration) of Abu `Abd Allah al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi (d. 857). He is

remembered particularly for his skill in developing the examination of conscience as an effective tool for advancement in the spiritual life.

Among the classics of this genre of religious literature in Sufism are the Kitab al-ta `arruf (Book of Knowledge) of Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 or 995), the Kitab al-luma` (Book of Concise Remarks) of Abu Nasr `Abd Allah ibn `Ali al-Sarraj (d. 988), Al-risalah al-qushayriyah (The Qushayrian Letter) of Abu al-Qasim `Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 1074), the Kashf al-mahjub (Unveiling of the Veiled) of `Ali ibn `Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri (d. 1071/2?), and the Qut al-qulub (Nourishment of the Heart) of Abu Talib Muhammad ibn `Ali ibn `Atiyah al-Harithi al-Makki (d. 996).

Spiritual guidance. Doubtless the primary goal of these manuals was to serve as guides for novices newly embarked upon the Sufi path. The literary structure reflected this; often the conceit was that of the master writing to, or answering the questions of, a particular disciple. The internal composition of the texts varies considerably from one author to the next. Some are collections of insights strung together like random pearls; others, such as the Kashf al-mahjub of al-Hujwiri, present a coherent and systematic analysis of Sufism.

Earlier Sufis had relied heavily on the personal relationship of master (shaykh, pir) with disciple (murid, talib) to provide the guidance necessary for spiritual progress. But as the number both of disciples and of famous shaykhs increased, written manuals became invaluable supplements to personal spiritual direction. The manuals preserved the teachings of many of the greatest Sufi guides and made their wisdom available to a larger number of the brethren. While Sufi manuals never supplanted the master-disciple relationship, they did attain a permanent place of influence and honor among Muslim mystics.

In addition to providing spiritual guidance, the Sufi manuals also addressed a number of subsidiary issues of critical importance. The first was the need to legitimize the place of Sufism in the broader spectrum of Islamic religious life. To this end authors such as al-Kalabadhi and al-Qushayri made deliberate efforts to demonstrate that Sufism was in conformity with the orthodox theological synthesis, namely Ash`arism. Al-Sarraj as well took pains to prove that Sufism was completely in tune with the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic legal tradition (shariah).

A further cause of heightened tension between Sufis and the champions of orthodoxy concerned the possible conflict between the roles of Sufi saint and traditional prophet. Sunni Islam presumed that prophethood was the pinnacle of spiritual perfection, exemplified by Muhammad himself. To substantiate this claim, Muslim theology asserted that all prophets possessed the special gift of impeccability (`ismah); each had the power, moreover, to perform a unique miracle (mu`jizah) in order to verify his mission.

Some Sufis, on the other hand, suggested that sainthood was an even more elevated spiritual rank than prophethood because it presumed a unique intimacy with the divine. Most manual writers, however, evolved a less polemical stance, one designed to reinforce the mainstream character of Sufism. They concluded that the highest level of sainthood was only the first level of prophethood. While the prophet was impeccable from birth, the saint was only protected (mahfuz) from committing serious sin, and this only after he or she had attained sainthood. Whereas the miracles of the prophets were unique and indisputable, the miracles of the saints (karamat) were repeatable and subject to satanic influence.

A common objective of all the Sufi manuals is to analyze in depth the various stages and states that make up the Sufi path. Stages are considered by spiritual writers to be levels of permanent growth in the mystical life; states represent the more transient emotional and psychological experiences associated with the various stages. The process of scrutinizing in analytic fashion the stages and states of mystical experience resulted in the creation of a

sophisticated technical vocabulary that provided a basis for common discourse among Sufis of every generation.

The exploration of the stages and states of mystical experience resulted, as well, in the development of highly refined theories of spiritual psychology. Sufi psychologists aimed first and foremost at providing trainees with the means to gain control over the nafs, or lower soul (surah 12:53), which was identified as the satanic element within men and women. Al-Makki describes the nafs as arrogant, deceptive, envious, a beast that wallows in excess.

The Sufi novice was not helpless, however, in his confrontation with the nafs. Men and women possessed an angelic force (malak) sent by God to do battle with the nafs in the arena of the heart (qalb). As al-Muhasibi indicates, both malak and nafs employ similar weapons, notably the various internal impulses (khawatir) that arise in the heart urging one to good or evil.

On occasion the various movements in the heart are quickly identifiable either as the satanic whisperings (waswasah) of the nafs or as the impulses of the malak. Much more difficult, however, are those times when the origin of the khawatir is unclear. For the devil-nafs excels at deluding the soul of the Sufi and seducing him to actions that, while not sinful, deflect him from the road to the greater good. It is in dealing with these spiritual dilemmas that the techniques of Sufi psychology articulated in the manual tradition demonstrate their subtlety and true sophistication.

Al-Ghazali. The effort of many of the manual writers to legitimize Sufism's place in Islam culminates in the work of a man whose contribution to the Islamic religious sciences ranges far beyond mysticism. Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali was born at Tus near the modern Iranian city of Mashhad in 1058. His early training was in jurisprudence (fiqh), but he soon excelled in theology (kalam) and eventually in Arabic philosophy (falsafah), which was exemplified by the Neoplatonism of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna).

A recurring theme in al-Ghazali's work is the relationship between reason and revelation. The great Arab philosophers tilted the balance in favor of reason, insisting that truth was attainable without the aid of revelation. The conclusions arrived at by philosophers, however, did not always conform to the standard orthodoxy derived from the Qur'an. For example, dogmas on the creation of the world from nothing, the resurrection of the dead, God's knowledge of particulars as well as universals—all were called into question by the philosophers.

Al-Ghazali championed the truth of revelation over that of philosophical speculation. He was not, like some fundamentalist extremists, antiphilosophical however. On the contrary, al-Ghazali's fascination with philosophical logic is manifested in many of his works, for he was convinced that philosophy could contribute substantially to Muslims' understanding of law and theology. It was only against the excesses of philosophy that he railed in his Tahafut al-falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), not against philosophical reasoning per se.

Al-Ghazali's influence was enhanced by the political support he received from the ruling authorities, especially the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk, who appointed him professor at the Nizamiyah madrasah in Baghdad in 1091. It was during his professorship at Baghdad, however, that a personal crisis radically transformed the future shape of al-Ghazali's career. Whereas his earlier concerns had been with more theoretical and speculative issues, the focus now shifted to the role of religious experience in the life of the Muslim.

In 1095 al-Ghazali experienced what can only be called an emotional and psychological breakdown. As he described it later in his autobiography, Al-munqidh min al-dalal (The Deliverer from Error), his state of anxiety left him almost catatonic. He suffered terrible doubts about his ability to arrive at any religious truth; more important he was

overwhelmed by the emptiness of external religious ritual and law. Al-Ghazali abandoned his teaching career and sought a solution to his doubts in Sufism, which, he hoped, would provide him with the personal experience of truth or dhawq (lit., "taste").

The success of his quest is attested by his later writings, which foster the integration of an interior life with the life of external observance. Alone, each leads either to excess or to spiritual myopia; together, however, they constitute a life of balance and dynamic spiritual growth. To this end al-Ghazali wrote what was to be his most influential work, the Ihya' `ulum al-din (Revivification of the Religious Sciences), which epitomizes his vision of Islamic life and which remains an integral part of the training of Muslim scholars to this day.

After eleven years of absence from teaching, al-Ghazali was persuaded to return once again to the classroom by the vizier Fakhr al-Mulk, son of his late patron, Nizam al-Mulk. His second career lasted only several years, for he retired to a Sufi convent at Tus before his death in 1111. The measure of his impact on the intellectual life of Islam is impossible to calculate. In the history of Sufism, however, he is especially remembered for having contributed substantially to the acceptance of mystical experience as an integral dimension of Islamic religion.

Other Genres. In addition to the Sufi manuals, other important genres of mystical literature developed in the classical period. Fables, epigrams, epic poems, poetry, aphorisms, all were creative vehicles for mystical expression. Early Qur'an commentators and street preachers had focused on the lives of the prophets for inspiration. This spawned the Qisas al-anbiya' (Tales of the Prophets), collections of lively didactic stories, often with moral themes. In similar fashion the lives of famous Sufis were assembled by mystical writers into biographical dictionaries, which evolved into important companion volumes to the manuals.

Despite the fact that authors rarely distinguished between historical fact and pious fiction, these hagiographic compendia are crucial for our knowledge of the lives and teachings of the great masters of classical Sufism. Individual compilers, moreover, offer important critiques of a number of Sufi movements, mystical theories, and the like.

The first systematic history of the lives of Sufi mystics is ascribed to Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Azdi al-Sulami (d. 1021). His Tabaqat al-sufiyah (Generations of the Sufis) became the basis for the expanded versions of two later Sufis, the Tabaqat al-sufiyah of Abu Isma`il Abd Allah Ansari (d. 1089) and the Nafahat al-uns (Wafts of Pleasure) of Nur al-Din `Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Jami (d. 1492). The most comprehensive work of Sufi hagiography, however, is the prodigious, multivolume Hilyat al-awliya' (Necklace of Saints) of Abu Nu`aym al-Isfahani (d. 1037). Later writers continued the tradition, including Farid al-Din `Attar (d. 1221?) with his Tadhkirat al-awliya' (Biographies of the Saints).

**`Abd Allah Ansari and the epigram.** Many of these authors excelled at more than one genre of mystical literature. `Abd Allah Ansari of Herat, a city in present-day Afghanistan, for example, is noted for important works on mystical theory but most especially for his epigrams, the Munajat (Intimate Conversations). This tiny book, a milestone in Sufi literature, is the vade mecum of countless Persian-speaking Muslims. Although the text appears deceptively simple it contains the kernel of An-sari's complex vision of mystical union.

To appreciate Ansari's contribution to Islamic mysticism, it is essential to place him in the context of the theological debates that resulted in the classical synthesis of al-Ash`ari (d. 935) and his school. Controversies arose in the ninth century over differing interpretations of the Qur'anic verses dealing with freedom and predestination, the nature of divine attributes, and the origins of good and evil. The most influential group defending radical freedom and moral responsibility were the Mu`tazilah, whose views were strongly influenced

by Greek thought. Since human beings are responsible for their deeds, they insisted, God cannot be blamed in any way for human turpitude. Reward and punishment are absolutely just because God himself is just. Furthermore God's justice requires that actions have an intrinsic moral worth that can be recognized by men and women.

The logic of the Mu`tazili view, nevertheless, was challenged by verses in the Qur'an itself that emphasize God's complete omnipotence and question human beings' ability to determine their fates, for God "leads astray whomever he wills and guides whomever he wills" (16:93). A solution proposed by al-Ash`ari and his followers was to choose neither radical freedom nor complete predestination, but rather to affirm both as true. This use of paradox as a hermeneutical tool permeates both theology and mysticism in Islam.

It must be admitted, however, that al-Ash`ari's views leaned more in the direction of predestinarianism than of freedom. He was a staunch proponent of God's complete control over human actions; freedom is little more than God's willingness to allow us to participate in his determination of our fate. It is God alone who first creates our actions and then ascribes them to us.

Even secondary causality is called into question because to assert that nature functions independently according to its own laws ms to ascribe to nature an independent power separate from God, a position smacking of shirk. In defending God's absolute omnipotence, furthermore, al-Ash`ari was obliged to deny the intrinsic goodness or evil of human actions. An action is good or evil only because God has determined it to be so. Lying, for example, is evil because God has so decreed; if he changed his mind lying would be right.

Ansari's theological views were even more conservative than those of al-Ash`ari. As a follower of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), Ansari defended the most literalist interpretations of the Qur'an. Whereas the Mu`tazilah allegorized the anthropomorphic descriptions of God's attributes in the Qur'an, and the Ash`ariyah affirmed their existence, albeit in a way beyond the grasp of human reason, Ansari and the Hanabilah insisted that the verses must be taken at face value. Consequently his positions appeared even more paradoxical than those of the more moderate Ash`ariyah.

As Ansari indicates in the Munajat, God commands us to obey him and then prevents our compliance. Adam and Eve, for example, are seduced not by Satan, but by God. Their seduction is predestined and they are obliged to particpate. Despite the ming victimization of humans by God, however, the Sufis are not to conclude that they are absolved of responsibility for their evil deeds. Paradoxical as it may sound, Ansari recommends that the true attitude of the devoted mystic is that taken by Adam and Eve when they were confronted with the tragedy of their sin. They realized they were God's pawns but blamed themselves for the deed: "And they both said, `O Lord, we have wronged ourselves!'" (surah 7:23).

Ansari moves naturally in the Munajat from a discussion of the paradoxical tension between freedom and predestination to that between good and evil. And he reflects an attitude toward ethics that is characteristic of many of the ecstatic Sufis: whatever God wills for the mystic, be it blessing or curse, intimacy or separation, is good because it comes from God. Such a stance runs counter to the mainstream ethics of Sunni Islam, which locate the guide for human action and the determination of moral worth in the synthesis of Qur'an, hadith, and shari`ah.

For the perfected Sufi, however, there is a higher law, namely the love relationship, that determines action and provides the means to evaluate the goodness or evil of particular behavior. The upshot is that, for the Sufi elite, certain practices are permissible that would be disproved according to the religious law of the community.

Such an attitude has often been cited as proof of the dangerous antinomian tendencies endemic to Sufism. On closer examination, however, such behavior is not that far removed

from the classical Ash`ari synthesis. Al-Ash`ari, we have n, claims that actions are good or evil because God determines them to be so; moreover, if he changed his mind about a particular action its moral worth would change. What one finds in the behavior of a number of Sufis is, in fact, the acting out of this hypothetical case, for the Sufi elite insist that the quality of their love relationship with the divine raises them to a higher tier of ethics, one at times radically different from the lower tier. Ansari counsels the Sufi to move beyond the everyday concerns with reward or punishment, and beyond the common notions of good and evil. The goal is to please the Beloved; that is what constitutes the good.

Ansari goes so far as to claim that the lover-beloved relationship moves one to a plateau on which even the five pillars of Islam appear superfluous. The pilgrimage to Mecca is an occasion for tourism; almsgiving is something that should be left to philanthropists; fasting is an ingenious way to save food; and ritual prayers should be left to old crones. The focus of the mystic should not be the laws and ritual structures of the Islamic community (ummah); it is the love relationship that supersedes all.

Ansari is a dramatic example of the mystic whose basic theological and religious conservatism do not bar him from the most exuberant expressions of union. He is not, however, alone in perceiving that the Sufi adept must often move beyond the constraints of Islamic law. Abu Sa`id ibn Abi al-Khayr (d. 1089) of Mayhana in Khorasan, for example, mirrors as well the same paradoxical approach to religious practice. He began his life as a violent ascetic, isolating himself from normal social intercourse and faithfully observing the obligations of the law. It is said that he was discovered by his father hanging upside down in a pit, reciting the Qur'an.

At the age of forty, however, Abu Sa`id attained gnosis (ma`rifah) and his actions changed dramatically. He and his followers became renowned for their feasting. In place of ritual prayer, communal Sufi devotions were substituted. Once, when questioned by a non-initiate about his attitude toward the pillars of Islam, especially the pilgrimage to Mecca, he replied that it was a waste of time to travel so far simply to circumambulate a stone house (the Ka`bah). Rather, the sacred cube should circumambulate him! These statements, shocking though they were to non-Sufis and even to some of the more sober mystics, were not intended to flout the law. On the contrary, the privileged spiritual elite understood their behavior as that which was enjoined on them by the Beloved.

**The mathnavi: Farid al-Din `Attar.** The epigrams of `Abd Allah Ansari, succinct and accessible to a wide range of people, are in sharp contrast with the poetic genre of mathnavi, which was introduced into Sufism by the Ghaznavid poet Hakim Abu al-Majd Majdud ibn Adam Sana'i (d. 1131?). The rhyming couplets of the mathnavi had previously been made famous in secular literature by the renowned Persian poet Firdawsi in his Shah-namah (The Epic of the Kings). The general structure of Sana'i's mystical mathnavis, the most famous of which is the Hadiqat al-haqiqah (The Garden of Truth), is imitated by later Sufi authors. The framework consists of mystical teachings interspersed with illustrative fables, anecdotes, proverbs, and the like. The different mathnavis vary, however, in length, the quality of their style, and in the organization and development of their themes.

Important as Sana'i's introduction of the mathnavi into Sufism was, he is not remembered as a great stylist. For a true master of the mathnavi form we must turn to the Persian poet and spiritual guide, Farid al-Din `Attar (d. 1221?). `Attar lived most of his life in and around the city of Nishapur, near the modern Iranian city of Mashhad. It is reported that he was killed during the Mongol sack of the city. His name indicates his occupation, that of apothecary, and it appears that he continued in his profession even as he composed his mystical treatises.

It is evident from `Attar's work that he was a man learned in both the religious sciences and secular literature. He demonstrates enormous perspicacity in his treatment of the subtleties of the spiritual life. `Attar's success, however, is due equally to the fact that he possessed the requisite literary skills to mold his ideas into an aesthetic whole of genuine quality. `Attar is poet, storyteller, and spiritual theorist; he entertains, cajoles, and leads the reader through numerous levels of spiritual awareness.

Of his mathnavis the best known is the mythic fable Mantiq al-tayr (The Conference of the Birds). The text operates on a number of levels. On the surface it is a lively fable about a group of birds who decide to k out their king, the Simurgh, of whom they have only the barest recollections. The journey is long and arduous, the path uncertain. Many birds abandon the quest out of weakness, apathy or fear; others perish along the way. Finally thirty birds arrive at the palace of the Simurgh. This event constitutes the pun on which the story is based, for "thirty birds" in Persian is si murgh.

The far more serious level on which the fable operates is that of an elaborate analysis of the Sufi path. Asceticism, illumination, and finally union are explored in depth. The internal structure of the work resembles an ascending spiral staircase. The bird-souls progress upward, often returning to an earlier point, except now at a more advanced level. The birds are not uniform souls but mirror a variety of human personality types. Their strengths and difficulties reflect, moreover, the issues faced by a wide variety of Sufi kers.

The overall power of the work is due to its meticulous organization. It is necessary to study the text closely to appreciate the care with which `Attar develops his multileveled thematic structure. The last section of the work describes the seven valleys through which the tested remnant must pass in order to reach the Simurgh. The final valley is that of fana', "annihilation," where the thirty birds merge with their beloved Simurgh as the moth merges with the flame.

Lyric and mathnavi: Jalal al-Din Rumi. Despite `At-tar's obvious literary and analytic skills, his work is surpassed by the greatest of the Persian mystical poets, Jalal al-Din Rumi (known as Mawlana, "our master"). Rumi was born in Balkh in 1207, the son of Baha' al-Din Walad, who was himself a noted legist, teacher, and spiritual guide. Around 1219, however, Baha' al-Din left Balkh because of the threat of invasion by the Mongols. The family set out on pilgrimage to Mecca, passing through the city of Nishapur where, it is reported, Baha' al-Din and his young son met `Attar, who predicted Rumi's future greatness.

Baha' al-Din settled eventually in Konya in Anatolia (known as Rum, hence the name Rumi). He was warmly received by the ruling Seljuk authorities and resumed his career as teacher and shaykh. Following in his father's footsteps, Jalal al-Din became well versed in the Islamic religious sciences and philosophical theology. After Baha' al-Din's death in 1231, Jalal al-Din assumed his father's teaching post.

Rumi's Sufi training progressed in serious fashion under the tutelage of Burhan al-Din Muhaqqiq, one of his father's disciples. The critical moment in Rumi's spiritual development, however, was his meeting in 1244 with Shams al-Din of Tabriz. For two years they were inseparable, Rumi finding in Shams the vehicle through which to experience the true ecstasy of mystical love. Their relationship was a source of jealousy and scandal among Rumi's family and followers. Abruptly, Shams departed Konya for parts unknown.

Rumi was disconsolate, but, with the help of his son Sultan Walad, he engineered Shams's return. Rumi's rekindled joy was shortlived, however, because Shams disappeared for the last time in 1248, and there is persuasive circumstantial evidence that Shams was murdered, perhaps with the connivance of Rumi's family.

The intense love relationship Rumi shared with Shams was the catalyst for the creation of some of the most extraordinary poetry in the Persian language. Rumi was prolific;

his poetic verses number close to forty thousand, collected in a work that bears the name of his beloved, the Divani Shams-i Tabrizi. He is a master of imagery, ranging from the mundane realities of food, weaving, and the like to more subtle treatments of nature, music, and religious symbols. Prominent, of course, is the image of Shams, "the sun," in whose brilliance and intensity Rumi loses himself. Both the agony of separation and the exhiliration of union ebb and flow throughout his poetry. The emotions evoked run the gamut of human experience. Rumi does not hesitate to shock; anger, cruelty, and vulgar sexuality share the stage with the ecstasy of annihilation in the Beloved, proving that the Sufi quest must not be romanticized. Love not only has the potential to fulfill; it also destroys.

Rumi's other masterpiece, his Mathnavi-yi ma`navi (Spiritual Couplets), was written at the urging of his cherished disciple Husam al-Din Chelebi. Husam al-Din, like many Sufis of the period, discovered in the mathnavis of Sana'i and `Attar a wealth of spiritual wisdom. It was imperative, Husam al-Din believed, for his revered shaykh to preserve his teachings in similar fashion for posterity. Thus Rumi was persuaded to dictate his Mathnavi to Husam al-Din, who transcribed the text and read it back to his master for correction. The final product is substantial, six books totaling almost thirty thousand verses. Several of Rumi's lesser works—letters, discourses, and sermons—have been preserved as well.

Whereas `Attar's works, especially his mathnavis, are noted for their clear structural development, those of Rumi resemble more the stream-of-consciousness style. One must be steeped in Rumi's work before daring to analyze his thought.

The statement is often made that Rumi's Mathnavi is the Qur'an of the Persians. While the main point is the enormous popularity the text has had, and continues to have, in the Persian-speaking world, there is another level on which the comparison is apt. The Qur'an communicates itself primarily in individual, sometimes self-contained, units, not as a structured whole. Similarly, many segments of the Mathnavi have an internal unity of their own. Yet the sections of the text are strung loosely together like a string of pearls of different sizes, shapes, and hues. Themes appear and disappear, only to be addressed again from a different perspective. To k out a unifying structural element in the Mathnavi is perhaps to do an injustice to the intent of the author. Its appeal lies in its fluidity and allusiveness. True, this can be frustrating at times; frustration, however, soon turns to fascination as the reader is lured once again into the complex web of Rumi's thought.

Gnosis and Ibn ‘Arabi

The history of mysticism in Islam is replete with individuals of brilliance and creativity. Among these exceptional personalities, however, one stands out from the rest because of his unique genius. Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-‘Arabi al-Hatimi al-Ta'i was born at Murcia in Muslim Spain in 1165. He is honored with the titles "Al-Shaykh Al-Akbar" ("doctor maximus") and "Muhyi al-Din" ("the revivifier of religion"). Eventually he came to be known under the name Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi.

While still a child, Ibn ‘Arabi and his family moved to Seville, where he received the greater part of his education in the traditional Islamic religious disciplines. He was greatly influenced in his spiritual development by two female Sufis, especially Fatimah of Cordova. A great deal of his mystical insight, however, evolved from visionary experiences, the first occuring during an illness in his youth. Throughout his life he continued to have visions on which he placed a great deal of reliance.

Ibn ‘Arabi's visionary bent is equally evident in his claim to have been initiated into Sufism by the mythic figure Khidr, a mysterious being, said to be immortal, associated with a Qur'anic fable (surah 18) and pre-Islamic legends. Khidr is renowned in Sufism as a saint and guide of exceptional spiritual power; to be chosen as one of his disciples is a rare privilege.

In his early twenties Ibn ‘Arabi traveled extensively throughout Spain and North Africa and broadened his intellectual perspectives. He describes a unique meeting in Cordova with the greatest of the Muslim Aristotelian philosophers, Ibn Rushd (known as Averroës in the Latin West). The encounter is heavy with symbolism, for Ibn Rushd represents the total reliance of philosophers on reason (`aql), while Ibn ‘Arabi champions gnosis (ma`rifah) as the only means to experience the fullness of truth.

In 1201 Ibn ‘Arabi left Spain and North Africa for the last time, undertaking travels that brought him to many important centers of Islamic learning. In 1223 he settled in Damascus, where he remained until his death in 1240. His mausoleum continues to be an important pilgrimage center.

Ibn ‘Arabi is unique because he was both an original thinker and synthesizer. Many of his ideas resonate with earlier intellectual developments in Sufism and in philosophical theology. His greatness, however, lies in his ability to systematize Sufi theory into a coherent whole with solid metaphysical underpinnings. Ibn ‘Arabi, therefore, should not be viewed as an eccentric outside of the mainstream, but rather as the genius who was able to gather together various strains of mystical philosophy and to mold them into an esthetic whole.

The corpus of Ibn ‘Arabi's work is massive, which complicates considerably any attempt at a comprehensive analysis of his thought. In addition his style is often dense, reflecting the esoteric nature of his ideas. Two of his most influential works are Al-futuhat al-makkiyah (The Meccan Revelations), which he was ordered to write in a visionary experience while on pilgrimage, and Fusus al-hikam (The Bezels of Wisdom).

Wahdat al-Wujud. The central concept in Ibn ‘Arabi's system is wahdat al-wujud, "unity of being." Scholars have debated whether Ibn ‘Arabi intends this term to describe a monist system, where nothing exists but the One. An affirmative response does not indicate, however, a dramatic shift in Muslim metaphysics because, in reality, Ibn ‘Arabi is only taking the Ash`ari synthesis to its logical extreme. The Ash`ari insistence on God's total omnipotence and control over the universe implies that God is the only true agent. It is not illogical, therefore, to suggest, as Ibn ‘Arabi does, that God must also be the only true existent.

The divine essence in itself is completely transcendent; it is, in fact, unknowable, the la ilaha ("there is no god") of the Muslim confession of faith. This plane of unconditioned unity (ahadiyah), however, is not the only plane on which divine reality exists. The plane of oneness (wahidiyah) is characterized by a unity in plurality, a unity in which the qualities of all possible existents reside. Once again the ultimate solution is paradox. The divine is undifferentiated and totally transcendent; yet in the divine are discovered the qualities of all potential beings.

Reality, therefore, is tiered, a progression of spiritual manifestations. Ultimate reality is the theos agnostos, the "unknown God," from which emerge the different planes of divine existence, culminating in the God of revelation, Allah, the illa Allah ("but God"), of the confession of faith. The creation of the cosmos occurs, not out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo) as traditional Western theology would have it, but because of the yearning of the unknown God to escape from isolation. A hadith dear to Sufis encapsulates God's intent: "I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the creation in order that I might be known".

Creation, therefore, is the manifestation of the One in the plurality of created beings. God's sigh of longing breathes forth the universe, the mirror in which he comes to know himself. The agency through which the cosmos is produced is the divine creative imagination. The process is not static but dynamic, for in the same way that God exhales, he inhales, drawing creation back to its source in the One. Gnosis for the Sufi, therefore, entails

progress along the path from illusion (the naive conviction that he is an independent reality distinct from God) to insight into creation's identification with God's self-revelation.

The Perfect Human Being. The mirror that the One projects forth is not uniformly polished. The created being in which the Absolute becomes most fully conscious of itself is man. And there is in every generation al-insan al-kamil, the Perfect Human Being, who is the link between Absolute Being and the created realm. Through the mediacy of the Perfect Human Being the dynamic process of emanation and return takes place. In fact, the process would be impossible without that being, the most perfected Sufi, the qutb ("pole"), the axis around which the cosmos revolves.

Ibn ʿArabi's emanationist view of creation reinterprets, moreover, the traditional understanding of the goal of mysticism in Islam. Many early Sufis described the path as a growth in loving union between a soul, which retains its essential independence, and the Beloved who, while being the source of creation, is distinct from it. For Ibn ʿArabi and his followers, the goal is not primarily love but wisdom, to move from the illusion of plurality to the gnostic insight that one has always been, and will continue to be, totally united with the source of all being.

Wahdat al-wujud has enormous implications, furthermore, for the Sufi understanding of human freedom and ethics. Nothing manifests itself in creation unless God wills it. This is an axiom of both Ibn ʿArabi and traditional Islam. In Ibn ʿArabi's system, the archetypes of all potential beings exist in the One. When these potential realities are actualized in the illusory realm of plurality, they function completely in accord with their celestial archetypes. In the realm of the created world, therefore, individual free choice is illusory. All change is predetermined by the archetype of the particular reality. Freedom exists only insofar as all creatures participate in the freedom of the One, with which they are ultimately identified.

Ethics, in addition, must be n in the light of the determinative power of the celestial archetypes. In the realm of creation, the law (shari`ah) delineates what actions are in accord with God's revelation. From the perspective of the One, however, all actions are good since they are manifestations of the divine creative imagination and are in accord with the celestial archetypes. Culpability is relative because it is operative only in the realm of created illusion. Eventually all return to the undifferentiated One; thus there is no eternal reward or punishment in the traditional sense.

The complexity of Ibn ʿArabi's thought defies summation in a few brief paragraphs. Nor have scholars in the field yet gained sufficient mastery of his work to unravel his convoluted and sometimes contradictory ideas. What is clear, however, is the pervasive influence of Ibn ʿArabi and his school on later Sufism. Disciples such as Sadr al-Din Qunawi (d. 1274) in Anatolia and commentators on his work such as `Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Jami (d. 1492) in Persia disseminated his ideas throughout the Islamic world.

Sufi Fraternities

The history of Sufism is much more than the history of mystical theory and expression. There is a significant social dimension to Islamic mysticism that must be explored if the picture is to be complete. Even many of the early Sufis, individualists though they were, sought out the advice and counsel of their fellow wayfarers. From the very beginning, therefore, companionship (suhbah) was considered essential for progress in the spiritual life. [Suhbah.]

Fluid interaction among Sufis soon evolved into the more structured relationship of master and disciple, adding a new level of social complexity. Not only would disciples visit

their masters, but many also took up residence with them. The earliest formal Sufi convent ms to date from the latter part of the eighth century CE, on the island of Abadan.

Political changes in the Islamic empire contributed to the stabilization of Sufi institutional structures. In the mid-eleventh century the Seljuks wrested control of the Abbasid caliphate from the Shi`i Buyids. The Seljuks were staunch Sunnis who took over the religious educational system of the madrasahs in order to reindoctrinate the intelligentsia with Sunni orthodoxy. The public support they provided for Sufi establishments afforded the Seljuks more control over the type of Sufi piety inculcated in the new recruits, but at the same time, government patronage ensured the survival of the various Sufi institutions.

By the thirteenth century, several types of Sufi establishments had evolved, each with a different general purpose. The ribat was a residence or training center, which originated in the Arab regions of the empire. Khanqahs were similar establishments rooted in the more persianized environment of Khorasan; they eventually spread, however, into the Arab centers. The more serious training took place in the zawiyahs, which usually housed a teaching shaykh; khalwah is the name given to the retreat of a single Sufi or dervish. (Dervish is derived from the Persian word for Sufi, darvish, "poor," “beggar.”)

More important than the physical environment in which Sufis congregated is the evolving infrastructure of the Sufi communities themselves. In the eleventh century, fluid organizations continued to predominate; their common link was the desire for suhbah and for the guidance of a shaykh. Frequently, a master and his disciples remained a cohesive social unit only until the death of the master, after which the group disbanded.

By the thirteenth century the situation had altered significantly. Many Sufi groups became self-perpetuating social organizations whose central focus was the founder and his teaching. No longer was the survival of the group dependent on a particular living shaykh; authority was passed from shaykh to disciple, thus providing a stable structural basis for the continued growth and development of the community. The new master was the chief custodian of the founder's spiritual legacy and, on occasion, an innovator in his own right. [also Darwish; Khanqah; and Madrasah[.

Silsilahs. These stable social organizations came to be called tariqahs ("ways"), known in English as Sufi orders, fraternities or brotherhoods. Each founding shaykh had his silsilah ("chain"), his spiritual lineage which contributed substantially to his stature in the Sufi community. The silsilah is, more precisely, a genealogy, tracing the names of one's master, of one's master's master, and so on back through history. Often a prominent shaykh would have been initiated more than once, by a number of illustrious Sufis, thus adding additional stature to his spiritual pedigree.

There are two main silsilah groups, which later subdivided into literally hundreds of Sufi fraternities. The first chain, generally considered the more sober of the two, traces its links back to Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd, the famed spiritual guide from whom al-Hallaj eventually broke away. The second, and more intoxicated, silsilah derives from the first great Sufi ecstatic, Abu Yazid al-Bistami. These designations are very general, and membership in either group indicates only a spiritual genealogy, not necessarily an actual attitude toward mystical experience.

The members of the Bistami branch are often called Malamati, "blameworthy." The appellation, however, can be overstressed, for it does not mean that they scorned Islamic law. On the contrary, many were meticulous in their observance. But eventually the name came to describe, in broad terms, those Sufis who eschewed completely all of the public trappings of Sufism and of piety in general; they were characterized by the virtue of absolute sincerity (ikhlas). The Malamatiyah rejected Sufi initiation and the guidance of a shaykh, nor would they engage in public devotional practices common to Sufis. Whatever ritual acts they

performed were carried out in private. Their individualism made them appear to some as suspicious and marginal. The Malamatiyah, nevertheless, should be clearly distinguished from the Qalandariyah, or wandering dervishes, many of whom did engage in practices that made mockery of the religious law and of traditional morality.

The centrality of silsilahs in Sufi fraternities is not completely unique. One discovers an analogous emphasis in the hadith literature, where the literary structure of a hadith has two parts: the chain of transmitters (isnad) and the body of the text (matn). According to Muslim tradition, the authenticity of the hadith is guaranteed by the reliability of the isnad. In the same way that the power of sacred word in the hadith has been preserved by the chain of transmitters, so too do the teachings and powers of a particular shaykh remain alive through his silsilah.

Whether or not the isnads are historically reliable is not a question that need be discussed here. Suffice it to say that the importance of isnads for Muslims is to ground hadiths solidly in the period of the original revelation. Thus there can be no question that the teachings of the hadiths are innovations; rather hadiths are but more detailed insights into God's will already expressed in general terms in the Qur'an.

In similar fashion the silsilahs of Sufi shaykhs provide them with religious legitimacy. Even though the Sufi orders may vary considerably in their teachings and attitudes toward mystical experience, they each can claim, through their spiritual genealogies, to be solidly based upon the foundations of Sufism.

Veneration of Saints. The institutionalization of ta-riqahs and the emphasis on silsilahs enhanced substantially the religious and political position of the master. Whereas in the past the shaykh functioned primarily as an expert and confidant, he now became a repository of spiritual power as well. A shaykh's lineage did not provide simply a list of teachers; it implied that the spiritual power of each of these great Sufis had been transmitted to this last member of the line.

The shaykhs of the great Sufi orders, therefore, took on superhuman qualities. They became known as awliya' (sg., wali), intimates or friends of God. Their spiritual perfection raised them far above the level of their disciples and of the masses of Muslim faithful. The spread of Ibn `Arabi's teaching, particularly the notion of the Perfect Human Being, which was elaborated upon by Ibn `Arabi's intellectual disciples, especially by `Abd al-Karim ibn Ibrahim al-Jili (d. 1428), provided an intellectual framework within which to explain this cosmic role of the saintlike shaykh. Many of the shaykhs of important orders were acknowledged by their followers as the qutb, the "pole" or "axis" around which the cosmos revolves, the Perfect Human Being, the point at which the divine Creative Imagination most fully manifests itself in the world of illusion. The fact that a number of individuals claimed this status at one and the same time was cause for a certain amount of friction and rivalry among the powerful fraternities.

The concept of qutb is linked by Ibn `Arabi and his predecessors with a whole hierarchy of cosmic beings. Al-Hujwiri describes them as the officers of the divine court, made up of three hundred akhyar ("excellent ones"), forty abdal ("substitutes"), seven abrar ("piously devoted ones"), four awtad ("pillars"), three nuqaba' ("leaders"), and one qutb (known also as ghawth, "succor"). Ibn `Arabi's hierarchy is somewhat different in structure. The qutb is joined by two a'immah ("guides"), four awtad, seven abdal, twelve nuqaba', and eight nujaba' ("nobles"). The cosmic hierarchy, regardless of its particular description, is the spiritual power through which the order and continued existence of the cosmos are ensured.

The term wali is often translated as saint; this is misleading because there is no religious hierarchy in Islam empowered to canonize individuals as saints, as one has, for example, in Roman Catholicism. Rather, the status of wali is attained through public

acclamation. There are, nevertheless, analogies between Christian saints and Muslim awliya', insofar as both possess spiritual power that is capable of being transmitted to disciples or devotees. In Islam this power is called barakah ("blessing"). The barakah of a wali has the potential to transform an individual spiritually as well as to provide concrete material blessings. Barakah should be understood as concretely as possible. It is often transmitted through the power of touch, similar to the laying on of hands or the application of relics, practices common in other religious traditions of the West. [For further discussion of the awliya' and barakah, Folk Religion, article on Folk Islam, and Walayah[.

The perfected shaykhs are objects of veneration both during their lives and after their deaths. It is generally accepted that they possess the power of miracles (karamat), although their miracles are subject to satanic influence in a way that the miracles of prophets are not. The extraordinary powers of the awliya' are not diminished in any way after their death; on the contrary, their intercession often appears more efficacious. Consequently the tombs of great Sufi awliya' are vibrant pilgrimage centers to this day.

Ritual Practice. Much has been said thus far about the shaykhs of Sufi orders. What were the general patterns of life of the members of these communities? It is difficult to generalize because of the different character of the various brotherhoods. There are, however, some areas of commonality. The full members of the fraternities committed themselves in obedience to the shaykh, who initiated them into the order and bestowed upon them the patched frock (khirqah), the sign of their entry onto the Sufi path. They were encouraged to subject themselves completely to the master's will, to be like dead bodies in the hands of the body-washers. Some members of orders remained celibate while others married; some lived lives of extreme poverty while others had a very comfortable existence.

Common to most of the Sufi fraternities were ritual practices called dhikr ("remembrance") and sama` ("audition").

Dhikr. The impetus for the practice of dhikr is derived from those Qur'anic verses that enjoin the faithful to remember God often. Among Sufis this duty evolved into a complex exercise performed by an individual or group. Many fraternities put their own particular stamp on the dhikr exercise. Most dhikr techniques, however, involve the rhythmic repetition of a phrase, often Qur'anic, in which one of the names of God appears. In Islam, Allah has one hundred names, ninety-nine of which are known; the hundredth name is hidden. Certain Sufis who ascribed to themselves the rank of qutb claimed to have been blessed with this most precious secret.

The more sophisticated methods of dhikr usually involve breath control, body movements, and a number of other complex techniques to gain control over the five senses as well the psyche and imagination. In some Sufi groups, such as the Naqshbandiyah, dhikr is a private exercise. The goal is to move from vocal dhikr to silent dhikr, with each stage representing a more intense level of union with the Beloved until, at the final stage, dhikr moves to the innermost recesses of one's being and one can no longer distinguish between the one remembering and the Remembered. [Dhikr.]

**Sama`.** Like dhikr, sama` has become identified with Sufi ritual practice. It involves listening to music, usually with a group. The music is often accompanied by Qur'an chants and/or the singing of mystical poetry. The recital is intended to spark a mystical experience within the auditors. Those most affected by the sama` rise up to dance in unison with the music. Depending on the Sufi group, the dance can be a marvel of esthetic movement or the frenetic writhings of the mingly possessed.

From its inception sama` has been controversial among Sufis. No one questions the efficacy of chanting the Qur'an. The doubts arise with music and the singing of mystical love poetry. Music and singing were considered by many shaykhs to be amoral: neither good nor evil by nature. Sama‘ possesses the power, however, to engulf the spirit of the disciples and to seduce them to immoral behavior. Consequently many shaykhs, if they approve of sama‘ at all, insist that only accomplished Sufis be allowed to participate. Novices are warned to beware. [Sama.`]

Dhikr and sama‘ have served an important function outside of the ranks of the full-fledged members of the Sufi orders. The theoretical developments in Sufism from the thirteenth century onward were shaped by the work of Ibn ‘Arabi and his interpreters. The complex and esoteric nature of this school of Sufi thought, however, placed it far beyond the reach of most Muslims. It was the ritual exercises of the orders that helped fill the gap and minister to the immediate spiritual needs of the faithful. Thus Sufism came to represent, for many, not abstruse theory but concrete practice that was accessible to all.

The emphasis on dhikr and sama` has helped to blur the distinction in popular Sufism between mystical experience that is attained after serious spiritual training and experience that is self-induced. Unsophisticated sessions of dhikr and sama`, to this day, often consist of self-hypnosis, hysteria, drug-induced states, and other violent emotions that pass for mystical experience. Despite accusations of vulgarization, dhikr and sama` remain important emotional outlets in the Muslim community and are unique sociological events during which various levels of society find themselves interacting on an equal footing. And in the hands of spiritual adepts, dhikr and sama` remain potent tools for creating an ambiance in which to attain heightened levels of religious experience.

The widespread interest in dhikr and sama` among the Muslim faithful has resulted in increased membership in the Sufi fraternities. These new members, however, should more properly be called affiliates. They perhaps take some training from a shaykh; their primary vehicle for contact with the group, however, is attendance at periodic sessions of dhikr and sama`. Otherwise they lead the normal life of a layman or woman. In parts of the Islamic world today, membership in one Sufi order or another has become for many a social obligation, even though those so affiliated have little interest in, or understanding of mysticism.

Particular orders became associated with different strata of society, geographical regions, and guilds. The Suhrawardiyah, for example, were extremely influential in court circles in thirteenth-century Delhi, while orders such as the Bektashiyah and Khalwatiyah in Turkey had a more popular appeal. The identification of order with social group became so complete that one could be said to be born into a particular fraternity. This did not, however, prevent an individual's eventual shift from one order to another.

The Orders: Individual Characteristics. The role of the shaykh and the ritual exercises of dhikr and sama` are integral elements in almost all of the Sufi orders. The distinctive personalities of the fraternities, however, are as significant as their similar structures and practices. The contrasts are often striking. In Anatolia, for example, the Mawlawiyah (or Mevleviye) and the Bektashiyah represent opposite ends of the spectrum.

Mawlawiyah and Bektashiyah. The Mawlawiyah trace their silsilah to the mystic and poet Jalal al-Din Rumi. Rumi himself, however, did not establish a formal tariqah during his lifetime; rather, it was his son, Sultan Walad, who took upon himself the task of organizing the order. The Mawlawiyah are known for their aesthetic sophistication, both in ritual practice and in mystical poetry. The order's particular identity is derived, of course, from Rumi's Mathnavi and the Divani Shams-i Tabrizi.

Perhaps the most famous aspect of the Mawlawiyah is its ritual sama`, an exquisite combination of music, poetry, and whirling dance (hence their name in the West, "Whirling Dervishes"). It is hard to capture in words the refinement of the choreography. The rhythmic, turning movements of the adepts are mesmerizing and executed with a subtle grace and precision equal to the best of European classical dance. The serene faces of the Sufis, moreover, reflect the depth of the spiritual rapture achieved by the practitioners.

In contrast, the Bektashiyah takes its name from a shadowy figure, Hajji Bektash of Khorasan (d. 1337?). At first the group was loosely organized, but by the fifteenth century it had developed a highly centralized structure. The Bektashiyah are noted for their syncretism; the rituals and beliefs of the order represent an amalgam of Shiism, Byzantine Christianity, esoteric cults, and the like. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Bektashiyah had become associated with the Janissary corps, an elite military unit of slave-soldiers established by the Ottoman sultan Murad I (1360-1389). Despite the heterodox practices of the Bektashiyah, their identification with the powerful and much-feared Janissaries provided them with security from persecution by the orthodox religious authorities. Where the Mawlawiyah attracted a more educated elite, the Bektashiyah appealed to the less literate masses who were fascinated with the magic-like rituals and political power.

Suhrawardiyah and Rifa`iyah. In Iraq, as well, there arose two fraternities with diametrically opposed interpretations of religious experience. The genealogy of the Suhrawardiyah begins with Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi (d. 1168), who was a disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazali. Abu Najib is the author of an important rulebook for novices, Kitab adab al-muridin (Book of the Manners of the Disciples). The text evinces Abu Najib's long experience as a director; his rules are strict and comprehensive, yet attuned to the human frailties of the young and untutored.

The fraternity that bears the name Suhrawardi was founded by Abu al-Najib's nephew, Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs `Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234). Shihab al-Din, the author of the extremely influential work, `Awarif al-ma`arif (Masters of Mystical Insights), is remembered in Sufi circles as a great teacher. Teaching, in fact, became a characteristic note of the fraternity. The Suhrawardiyah made significant inroads into the Indian subcontinent, where its ranks included such important figures as Baha' al-Din Zakariya of Multan (d. 1268).

While the ethos of the Suhrawardiyah is characterized by serious training in the classical Sufi tradition, the Rifa‘iyah or "Howling Dervishes" focus primarily on dramatic ritual. This fraternity springs from the marshlands of southern Iraq, where its founder, Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Rifa‘i (d. 1182), spent most of his life. Contemporary observers describe vividly the bizarre practices engaged in by members of the fraternity: fire-eating; piercing ears, hands, necks, and penises with iron rings; biting heads off live snakes, and so forth. Clearly the appeal of the Rifa‘iyah is primarily emotional.

Shadhiliyah. A fine example of a fraternity that responded to the religious needs of the larger community while cultivating a solid intellectual base in mystical theory is the Shadhiliyah. Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258) began his religious career at Tunis, where he was well known as a preacher. It was there that he founded his order in 1227. Impelled by a vision, he traveled eastward and settled eventually in Egypt, where the Shadhiliyah order came to flourish.

The most famous of the early Shadhili shaykhs is not the founder but the third leader of the group, Ibn ‘Ata' Allah (d. 1309). He was born in Alexandria and spent his early years in the study of hadith and the law. Ibn ‘Ata' Allah's training in the traditional religious sciences made him wary of any involvement with Sufism. His attitude eventually mellowed,

and for twelve years he placed himself under the direction of the second shaykh of the order, Abu al-`Abbas al-Mursi (d. 1287), whom he eventually succeeded.

Ibn ‘Ata' Allah's writings epitomize the spirit of the Shadhiliyah order. On one hand his work is very much in the intellectual tradition of the Ibn ‘Arabi school. For example his book, Lata'if al-minan (Subtle Graces), written in defense of the fraternity and its practices, emphasizes the exalted role of the shaykh as wali and qutb. On the other hand, the true genius of Ibn ‘Ata' Allah is most evident in his collected aphorisms, the Hikam (Maxims). They remain to this day one of the most popular Sufi texts in the Islamic world. Combining the erudition of the scholar with the vibrant, persuasive language of the enthusiast, Ibn ‘Ata' Allah succeeds in communicating complex ideas in a way that is accessible to a wide range of individuals. Like the Munajat of `Abd Allah Ansari, the Hikam of Ibn ‘Ata' Allah must be savored time and time again, for their richness ms almost inexhaustable.

In the same way that Ibn ‘Ata' Allah, through his writings, made the Sufism of the orders more accessible to larger numbers of Muslims, his fraternity as a whole adopted a structural form more in tune with the lives of the laity. Whereas some brotherhoods insisted on the abandonment of one's profession and even of family life, the Shadhiliyah allowed its members to remain involved in the secular world. In this respect, they were precursors of a similar development in the Christian West, when, in the sixteenth century, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, whose members contrary to traditional monastic structures, were intent on fostering contemplatio in actione, contemplation while remaining fully involved in the secular world. Ibn ‘Ata' Allah's Hikam has a place of honor in Islamic spirituality equal to that of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises in Christianity.

There is not sufficient space to describe even briefly all of the great tariqahs that have become part of mainstream Sufism since the thirteenth century. The Qadiriyah, whose eponymous founder, `Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1116), is perhaps the most widely revered saint in all of Islam; the Naqshbandiyah, whose stern Sunni spirit, disseminated in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, has spawned political movements and great poets such as Mir Dard (d. 1785); the music-loving Chishtiyah, Kubrawiyah, and so forth—all have played pivotal roles in the formation of Islamic religious life. [Tariqah for further discussion.]

Decline of the Orders. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, have not been kind to Sufism, especially the Sufism of the orders. A number of factors contributed to the decline: the general secularization of world culture; colonialism, with its concomitant critique of Islamic religion and society; the response of Islamic modernism; and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

The changing political climate had profound effects on the Sufi orders. In Turkey, for example, they were abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1925 because they represented to him all that was corrupt and backward about Islam. Atatürk was in the process of transforming Turkey into a modern nation state from the rubble of the Ottoman empire. The traditional power of the Sufi shaykhs and orders was incompatible with nationalism; the orders, therefore, were eliminated as public institutions.

At times, however, the orders were not victims of political change but its instigators. The Tijaniyah of West Africa and the Sanusiyah of North Africa are prime examples. The Tijaniyah were militant revivalists. They fought bravely against the French in West Africa and eventually established a kingdom of their own during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The Sanusiyah were similarly fundamentalist and militant. For decades they were at odds with Italian colonial power in North Africa. As a counterbalance they sided with the British who eventually invested the shaykh of the Sanusiyah with authority in the region. The

transformation of the shaykh into king of Libya and the accompanying solidification of political power eventually led to the decline of the Sanusiyah as a Sufi movement.

Despite the fact that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sufi groups reflected fundamentalist tendencies, they still became the objects of attack by the ultra-orthodox, of whom the Wahhabiyah of Saudi Arabia are but one example. Among such groups, any ritual practice not explicitly sanctioned by religious law is anathema. The very premise on which Sufism is based, namely union with God, is rejected as un-Islamic. We today in many of the most vibrant Islamic revivalist movements a similar tendency to espouse the most puritanical forms of literalist religion. In such a world Sufism has little place.

In the Indian subcontinent, the involvement of many hereditary pirs (i. e., shaykhs) with Sufism has been based, in the modern period, more on family status, wealth, and influence than on any serious interest in mysticism. A backlash was inevitable. Muhammad Iqbal, one of the fathers of modern Muslim intellectual life in the subcontinent, rejected Sufism because of the corruption he perceived. He also reacted strongly against the Sufi doctrine of wahdat al-wujud, because it entailed the negation of the self: if the self is nonexistent, why confront the problems of human existence? Nevertheless, his Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, published in 1930, reflects Sufi emphases on interiority, although his goal was to reinterpret Islam in humanistic terms that harmonized the spiritual and material realms of existence.

Attacks on Sufism are not new; they have occurred throughout the history of the tradition. The dramatic decline of Sufism in the modern period, however, is due as much to external as to internal forces. The intimate contacts between the Islamic world and the European West resulted in virulent critiques of Islamic religious practice, especially devotionalism. Muslim reactions were varied: some accepted the critique and mimicked Western secular societies (Atatürk's Turkey, for example); some reasserted their identity by returning to what was believed to be true Islam, devoid of Sufi accretions (the Wahhabiyah, for example); others, such as the Muslim modernist Muhammad `Abduh and his successors, proposed various more moderate plans for the adaptation of Muslim society to the demands of the modern world.

All of these responses, however, possessed anti-Sufi elements, for most rejected Sufi ritual practice and devotionalism as either non-Muslim or antimodern. Moreover, the power of the Sufi shaykhs over masses of the faithful was n by most to be counterproductive to modernization and to the development of a functioning secular state, for the shaykhs were often perceived as proponents of superstition, religious emotionalism, and outmoded power structures.

Mysticism in modern Islam is not an arid wasteland but rather more like a fallow field. There have been important modern teaching shaykhs such as Ahmad al-`Alawi (d. 1934), whose influence is still felt in North Africa. Moreover, the popular piety of Sufism still flourishes in many parts of the Islamic world, including North Africa, Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, and Indonesia. The great tradition of vernacular poetry, established by master artists such as the Turkish mystic Yunus Emre (d. 1321), continues to produce a rich literature. Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Indonesia—every corner of the Islamic world has produced its local poet-saints.

Doubtless Sufism has become increasingly more identified with popular ritual practice than with formal spiritual training. The transformation of Sufism into a mass movement could not help but lead to a certain vulgarization. There continue to arise, nevertheless, individual masters whose commitment to the path is reminiscent of the great figures of the classical period. Classical Sufi literature survives because it still has the ability to touch the spirits of modern men and women. It is in this continued interaction between shaykh and murid that hope for the future of Sufism resides.

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II

MYSTICISM[٢]**.** No definition could be both meaningful and sufficiently comprehensive to include all experiences that, at some point or other, have been described as "mystical." In 1899 Dean W. R. Inge listed twenty-five definitions. Since then the study of world religions has considerably expanded, and new, allegedly mystical cults have sprung up everywhere. The etymological lineage of the term provides little assistance in formulating an unambiguous definition. In the Greek mystery cults, muein ("to remain silent") probably referred to the secrecy of the initiation rites. But later, especially in Neoplatonic theory, the "mystical" silence came to mean wordless contemplation. Even this "contemplation" does not coincide with our own usage of that term, since theoria denotes speculative knowledge as well as what we call contemplation.

Nor does the early Christian term mustikos correspond to our present understanding, since it referred to the spiritual meaning that Christians, in the light of revelation, detected under the original, literal meaning of the scriptures. Eventually the idea of a meaning hidden underneath surface appearances was extended to all spiritual reality (the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, even nature itself as expressive of God's majesty). Yet the strictly private character that we so readily associate with the term mystical was never part of it.

Sometime between the fourth and the fifth centuries, the Christian meaning began to absorb the Greek connotations of silence and secrecy. For Dionysius the Areopagite, the influential Syrian (?) theologian, mystical theory consisted of the spiritual awareness of the ineffable Absolute beyond the theology of divine names. Still, even for him, mystical insight belonged essentially to the Christian community, not to private speculation or subjective experience. Contrary to this objective, communal meaning, Western Christianity, mostly under Augustine's impact, eventually came to understand the mystical as related to a subjective state of mind. Thus Jean de Gerson, the fifteenth-century chancellor of the Sorbonne, described mystical theology as "experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love." Here we witness the formulation of the modern usage of a state of consciousness that surpasses ordinary experience through the union with a transcendent reality.

Characteristics. With such a wide range of meanings, it is not surprising that commentators disagree about the characteristics of the mystical experience. Those mentioned in William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience rank among the most commonly accepted. Ineffability emphasizes the private, or at least incommunicable, quality of the experience. Mystics have, of course, written quite openly and often abundantly about their experience. But, by their own testimony, words can never capture their full meaning. This raises a delicate problem of interpretation to which we shall return. Secondly, James mentions the noetic quality of the experience. To be sure, mystical insight hardly ever augments theoretical knowledge. Nevertheless its insight suffuses a person's knowledge with a unique, all-encompassing sense of integration that definitely belongs to the noetic order. This point deserves emphasis against those who assert that mysticism is the same everywhere and that only the postmystical interpretation accounts for the difference. Distinctions begin with the noetic qualities of the experiences themselves. The pasivity of the mystical

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.[٢] Louis. Dupre, *MYSTICISM*, Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol10, p.245-261 (Second Edition, Vol 9, P.6341 - 6354)

experience may well be its most distinctive characteristic. Its gratuitous, undeserved nature stands out, however much the privileged subject may have applied himself to ascetic exercises or meditative techniques. Once the higher power takes possession, all voluntary preparation appears to lose its efficacy. Transiency, a more controversial characteristic, has, I think justifiably, been challenged, for great mystics have remained for prolonged periods in enhanced states of consciousness. Intermittent intensive experiences figured therein as moments of a more comprehensive surpassing awareness. Perhaps we should speak of the rhythmic, rather than the transient, quality of mystical life.

To James's four characteristics we may add a fifth: integration. Expanded beyond its ordinary limits, the mystical consciousness somehow succeeds in overcoming previously existing opposition in its integration with a higher reality. This, however, should not be interpreted to mean that all restrictions cease to exist. Some of them clearly maintain a sense of transcendence within the union. This is precisely what gives them their distinctly religious character.

Identity and Difference. That a "common factor" underlies the most diverse spiritual theologies has been asserted with great emphasis by such writers as René Guénon, Aldous Huxley, Frithjof Schuon, and Alan Watts. Some assumption of identity also seems to direct the thought of several Indian philosophers. In the West at least, the theory rests on the general principle that only subsequent interpretations distinguish one mysticism from another. Each mystic unquestionably tends to interpret his experience in the light of the theological or philosophical universe to which be belongs. Moreover, the nature of his spiritual quest usually shapes the experience. But to conclude therefrom that the interpretation remains extrinsic is to deny the experience a specific, ideal content of its own and to reduce it to mere sensation. Experience itself is distinctly cognitive and intentionally unique. As Gershom Scholem once pointed out, there is no mysticism-in-general; there are only particular mystical systems and individuals, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and so forth.

The specific quality of the experience in mystical individuals or schools does not, of course, exclude a kind of family resemblance in this variety. A denial of similarity has induced traditional interpretations to study mystical schools exclusively from the perspective of their own theological principles. Thus, for example, R. C. Zaehner's controversial Mysticism (1957) ranks mystical schools according to their proximity to orthodox Christian love mysticism. Alternatively, the assumption of a genuine similarity of experiences enables us to consider a variety of phenomena under some general categories without reducing them to simple identity. Such a general discussion would include nonreligious as well as religious mysticism, even though basic differences separate them. The present essay focuses only on religious mysticism. But a few words must be said about so-called nature mysticism, a term unrelated to the distinction, current in Roman Catholic theology, between "natural" (or acquired) and "supernatural" (or infused) mysticism. Nature mysticism refers to the kind of intense experience whereby the subject feels himself merging with the cosmic totality. Now, a mystical experience of the cosmos may also be religious. But in the religious experience a sense of transcendence persists throughout the experience of cosmic union either with regard to nature as a whole or to its underlying principle. Some descriptions of romantic writers (John F. Cooper, William Wordsworth, Jean Paul) seem to express such a mystical awareness of nature. We also find traces of it in Turner and in the nineteenth-century painters of the Hudson River school. The artist most remembered for his mystical descriptions of nature may well be Richard Jeffries. In his case the distinction between the religious and the nonreligious is particularly hard to maintain. In other cases any religious equation of cosmic-mystical experiences with what John of the Cross or the Bhagavadgita expressed would be clearly inappropriate. Nevertheless, to deny any resemblance between the intense, unifying

experience of nature and that of a transcendent presence would be absurd. [See Aesthetics, article on Philosophical Aesthetics.]

At this point the problem of narcotically induced states presents itself. [See Psychedelic Drugs.] Must we dismiss them as not mystical or at least as not religiously mystical because of their chemical origin? Such a simplistic categorization would be a blatant instance of the "genetic" fallacy. Instead of describing the phenomenon itself, we would then be satisfied to evaluate it according to its presumed origin. Of course, any mental state introduced without spiritual preparation is unlikely to foster spiritual development, and, if habitual, the reliance on chemical means may permanently obstruct growth. But however beneficial or detrimental this eventual impact upon personality may be, there can be no doubt that in a religious context chemicals may induce states of undeniably religious-mystical character. Thus the ritual consumption of peyote cactus buttons, dating back to pre-Columbian times, has undoubtedly played a significant role in the religious awareness of native Americans and has since the end of the nineteenth century been instrumental in remythologizing the cult.

Similarly, experiences resulting from pathological psychic conditions (e.g., manic depression, hysteria) should not per se be excluded from the mystical. Nor should these or drug-induced states be considered separately from "nature" or religious mysticism. On the latter alone we shall concentrate. The typology here presented considers only the mystical aspect of various religions: it claims neither adequacy in the general area of religion nor completeness in the classification of mystical religion.

Mysticism of the Self. Mysticism belongs to the core of all religion. Those religions that had a historical founder all started with a powerful personal experience of immediate contact. But all religions, regardless of their origin, retain their vitality only as long as their members continue to believe in a transcendent reality with which they can in some way communicate by direct experience. The significance of such an experience, though present in all religion, varies in importance. Christianity, especially in its reformed churches, attaches less significance to the element of experience than other faiths do. In Vedantic and Samkhya Hinduism, on the contrary, religion itself coincides with the kind of insight that can come only from mystical experience. Their particular concept of redemption consists in a liberation from change and from the vicissitudes of birth and death. Their craving for a state of changeless permanence aims not at some sort of unending protraction of the present life but rather at the extinction of all desire in this life. Hindu spirituality in all its forms displays an uncommonly strong awareness of the sorrowful quality of the human condition. Apart from this common temper and an acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, Hinduism presents such a variety of religious doctrines and practices that a single name hardly applies. Still, a similar, inward-directed mystical tendency warrants discussion under a single title.

The original Vedic religion with its emphasis on sacrifice and rite appears rather remote from what we usually associate with the term mysticism. Yet two elements in its development strongly influenced the later, more obviously mystical direction. First, forms of meditation became at some point acceptable substitutes for the performance of the actual sacrifice and were held to yield equally desirable benefits. Though such forms of concentration had little in common with what we understand today by contemplation, they nevertheless initiated an interiorization that Hinduism would pursue further than any other religion (Dasgupta, 1972, p. 19). Second, the term brahman, which originally referred to the sacred power present in ritual and sacrifice, gradually came to mean a single, abstractly conceived Absolute. The search for a primal unity is already obvious in some Vedic texts (e.g., the Creation Song, which speaks of "that one thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature"). The subordinate status of the gods ("The gods are later than this world's

production," Rgveda 10.129) may have favored the drive toward unity. Polytheism, though abundantly present, had remained spiritually so undeveloped that it did not obstruct the road toward spiritual unity.

In the Upanisads (eighth to fifth century BCE) the unifying and the spiritualizing tendencies eventually merged in the idea of an inner soul (atman), the Absolute at the heart of all reality to which only the mind has access.

> *The inner Soul of all things, the One Controller,*
> *Who makes his one form manifold—*
> *The wise who perceive Him as standing in oneself,*
> *They, and no others, have eternal happiness!*
> *(Katha Upanisad 5.12)*

This is not a metaphysical theory, but a mystical path to liberation. It requires ascetical training and mental discipline to overcome the desires, oppositions, and limitations of individual selfhood. "As a man, when in the embrace of a beloved wife, knows nothing within or without, so this person, when in the embrace of the intelligent Soul, knows nothing within or without" (Brha-daranyaka 4,3.22). Her lies the origin of the advaita (nondualist monism that would become dominant in classical Hinduism). The Mandukya Upanisad anticipates the later, radical expressions in its description of the highest state of consciousness as one beyond dreamless sleep. Above all, it equated the deeper self (atman) thus discovered with brahman itself. This deeper self tolerates no subject-object opposition. If taken literally, this state would eliminate consciousness itself and with it the very possibility of a "mystical" state. Yet such a total elimination of personal consciousness remains an asymptotic ideal never to be reached but to be approached ever more closely. The three aspects of brahman (sat-cit-ananda) that even extreme monists distinguish include two that are clearly conscious. Even if any distinction beyond the One were to be a mere illusion, as in the extreme interpretation of maya (originally, the created world itself) given by Sankara (eighth century CE), it still remains an opposition to indiscriminate Unity. Metaphysical speculation in classical Hinduism may occasionally have surpassed its mystical tendency. But that there was a religious experience at the basis of this extreme monism cannot be doubted.

> The starting-point of Sankara and the Samkhya-Yoga is the experience of the immortality of the soul; and immortality in this case does not mean the infinite prolongation of human life in time: that is Samsara which the Hindus regard rather as a living death; it is death-in-life, not life-in-death. It means rather an unconditioned and absolutely static condition which knows nothing of time and space and upon which death has no hold; and because it is not only pure Being, but also pure consciousness and pure bliss, it must be analogous to life. (Zaehner, 1962, p. 74)

Of course, not all the Upanisads were radically monist in their expression (Svetasvatara is clearly not), nor was the Vedantic theology the only mysticism of the self in India. The Samkhya-Yoga mentioned in the above passage advocates a radical dualism. It recognizes two irreducible principles of reality: prakrti, the material principle and source of energy, cause of both the material world and psychic experience, and purusa, discrete units of pure consciousness similar to the atman of the Upanisads. In contrast to cosmic intellect (mahat), ego-consciousness (ahamkara), and mind (manas) as the source of perception and action, the multiplicity of individual purusas exists independently of the cosmic forces altogether. Yet purusa must be liberated from a confusion with prakrti by means of concentrated effort. Samkhya thought, although it has no place for deity and is specifically

atheistic, was assimilated into the age-old tradition of yoga, providing the practice with a soteriological and cosmological framework. This mystical self-isolation recognizes no absolute One (brahman/atman) beyond the individual spirit. Liberation here means the opposite of merging with a transcendent Self. In its pure form, Samkhya-Yoga, far from leaning toward pantheist monism (as Vedantic spirituality does), results in the most extreme individualism. If the idea of God appears at all, it is as that of one purusa next to all others, their model insofar as God is entirely free of cosmic contamination. But we must avoid tying the Yoga techniques to the later Samkhya theology: they were practiced also in non-dualist or in the so-called qualified-dualistic (Visistadvaita) systems.

What are these qualified-dualistic systems that make up the third school of Hindu mysticism? It seems hazardous to ground them in theological theories. To be sure, each mystical system contains an interpretation as an essential part of the experience, but these interpretations cannot be simply transferred into the kind of logically coherent systems for which we usually reserve the name theology. A mystical theology is less concerned about logical consistency and sharply defined concepts than about adequate translations of the actual experience. This is particularly the case in a tradition wherein the mystical element constitutes most of the core of the religion itself. Hence in describing such later writers as Ramanuja (eleventh century CE) as "qualified dualists," we should be aware that we are referring more to a practical-devotional than a speculative-metaphysical attitude. Ramanuja may never have abandoned the metaphysical assumptions of the monist tradition in which he grew up. But finding absolute monism inadequate for the practice of spiritual life, he reaffirmed the traditional concept of a God endowed with personal attributes (saguna brahman), instead of the attributeless absolute substance (nirguna brahman). God thereby is not merely a model but also a redeemer who assists the soul on its path to liberation.

In thus qualifying the monist doctrine, Ramanuja was inspired by what the Bhagavadgita (c. second century BCE) had assumed throughout. This mystical poem, perhaps the finest spiritual work to come from the East, is hard to classify by Western canons. The narrative assumes a clearly theistic position: the god Visnu incarnated in Krsna exhorts the hero Arjuna on the eve of battle with his stepbrother to take heart and fight. But the message he delivers ranges from traditional piety and observance of the ancient rites to the monism of the Vedanta, combined with the dualistic cosmology of Samkhya-Yoga. The work is a synthesis in all respects. Not only does it unite the monist and theistic strands, but it also presents a method of combining the active with the contemplative life. It advises a mental discipline that enables a person to act with total detachment from the fruits of his deed. By itself, the active life (karman) weaves its own web of causes and effects, entailing an endless cycle of birth and death—the very essence of what a person seeks to be liberated from. Yet various kinds of yoga detach the mind from this natural determination, while still allowing a person to fulfill the obligations of his station in life. Through equanimity of emotions, holy indifference, and purity of heart, even the active person will come to detect the one presence of brahman in all things. The Gita is not a manual of yogic practice. It is a mystical work that culminates in a vision of God. A most powerful theophany completes Krsna's description of God's presence in the world (chap. 11). Still the poem concludes with the sobering advice to seek God in the ordinary way of piety rather than through self-concentration. The advice was taken up by the bhakti movement, which produced some of the finest flowers of Hindu spirituality and which continues to nourish much of Indian piety today.

The Mysticism of Emptiness: Buddhism. It seems difficult to conceive of two religious doctrines more different from one another than Hinduism, especially Samkhya, and Buddhism. In one, we find a quest for an absolute self (atman, purusa); in the other, the obliteration of the self (anatman/anatta—no soul). Yet upon closer inspection the two appear

to have a great deal in common. Both are systems of salvation, rooted in a profoundly pessimistic attitude about the changing world of everyday existence, and they aim at a condition of changelessness that surpasses that existence. Moreover, their adherents mostly hope to attain this salvation through enlightenment prepared by moral discipline and mental concentration. In the more radical schools the quest for a unified state of mind leads to some form of practical monism and, in Indian Mahayana Buddhism no less than in "classical" Hinduism, a theoretical monism. Any kind of "grace"—which would introduce a new dualism—is thereby excluded. Even those parts of the tradition that deviate from these rigorous principles appear to have some common features. Amida Buddhism advocates a faith in the "saving Buddha" that strongly resembles bhakti Hinduism.

Meanwhile, the goal of enlightenment is conceived in very different ways. The Buddhist description both of the experience and of the path that leads to it is characterized by a spare simplicity as well as by a persistent reluctance to use any but negative predicates. For our purposes it is not necessary to enter into the basic tenets of the theory. Their development varies from the Hinayana to the Mahayana doctrines. But even in the Theravada tradition, the Eightfold Path of virtue concludes with "right concentration," which, in turn, must be obtained in eight successive forms of mental discipline (the dhyanas). Once again we are confronted with a faith that from its origins is headed in a mystical direction. The three negative terms—nonattainment, nonassertion, nonreliance—define a state of utmost emptiness by which Nagarjuna's Madhyamika school (150 CE) described enlightenment. Emptiness appears, of course, also in Hinayana schools, as the principal quality of nirvana, the supreme enlightenment. But with the Mahayana schools the emphasis on emptiness, even in the preparatory stages, becomes particularly strong. Nirvana itself thereby ceases to be an independent realm of being: it becomes a particular vision of the phenomenal world. Nonattainment consists in emptying the self of all personal qualities, desires, and thoughts, indeed of all that might be considered to comprise a "self." For ultimate reality is unconditioned and void of all defining distinctions. If this concept is understood ontologically, there is no substantial soul; if understood epistemologically, there is no way of knowing reality as long as the notion of subject remains; if understood ethically, there is no expression of ultimate reality as long as one's desires condition one's existence. As the late Mahayana poet Santideva wrote:

> The Stillness (Nirvana) lies in surrender of all things, and my spirit longs for the Stillness; if I must surrender all, it is best to give it for fellow-creatures. I yield myself to all living creatures to deal with me as they choose; they may smite or revile me for ever, cover me with dust, play with my body, laugh and wanton; I have given them my body, why shall I care. Let them make me do whatever works bring them pleasure; but may mishap never befall any of them by reason of me.
>
> (quoted in Ananda Coomaraswamy's
> *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism,*
> New York, 1964, p. 321)

Beyond wisdom, then, the Buddhist ideal requires compassion, an attitude rooted in the deep awareness that all beings are interconnected. It is this compassion that inspired the bodhisattva vocation in Mahayana Buddhism.

As Nagarjuna defined it, nonassertion became the logical counterpart of the emptiness doctrine. The Madhya-mika paradoxes reveal an intense awareness of the ineffable quality of ultimate truth. No expression is definitive, not even the Four Noble Truths on which Buddhism is founded. The entire Dharma itself, the doctrine, is no more than a dream, a vague echo. To be sure, the conception of an ineffable absolute is also present in Hinayana

Buddhism, as the following Udana statement clearly asserts: "There is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded; and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, no escape could be shown here for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded" (Buddhist Texts through the Ages, ed. Edward Conze, Oxford, 1954, p. 95).

Yet the Mahayana schools drew more radical conclusions. For the Madhyamika nirvana consists mostly of sets of contradictories, both of which are negated. To Nagarjuna, nirvana is logical "nonsense" to which the principle of contradiction does not apply. One may read this as a program of extreme skeptical philosophy. It is, in fact, a powerful assertion of transcendence in which all distinctions vanish. For the Madhyamika masters, nirvana lies beyond the total peace experience: it has become the Absolute in itself, the undivided Oneness of the ultimate reality. No longer separated from conditioned existence, the Mahayana nirvana becomes indistinguishable from the samsaric realm of phenomenal (and therefore illusory) reality. The Buddhist negation, far more radical than a mere declaration of absence, leaves no common space wherein the Absolute could be compared with any positive qualities. It attempts the logically impossible, namely, to overcome the very interconnectedness of all dependent being and, since all that exists is dependent, of existence itself. Nothing remains here but the road to total silence. Salvation comes through wisdom, but clearly the wisdom here is the opposite of cognitive—it consists in mystical silence.

The ways to emptiness vary. Mental training by the confrontation of paradoxes has been mentioned. Other ways, especially Yogacara Buddhism, emphasize the attainment of "pure thought." This consists not in thinking about something but rather in the insight that thought is not in any object but in a subject free of all objects. Yogacara pursues the basic truth of emptiness in a practical rather than a logico-metaphysical way.

Of particular importance here is Ch`an (Jpn., Zen) Buddhism, a doctrine imported into China by the Indian Bodhidharma that later spread to Japan. Most consistent of all in its pursuit of emptiness, it rejected all dependence (nonreliance), including the one based on the Buddha's own words. Indeed, the very desire for enlightenment must be abandoned, according to the famous Zen master Dogen. The name Ch`an, or Zen, derived from dhyana (Pali jhana), indicates the importance of mental concentration. But Zen also requires a systematic surpassing of reason. At an early stage in his training the disciple is given a koan, a paradoxical statement that baffles reason and for which he must find a "higher" sense. Once the mind has become cleared of the ordinary apparatus of conscious thought, unconscious elements emerge from its subliminal depths. Zen masters refer to this stage of hallucinations as makyo—the demonic universe—and advise the student not to dwell on any extraordinary experiences. Their advice agrees with the attitude recommended by Christian spiritual directors to mystics passing through the so-called "illumination" stage with regard to visions and voices. All this prepares a state of unification in which the mind gradually sheds the patterns of oppositional consciousness present in desire, fear, prejudice, or even objective conceptualization. C. G. Jung once suggestively described it as "a breakthrough by a consciousness limited to the ego-form, into the non-ego-like self." In the experience of total unity the self becomes reduced to a state of pure perceptiveness. This occurs in the final stage, satori, enlightenment itself, often referred to as kensho, the ability to see the essence of things. We might perhaps translate it as "suchness" or "ultimate reality" (the Sanskrit term tathata, used for the one reality that constitutes the entire universe, coincides in Mahayana Buddhism with nirvana itself).

Most typical of that final state of emptiness as Zen Buddhists conceive of it is that it results not in a withdrawal from the real but in an enhanced ability to see the real as it is and to act in it unhampered by passion and attachment. Thus emptiness creates a new worldliness. Can such a state be called mystical? Not if one reserves the term for a direct contact with an Absolute that can be described by positive attributes. But such a restriction is not warranted.

Any form of religious mysticism claims a direct contact with the Absolute. How it defines this Absolute depends on its particular outlook. Judaism and Christianity are religions of the word; Buddhism is a religion of silence that renounces all ways of naming the Absolute. Even to demand the presence of grace as a specific expression of a divine benevolence is to deny Buddhism the right to conceive of the Absolute as lying beyond any form of expression. Meanwhile, the function of what Christians call "grace" does not remain unfulfilled, as appears in the attitude of thanksgiving that shapes the Buddhist monk's life as much as that of his Western counterpart. In thanking the nameless source of all goodness, the Buddhist professes the presence of a benevolent Absolute.

Of course, here as in other cases the outsider is unable to decide to what extent religion blossoms into actual mystical experience. What counts is the possibility it presents of an intense, direct contact with the Absolute, and the methodic way that a particular religion offers for realizing this encounter. Not every form of Zen may be called mystical or even religious, any more than the practice of yoga in Hindu culture or, for that matter, the study of Neoplatonic theory.

Mysticism of the Image: Eastern and Early Western Christianity. Unlike some other religions, Christianity has never equated its ideal of holiness with the attainment of mystical states. Nor did it encourage seeking such states for their own sake. Nevertheless, a mystical impulse undeniably propelled it in its origin and determined much of its later development. The synoptic Gospels present Jesus as dwelling in the continuous, intimate presence of God. His public life begins with a prayer and a vision: "While Jesus after his baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape like a dove" (Lk. 3:21-22). It ends with a prayer of total abandonment: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). Jesus initiates all important public acts with a prayer. He often withdraws from the crowd for long periods of solitary prayer. He interprets his entire existence through its reference to God, whom he calls Father. To himself he applies Isaiah's messianic words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." The same Spirit he promises to those who pray in his name.

The mystical quality of Jesus' life is most clearly stated in the Fourth Gospel. Some of the words attributed to him may have originated in theological reflection rather than in his own expression. But they thereby witness all the more powerfully to the mystical impulse he was able to transmit to his followers. Biblical speculations on the Word of God are reinterpreted as expressions of God's personal revelation in an incarnated divine Logos. The intimate union between the Father and the Word is, through the Holy Spirit, granted to all true believers. Indeed, the presence of the Spirit entitles them to the same love with which God loves his Son. In John's gospel the two principal currents of Christian mysticism have their source: the theology of the divine image that calls the Christian to conformity, and the theology that presents the intimacy with God as a relation of universal love.

The letters of Paul develop the idea of life in the Spirit. "We all reflect as in a mirror the splendor of the Lord; thus we are transfigured into his likeness, from splendor to splendor: such is the influence of the Lord who is Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). The Spirit's principal gift, in the understanding of Paul, consists in gnosis, that insight into the "mystery of Christ" that enables the believer to understand the scriptures in a deeper, "revealed" sense. This insight into the hidden meaning of the scriptures led to the Alexandrian interpretation of the term mystical discussed earlier. Yet the practice long preceded the term. The entire Letter to the Hebrews consists of an allegorical reading of the Yom Kippur sacrifice as foreshadowing Christ's definitive sacrifice on the cross.

The tenor of early Christian mysticism was determined by the New Testament and by trends in Hellenistic Judaism (especially Philo Judaeus's scriptural theology and the late

Judaic meaning of gnosis). A third factor, usually referred to as Neoplatonism, must be added. Yet that movement, though influential in the development of Christian spirituality, may be too restricted an account of its beginnings; Origen (and, to some extent, even Clement) had already developed a mystical theology of the image before Plotinus. It might be more accurate, then, to look to the entire philosophically Platonic, religiously syncretic, and generally gnostic culture of Alexandria at the end of the second century. In that climate Ammonius Saccas himself, Origen's and Plotinus's common master, grew up and taught. But soon Plotinus's philosophy was to provide much of the ideological apparatus for a Christian theology of the image. Though Plotinus's thought leaves no doubts about its Platonic origins, it was profoundly affected by such religious influences as the mystery religions, gnosticism, Philo's Judaism, and that syncretism of Hellenistic currents and older Egyptian traditions that is usually referred to as Hermetism. Plotinus's philosophy as exposed in his nine treatises (the Enneads) is often presented as an emanational process that originates in an undetermined Absolute (the One), becomes intelligible in a realm of mind (the nous), and arrives at its final hypostasis in a world soul (the psuche) shared by all individual souls. Such a presentation misses Plotinus's central insight and the source of its mystical fertility, namely, the immanence of the One in all the lower hypostases. The mystical-intellectual process for him consists in a return to that ever-present One, beyond the vision of the intelligible forms. A crucial role in this process is played by the notion of image, so important in early Christian mysticism. For Plotinus each emanation reflects the previous one as an image. Even the world, though steeped in opaque matter that allows no further emanations, reflects the soul and the mind. Clearly, in this context being an image is more than being an external copy. It implies that each sphere of reality refers in its very essence to a higher one. As such, the image presents, rather than represents. Man alone is able to read his world and his own soul as an appeal to turn inward to mind and, beyond mind, to the One. By a process of asceticism and contemplation, he may overcome the dispersion of time and of all that separates him from the total simplicity (the One) of his inner core. The Plotinian union with the One has been called ecstatic, but the term instatic might be more appropriate for describing a movement of inwardization and simplification. Plotinus's spiritual theology strikes us as decidedly cool: no sensuous feeling, no "visions," and no emotion. Yet more than any other master (outside the scriptures) did this last of the great pagan philosophers influence subsequent Christian mysticism.

The first attempt at a systematic theology of the mystical life in Christ was written by Plotinus's fellow Alexandrian and codisciple, Origen. In his Twenty-sev-enth Homily on Numbers Origen compares spiritual life to the Jews' exodus through the desert of Egypt. Having withdrawn from the pagan idols of vice, the soul crosses the Red Sea in a new baptism of conversion. She passes next through the bitter waters of temptation and the distorted visions of utopia until, fully purged and illuminated, she reaches Terah, the place of union with God. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen initiated a long tradition of mystical interpretations that see in the erotic biblical poem just such a divine union. His commentary also presents the first developed theology of the image: the soul is an image of God because she houses the primal image of God that is the divine Word. Even as that word is an image of the Father through its presence to him, the soul is an image through the word's presence in her, that is, through her (at least partial) identity with it. The entire mystical process thus comes to consist in a conversion to the image, that is, to ever greater identity with the indwelling Word. The emphasis on the ontological character of the image of God in man (as opposed to the external copy) persists throughout the entire Christian tradition and holds the secret of its amazing mystical power.

The privileged place of love distinguishes Origen's theology from Neoplatonic philosophy. This emphasis on love becomes even more pronounced in the writings of

Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth-century Cappadocian bishop. Under Neoplatonic influence Gregory describes the mystical life as a process of gnosis initiated by a divine eros, which results in the fulfillment of the soul's natural desire for union with the God of whom she bears the image. Though akin to God from the beginning, the soul's mystical ascent is a slow and painful process that ends in a dark unknowing—the mystical night of love.

This theology of darkness, or "negative theology," would be developed to its extreme limits by a mysterious, Greek-writing Syrian of the sixth century who presented himself as the Dionysius whom Paul converted on the Areopagus. His enormous (though in the West not immediate) impact steered the theology of the image in a wholly new direction. Neoplatonic as no Christian theologian had ever dared to be, he identified God with the nameless One. Even the divine relations of the Trinity were ultimate only in the order of manifestation. Beyond all names and even beyond being itself lies the dark reality of a divine superessence. The mystical ascent moves toward that nameless unity. Throughout this thoroughgoing negation, Dionysius preserves the core of the image theology, for precisely the primordial union of the soul with God serves as the moving principle of the mystical ascent. Through constant negation the soul overcomes the created world, which prevents the mind from reaching its ultimate destiny. Yet Diony-sius's Mystical Theology is ecstatic rather than introspective in its concept: the soul can achieve her vocation of union with God only by losing herself in the recesses of the divine superessence. In this respect it differs from the Western mysticism that it so deeply influenced.

Augustine (354-430), the towering figure who stands at the beginning of all Western theology (also, and especially, spiritual theology), described the divine image rather in psychological terms. God remains present to the soul as both origin and supreme goal. She is attracted by him and bears his image. But, unlike its definition by the Greek Fathers, that image remains for Augustine mostly the external effect of a divine cause. Augustine's treatise On the Trinity abounds with speculations on the soul's similarity to the Trinity, such as her constituting one mind out of the three faculties of intellect, will, and memory. They would amount to no more than superficial analogies were it not that God's presence in that same inner realm invites the soul to turn inward and convert the static resemblance into an ecstatic union. "Now this Trinity of the mind is God's image, not because the mind resembles, understands and loves itself [the superficial analogy], but because it has the power also to remember, understand and love its Maker" (On the Trinity 14.12.15). In actualizing the divine potential of its external resemblance, in allowing it to be directed to its archetype, the soul is gradually united with God. While the Greeks assert the initial identity, Augustine starts from a creator-creature analogy, which the divine attraction and man's following of it transform into an identity.

Unfortunately, this rich theology of identity remained largely unexplored by Augustine's spiritual followers until, in the twelfth century, the Cistercians and the Benedictines of Saint Victor Abbey combined it with the mystical theology of the Greeks. This fertile synthesis of Augustinian psychology with Greek spiritual ontology culminated in the two movements of Rhineland mysticism and Flemish spirituality. We shall here consider only their chief representatives: Eckhart and Ruusbroec.

Johannes Eckhart, possibly the most powerful mystical theologian of the Christian Middle Ages, synthesized the Greek and Augustinian theories of the image with a daring negative theology in one grandiose system. His mystical vision became the basis of an entire theology and, indeed, of a metaphysics of being. He was a subtle dialectician in his systematic Latin works and a paradoxical preacher in his vernacular sermons, so that his spiritual identity remains even today a subject of controversy. Few have succeeded in harmonizing the two parts of his prodigious output. Yet they do belong together. For Eckhart's endeavor was precisely to present the mystical union not as a privilege of the few

but as the very vocation and ultimate realization of humanity. The mystical theory of the divine image holds the key to his theological ontology.

God is Being, and being in the strict sense is only God. With this bold principle, Eckhart reinterprets a Thomist tradition that "analogously" attributed being to God and finite existence. For Eckhart, the creature qua creature does not exist. Whatever being it possesses is not its own, but remains God's property. Both its limited essence (what determines it as this being rather than that) and its contingent existence (that it happens to be) are no more than the negative limits of its capacity to receive God's own being. "Every creature," Eckhart wrote, "radically and positively possesses Being, life and wisdom from and in God, and not in itself." Hence, God is totally immanent in the creature as its very being, while totally transcending it as the only being. By this presence God is totally like the creature; yet, lacking any of its determinations, he is totally unlike it. On these productive antinomies Eckhart builds his densely rich concept of image. The entire content of the creaturely image of God consists in the divine presence, while the fact that the creature's limitation reduces this identity to a likeness (hence including difference) accounts for the image's total directedness toward the divine exemplar: "Every image has two properties. One is that it takes its Being immediately from that of which it is the image. . . . The second property of the image is to be observed in the image's likeness. And here especially note two things; an image is, firstly, not of itself and (secondly) not for itself" (Meister Eckhart, trans. Maurice O. Walshe, London, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 124-125).

Since the finite subject conveys nothing positive to the image but rather obscures it by its limitations, only God's unlimited self-expression in his eternal Word (the Son) is his perfect image. The quality of the creature's image depends on the presence of that divine image in it, or, more correctly, on the degree of its own immanence in that archetype. The mind—specifically the spiritual mind—fully actualizes that immanence. Eckhart appears to join earlier (Greek) theologians who had defined the image through the presence of God's Word in the soul. But he gives it a more radical turn by declaring that divine Word the soul's very being. Rather than presence, Eckhart speaks of identity. Of course, as a creature the soul totally differs from the divine image. But its created nature contains God's own, uncreated being. In that being the soul coincides with God. "There is something in the soul that is so near akin to God that it is one and not united [to him]. . . . If man were wholly thus, he would be wholly uncreated and uncreatable" (ibid., vol. 2, p. 85).

The soul's being is generated in an eternal now with (indeed, within) the divine Word: "The Father bears his Son in eternity like himself. `The Word was with God, and God was the Word' (Jn 1:1): the same in the same nature. I say more: He has borne him in my soul. Not only is she with him and he equally with her, but he is in her: the Father in eternity, and no differently" (ibid., p. 135). The mystical process then consists in a person's becoming conscious of his divine being. But this is far more than a cognitive process. It demands that utmost poverty and total detachment whereby he gives up his entire created existence "as he was when he was not [that is, before his birth]" (ibid., p. 271). Indeed, the spiritual soul no longer prepares a "place" for God, for "God is himself the place where He works." Only through that ultimate detachment, that waylessness in which there are neither names nor methods, does the soul come to resemble the image that she was in God "and between which and God there was no distinction before God created."

Farther than Eckhart the mysticism of the image could not go. Yet the identity that he so powerfully affirmed excluded any positive consideration of difference. Must the creature's difference remain without any spiritual significance? Was this no more than the circle of nothingness drawn around God's own being? Were even the trinitarian distinctions in God destined to be surpassed in a permanent rest in nameless unity? These were the questions that confronted later mystics of the Rhineland and the Low Countries. No one answered them

with more balance and deeper insight than Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), a Brussels parish priest and later a hermit in the wooded solitude of Groenendaal. Unlike Eckhart's theology, Ruusbroec's majestic summa of Christian life in the spirit did not conclude in a darkness beyond distinction. For Ruusbroec also the soul must move into God's nameless unity. But this divine desert is not a terminal resting ground. God's own being, as the mystery of the Trinity discloses, is dynamic, never at rest nor permanently withdrawn into its own darkness. Its silence is pregnant with God's revelatory Word. And so the contemplative, after having reached the divine silence, moves into God's self-revelation in the image of the Son and, with the Son, out into the otherness of creation. For Ruusbroec also, God dwells in darkness. But "in this darkness there shines and is born an incomprehensible light, which is the Son of God, in whom we behold eternal life; and in this light one becomes seeing" (Spiritual Espousals 3.1). Ruusbroec postulated no unity beyond the Trinity. The One is the Father—that is, a fertile unity, a silence that must speak, a darkness that yields light. Through its union with God the soul partakes in the movements within God. Once arrived in the empty desert of the Godhead, she is carried by the divine dynamism and moves with the Father into his divine image and into the multiplicity of creation. At that point the creatures appear both in their divine foundation within the image and also in their divinely constituted otherness. Not only their divine core but also their limited creaturehood are to be respected and cherished. Unlike Eckhart, Ruusbroec included in his mysticism of the image a mysticism of creation. Finitude itself, however different, is never separate from the divine image. Thus his theory of contemplation culminates in the ideal of the "common life," a rhythmic balance between withdrawing into interior life and flowing out into charitable practice.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages the mysticism of the image receded in favor of the more personal but also more private mysticism of love. Yet the theology of the image never died. It survived in the theological theories of uncreated grace (e.g., Lessius, De la Taille, Rahner), in patristic studies (Petavius, de Regnon), and in Cistercian spirituality. Today it enjoys a genuine revival, as the success of Thomas Merton's work witnesses.

Mysticism of Love: Modern Christian Mysticism and Sufism. All Western religions have produced mystics of love. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have known each its own kind of spiritual eros. In singling out love as characteristic of some movements in particular, I restrict the term to those in which personal love of God dominated—namely, Sufism and the spiritual movements that gradually came to prevail in Western Christendom since the late Middle Ages. Chronologically, Sufism precedes Christian love mysticism. Yet I shall discuss the latter first in order to maintain the continuity with the earlier type of Christian spirituality.

Christianity. Some time during the twelfth century, Christian piety underwent a basic change: its approach to God became more human and affective. Love had, of course, always been an essential ingredient. But now it became the whole thing. At first it appeared in conjunction with the newly recovered trinitarian mysticism. The same Cistercians who reintroduced the Greek theology of the image to the West also initiated love mysticism. Thus in William of Saint-Thierry's influential works, the two currents of contemplation and affection, of image-identity and love-likeness appear simultaneously, occasionally in the same sentence. "When the object of thought is God and the will reaches the stage at which it becomes love, the Holy Spirit at once infuses Himself by way of love. . . . The understanding of the one thinking becomes the contemplation of one loving" (Golden Epistle 249-250). The duality persisted for centuries. Ruusbroec brought both trends to a powerful synthesis in his Spiritual Marriage, a work that incorporates Greek trinitarian mysticism in the scheme of a treatise on spiritual love by subordinating the more extrinsic assimilation through love to the more intrinsic inhabitation of God in the soul.

The emphasis on love is part of a more general tendency to involve the entire personality in the religious act. The new spiritual humanism (partly influenced by the Spanish Islamic culture) would revive interest in the psychological theory of Augustine and pay an unprecedented spiritual attention to the created world. The first great name to emerge was Bernard of Clairvaux. No Christian mystic has ever surpassed "the mellifluous doctor," as he is called, in the eloquent praise of spiritual love. Still, in many ways he remained a transitional figure: his Christocentric love is directed at the divine person of the Word, rather than at the human nature of the Christ, focus of later medieval spirituality. But the tradition he established clearly differs from that of image mysticism. In a famous sermon on the Song of Songs, he defines the unity of the spirit with God as resulting rather "from a concurrence of wills than from a union of essences." Here likeness firmly replaces im-age-identity. Does it mean that Bernard accepts only an external union with God? Not really, for in his treatise On Loving God he describes the highest degree of love as the condition of a drop of water disappearing in a quantity of wine. Experience itself becomes transformed. "To love yourself as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing, is not a human sentiment but a divine experience" (10.27). Nevertheless, the transient quality of ecstatic love, its submission to the psychic rhythm of the soul, its affinity with human eros, all herald the advent of a different type of spirituality.

The humanization of man's relation to God transforms man's attitude toward a creation in which God now comes to be more intimately present. An interpersonal, and hence more creaturely, relation to God is ready to accept each creature on its own terms and for its own sake. In this respect its attitude differs essentially from the image mysticism that holds the creature worthy of spiritual love only in its divine core, where it remains rooted in God. The love mystic also cherishes its finite, imperfect being, which, resulting from a divine act of creation, is endowed with a sacred quality of its own. The mystery of the divine incarnation here attains a more universal level of meaning, as if Christians suddenly understood how much the creation must matter to a God who himself has become flesh. The new awareness gave rise to the powerful humanism that since the thirteenth century has characterized Western Christendom. Francis of Assisi taught his contemporaries to regard nature with a different eye and to love the deformed and the sick as much as the hale and the sound. His attitude found a uniquely poetic expression in the Canticle of Brother Sun and in Jacopone da Todi's lyricism. But the discovery of God's presence in creation was capable of systematic treatment, as one of Francis's followers, Bonaventure, demonstrated in The Journey of the Mind to God. By now the Christocentric orientation of the new spirituality had moved to Christ's humanity—the perfect creature so intimately united to God that loving could never detract the soul from loving God himself. Soon that humanity came to fulfill an essential mediating function in spiritual life. Teresa of Ávila would accuse herself of having neglected this link with the divine in her early years.

As the incarnational consciousness spread to all creation, divine transcendence ceased to imply a negation of the created world. Thenceforth God's presence has been found within rather than beyond creation. Precisely this immanentization of the divine accounts for the earthly quality of Christian love mysticism and for its followers' deep involvement with human cares and worldly concerns. Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola, and Teresa of Ávila, among many others, led extremely active lives and deeply influenced the culture of their age. This orientation toward the creature created new spiritual problems. For it requires uncommon virtue not to become attached to a creature one loves for its own sake. By no coincidence did most love mystics become "saints," that is, persons who, by heroic virtue, learned to love without possessiveness. All mysticism demands mental purity. But for those whose love of God passes through creation, the purifying process proves especially exacting. Besides renouncing the superfluous, an essential condition of spiritual growth, mystics so

deeply involved with creation have to move against the grain of their natural inclination in order to establish the precarious balance of love and detachment. What al-Ghazali writes about Sufi mortification is a task for all love mystics: "The uprooting from the soul of all violent passions, the extirpation from it of vicious desires and evil qualities so that the heart may become detached from all that is not God." But when the mystical state proper begins, spiritual men and women tend to stop or reduce this active mortification.

Significantly, John of the Cross, one of the most articulate mystics of love, describes the entire spiritual process as an increasing purification, a "night" that starts with the senses, spreads to the understanding, and concludes in the total darkness of union with God. Most mystics would, perhaps more appropriately, refer to the second and third stages as illumination and union. But they equally emphasize the increased need for detachment. Followers of this tradition tend to equate the beginning of the mystical life with a state of passive prayer that excludes the ability to meditate. John of the Cross distinguishes the night of the senses, common to all who enter the mystical life, from the "horrible and awful" passive purgation of the spirit in the advanced. Not all agree with this description, but all stress the need for total passivity with respect to the divine operation. An entire school has taken what Teresa of Ávila calls the prayer of "quiet" to be the goal of spiritual life itself. As practiced by Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696) and Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717), this controversial concept drew upon itself a number of official condemnations. The debate began with the question whether the spiritual person should remain passive with regard to temptations, especially carnal temptations. The quietist attitude, the adversaries claimed, led to gross immorality—as in the case of Molinos. But the discussion then moved toward the more central issue of whether quiet is acquired or infused. The quietists failed to make adequate distinctions and thereby appeared to present mystical graces available to all, while allowing the pious to neglect the pursuit of common virtue and the practice of good works. Finally, with the French bishop Fénelon, both pupil and director of Jeanne Guyon, the dispute turned to the problem of "pure love": only the love that loves God exclusively because of himself is worthy of a spiritual person. Once the mystic has attained this state of pure love, he or she abandons the methodic pursuit of virtue and, eventually, all control over the spiritual process. None of the charges against the quietists was ever fully substantiated. Yet the entire controversy reveals how sensitive the issue of active or passive quiet had become. The question whether the "higher states of prayer" are available to all could hardly have been raised in an earlier, less psychological age.

The "illumination" that normally follows the period of purgation should not be thought of as a succession of new insights. John of the Cross refers to it as a darkness of the understanding caused by the excessive light of faith (Ascent of Mount Carmel 3.3.1). Still, the light is often reflected in unusual cognitive states—hallucinatory perceptions, intensively imagined visions or voices, nonrepresentational intuitions—which in unpredictable ways testify to the profound transformation the mind undergoes in the higher stages of mysticism. They are often hard to interpret, and spiritual masters have traditionally adopted a cautious attitude toward them. Yet we should not place them all on an equal footing. John of the Cross distinguishes concrete visions (either sensational or imaginary) from so-called spiritual apprehensions. While he dismisses the former as a breeding ground of moral illusions, among the latter he finds the most direct expressions of God's experienced presence. John equates such "intellectual" (nonrepresentational) visions (ibid., 2.24) with revelations of God's being "in the naked understanding" of the soul that has attained the state of union—"for they are themselves that union" (ibid., 2.26)—and with the spiritual "feelings" that emerge "in the substance of the soul" (ibid., 2.32). In such states illumination has in fact turned into union.

It is in terms of union that Teresa of Ávila discusses the matter in her Interior Mansions (Fifth and Sixth Mansions). What characterizes this final stage of love mysticism—

whether defined in cognitive or in affective terms—is its permanence. Hence Teresa refers to it as a "marriage." Here the distinction between the "likeness" of love mysticism and the "identity" of image mysticism ceases to exist—even in the terminology. In the highest love union, intentional intermediacy yields to substantial presence. The trend from likeness to unity appears even more clearly in Sufi mysticism.

Sufism. With its stern emphasis on law and orthodoxy, Islam hardly seems to present a fertile soil for intensive personal experience of the love of God. Yet Islam assumes the entire social system, shari`ah (the way), into a privileged communal relation with God. Moreover, the Qur'an states that, next to the ordinary believers who serve their creator according to the precepts of the law, there are some to whom God communicates his essential mystery inwardly in peace of the soul and friendship with God (Qur'an 17:27). Here the Prophet allows for the possibility of a realm of personal religion. The possibility was soon actualized and eventually flowered into unparalleled mystical beauty. Even the unique authority of the Qur'an has in an indirect way contributed to Islam's mystical wealth, for precisely because it remains the supreme norm of its interpretation, pious readers may find in it whatever meaning divinely inspired insight (istinbat) privately reveals to them. Only when personal interpretation openly clashes with established doctrine (especially its rigorous monotheism) could religious authorities interfere. Thus, paradoxically, Islam, the "religion of the book," allows greater freedom of interpretation than religions that place less emphasis on the written word. Though early Muslim mysticism stayed in close connection with the Islamic community, conflicts arose. Already at the time of Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), the patriarch of Islamic mysticism, Sunni traditionalists objected to his attempt to go beyond the letter of law and doctrine. Thus began the opposition between "internal" and "external" religion that, from the tenth century on, led to increasingly severe confrontations. Nevertheless, a deep personal piety remained an essential element of the Islam that substantially contributed to rendering it a world religion.

Most Islamic mysticism could be characterized as love mysticism. Many texts show an amazing similarity in spirit and even expression with later Christian mysticism. Certain passages in the poetry of Rabi`ah al-`Adawiyah (d. 801) appear to throw a bridge across the centuries to Teresa of Ávila, while John of the Cross's Dark Night echoes some of Shaykh al-Junayd's poems. The similarity becomes somewhat intelligible through the established influence of Syrian monasticism (especially the hesychastic movement) upon the early Sufis, and the strong Muslim impact upon Spanish culture as a whole and upon its mystics in particular. The resemblance has often tempted Western scholars to interpret Sufi writings by means of Christian concepts. yet the difference is substantial and appears with increasing clarity in some later Sufi developments toward monism. Here love no longer represents the highest union with God but is merely a way station on the road to a more total identity. Still, early Sufis adopted models of asceticism that had closer ties with the spirituality of the Desert Fathers than with the worldly luxury of the expanding Muslim empire. Even the wool dress (suf) from which they probably derived their name may well have had a Christian symbolic meaning. At any rate, the passive asceticism of the early Sufis stood in sharp contrast with the outgoing, active attitude of the Prophet's early followers. Not until the eighth century, however, did the emphasis shift from an asceticism inspired by a fear of judgment to a mysticism of love for which fasting and poverty served as means to a higher end.

The most attractive figure in this early love mysticism is certainly the former slave Rabi`ah. To her we owe some of the purest mystical love poetry of all time, such as her famous prayer at night: "Oh, my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed, and kings have shut their doors, and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here am I alone with Thee" (Margaret Smith, Rabi`a the Mystic, Cambridge, 1928, p. 22). Her "pure"

love, even as the love of later mystics possessing that quality, refuses to act or pray out of self-interest, "If I worship Thee from fear of hell, burn me in hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of paradise, exclude me from paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then do not withhold from me Thine eternal loveliness." Only repentance inspired by sorrow for having offended the Beloved is worthy of the spiritual person. For all its erotic exuberance, this and similar love mysticism remained doctrinally "sober." It developed elaborate schemes of the stages (maqamat) of the love of God. Eventually it used Neoplatonic categories, which strengthened it theoretically but may have favored its later development toward monism.

In Shaykh al-Junayd (d. 910), Sufi mystical theology reached full maturity as well as a systematic unity. Though this religious leader went far in adopting Plotinus's theory, his orthodoxy was never questioned. Louis Massignon, the famous student of Islamic mysticism, describes al-Junayd as "clever, prudent and timid, conscious of the danger of heterodoxy which is peculiar to mysticism," and as a wise spiritual director "who suspends his judgment and defers the question so long as experience does not seem to him decisive and crucial" (Massignon, 1954, p. 275). Still, his theory of emanation from a preexistence in God to a separate existence in time daringly reinterpreted the creation doctrine. In Kitab al-Fana' he writes, "He annihilated me [in my divine preexistence] in creating me even as, in the beginning, He created me [in my separate existence in time] when I was not," and "He was the source of their existence, encompassing them, calling them to witness when still their eternal life was utterly negated, a state in which they were from all pre-eternity" (Zaehner, 1957, pp. 165-166).

By following this principle of emanation to its ultimate consequences al-Junayd's disciple, al-Hallaj, ended up with the allegedly monist theory for which he was executed in the year 922. With al-Hallaj begins a wholly new phase in Sufi mysticism that continued to use the language of love, but frequently in a more symbolic sense than had the earlier Sufis. Meanwhile it remains very doubtful whether al-Hallaj, despite his strong expressions, ever considered himself fully identical with God. His claim of divinization refers to a passive, transient state—not to a permanent self-deification. Such ecstatic exclamations as "I am the Truth," by no means unique to him, express a temporary, divinely granted awareness of identity with God. He probably remained a love mystic always longing for a union that was only occasionally attained, as in the following oft-quoted verses: "Between me and Thee lingers an `it is I' that torments me. Ah, of Thy grace, take this `I' from between us." Even the supreme expression of union still indicates a remnant of duality. "I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I. We are two Spirits dwelling in one body" (Nicholson, 1939, p. 218). Elsewhere al-Hallaj firmly upholds God's transcendence with respect to his creation, as in the words quoted by al-Qushayri: "He has bound the whole to contingency, for transcendence is His own. . . . He remains far from the states of his creation, in Him there is no mingling with His creation, His act permits of no amendment, He is withdrawn from them by His transcendence as they are withdrawn from Him in their contingency" (Louis Massignon, La passion d'al Hossayn-ibn-Mansoûr al Hallaj, Paris, 1922, p. 638).

After al-Hallaj, Sufi piety reached a temporary truce with orthodox learning in al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the greatest of the theologians. A learned teacher of law and doctrine, he abandoned his chair to spend eleven years as a wandering Sufi, and at the end of his life retired to a Sufi monastery. Bypassing the antinomian trends that emerged after al-Hallaj, he returned to a more traditional attempt to emphasize experience over the letter of the law. With Ibn al-`Arabi (d. 1240) the dependence on Neoplatonism (especially the so-called Theology of Aristotle) and, with it, the movement toward monism became more pronounced than ever. He provided the link between Western classical culture and Eastern Islamic mysticism that culminated in Jalal al-Din Rumi. Sufi mysticism, however much inclined toward monism, never abandoned the language and imagery of love. Ibn al`Arabi, with al-Ghazali the most

philosophical of all Muslim mystics, never ceases to integrate his Neoplatonic vision with the Qur'an's dualistic doctrine of man's relation to God. Still one may doubt whether he did more than adapt the terminology of traditional Sufi love mysticism to his own kind of monism. The Absolute for him is an indistinct One that, overcome by the desire to be known, projects itself through creative imagination into apparent otherness. In this projection the relation of the One to the created world, specifically to man, determines that of the Abso-lute to the differentiated idea of God, the intellectual pole as opposed to the cosmic pole of finite being. All that the creature is, is divine, yet God always exceeds creation. Through man's mediation the dependent, created world returns to its primordial unity. As the image of God, man imposes that image upon the cosmos and reflects it back to its original. In fulfilling this mediating task he approaches the (gnostic?) archetype of the Perfect Man, the ideal link that restores the broken oneness. Only the Muslim saint realizes the model in its fullness.

All of this appears far removed from Islamic love mysticism and even from monotheism. But the same Ibn al-`Arabi also wrote a collection of sensual love poetry to which he later added a mystical interpretation. Even his "monist" Bezels of Wisdom concludes with a dithyramb on spiritualized sexual love as providing access to the perfect love of God. It states that in woman, man most perfectly contemplates God. "The greatest union is that between man and woman, corresponding as it does to the turning of God toward the one He has created in His own image, to make him His vice regent, so that He might behold Himself in him. . . . If he [man] knew the truth, he would know Whom it is he is enjoying and Who it is Who is the enjoyer; then he would be perfected" (The Bezels of Wisdom, in The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. John Farina, New York, 1980, pp. 275-276). However thorough Ibn al-`Arabi's doctrinal monism may have been, it never prevented him from attributing to love a primary role in the practical process of reunification with God. His readers, both inside and outside Islam, have always emphasized this dualism of mystical praxis. This explains his impact both on Spanish Catholic (Ramon Lull, John of the Cross) and on Persian Sufi mystics.

In the refined mystical poetry that constitutes the glory of Persian Sufism, the same drift toward monism is frequently expressed in erotic language. Here the undisputed master is Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273). He himself was influenced by others (such as `Attar, and Ibn al-`Arabi's disciple in Konya, al-Qunawi, and especially his strange mentor, al-Tabrizi), yet sang, with a voice uniquely his own, of the longing for the Beloved.

> I am not the kingdom of `Iraquain, nor of the country of Khorasan, I am not of this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise, nor of hell. My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless; 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved. I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one: One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call. He is the first, He is the last, He is the outward, He is the inward.
>
> *(Divani Shamsi Tabriz,*
> trans. R. A. Nicholson,
> Cambridge, 1898, p. 125)

Persian poets after Rumi expressed a similar synthesis of monist reality and erotic longing, none with more force and evocative power than `Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492):

> Beware! Say not, "He is All Beautiful,
> And we His lovers? Thou art but the glass,
> And He the face confronting it, which casts
> Its image on the mirror. He alone
> Is manifest, and thou in truth art hid,
> Pure Love, like Beauty, coming but from Him,

Reveals itself in thee."
(E. G. Brown, A Year amongst the Persians,
Cambridge, 1926, p. 138)

Yet most important for the later mystical life of Islam in Iran were the flourishing Sufi orders of dervishes (one of them founded by Rumi himself). As they spread, mystical life reached all layers of the population, and the search for mystical trance reached unprecedented proportions. After the fifteenth century, Persian mysticism produced no more great writers. Generally speaking, the trend of the past three centuries in Islam has been more toward communal piety and law than toward personal devotion. Yet in our own day we witness a revival of Sufi movements.

Eschatological Mysticism: Jewish Mystics. The section headings in this article do not capture the full meaning of the content. At best they approximate a definition of a dominant trend in a particular, more or less unified mystical school. In the case of Jewish mysticism the description may not even serve this minimal purpose: Judaism has produced forms of mysticism so unlike any other and so variant among themselves that no common characteristic marks them all. At most we can say that they "commune" with one another, not that they share an identical spirit. Gershom Scholem wisely embedded this irreducible diversity, reflective of a spiritual Diaspora, in the very title of his authoritative work Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (1941). The closest he comes to a general characteristic is the point at which he draws attention to the persistent presence of eschatological traits in Jewish mysticism: "This eschatological nature of mystical knowledge becomes of paramount importance in the writings of many Jewish mystics, from the anonymous authors of the early He-khaloth tracts to Rabbi Naham of Brazlav" (p. 20). The eschatological element most clearly appears in the earliest trend: the often gnostically influenced mythical speculation on Ezekiel's vision of the throne-chariot, the merkavah. Mysticism around this theme began in the first centuries of the common era. It consisted of an attempt to ascend to the divine throne beyond the various intermediate spheres (the heikhalot). Except for its biblical starting point (first developed in the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch), the impact of gnostic pleroma mythology dominates this spiritual "throne world." But also the typically Hellenistic connection of mysticism and magic appears to have been strong. Merkavah mysticism declined after the seventh century, but enjoyed a steady revival in Italy in the ninth and tenth centuries, which, in turn, may have influenced medieval German Hasidism.

Whereas merkavah mysticism had been esoteric, Hasidism (from hasid, "pious one") began in the twelfth century as a popular movement closely connected with the halakhah (law). The early development has been fixed in the Sefer Hasidim (Book of the Pious), which contains the spiritual testaments of the prolific Yehudah the Pious and of two other early writers. The eschatological element, present from the beginning, gradually became more pronounced. Yet various other elements appear as well, among them an almost monastic emphasis on the religious virtues of simplicity, humility, and indifference. While merkavah mysticism attained its goal by contemplation, Hasidism did so primarily by prayer and spiritual practice. To pure transcendence it opposes the intensive awareness of an omnipresent creator accessible to the Hasid even in his daily activities. Finally, while merkavah mysticism displays gnostic traits, Hasidic "theology" shows a resemblance to Neoplatonism even in its Greek Christian development. God's glory (kavod) is distinct from God's being as a first manifestation of his presence (shekhinah), which mediates between this hidden essence and the fully manifest creation. The Hasidim indulged in elaborate speculation about the inner and outer glory of God, and about the kingdom of his created yet hidden presence.

These daring speculations seldom developed into a coherent theology. In that respect they differed from the spiritual movement that, from the fourteenth century on, would largely replace it—Qabbalah. It originated in thirteenth-century Spain as a highly esoteric doctrine, one that its followers were reluctant to divulge. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1492), however, it developed into a theology of exile that spread to large segments of the Jewish world. More speculative than ecstatic (though methods for ecstasy were not absent), it was deeply influenced by gnostic theologies. Its masterwork, the Zohar, by its daring adoption of gnostic cosmogonies surpassed in this respect even merkavah mysticism. In addition, it absorbed the Neoplatonic currents that had swept through the Arabic and Jewish culture of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Spain. Considering the hazardous nature of its thought, its relation to normative tradition and official authority remained, on the whole, remarkably peaceful, if not always amiable. Indeed, the branch that produced the most daring speculation found its expression mostly in traditional rabbinical commentaries on the sacred text. Another trend of Qabbalah, culminating in Avraham ben Shemu'el Abulafia (1240-after 1291), is more prophetic. It combines in a highly original way philosophical theory—much of it derived from Maimonides (Mosheh ben Maimon, 1135/8-1204)—with mystical speculations on the divine names. Abulafia left his native Saragossa early in life to travel all over the Near East and to settle down in Sicily, where he wrote most of his many works. They all aim at assisting the soul to untie the "knots" that bind it to this world of multiplicity and to allow it to return to its original unity (surprisingly named after Aristotle's Agent Intellect). This union may be attained through contemplation of a sufficiently abstract object, such as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Any combination of letters results in word figures that in some way refer to the sacred tetragrammaton of the divine name, YHVH. In meditating upon them—somewhat as the yogin uses a mantra—consciousness moves to a higher state of unity that releases man's prophetic faculty.

Wholly different is the theophysical mysticism that resulted in that unsurpassed masterpiece of mystical speculation, the Zohar (Book of Splendor). Its origin remains mysterious, because the anonymous author has carefully covered his tracks (even to the point of writing in Aramaic rather than Hebrew) and attributed his work to earlier authorities. Yet internal criticism suggests that it was written in Spain in the last third of the thirteenth century, probably by one author. The writer, familiar with the philosophies of Maimonides and of Neoplatonism, has, above all, undergone the influence of unknown gnostic sources. Synthesizing all qabbalistic writings of the century, he attempts to stem the rationalist trend by giving traditional Judaism a hidden mystical interpretation. Thus this highly esoteric work was, in fact, written for the enlightened Jewish intelligentsia of late-fourteenth-century Spain. Central in the Zohar doctrine is the theology of the sefirot, the ten "regions" into which the divine emanation extends itself. Importantly, the divine pleroma of these sefirot does not emanate from God: it remains within God as his manifest being, in contrast to the "hidden God." Gershom Scholem writes: "The point to keep in mind is that the sefirot are not secondary or intermediary spheres which interpose between God and the universe . . . not steps of a ladder between God and the world, but various planes in the manifestation of the Divinity which proceed from and succeed each other" (Scholem, 1961, pp. 208-209). Here also language fulfills a crucial function: the sefirot, the creative names God gives himself, antic-ipate the faculty of speech in man. The ultimate manifestation consists of God's simple, immanent presence in the entire creation, the shekhinah. In becoming aware of this divine presence, man comes to understand his own deeper self.

Creation takes place within God as a transition from the divine Nothing, the mathematical point frequently identified with God's Wisdom (the hokhmah of Proverbs). Even evil proceeds from a negative principle in God himself that has become isolated from

the rest of the divine organism. Man's reaction consists in restoring creation to its original union within God.

The idea of an immanent creation was taken one step further by some sixteenth-century mystics of Safad in Palestine, exiled from Spain after the expulsion decree. The new Diaspora gave Qabbalah a distinctly messianic, eschatological aspect that had been less prominent in the Zohar. Thus the mystical return to the aboriginal creation now came to be seen as anticipating the messianic era. According to Isaac Luria (1534-1572), the most important mystic of the school, creation originates through a process of self-emptying whereby God withdraws from a mystical space within himself in order to establish the possibility for a reality other than his own omnipresent being. The concept of tsimtsum (withdrawal) allows Luria to distinguish the world of creation from the emanations that occur within God's own being and to prevent creation from collapsing into a pantheistic oneness.

The gnostic idea of the primordial man, adam qadmon, which models God's manifest being on the human organism, provides a transition between the sphere of the sefirot and the created world, while, at the same time, explaining the origin of evil. The light of the divine being is refracted through this supreme emanation. The first six sefirot receive and reflect the divine light radiated by adam qadmon. But the lower six are not powerful enough to retain the light, and it "shatters the vessels" (shevirat ha-kalim). Here evil begins to exist as a separate entity. Through the breaking of the vessels, the forces of evil that were mixed with the divine light become segregated from the good. This purgative event, good in itself, would have allowed the total elimination of evil in the final reintegration of the last sefirah. But Adam's fall, once again, reintroduced chaos into the cosmos. The Diaspora symbolizes this general disarray in which the shekhinah itself is sent into exile.

Luria's mystical theory culminates in his idea of redemption, a redemption, mystically conceived, that coincides with the messianic era. Through prayer, spiritual man plays an active role in restoring the original order of the universe. Mystical piety will recall the shekhinah back to the spiritual pleroma and prepare the world for the messianic coming. The powerful concept of tikkun (reintegration) conveyed meaning to the bitter experience of the exile. Yet, combined with messianic expectations, it also created a tense and potentially explosive sense of anticipation. Luria's mystical theology therefore prepared the terrain for the pseudomessiahs and the antinomian movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus the unstable Shabbetai Tsevi (1625-1676) was able (largely through the efforts of his "prophet," Natan of Gaza) to render himself accepted as the Messiah and even to retain many of his followers when he himself apostasized to Islam. Was this not part of the Messiah's vocation in a world that had exiled him to the realm of darkness? Large groups of Shabbateans apostasized publicly while secretly preserving their messianic faith—thus repeating voluntarily what Marrano Jews had been compelled to do involuntarily. The exile among the infidels initiated the condition for the final separation of good and evil of the messianic era. At the same time, antinomian behavior inaugurated a reign in which the restrictions of the Law would be abolished and the primordial state of freedom restored.

Qabbalah was not to end in this state of general disintegration. A new Hasidism on the rise in eighteenth-century Poland incorporated much of its mystical piety while rejecting its messianic excesses. It was neither esoteric nor elitist. More emotional than intellectual, it appears more as a revivalist movement than as a theological school. Yet its nonsystematic character has not prevented it from occasionally attaining speculative peaks. It honored the charismatic leader more than the learned rabbi, even though most of its leaders were rabbis and all endeavored to remain within rabbinical orthodoxy. The new Hasidism began with two inspired men: the Besht (Yisra'el ben Eli`ezer, 1700-1760) and his disciple, Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirich. They, like all their major followers, distinguished themselves more by the striking gesture, the memorable story, than by interpretation of the Torah. It is hard to

evaluate the precise "mystical" significance of so popular a movement. Yet the intensive religious experience of its greatest writers leaves no doubt. Here particularly we should restrain ourselves from imposing too narrow limits on the term mystical. Hasidism may be more practical and certainly more social than earlier spiritual movements, but its emphasis upon a joyful spirit and moral living derives from a mystical source.

Jewish mysticism shows an unparalleled variety of forms ranging from deep speculation to purely emotional experience. It consistently appeals to scriptural authority, yet no mystical movement ever strayed further from theological orthodoxy than late messianic Qabbalah. And still for all the variety of its forms and of the external influences to which it was exposed, Jewish mysticism unquestionably possesses a powerful unity of its own. In it the word dominates, and the often tragic experience of the present lives in constant expectation of the future.

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III

MONOTHEISM[٣]. Derived from the Greek mono ("single") and theos ("God"), the term monotheism refers to the religious experience and the philosophical perception that emphasize God as one, perfect, immutable, creator of the world from nothing, distinct from the world, all-powerfully involved in the world, personal, and worthy of being worshiped by all creatures. Some forms of monotheism, however, differ about the notions of God as distinct from the world and as personal.

The term monotheism has generally been used theologically rather than for philosophical or cross-cultural descriptions of religion. Philosophers have used the term theism with the same meaning as monotheism, and cross-cultural descriptions find categories like monotheism and polytheism to be inappropriate in describing some religious traditions. The term monotheism presupposes the idea of theos—a divine being with mind and will, fully personal, conceivable in images drawn from human life, and approachable through prayer. In this respect monotheism differs from deism and from the various forms of monism. It also presupposes the unity of the divine and raises one theos exclusively to absolute supremacy and power, producing and governing everything according to the divine will. In this respect monotheism differs from those views that accept a plurality of divine beings. In the strict sense, monotheism best describes the idea of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and in the philosophical systems based on these traditions. But we can extend the term to include conceptions of deity in certain other traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, even though these traditions include somewhat different conceptions, such as the existence of evil forces alongside God, the nonpersonal nature of God, God's complete immanence in the world, or the fundamental unreality of the world. In this article, the basic requirement for a religious tradition to be considered monotheistic is that it emphasize both theos and monos.

Monotheism in Religious History. Whereas monotheism is most often associated with the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions and philosophies, tendencies contributing toward a monotheistic outlook have long been present in human religious history. Monotheism is like a river with many springs and many tributaries. The course of the river is

.[٣] Theodore M. Ludwig, *MONOTHEISM*, Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol10, p.68 – 76 (Second Edition: VOL. 9, P. 6155- 6162)

difficult to map, for monotheistic beliefs are often put forward in protest against other beliefs and practices.

Obscure as they are, springs of monotheism can be discerned at the very earliest levels of known human cultural life, in the primordial high god of the archaic hunters. The theory of Urmonotheismus ("original monotheism") as put forth by Wilhelm Schmidt and others held that a primordial monotheism was the earliest form of human perception of deity, and that the plurality of gods and spirits found in most primal religions was a degeneration from this original perception. While that theory cannot be substantiated in the history of religions, research in recent years has made it clear that a great many primal or archaic peoples have conceptions of a high god who is creator of the world, has supreme authority over other gods and spirits, and presides over human morality. Some of the most archaic peoples, such as certain groups in Africa, Australian Aborigines, and the nomadic hunters of Tierra del Fuego, have definite conceptions of a supreme god associated with the sky who is changeless, invisible, and all-powerful and who gives morality. The supreme high god characteristically is a remote god (deus otiosus), too distant, all-powerful, good, and just to need worship or to be intimately involved in ordinary existence; there are lesser gods and spirits who play a much more active role in the lives of the people.

The streams of the monotheistic vision run dimly through the fertile valleys of archaic agricultural religions with their pluralistic experience of the forces of nature centered on Mother Earth. Here the high god tends to become head of the divine pantheon; pushed into the background by earth gods of fecundity, the high god could hardly be the focus of a unifying perception of deity. But a few high gods developed with supreme sovereignty and autonomy, as sources of fecundating power and guarantors of the order and norms of the world and of human society. For example, Zeus and Jupiter were ruling high gods fashioned in accord with the Greek and Roman notions of norm and law. In India, Varuna was sovereign guardian of rta, cosmic order, a role taken over later by the great gods Visnu and Siva. Yahveh, the high god of the ancient Hebrews, showed himself as all-powerful creator, absolute sovereign, and author of all norms and laws by which the earth functions. Belief in these high gods did not necessarily exclude lesser divine forces, but it did provide the opportunity for reflections on the unity of divine reality, as we see in the following examples from ancient Greece, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Greek religion. Among Greek thinkers, ideas of a unitary divine reality were expressed as a means of showing the order and reasonableness of the world. Already in pre-Socratic times, it seems, philosophers like Xenophanes depicted the spiritual unity of the whole world in the notion of the All-One, uncreated, unchangeable, and immanent in all things. Plato stressed the unity of the Good and identified God with that: God must be perfectly good, changeless, and the maker of the best possible world. Aristotle also made the idea of goodness central to his concept of God, the causal principle of all. The unicity of the supreme First Mover follows from the unity of the physical world: God is one, eternal, and immutable. God is defined as pure mind (nous), who always thinks one and the same subject, namely himself—and thus this view is not really theism. Later in the Hellenistic religions, the sense of God's unicity was expressed by raising one god or goddess to supremacy, encompassing all others. For example, Apuleius described Isis as the one Great Mother of all, by whatever name she may be called in different areas (Metamorphoses 11).

Hinduism. Hinduism is characterized by monistic (advaita, or nondualistic) thought, which merges the divine reality with the world in a unity called brahman. Here the unifying principle is strong, but the theistic quality of the unified divine reality is of lesser importance. There have always been theistic tendencies in Hinduism, but these have been associated with

a variety of divine beings. Yet intense concerns of bhakti (devotion to a god) have sometimes led Hindus to raise up one god as supreme ruler, or to see the various gods as manifestations of one God. "They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and Agni . . . ; but the real is one, although the sages give different names" (Rgveda 1.169). Among Vaisnavas, Visnu tends to become all, and the same is true of Siva among Saivas. Krsna, avatara of Visnu, can be put forth as the supreme God behind all names: "Many are the paths people follow, but they all in the end come to me" (Bhagavadgita 4.11). Thus Hinduism does recognize the oneness of the divine, and it includes theistic forms of worship, even worship of one God exclusively, without denying the reality of other gods.

Buddhism. Buddhism, like Hinduism, is essentially a monism which has only an inferior role for those born at the level of gods, trapped as they are like all living beings in the cycles of rebirth. But in Mahayana Buddhism, the idea has arisen that beings who have realized their Buddhahood (that is, Buddhas and bodhisattvas) can function similarly to gods in theistic religions. Generally Mahayana Buddhism holds to the multiplicity of these powerful beings, but in certain schools one such Buddha becomes supreme and is worshiped exclusively. Such is the case with Amitabha (Jpn., Amida) Buddha in Pure Land Buddhism, a soteriological monolatry offering the one hope of salvation for this degenerate age. Esoteric Buddhism has developed a unified cosmotheism, according to which the whole universe is the body of Mahavairocana, the Great Sun Buddha, with all Buddhas and bodhisattvas—and thus all reality—united in this supreme Buddha-reality.

Egyptian religion. One of the earliest forms of exclusive monotheism apparently developed in ancient Egypt. Within the elaborate and complicated polytheism of Egyptian religion there had long been rationalistic tendencies toward seeing various gods as different forms of one particular God, with an emphasis on the supremacy of the Sun God, who tended to absorb other gods. Around 1375 BCE Pharoah Amunhotep IV repudiated the authority of the old gods and their priests and devoted himself exclusively to Aton, the god appearing as the sun disk. He proclaimed himself the son of Aton, taking the name Akhenaton ("devoted to Aton"), and he imposed this worship on others. By royal decree Aton became the only God who exists, king not only of Egypt but of the whole world, embodying in his character and essence all the attributes of the other gods. Akhenaton even had the names of the other gods effaced from inscriptions and replaced with the name of Aton. Akhenaton's monotheism was related to protest against abuses in the cults of the gods, but it does not appear to have led to new ethical standards. Within twenty-five years Akhenaton was gone, and his successors restored the old cults.

Zoroastrianism. Growing from the ancient Indo-Iranian polytheistic religion, Zoroastrianism unified all divine reality in the high god Ahura Mazda. Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), who lived sometime between 1700 and 1500 BCE, was a priest who turned against some of the traditional cultic rituals and proclaimed the overthrow of polytheism. In his teaching, Ahura Mazda (Pahl., Ohrmazd) is the one God who, to implement his will in the world, associates with himself the six Amesha Spentas ("holy immortals"), spirits or angels that represent moral attitudes and principles. Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, is good, just, and moral; he creates only good things and gives only blessings to his worshipers. The one God is sovereign over history, working out the plan he has for the world. Humans are to assist God through upright deeds, and there will be a final judgment in which every soul will be judged to see if it is worthy of entering Paradise. Conflict is accounted for as the hostility of two primordial spirits: Spenta Mainyu, the good spirit, and Angra Mainyu (Pahl., Ahriman), the evil spirit. Ahura Mazda apparently fathered these two spirits; the struggle between them has been going on since the beginning of time, when they chose between good and evil. It appears, then, that Ahura Mazda cannot be called omnipotent, for the realm of evil is beyond

his control; in that sense it may be said that this is not a complete monotheism. Yet there is no doubt that Zoroastrianism considers the realm of Ahura Mazda to be ultimately victorious. Further, in this eschatological religion the conflict between good and evil is understood not so much metaphysically as ethically, involving the free choice of humans either for the rule of the Wise Lord or for that of Angra Mainyu. It is true that later Zoroastrianism brought some of the other gods back into the picture again. But in the teaching of Zarathushtra in the Gathas is found a unique monotheism with an ethico-dualistic accent.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The three religions that are generally held to be the full expressions of monotheism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, also arose against the background of the polytheism of the ancient Near East. These three religions are closely related in that they grew from the Semitic cultural background and the foundations of the religion of ancient Israel.

Although it was the fountainhead of this type of monotheism, the religion of ancient Israel was not actually monotheistic in early times. Stories of the patriarch Abraham show that he worshiped the Canaanite high god El in a variety of forms in addition to the god of the clan, and when the people of Israel entered into a covenant with the high god Yahveh they did not exclude the existence of other gods. One might call early Israelite religion henotheistic or monolatrous in the sense that exclusive loyalty was to be given to Yahveh, but Yahveh's power was limited because other nations had their own gods. Some Israelites lived with a polytheistic vision, giving loyalty to Yahveh as the god of the covenant but also worshiping Baal and the other gods of fecundity as they settled in Canaan and became agriculturalists. But the covenant relationship with Yahveh contained the seeds of monotheism; the Israelites experienced Yahveh as personal, showing himself in historical events and demanding exclusive loyalty and ethical behavior according to the covenant law. Prophets arose who challenged the polytheistic notion that various gods controlled the functions of nature. Elijah and Hosea, for example, held that it is only Yahveh who makes his power felt in all areas of existence, as the creator of all and the one God who sends corn at the harvest and wine at the vintage. Just as polytheistic ideas were overcome, the prophets also struggled to overcome the limitations of a henotheistic view of God. At one time it was accepted that one could not worship Yahveh outside the land of Israel. But Amos insisted that the one God, Yahveh, had not only brought Israel out of Egypt, but had also brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir (Amos 9:7). And Second Isaiah, the prophet of the Babylonian exile, went so far as to describe Cyrus II, the mighty king of the Medes and Persians, as "the anointed one of Yahveh" whom Yahveh had taken by the hand (Is. 45:1). In the vision of these prophets, Yahveh is no tribal god sharing power with other nations' gods; rather, he is the universal creator of all and the director of the history of all peoples according to his holy design.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims drew on the fundamental monotheistic vision of ancient Israel, each group filling out the picture of God with colorings and shapes drawn from its own particular culture. The dimensions of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim type of monotheism will be discussed at more length below.

Sikhism. One more expression of monotheism should be mentioned in this religio-historical survey: Sikhism. Starting with Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE), an Indian type of monotheism developed that synthesizes the mystical monotheism found in Hinduism and the ethical, personal monotheism brought into India by Islam. In Guru Nanak's teaching, there is only one God, who is immortal, unborn, self-existent, creator of all the universe, omniscient, formless, just, and loving. God is both transcendent as pure potentiality and immanent as

world-embodiment. Thus God is contained in everything. God is personal but is beyond complete knowledge, to be worshiped mainly in rituals of repeating his name. Revelation comes through gurus who speak the divine word. Humans attain heaven or hell at the end of a lifetime, although they are involved in many rounds of births and deaths. Final salvation for humans is nirvana, absorption into God's being like water blending with water.

Summing up this cross-cultural religio-historical survey, it is clear that monotheism has arisen in a number of ways. In some areas it came through rationalization, seeing the logic of unified divine power. In other traditions, mystical experience of everything as one and unified with the divine gave rise to monotheistic expressions. In still other traditions, historical experiences of one powerful, personal God led toward formulations of monotheistic belief.

Monotheism in Contrast to Nonmonotheistic Views. Monotheism often arises in antagonism to other views of divine reality. One of the most obvious contexts against which monotheism defines itself is a plurality of divine beings or forces, which is commonly called polytheism. Central to polytheism is the notion of theoi, personal divine beings within nature and society. These gods have personal wills, control specific spheres, and interact with one another to make up a functioning organism. The functioning of nature is seen as the operation of a plurality of divine wills, and this plurality and conflict are extended to human life and society. Typically there is a head of the pantheon, but this high god is limited in power and authority and often is thought of as old or impotent.

Monotheism distinguishes itself from the various forms of polytheism in that the whole realm of divine power is unified, with no conflicting wills or limitations. God has unlimited authority and power but still is theos, possessing personal will and relationship to the world. The plural forces are seen as qualities and attributes of God or as subservient beings of the created world. In the monotheistic view, God transcends the world of nature and human society; the world is not the locus of divine power, for God is the universal creator of everything out of nothing (ex nihilo). Humans find value and integration of meaning by realizing their common creaturehood and serving this one universal God. Revelation from God is the source of unified, universal meaning.

Related to polytheism is what F. Max Müller called henotheism and what others have called monolatry: worshiping one god at a time or raising up one most powerful God as the only one to be worshiped. [See Henotheism.] The other gods, while real, are downgraded before this supreme God. Monolatry means one God is worshiped as supreme, though the lesser gods of other peoples are recognized. Henotheism (kathenotheism) would be the view that different gods can be worshiped as the supreme God one at a time without implying that the other gods do not exist.

In contrast to monolatry and henotheism, monotheism universalizes the power and authority of the one God exclusively, for even sharing power with lesser gods would be a limitation that cannot apply. Monotheism is intrinsically universal, transcending tribal or nationalistic limitations; the one God has authority and power over all peoples, friends and enemies alike. And monotheism refuses the henotheistic idea that one god can be worshiped as supreme at one time and another at another time, although it does allow for the experience of various aspects of the one God at different times.

A form of thought close to monotheism but still related to polytheism and henotheism is theistic dualism. [See Dualism.] Typically, this experience of the divine reality separates out the hurtful or evil elements and associates these with another divine power, thus setting

up a divine struggle with echoes in human life. One unified supreme God is posited as the good divine force, and the source of evil can be thought of as many beings or as one evil being.

Strictly speaking, monotheism does not allow the one God to be limited even by the causes of destruction and evil; these causes cannot be divine forces outside the will of the one God. Ultimately the one God must be the source of all reality and all events, including those that humans experience as evil and destructive. Some forms of monotheistic thought do allow for evil beings as creatures of God, permitted to cause destruction and evil for various purposes within the overall authority of the one God. But these demons, devils, and satans are only part of the panorama of human existence, and they cannot limit or act against God's power, authority, and will.

Monism (nondualism) in the history of religions refers to a broad category of thought and experience in which the divine reality is unified and no ontological separation exists between the divine and the world itself (monism), or the divine is the "soul" of the world (nondualism). [See Monism.] All reality, including humans, share in the divine nature. Monism and nondualism tend to be nontheistic, for qualities of personal will and otherness from the world do not fit this perception of the divine. The world is not what it appears to be in the multiplicity of our perceptions. Rather, either the world is in essence one divine reality, or it is fundamentally an illusion, or it consists of forms and expressions that emanate from the one divine source. Further, monism and nondualism tend to be nonhistorical, in the sense that a cyclical rhythm of time expresses the experience of the one divine reality. The religious path is one of mystical discipline and meditation, bringing progressively higher stages of knowledge and ultimate liberation in union with the one divine reality. Of course, provision is made for theistic practices at the lower levels of spiritual perfection.

Monotheism distinguishes itself from the various forms of monism and nondualism by positing a definite separation between the one divine reality and the world which God brought into existence. In this sense there is a dualistic emphasis in monotheism, for there are two distinct realms of reality, the divine and the created world. Only God is eternal and transcendent; he created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo). At the same time, most forms of monotheism hold God not only as transcendent but also as immanent in the world: God's presence, power, and operation are immediately present in human experience. [See Transcendence and Immanence.] The world is a creature, real and good as part of God's design. Revelation from God is important as guidance; prophetic and devotional emphases predominate over the mystical and meditative ones. God is a personal theos who confronts one in historical existence as an Other, to whom one relates through obedience and service. And God works in the history of the world, directing events toward an eschaton in which there will be evaluation and judgment. History has a beginning and an end, and God transcends it all.

Dimensions of Monotheistic Belief and Practice. In setting up a typology of monotheism to show the ideal types toward which the various monotheistic religious traditions point, it is important to realize that even within one tradition there will be different experiences and philosophies of monotheism. Thus, while a tradition may be dominated by a certain type, its particular coloration may be affected by hues drawn from other types. Further, monotheistic thought focuses especially on the theoretical or verbal dimension of religious experience. When we move to the practical and the social spheres we encounter a variety of phenomena which at times may not be distinctively monotheistic. Worship, law, customs, and social forms may show striking parallels in different religions without regard to

the theoretical stance on monotheism, polytheism, or monism. For example, visual images of the divine reality are used in Christianity as well as in Hinduism, but not in Islam or Judaism—and also not in polytheistic Shinto. Some Muslim mosques are as bare and simple as Buddhist meditation centers, while some Christian churches gleam with golden brocade, candles, images, and saints that rival Hindu or Taoist temples. Orders of priests, monks, and nuns bring some Christian groups close to Buddhism, while the rabbi and imam of Jews and Muslims resemble more the learned teacher of a Hindu ashram. The veneration of saints in some sectors of Islam and Christianity appears similar to the veneration of spiritual beings in traditional African religions, but other sectors of Islam and Christianity strongly reject these practices. Thus care needs to be taken in setting up a monotheistic typology, so that religious traditions are not fitted in too tightly, doing damage to the integrity and richness of the particular religion.

The following typology of dominant emphases in the monotheistic religions includes elements from some religious traditions that may not be fully monotheistic, yet they all put forth the two essential ingredients of monotheism: monos and theos.

Monarchic monotheism. Monarchic monotheism, the belief in one God who rules over many gods, is close to polytheism and grows out of a cosmic religious context. One high God rises to supreme authority and unlimited power, forcing the other powers to total submission. Akhenaton's monotheistic movement in ancient Egypt was of this type; and Yahvism in early Israel displays this form, with Yahveh pictured as "a great king above all the gods" (Ps. 95:3). The attitude which subjugates other religions and imposes a monolithic system on all may be a result of this type of monotheism.

A subtype of monarchic monotheism would be dualistic monotheism: one God opposed against evil forces. In this view there is one ruler God, all-good and all-just, who tends to become distant, watching over the struggle within existence in which evil divine forces play a part. The distinctive quality of this type of monotheism is that it takes evil away from the being of the one God, accounting for it through demons or devils. Zoroastrianism is a classic example of dualistic monotheism: although the one God, Ahura Mazda, is supreme, the evil spirit Angra Mainyu struggles throughout the history of the world, to be overcome only at the end. Popular forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have sometimes approached this type of dualistic monotheism with ideas of Satan or the devil defying God's will, although generally these religions see the evil one as a creature permitted by the one God to perform evil within creation. The struggle between God and evil forces can be seen as a cosmic struggle, as in the Hindu Puranas, in which demonic powers arise anew in each new age and Visnu incarnates himself in an avatara to do battle and realign the cosmic order. Some traditions in Judaism and Christianity describe God's struggle with Satan or the Antichrist as taking place on a trans-historical, cosmic plane. More commonly, however, dualistic monotheism has strong ties to the historical plane of human existence and provides an ethical dimension for human involvement in God's struggle against evil.

Emanational mystical monotheism. We can divide emanational mystical monotheism into two subtypes: the worship of one God through many gods, or the worship of one God as the world soul. The first subtype, congenial especially to a monistic context, recognizes many gods but sees them as emanations of the one divine source, which is conceived of in theistic terms. Some ancient Greeks rationalized the plurality of the gods in relation to a particular supreme high god in this way. Hindu theistic cults sometimes offer this explanation of the relation of the many gods to the one great god worshiped in that cult. Visnu, for example, can also be worshiped in many avataras and with many different names.

Another example would be Esoteric Buddhism, in which all Buddhas and bodhisattvas can be seen as emanations of the Great Sun Buddha, Mahavairocana.

Another type of monotheism related to the monistic worldview is the mystical view of the one God as the world soul. This type of monotheism holds that there is one personal theos who is not sharply separate from the world but rather is the creative divine force in everything. Again, the great theistic cults of Hinduism and Buddhism often show this type. For example, Ramanuja's "Qualified Nondualism" holds Visnu to be the absolute, supreme God to whom the worshiper relates in bhakti as qualitatively different from the worshiper himself; yet Visnu and the worshiper are united as soul and body are united. In the theistic Krsna cults, Krsna as the supreme personality of God can be experienced as different from the world, yet in the highest mystical experiences these differences fade away and Krsna becomes all, as expressed in Arjuna's vision (Bhagavadgita, chap. 11). Sikhism is a monotheism that emphasizes God as absolute creator, self-sufficient and unchanging; yet God is embodied in the world, and the believer who finally reaches nirvana becomes absorbed in God. Sikh monotheism, like Hindu monotheistic forms, tends to be nonhistorical, looking on existence as a countless series of cycles until finally the separation is overcome and the worshiper achieves complete union with the one God. Certain mystical movements within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have also approached this type of monotheism without displaying the ahistor-ical feature. For example, the "panentheism" ("everything is in God") of Sufi mystics like Ibn al-`Arabi (1165-1240 CE) or of medieval German Jewish mystics tended to see the whole universe as an emanation of God's own being, a reflection of the divine, while maintaining a view of God as distinct from the world.

Historical ethical monotheism. Historical ethical monotheism, the belief in one God guiding the historical design, characteristically describes God as personal, having a will for the historical design of the world, guiding all events as the creator, separate from the world yet immanently involved in human history as the God whose law governs all, who gives value to all and holds all accountable at the end of history, and who reveals himself through pivotal prophets, events, and scriptures. Humans are expected to follow God's design by establishing goodness and justice in human society. God makes total demands, controls political history, is intolerant of other gods or other ultimate commitments, and is to be worshiped by all exclusively.

Zoroastrianism contains most of these monotheistic features, although it makes the dualism of good and evil central to the conception of the divine and thereby assigns some limits to the power of God. Sikhism also contains many of the features of ethical monotheism, but it gives central place to a cyclical view of existence and the goal of mystical absorption into God.

The family of religions made up of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam most fully expresses this type of monotheism and places it at the center of religious thought and practice. Each of these three traditions also adds its particular hue to the universal monotheistic vision. Judaism places a strong emphasis on the personal character of God, encountered in an "I-Thou" relationship and providing an ethical design for life as spelled out in the Torah and Talmud. The universal character of the one God is seen as turned toward humankind, especially in the very specific form of the covenant relationship with the Jews as "chosen people." The particular nature of this covenant and its demands does not negate God's universality, in the Jewish view. God's design for the world is to be fulfilled especially through the covenant with the Jews and thus a great responsibility is placed on them. Further, all non-Jews who fulfill in their lives the basic human principles known as the "seven

commandments of the sons of Noah" will have a share in the life of the world to come. Thus the religion of Judaism expresses a universal monotheism that focuses on God's particular relationship to humans through the covenant with the Jews.

Christians have modulated historical ethical monotheism into concrete, existential terms by emphasizing the personal character of the one God revealed in human history. Resisting tendencies of tritheism, Christian tradition has worked out a triunity that makes God concretely immanent in this world as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Central to this vision is the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, a historical particularization of the universal God that provides a pivot for all of human history and points to the fulfillment of God's whole design in the eschaton. Christians insist that their Christology is monotheistic; Christ is one substance (homoousios) with God the Father. Jews and Muslims, of course, find this doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ to be out of line with their understanding of monotheism.

Muslims have made the unity (tawhid) of God the central statement of their confession of faith: "There is no god but God." Islam puts forth a very radical monotheism in insisting on the utter transcendence and sovereignty of God, all-powerful in every aspect of the universe, to be likened to nothing. The greatest sin is shirk, associating anything else with God. The universal God is particularized in Islam by making the Qur'an the concrete revelation by which God relates to all humans and gives them guidance. While the final revelation came through the prophet Muhammad, it is intended for all humans in all ages as their guide to the ethical life and to the blessings that God intends for faithful creatures.

Current Reflections on Monotheism. Monotheism is the long-established religious tradition in the cultures informed by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but still a considerable amount of searching and rethinking goes on. Philosophers and theologians continue to draw out the implications of the monotheistic vision for thought and society. For example, an influential work by H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York, 1960), argues that modern society tends toward henotheism, making one particular society into the center of value and the object of loyalty; in contrast, radical monotheism has as its reference the One, beyond all the many, from whom all reality receives its value. Contemporary Jewish and Muslim writers have also stressed radical monotheism as a critique of the polytheistic or henotheistic tendencies of modern society.

Modern thinkers have also been wrestling with some of the central characteristics of traditional monotheism that seem to be problematic. Difficulties revolve around God's personality, God's immutability, and his strict separation from the world; the theocratic overtones of monotheism, its patriarchal associations and seeming suppression of human freedom; and the rejection of mystical spiritism found in monotheism. Without surveying all the recent critiques and reinterpretations of the doctrine of God among philosophers and theologians, several lines of thought directly related to monotheism may be mentioned here. For example, feeling that the traditional view of God as personal tends to make him another being in additional to those we know in the world, John Macquarrie and Paul Tillich speak of the divine reality as "Being" or the "Ground of Being," avoiding pantheism but holding God to be not one being but the source of all being.

The movement known as process philosophy or theology has attempted to move to a via media between an untenable unipolar theism in which God is immutable and completely separate from the world, and an equally untenable pantheism. Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne maintain that God includes and penetrates the world, while still being distinct from the being of the world. This bipolar view sees God as infinite personal existence

and thus independent of the actual world in his abstract identity but including the actual world in his concrete existence. God is the source of love and the cause of nature's order and has an overall design for the world. Since God is personal, change and growth take place in God as well as in the world.

Critiques of traditional monotheism have also come from analyses of the type of ideology and society associated with monotheism. In 1935 Erik Peterson, in an essay called "Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem," described monotheism as a political ideology linked with the notion of divine kingship and leading to totalitarianism, and this line of criticism has recently been renewed. Disillusioned by the effects of secularism, thinkers of the "New Right" in France, such as Alain de Benoist and Manuel de Diéguez, blame monotheistic ideology for suppressing human freedom and forcing people to adopt atheism as the only alternative. They seek a neopagan resurgence as a new location of the sacred in the plurality and freedom of human life rather than in the monolithic totalitarian rule of monotheism. David Miller likewise has suggested that monotheism can no longer sustain and provide creativity for modern culture, calling for a return to the creative sources of polytheism. And feminist thinkers have criticized monotheism as a model of the highest form of patriarchal power and authority; in monotheism, God is imaged as male, omnipotent with unilateral power and authority over the world, separate and autonomous, exclusive, and opposed to everything related to change, sensuality, nature, feeling, and femininity.

There have, of course, been many responses to these critiques. For example, theologians have attempted to be more careful in the use of conventional dualisms like monotheism-polytheism, personal-impersonal, and transcendent-immanent, recognizing that religious traditions, including those labeled monotheistic, are complex and embody elements from both sides of these conceptual dualities. New defenses of monotheism are being proposed. For example, Bernard-Henri Lévy turns to the Jewish tradition to show that monotheism actually has a liberating function, safeguarding against totalitarianism and all the idols of nature, ideology, and the state. Some Christian theologians, like Jürgen Moltmann, recognizing the problems with a monarchical, patriarchal monotheism, stress God's liberating relation to humans by reemphasizing the trinitarian conception—though such emphasis widens the gulf between Christian thought and that of Judaism and Islam.

This ongoing discussion makes it clear that monotheistic thought, while often challenged by and in tension with alternate and modified religious understandings, is still central to most of the Western world and will continue to be a dominant mode of experiencing and expressing the divine reality.

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The End