

## Review

William Johnston, *The inner eye of love: Mysticism and religion*. London: Fount Paperbacks, 1981, 208 pp. £1.75.

In this book, originally published in 1978, Father Johnston, professor at Sophia University in Tokyo and well-known author of *The mysticism of 'The cloud of unknowing'* (1967), *The still point: Reflections on Zen and Christian mysticism* (1970), *Christian Zen* (1971) and *Silent music: The science of meditation* (1974), continues his explorations into "spirituality for modern man."

Needless to say, these works do not resort strictly to the science of religion, but rather carry the banner of religious praxis and its methodology. The present work, too, may be most helpful to Christians—or people with a Christian background—who long for something deeper than the one-dimensional life imposed by consumerist society and who, on the other hand, do not know too well how to situate or handle the many spiritual paths which the "mystical East" has to offer. The present work constitutes an ardent summons "to embark on the mystical journey" from a deeply Christian point of view. The result is, however, that this reviewer, not being a mystic himself, feels rather unqualified for his task.

Still, considering that the present work implies a wealth of reflection on what religion is all about, and particularly devotes a lot of attention to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which is after all a significant feature of the contemporary religious scene in Japan, it may not be out of place to present it here under these (admittedly secondary) points of view. Under these provisions, it may be said that the book advances the following theses:

1. "Mysticism is the very centre of religion and theology" (p. 10), and is "limited to no one religion . . . the high point in man's search for fulfillment, authenticity and self-realization" (p. 61).

2. "Mysticism is a universal call" (p. 31) for everybody and not the privilege of the contemplative few.

3. "Mysticism is a question of love . . . love without restriction" (p. 195); "it is precisely love that leads one beyond thoughts and images and concepts into the world of silence" (p. 19).

4. Our present world hungers for mysticism. "It is a world which, in spite of its incredible progress, is acutely aware of its spiritual poverty . . ." (p. 78); "the whole emphasis [in the new culture] is, and will be, on the inner world" (p. 57).

5. The great religions of the East being deeply mystical, a Western dialogue with them "will be a miserable affair if the Western religions do not rethink their theology in the light of the mystical experience" (p. 10). Not daring to expect the emergence of "Christian theologians who are also mystics" (p. 57), the author limits himself to a call "to elaborate a theological method which would put greater emphasis on *reflection on mystical experience*" (p. 58, emphasis in the original).

6. Conversely, mysticism being common to Eastern and Western religions, it should now be approached in the light of the interfaith dialogue.

7. However, we are not ready to treat Eastern and Western mysticism together since we "have as yet no common vocabulary or theological way of speaking" (p. 61). This makes it unavoidable for the author to "use a language and a way of speaking taken from the Christian West" (p. 15).

8. Mysticism cannot be opposed to action in the world, for "mysticism . . . has led to the most dynamic and revolutionary action the world has known" (p. 11). In that light, the widely accepted dichotomy between "the mystical, passive religions of the East and the prophetic, active religions of the West" cannot be upheld (p. 10 and the whole of part IV, "Mystical action.")

At this point we might ask ourselves whether we can go along with these "theses." While on the whole I find them very appealing, I could, for example, understand sociologists having their doubts about the readiness of present civilization to "turn inward."

But my main question would be whether and to what extent a Buddhist could recognize his experience in this presentation of mysticism as a question of love. In subsequently describing mysticism as a "Journey into the void" (Ch. 10), a "Journey towards union" (Ch. 13), and a "Journey of love" (Ch. 14), Johnston is groping in an intuitive way for the essential unity of these three, for the unifying essence amidst the contrasting phenomena and terminologies of East and West. Granted that here lies one of the main tasks of the interfaith dialogue and that the author, in boundless empathy, unfailingly discovers the points of connection, the analytic thinker, for his part, is left with many question marks. What, for example, of the strong identification of the Christian ideal and "a quest for enlightenment" (p. 187), of union with Christ and "identity with the totality" (p. 133), or the "call" character of mysticism and the passivity of love (p. 89)? And, granted that Mahāyāna points in the direction of the identity of Wisdom and Love (p. 113), is not Theravāda left out.

As for *lapsus—quandoque dormitat* ... —I have noticed the author speaking of twelve oxherd pictures (p. 90) while ten is surely a more traditional number, and of *karma* in connection with the ripples on the pond of the world (p. 165), while *pratītya-samutpāda* might be more appropriate.

These reservations, however, which after all originate far from the central (practical) concerns of the author, do not in the least impair the great value of the book as a trustworthy guide for the contemporary pilgrim on the path to inwardness. It succeeds in painting the often forbidding-looking world of mysticism in tints at once familiar and attractive. And by his works Johnston is making it well-nigh impossible for any Christian to write on mysticism without taking the Eastern religions into account—which is no small achievement. Not the least of the book's merits is its eminently readable, fast colloquial style.

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