

Mysticism and the mystical

The current debate

Edward Howells

MYSTICISM CONCERNS THE NATURE of our access to God, reality and truth, and therefore it is no surprise that it is a matter of controversy. Indeed, in recent years some prominent writers have suggested that it is part of the nature of mysticism to be controversial. Michel de Certeau, Rowan Williams, Michael Sells and Denys Turner have argued, in various ways, that the function of mysticism is to act as a critical dynamic within the self-understanding of Christianity.¹ On this definition, mysticism acts as a kind of purification tablet in the impure water of Christian faith and practice. Yet they do not go as far as some post-modern thinkers, such as Don Cupitt,² who regard mysticism solely as subversive language and reject its ontological role as a special kind of relationship with God. In order to have this purifying effect, mysticism must be not simply critical or controversial but also intimately connected to the core of the Christian faith; it must move the believer, or community, or religious discourse in which it acts in the right direction, towards the truth of God.

In this article, I shall briefly survey the contemporary discussion of mysticism and, while doing so, seek to articulate my own position. I shall aim for a middle position, between defining mysticism as, on the one hand, a critical dynamism thoroughly bound up with the ordinary, mediated structures of Christian living, and on the other hand, an ontological transformation to a state of 'immediate' relationship or union with God. Mysticism is not an escape from the complexities of human relationships, language and activity; and yet it is also an 'immediate' kind of access to the divine dynamic present *within* these realities. As Bernard Lonergan has put it, mysticism is a 'mediated return to immediacy' in our relationship with God.³

Non-theological understandings of mysticism

William James

A prominent project in the modern debate on mysticism has been to remove ontological questions concerning God from the field of study. This is a superficially attractive proposition, because few people are

agreed on who or what God is, and, particularly if we want to compare certain kinds of experience across the religions, it seems advantageous to avoid the question of the nature of God. The alternative suggested is to examine human experience alone, defining mysticism as a certain kind of human experience prior to questions of belief and interpretation. This was the project developed by William James, whose *Varieties of religious experience* remains the most influential and popular approach to mysticism and mystical experience today.⁴ James asks us to look at human experience as an 'empirical' sphere of study, particularly at the numerous accounts of putative mystical experience across the religions – which he amassed at great length – and to use the scientific method, working from data to hypothesis and back again, to analyse exactly what marks out these experiences as a distinct category of human experience in general. He extracted four characteristics or 'marks' which, he claimed, could be used to define mystical experience – ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity.⁵ He did not concern himself with whether the object of the experience was God; he saw it as an advantage of his method that this question could be left to individual preference and religious commitment, while the experience could be defined using wholly 'objective', scientific criteria. James argues that he has defined 'mystical experience' irrespective of religious belief.

A detailed criticism of James' understanding of religious and mystical experience is to be found in Nicholas Lash's *Easter in ordinary: reflections on human experience and the knowledge of God*.⁶ Lash focuses on the problematic separation of experience and understanding in James' thought. For James to say that mystical experience can be defined apart from belief is to suggest that humans are capable of separating their 'experience' from how they *understand* their experience. In fact, Lash argues convincingly, there is no such separation. Our experience *is* what we understand it to be. 'Experience' describes a cognitive relationship *between* subject and object rather than an object which can be separated from human understanding. The object experienced can be separated from our understanding, but the *experience*, as distinct from the object, remains thoroughly bound up with our understanding. Further, Lash argues that this is especially true of religious experience, where it is much more difficult to differentiate God as the 'object' of our experience than is the case with ordinary objects in the world. We require a very specific structure of religious understanding to be able to do this, or even to make sense of the possibility, as God is not like other objects. There is, at most, an

analogy between experience of God and experience of the world, rather than a literal equivalence, and how this is to be understood requires a religious explanation. Therefore, theological questions are unavoidable in the study of mystical experience.

Steven Katz

Lash does not go so far as to say that religious belief *determines* the content of mystical experience, thereby rendering mystical experience invalid outside the sphere of the religions, but this is the position adopted by those known as 'constructivists' in the contemporary debate, led by Steven Katz. Katz argues that there is no unmediated experience – all experience is constructed in relation to the cultural and social situation of the experiencer.⁷ For Katz, experience is so dependent on the system of thought or religion in which it is said to occur that there is no possibility for comparing putatively similar 'mystical experiences' across religions or cultures, as there is no way of knowing that like is being compared with like. All that can be said is that, within the sphere of a particular religion, an experience may be understood to be mystical. Yet Katz takes this to extremes: he seems to be proposing a deeper philosophical move, that we have no access to a divine or universal level beyond the contingencies and mediations of our experience, by which we might judge our experience by universal criteria. He sees this as a necessary step against the suggestion that we might have immediate access to God or ultimate truth. But in fact he has gone a lot further, towards a radically relativist view which severs the individual from an ability to form an impartial judgment on any matter. His own argument would fail if this were the case. The constructivist position ends up shooting itself in the foot, when taken to this extreme.

Robert K. Forman

At the other end of the spectrum from the constructivist position is a group working to rehabilitate a Jamesian understanding of mysticism, known as the 'essentialists', in that they posit an immediate link between the experiencing subject and universal 'being' or God, to which all humans have access.⁸ This position is best represented in two recent books of essays edited by Robert K. Forman, *The problem of pure consciousness* and *The innate capacity*.⁹ Labelling Katz, correctly, as a neo-Kantian who has severed the ontological link between the individual and universal 'being', these essayists attempt to reforge the connection by appealing to a natural capacity in the human person which provides immediate access to being. They identify a state of

'pure consciousness', characterized by the loss of concepts and a sense of unity with all things, transcending subject-object differentiation, where the individual finds this level of universal being within themselves. Following James, they eschew theological definitions of this intimate link with being on the grounds that the event of pure consciousness indicates the impossibility of applying concepts and definitions to it. Rather, all we can do is point to 'certain deep and consistent psychological structures' in the human psyche which are revealed by this pure consciousness event.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the argument here is self-defeating: it is claimed that 'pure consciousness' demonstrates our profound unity with transcendent being, and yet at the same time that we can say nothing about being and truth but only about the human psyche. We are back to the Jamesian problem that only some rather trivial psychological patterns in putatively mystical experience have been shown, without giving any justification for the more important ontological claim that this is an experience of unity with God or universal being.

Some criticisms of 'experience'-based approaches

Both the constructivist and essentialist positions should, in my view, be regarded as *modifications* of the Jamesian approach rather than real criticisms of it, in that they share the conviction that human 'experience' is a stable object of enquiry. Katz goes a considerable way towards setting experience in a context of belief, but he makes the same separation as James between what people *say* they experience and what they are 'actually' experiencing, as if experience can be treated apart from questions of belief. Religion and understanding still rank merely as an interpretative framework for Katz, within which the prior field of human experience is worked out – understanding is not intrinsic to the category of 'experience' itself. The fault with this view has been pointed out by Lash (as above), and a still more convincing critique is to be found in historical treatments of the way that ideas of religious experience have shifted according to their context in different systems of thought. Wayne Proudfoot and, in a more theological vein, Mark A. McIntosh,¹¹ point out that it is only since the Enlightenment that the notion has arisen of reducing the entire field of human experience to a graspable, substantive 'object' for scientific analysis. Before this, 'experience' was understood in participative terms, as the human subject entering into a relationship with the world and other creatures founded on the prior relationship between God and creation. Both positions are affected by the belief system on which they rest, but the

former is positively misleading in claiming a false objectivity and separation of experience from questions of belief. With Lash, Proudfoot and McIntosh ask us to return to an examination of beliefs about God and the world as the key to understanding how to define religious and mystical experience.¹²

Theological understandings of mysticism

In suggesting that only explicitly theological understandings of mysticism are sufficient, there is one initial objection that must be dealt with. The objection is that to consider mysticism only within the context of a particular religion or theology is to concede to the extreme constructivists that all experience of God is *entirely* determined by prior belief and therefore has no validity outside the religions, indeed, that it is indistinguishable from self-deception. Against this, I would say that I have not excluded the possibility that there is one mysticism across all the religions, even outside the religions, or that mysticism really is a universally attainable, immediate experience of God. But I take Katz's point that mystical experience is dependent on the ontological structure of relationship with God as understood within a religion. The problem is that claims for the universality of mystical experience must be made within the contingencies of a particular system of thought. In the case of Christianity, the fact that God is one suggests that our relationship with God, and hence mysticism, will be one and the same for all people, in certain central respects; but this claim for universality is made within the historically contingent perspective of the religion. I part company with Katz only in his insistence that the contingency of our perspective *necessarily* rules out the truth of universal claims about experience of God. This need not follow. In fact, Katz does not follow it himself, as he makes his own universal claim that 'all experience is mediated' – a statement which is as dependent on the system of thought within which it is made as are religious claims for immediate experience of God. The relative merits of the two statements can only be compared by a thorough investigation and evaluation of the two systems of thought. The point for the study of mysticism is that an explicitly theological treatment is not a retreat from universality to a narrower 'religious' sphere, but that access to universality is inalienably linked to the restrictions of perspective for human beings. As a consequence, the study of mysticism *must* enter into a theological debate, including all the restrictions of context and perspective among competing theologies, rather than first seeking some purportedly universal discourse.

The twentieth-century theological debate on mysticism in western Christianity may be seen as following an overall shift from a preoccupation with a universal field and language of mysticism to an insistence on the claims of historical context and perspective. This debate has shown, at every point, the intense difficulty of bringing together the particularity of our perspective with the universal claims of Christian ontology. The general problem of how to combine particularity with universality in Christianity is intensified in the case of mysticism by the claim for 'immediate' relationship with God, which implies a shift from the usual limitations of human particularity towards a more immediate appropriation of universality. I shall briefly examine this recent history.

French neothomists

The debate on mysticism among mainly French, mainly neothomist theologians in the first four decades of the twentieth century dominates the entire century, but I am only able to note one important development here, which was the new attention given to the epistemology of mysticism. These neoscholastics reopened a debate which had lain dormant since the late mediaeval period over precisely how mystical knowledge of God could be set within the context of an entire human epistemology. They were able to do this by rejecting the foregoing 'orthodoxy' in modern intellectual history, that of Cartesianism, in favour of a still rather narrow, but visionary for the time, concentration on Thomas Aquinas. For instance, Jacques Maritain, in his *Degrees of knowledge*,¹³ used the Thomist understanding of *intentionality* as a participation in the divine self-knowing of the Trinity to show the fundamental unity between mystical knowing and ordinary knowing in the human subject, appealing to the mediaeval understanding of a hierarchy of degrees of participation in God as an explanation for the distinctiveness of mystical knowing. There was little attention given to history and context among the neothomists – Aquinas was marched onto the scene as the one with the universally 'right' answers in much the same way as Descartes and Enlightenment thought had been before – but for the first time in the modern period mysticism could be examined in a context capable of demonstrating its epistemological value.

Transcendental Thomists

In the next generation of theologians, there was a reaction to the neoscholastic tendency to 'pigeonhole' mysticism into rather rigid categories of spiritual development and psychology, in favour of

constructing larger systematic theologies. The two most important theologians associated with this movement are the 'transcendental Thomists', Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.¹⁴ Neither had a great deal to say about mysticism – certainly not in relation to their total output – but both gave it a central role, and what they do say is all the more significant for being placed in a systematic context. Taking Lonergan as an example, we find in his *Verbum: word and idea in Aquinas*,¹⁵ a development of Thomist epistemology which takes further Maritain's insight into the central role of intentionality in relating all human knowing to the processions of the Trinity. He argues that our pre-linguistic, immediate relationship with God may become explicitly known in mystical experience as a 'prolonging' of our self-knowing into God's own self-knowing.¹⁶ This knowing is 'immediate' in the sense that we do not make either God or ourselves the object of knowing in the ordinary way, but penetrate further 'into' our natural relationship with God, by the transformation of our cognitive abilities into the dynamic structure of the Trinity, by grace. This is what Lonergan calls a 'mediated return to immediacy', in that we come to know God *both* at the level of God's immediate trinitarian self-knowing *and* in our mediated structures of human knowing, at once.¹⁷ Later, he came to redefine this mystical knowing as a kind of 'consciousness', as it is not merely knowing or experience, but the transformation of our *way* of knowing and experiencing, so that we can perceive, and put first in our knowing, the pre-linguistic relationship with God in our 'ground'. Here, in my view, is a highly satisfactory definition of mysticism, in that it brings together a serious treatment of human epistemology with the central claim for 'immediate' knowledge of God which marks out this experience as *mystical*.

The historical context

Still, however, among the transcendental Thomists, the debate on mysticism had not made the shift from universal categories – in this case, the categories of theological anthropology – to a proper attention to historical context. The first move in this direction came from another major systematic theologian of the period, Hans Urs von Balthasar. Von Balthasar, as has been recently argued by Mark A. McIntosh,¹⁸ set the question of mysticism within a christology which insists on the priority of the historical revelation in Christ over any universal metaphysic concerning our appropriation of God. The main point to be noted here is that this move provided a systematic basis for giving historical context a central place in the definition of mysticism, since the context in which

God is received, even in the 'immediate' relationship of mysticism, has the same priority as the historical form of Christ in christology. For von Balthasar, mysticism is to be understood as the trinitarian momentum towards incarnation received *through* our particular relationships with the historical revelation in Christ, bringing us into immediate contact with the universal passage of the Trinity into creation.¹⁹ This systematic move anchors mysticism firmly in the historical context of the reception of God in the life of the mystic.

The four figures in the current debate on mysticism whom I began by mentioning, Michel de Certeau, Rowan Williams, Michael Sells and Denys Turner, without being explicit followers of von Balthasar,²⁰ can be characterized as working out his insight concerning the inextricable link between historical appropriation and universal relationship with God, in their own studies. To these must be added Bernard McGinn, whose multi-volume *magnum opus* covering the entire western Christian tradition is a programmatic application of this move to examine mysticism through its context in the history of Christianity.²¹

Michel de Certeau, the most unusual and earliest of the group (1925–86), was the pioneer of a thoroughly contextualized study of mysticism. In his major work on mysticism, *The mystic fable*, he noted that the word 'mysticism' was used for the first time in seventeenth-century France ('*la mystique*').²² Before this, it had not been used as a noun but only in an adjectival sense, referring to a linguistic field *within* the larger structure of Christian theology, in phrases such as 'mystical theology'. The mystical was understood as a state of 'otherness' – hence the extraordinary states and sufferings ascribed to mystics in the mediaeval period – reflecting Christ's own 'otherness' while on earth, especially in his suffering, that is, it was dependent on a traditional Christian theological structure for its meaning.²³ In the modern period, this Christian framework broke down under the influence of the new science, and was replaced by an *ersatz* 'scientific' field of 'mysticism' focusing on extraordinary phenomena, now divorced from the system of thought which gave it meaning. De Certeau's emphasis is on the fact that mysticism is socially, historically and linguistically conditioned, but his comments on the disintegration of the mediaeval theological synthesis indicate that he regards mysticism, correctly understood, as a certain type of concrete, historical imitation of Christ offering immediate access to God within a christological theological structure.

Rowan Williams has written the least of this group specifically on mysticism, but not unlike von Balthasar, the mystical has a central place in his thought. In an early article on the relationship between the

'mystical' and the 'prophetic',²⁴ Williams developed an idea of the mystic which resembles de Certeau's view, as one who departs from social and religious conventions, like the prophet, but whose 'otherness' is to be understood, and has its function, within particular religious traditions. Thus, his definition of the mystical is of a specific departure from the ordinary practice of the religion which is given meaning, paradoxically, *within* the traditional structure provided by the religion. This combination of the particular and unconventional with the universal truth of mysticism is fleshed out in his later, detailed study of Teresa of Avila.²⁵ Williams emphasizes that the 'point of access' to God is in Teresa's *life*, and in the mediation through this life of a particular understanding of mystical union.²⁶ Her ecstatic, out-of-body experiences are not valuable or mystical in their own right, but only within the context of her active imitation of Christ. The context of her mysticism is christological, and in this sense ordinary, and yet by being rooted in this context, the extraordinary manifestations of her ecstasies and unions function as signs of the immediate access of her life to God.

Michael Sells and Denys Turner are both concerned with the role of language and texts as the context of mysticism.²⁷ Sells understands mysticism as a 'meaning event' which occurs at 'that moment when the meaning has become identical and fused with the act of predication'. This is 'the semantic analogue to the experience of mystical union',²⁸ in the sense that mysticism is not so much defined as performed in language using the 'shape' of the language as an analogy for the event of mystical union. The question which follows from this, however, is not addressed by Sells, which is how this language actually refers to God. Is the truth of mysticism merely a linguistic technique, or does it refer to God *beyond* language? Turner takes up this point.²⁹ Turner regards the mystical as a specifically *apophatic* moment when our language fails in the approach to God, which he identifies in key texts in the tradition, especially in Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite and Meister Eckhart. The mystical is an admission, at the moment of union, of the failure of language. Turner does not seek to sever the apophatic use of language from the truth of God, however, or from the cataphatic, but requires the dynamic interplay of these two kinds of language to maintain the relationship with God who is beyond language. The apophatic, mystical moment in language occurs only within a larger 'theological strategy' where language fails precisely because God is real.

Bernard McGinn spends just a few pages out of what will be several thousand in his emerging history of mysticism in defining what

mysticism is. He describes his method as that of the 'hermeneutical spiral', which begins with merely the bare bones of a definition, a 'heuristic' notion of mysticism, which will be tested and modified against the full range of historical detail covered in the course of his history, so that he will not give a full definition until he has reached the end. Yet, from the little that McGinn has said,³⁰ it is clear that he is seeking a definition which brings together the two main elements in mysticism that I have focused on in this article, the epistemological and the historical-contextual. The centre of mysticism, for McGinn, is the 'consciousness of the immediate presence of God',³¹ which he understands following Bernard Lonergan – his teacher – as the kind of 'mediated return to immediacy' in human consciousness that I have described above. The mystical, for McGinn, is centrally about experience, but experience understood as part of a full epistemology; mysticism is not just a particular experience, or vision, or moment of union, but immediate 'consciousness' in relation to God, which brings the whole range of human experience and how we understand experience into its purview. Further, this mystical element can be identified as a tradition in Christian history using a 'nexus of key themes' which form the linguistic and historical field of mysticism.³² This makes it possible to treat mysticism at once as a single element in Christianity and as a multiplicity of historical figures, texts and ideas, strenuously avoiding putting either one ahead of the other, but using the method of the hermeneutical spiral to draw both equally into the definition of mysticism.

Conclusion

This survey of the current study of mysticism cannot be comprehensive, and there are many important figures whom I have left out. But I have sought to show the main trends in the recent debate on mysticism and to explain them in some detail. I have also put forward my own position, which may be summarized in three points. First, the definition of mysticism cannot be severed from the system of thought in which it is given, and particularly not from ideas of experience which differ widely over the course of history. Second, if the claim is made, as it usually is, that mystical experience is experience of God, the system of thought will be explicitly theological. Third, this reference to God in mysticism, and still more so, the claim for 'immediate' access to God which marks out mysticism from the wider field of religious experience, is problematic because it is a universal claim. How can 'God' be said to be the object of mysticism, when all theologies are as

thoroughly bound up with their context and particular perspective as are the definitions of 'experience' already mentioned? This difficulty has been worked out in recent Christian theology by appealing to the relationship between particularity and universality and between human and divine in Christ. Mysticism's universal claim for immediate access to God is to be understood as an appropriation of Christ's own consciousness, in which immediate relationship with the Father is combined with a fully human life.

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NOTES

1 Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique XVIe–XVIIe siècle* (1982); Michael B. Smith (trans), *The mystic fable: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Rowan Williams, 'The prophetic and the mystical: Heiler revisited', *New Blackfriars* 64 (1983), pp 330–347, and idem, *Teresa of Avila* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991); Michaels Sells, *Mystical languages of unsaying* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); Denys Turner, *The darkness of God: negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). These are further discussed below.

2 See Don Cupitt, *Mysticism after modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Grace Jantzen, whose studies are more historically nuanced than Cupitt's, must also be regarded as a fundamentally post-modern thinker in this respect: see her *Power, gender and Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Unfortunately there is not space to consider Jantzen's position in this article, though she ranks as a major force in the contemporary debate on mysticism. She would reject the ontological claim for mysticism as immediate access to God that I am making in this article.

3 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p 77, also p 29.

4 William James, *The varieties of religious experience* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1902), esp. lectures XVI and XVII.

5 *Ibid.*, pp 380–382.

6 Nicholas Lash, *Easter in ordinary: reflections on human experience and the knowledge of God* (London: SCM, 1988), chs 1–8.

7 Steven T. Katz, 'Language, epistemology, and mysticism' in *Mysticism and philosophical analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), pp 22–74.

8 This follows not just James but other important precursors such as the 'perennial philosophy' of Aldous Huxley and the 'common core' theory of mysticism across the religions put forward by, e.g., Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), and W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960).

9 Robert K. Forman (ed), *The problem of pure consciousness: mysticism and philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), and idem, *The innate capacity: mysticism, psychology, and philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 1998).

10 *Innate capacity*, p 28.

11 Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious experience* (California: University of California, 1985); Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical theology: the integrity of spirituality and theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

12 Another prominent example of an approach to religious experience which ignores the need for history and theological context is the recent proliferation of 'proofs from experience' of the existence of God. Examples are Richard Swinburne's *The existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and William Alston's *Perceiving God: the epistemology of religious experience* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991). These seem to take implicitly atheistic modern ideas of experience and then seek to work God back in, ignoring the shift in the understanding of experience since such proofs were first formulated in the mediaeval period.

13 Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer pour unir, ou Les degrés du savoir* (1932), Gerald B. Phelan (trans), *Distinguish to unite, or The degrees of knowledge*, 4th edn (New York: Scribner, 1959).

14 Rahner's main criticism of the neoscholastics was their failure to identify the whole of the spiritual life, mystical states included, with a single gracious relationship between God and the human subject, but rather to isolate certain states as spiritual or mystical, so placing anthropological and psychological distinctions ahead of the unity of the human-divine relationship. (See Philip Endean's forthcoming book on this subject, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian spirituality* [Oxford: OUP, 2001], esp. ch 3.) Lonergan criticized the neoscholastics for forgetting the human subject in their analysis of the soul: they identified all sorts of faculties and senses, but no conscious person to inhabit them. As he proclaimed, 'intentionality analysis [has] routed faculty psychology', indicating that the unity of the human subject as an intentional being must be placed ahead of the divisions in an epistemology; see his *Method in theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p 96.

15 Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: word and idea in Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), first published as a series of articles in the 1940s.

16 *Ibid.*, p 103.

17 See note 3 above.

18 McIntosh, *Mystical theology*, esp. pp 101–114.

19 Philip Endean, contrary to McIntosh, ascribes this priority of our appropriation of the historical life of Christ in mysticism to Rahner also. See his forthcoming book, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian spirituality*, cited above, and also 'The Ignatian prayer of the senses' in *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990), pp 391–418. It should also be noted that Karl Barth uses an argument similar to von Balthasar's for the priority of the historical over the interior states of mysticism to *reject* mysticism as a valid part of Christianity altogether: he thinks that this turn to the interior is an egocentric move which conflicts with the objectivity of historical revelation in Jesus Christ.

20 With the possible exception of Rowan Williams, though his work is too diverse to be described as following any single theologian.

21 Bernard McGinn, *The presence of God: a history of western Christian mysticism*, three vols to date (New York: Crossroad, 1992–98).

22 Cited in note 1. Also important as a study of the early history of the word 'mysticism' in Christianity is Louis Bouyer, 'Mysticism: an essay on the history of the word' in Richard Woods (ed), *Understanding mysticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), pp 42–55.

23 *Ibid.*, p 22.

24 Cited in note 1.

25 Cited in note 1.

26 Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, p 153.

27 The works to which I refer are cited in note 1.

28 Sells, *Mystical languages of unsaying*, p 9.

29 See Turner, *Darkness of God*, esp. ch 11.

30 See the introductions to each of the *History of western Christian mysticism* volumes, esp. vol 1, and also McGinn's article, 'Quo Vadis? Reflections on the current study of mysticism', in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 6, no 1 (1998), pp 13–21. McGinn also provides an extremely

valuable and detailed summary of modern scholarship on mysticism in vol 1 of the *History of western Christian mysticism*, pp 265–343.

31 McGinn, *History of western Christian mysticism*, vol 1, p xvii.

32 McGinn, 'Quo Vadis? Reflections on the current study of mysticism', in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 6, no 1 (1998), p 17.