Mysticism
& Social
Transformation

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Introduction

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Mysticism is, at the present time, a topic of great interest in both the popular and scholarly worlds. The study of mysticism is now a specialized academic field either within the "field encompassing field of spirituality" (Schneiders 1986, 274) or more traditionally within the study of religion, as an element in the religious life and belief of many cultures.

Bernard McGinn divides recent scholarship into two periods beginning with the middle of the twentieth century. He characterizes the themes and issues in research and publication in the first of these periods, from 1950 to 1975, as debates and contributions from philosophical and comparativist perspectives—theological attempts to heal the split between theology and spirituality, and "the creation of a new genre—the history of Christian mysticism" (1998b, 13).

McGinn identifies three additional major concerns in the subsequent period of the last two decades: "(1) the retrieval of mystical traditions; (2) debates about the constitution of mysticism; and (3) the role of mysticism in post-modernity" (13). Explicit attention to gender is important for feminist scholars in all three of these concerns, but not generally for others in the field, who seem to remain largely indifferent to questions of both gender and power in their theories and definitions (Bruneau 1998; Jantzen 1995; Erickson 1993).

The breadth and intensity of the interest in mysticism during the last half of the twentieth century have given rise to many different interpretations of mysticism and many conflicting theories about it. These interpretations define mysticism as a subjective and mainly affective phenomenon, a particular form of discourse, an element of lived religion, a source for doing theology, the experience of a certain type of knowing, the experience of a kind of intersubjectivity, and a set of texts from a variety of traditions requiring a complex hermeneutics.

Within the field, the relationship between mysticism and social transfor-

mation has received relatively little exploration. This lacuna in the scholarship is rooted in a modern construction of mysticism in both philosophy and psychology that often fails to account for the social and religious contexts and institutions that influence historical mystics and within which mystics live and act and communicate. The increasing privatization of religion in general during the modern period has tended to separate mysticism, often referred to historically as the contemplative or inner life, from the worldly life of politics, commerce, academics, and public life. Even within religion itself, mysticism and theology have since at least the fourteenth century become increasingly alienated from one another. These splits have obscured the real relationships between contemplation and action, theory and practice, and mysticism and ethical behavior.

Conceptual categories for linking the struggle for social justice, social transformation, and various liberation movements to explicitly religious practices and convictions as well as to various mystical teachings and experiences were developed in social and political thought throughout the modern period, especially in political attitudes and philosophies supporting the ideal of democracy. Meanwhile, theologies of the "apostolic life," beginning in the late medieval period, have explicitly linked a personal love of Christ with love of one's neighbor concretized in acts of service and even in systematic efforts to alleviate the suffering of the poor and oppressed. But without sociological categories, desires for the transformation of society usually appear as prophetic proclamation in the cause of "reform" or "renewal" rather than as intentional or directed social change. Finally, Marxist social analysis began to alter the way the relation between theory and practice was conceived, promoting the ideal of a more dynamic and dialectical relationship.

These political and economic frames of reference have not figured strongly in the field of religion when religion is conceived of as a private rather than as a public sphere of action or when mysticism is defined primarily as a psychological phenomenon or as an altered state of consciousness without reference to any larger or encompassing reality or to an Ultimate Other that discloses itself through mystical experience and requires some type of action in response. When this subjective pole alone is emphasized, the concrete claims of human and nonhuman "others" for sufficiency of the conditions for life required by justice and compassion may slip from active and shared concern.

This volume represents a modest exploration of this relatively neglected theme within the larger context of the current interpretations and theories of mysticism. As such, it does not resolve any of these current debates, nor does it present a unified theoretical approach to its major theme. It does, however, bring many of the available perspectives into dialogue with one another as the

contributors develop specific aspects of this topic in relation to the various traditions and periods of their specialized interests.

Within the current scholarship, the comparativist and philosophical perspectives have tended to interact with one another. The term *mysticism* was first extrapolated from Christian contexts, then defined by philosophers and scholars in comparative religious studies, and applied to broadly analogous phenomena in other religious traditions. The initial positions established by William James, W. T. Stace, and others were largely "essentialist" ones, based on a conviction that there is in mysticism an "inner unity, common core or essential sameness" across religious traditions and historical periods (McGinn 1998b, 15).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, these views were forcefully challenged by Steven Katz and others who argued for a "contructivist" position emphasizing the relationship between particular religious contexts, the composition of mystical texts, and the mystical experiences of persons within a given religious or mystical tradition. This conceptual perspective argues that the historical, social, religious, and theological influences within religious experience are decisive, but it makes impossible the identification of any common core or set of family resemblances as a starting point for comparative studies. It makes the term *mysticism* in the titles of the books edited by Katz at best equivocal, at worst meaningless.

A more sophisticated counterreaction then ensued "in favor of a philosophical-phenomenological inner unity of mystical experience/consciousness" (McGinn 1998b, 15). Although this approach does recognize the need for dealing with a wide variety of cross-cultural expressions of mysticism, as well as for a more careful study of particular mystical texts and their historically situated character, there remain some problems with it in its usual expression.

If mysticism is reduced to a psychological experience, those elements of mystical practices and texts that by definition are not central to the experience itself remain displaced or neglected in the study. Furthermore, this approach tends to downplay such nonpsychological factors as the interpersonal bonds of loyalty and service that connect mystics with their wider religious communities or to ignore traditional criteria for determining the validity of mystical experiences, such as the religious and ethical practices required of everyone within a given tradition or the qualities and implications of action subsequent to the mystical experiences—that is, their "fruits."

The scholarly work assuming either of these positions therefore raises critical questions about whether the category of mysticism is a coherent one or whether it refers to phenomena that are so different from one another as to constitute a category mistake.

Typologies and Definitions

A second problem related to defining mysticism at the present time relates to currently available typologies of mystical teaching or experience. On what basis are these typologies developed? Even more importantly, do they credibly account for the stunning differences apparent in the great variety of mystical texts that have been retrieved and translated from different religious and esoteric traditions?

Within Christianity alone, for instance, certain mysticisms emphasize the intellect, others emphasize the heart, and still others emphasize dedicated action in the world. The mystical path to God through knowing is often largely speculative and theological in its emphasis. The encounter between the divine and the human results in insight, realization, awe, and an integration between theology and contemplation. This integration used to be known as *mystical theology* and figures strongly in Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart. It seems to correspond to the *jnana yoga* of the Hindu tradition and certain parallel spiritual attitudes and practices in Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam.

The mystical path to God through the heart is often known as *affective mysticism,* which became prominent in Christian history with Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, and others, and which medieval women mystics developed to a high degree. The path through love and devotion emphasized symbols and practices related to desire, eros, and intense feeling. The Sufi mystics, Rābi'ah and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, exemplify this tradition in Islam. Something similar occurs in the *bhakti* traditions of Hinduism, and in some forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as in Jewish Hasidism.

A mystical path of action is exemplified in Christian tradition by Ignatius of Loyola and others whose mystical apprehension of God sent them on particular missions in the world, often entailing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The path to God through action in the world in the service of others seems to correspond to the tradition of *karma yoga* in Hindu traditions, to the bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and to the strong emphasis on the mystics' specialized roles within their religious communities in Jewish and Islamic traditions. This threefold pattern is associated with bodily "centers" of head, heart, and belly in some esoteric schools of meditation (Naranjo and Ornstein 1971).

Yet typologies can obscure as much as they inform. One might be able to characterize mystical texts along these lines, but individuals may themselves employ two or all three forms at different times in their spiritual development, with one or another path tending to be dominant.

Within Christian tradition, a classic binary typology of *kataphatic* and

apophatic mysticism also originates in Pseudo-Dionysius and was fused with distinct theological approaches. The elite theological tradition has preferred to emphasize apophatic forms characterized by negation, silence, nothingness, an absence of content, or an "unknowing" with heightened affective experiences. Many women and some men, on the other hand, have favored and even rejoiced in kataphatic forms, involving images, sensory impressions, visions, voices—a mysticism mediated through the senses, through symbols, through concrete objects, and through human relationships. Some have taught that one may begin with kataphatic practices and experiences, and then mature or develop into more apophatic ones.

However, as predictors, these categories are highly problematic. They are sometimes mixed in the life stories of individuals. My own qualitative research tentatively contradicts the succession model, at least for many women (Ruffing 1995). Jantzen (1995) has shown a gender bias at work within these particular definitions; and Bruneau (1998), drawing from the work of Michel de Certeau, shows the creative ways in which some women used "negative mysticism" as a powerful "tactic of opposition" and altered or minimized their sensory descriptions whenever they made them known to clerical authorities and made themselves vulnerable to clerical social control.

Recent linguistic studies of mysticism, moreover, suggest that categorizing mysticism in these ways often betrays a serious misreading of the intentions of mystical texts themselves. Careful textual analysis may show that the language of negation is often a corrective to or warning against valorizing any single type of practice or experience as more important than another or to be sought more than another (Turner 1995; Sells 1994; McIntosh 1998). Apophatic practices and experiences are not to be valued more than any other specific practices or experiences. Apophatic language may be understood properly, at least in some contexts, as referring more to the ineffability of God than to the experience of the human person at prayer, although in general both conception and experience are probably more often interrelated.

The sociology of religion offers yet another binary typology: "world-rejecting" and "inner worldly" forms of asceticism and mysticism, as originally developed in the work of Max Weber. Religious virtuosi of the world-rejecting type of religious orientation "sought contemplation as they sought political and economic goals 'by avoiding interruptions caused by nature and the social milieu'" (Erickson 1993, 74). In the gesture of radical renunciation can be read a negative determination about the promise and prospects of "the world." The inner worldly type of religious virtuoso participates fully in the world, but seeks changes in the self and its motives so as not to be co-opted by the world. The first orientation tends toward a conception of the divine as utterly transcendent mystery, favoring apophatic emphases and tending toward

silence, whereas the second discovers the divine to be immanent within the world as perceived by a transformed self and often favors kataphatic practices and expressions, tending toward proclamation.

Erickson notes that Weber left out the erotic orientation altogether in developing this typology (1993, 75). Many mystical texts creatively employ erotic metaphors in the service of both explanation and evocation. Jantzen (1995) shows that women often employ these images and ascribe gender to God in their mystical writings in ways quite different from men.

For nearly three decades now, feminist scholars have focused simultaneously on creating a usable feminist history and on deconstructing the masculinist assumptions that characterize virtually all the fields of knowledge that impinge on the study of mysticism (Lerner 1993). Feminist women—notably Caroline Walker Bynum, Elizabeth Petroff, Grace Jantzen, and Marie-Florine Bruneau—have developed distinctive theoretical approaches, and numerous others have worked on specific figures and periods, viewing mysticism through a variety of complementary lenses. In the process, they have accumulated a sufficient body of scholarship to facilitate, with some adequacy, a deeper understanding of gender differences in this field. The cultural construction of mysticism, of the sacred, and of power have all been "gendered" through and through, affecting men and women quite differently. These themes weave through this volume explicitly in the essays by Jantzen, Hollywood, Slade, and Bostic.

Two issues emerge as especially significant in this work. The first is the creativity women mystics have demonstrated in their development—through mystical transformation—of a God-empowered "agency" when this very agency and its characteristic sense of selfhood seemed permanently threatened within patriarchal contexts. The second is the way the role of mysticism itself has been a source of resistance to woman-negating forces and a source of solidarity with others who suffer the same deprivations and conflicts.

Although gender constitutes only one concrete form of oppression, the experience of other oppressed groups often resembles the social experience of women. Most feminists embrace a perspective that seeks to include the liberation of other oppressed people and groups as an intentional part of their agendas.

Within the field of Christian mysticism, Bernard McGinn has done a great service by undertaking a multivolume history of Western Christian mysticism and by offering a preliminary heuristic definition of mysticism along with his valuable sketch of the history of the study of mysticism. According to McGinn, "the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God"

(1991, xvii). He crafts his definition in such a way that mysticism does not equal haphazard one-time experiences but an entire process within a person's life. He emphasizes that, historically, persons judged to be mystics have practiced a "religion" rather than "mysticism" and that their practices were usually guided by and interpreted through religious texts of varying kinds. Further, McGinn includes reactions to the consciousness of the presence of God in what he means by mysticism. These reactions could be the production of mystical texts or of a way of living or acting consonant with this consciousness, or the formation of a community that can sustain and enrich and pass on a mystical lifestyle.

Mark McIntosh reports that McGinn continues to refine this definition, emphasizing a vocabulary of mystical "consciousness" in preference to mystical "experience." According to McIntosh, McGinn takes this turn in order to encompass experience without eliminating or obscuring the roles that cognition and context play (1998, 31). McGinn's definition, therefore, encompasses the dialectic of contemplation and action envisioned by a number of the contributors to this volume, and includes prophetic consciousness, which is intimately related to the question of the relationship between mysticism and social transformation.

Mysticism and Prophecy

One of the most important—though often neglected—theoretical issues related to types, descriptions, or definitions of mysticism and the mystical is the relationship of mysticism to *prophecy* or *the prophetic*. The connection between these two phenomena is rarely explicitly discussed, although it may be evoked in some communities, in some authors, and in some situations.

This theme lies behind Johann Baptist Metz's frequent allusions to a "mystical-political" dimension in Christianity (1998) and behind Edward Schillebeeckx's use of this same language (1968b), followed by David Tracy's more recent transposition in his "mystical-prophetic" element and by a parallel development in the work of some of the Latin American liberation theologians, including Gustavo Gutiérrez. The notion of a relationship between the mystical and the prophetic or the political also appears in the work of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and the other thinkers associated with "the Frankfurt school" of revisionary Marxism that influenced Metz. Metz also came upon a strong apocalyptic strain in Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, discovering in them neglected resources within Judaism. It was especially this apocalyptic theme that enabled Metz to recover a mystical-political element that challenges the privatization of bourgeois religion and locates the experience

of God not in peaceful tranquility but in protest to God about evil in the world, a questioning of God, and a "suffering unto God" (Metz 1998, 16).

This latter kind of mysticism, then, entails an active form of resistance to suffering in the world; it demands that human beings act courageously to create a more just social order and struggle for a more universal realization of the Enlightenment ideal "that all persons be able to be subjects" of their own histories; it becomes the inspiration and provocation of "the struggle for a universal liberation" (Metz 1998, 37). Metz dramatically describes the primary conflict facing the churches today as "a conflict between bourgeois religion that cannot get beyond just taking care of its members, and a messianic religion of discipleship" (1998, 45). And it is a particular form of relationship with God that Metz describes—a radical hope that God will bring about salvation in the form of justice and that, contrary to some postmodern conceptions of endless evolutionary time, the end of time belongs to the biblical God who comes toward humanity at the eschatological moment.

The ability to link religious commitment to social action as well as to an intimate relationship with God demands a coherently articulated connection between mysticism and prophecy. To relate these categories through yet another binary opposition, construing them as opposites in the manner of Friedrich Heiler (1997) or, more recently, of Peter Berger (1981), seems strained and artificial. Yet there is not yet anything like an adequate history of prophecy or prophetic phenomena that can be brought to bear on our understanding of the mystical traditions, even with all of their definitional difficulties.

For religious traditions rooted in the Bible, however, prophecy is everywhere. The most characteristic form of "religious experience" in the Bible, as Martin Buber has pointed out, is not realization or rapture, but vocation and mission. The prophet is the ultimate model and designation for the founder of Islam, Mohammed, who has always been understood within Islam as the last and the greatest manifestation of this type. Jesus, too, clearly functioned as a prophet in relationship to the Judaism of his time and, in fact, was called a prophet by his contemporaries.

Analysis and description of the prophetic task and role usually remains safely hidden within biblical studies and divorced from systematic theology, spirituality, or the study of mysticism unless and until believers begin to interpret these prophetic narratives and discourses in reference to contemporary contexts of suffering and injustice. Once again, then, prophecy surfaces but often in ways that lack theoretical clarification to support its relationship to mysticism. Yet prophecy remains a key category for religiously motivated social criticism and directed social change.

It is no accident that the prophetic and the mystical have been systematically separated from one another. Karl Rahner claims:

it can be said with but little exaggeration that the history of mystical theology is a history of the devaluation of the prophetic element in favor of the non-prophetic, "pure" infused contemplation. People are . . . more suspicious of prophetic mysticism, which invokes revelations and instructions from above to claim a mission and right in the Church to admonish and guide the Church and her members, than of the image-free, ineffable mysticism of pure contemplation. Certainly, the former is more dangerous and prone to come into conflict with Church authority than the latter. Nevertheless, prophecy has its foundation in Scripture, and in practice has a great history in the Church . . . yet orthodox theology has never paid any serious attention to the question whether there are prophets even in post-apostolic times, how their spirit can be recognized and discerned, what their role is in the Church, what their relationship [is] to the hierarchy, what the import of their mission [is] for the exterior and interior life of the Church. (1963, 20–21)

In this essay and in his piece on the charismatic element in the Catholic Church (1964), Rahner is carefully retrieving the role of prophecy and other manifestations of the Spirit's capacity to "do a new thing," to innovate and to reform or correct situations that are contrary to the foundational experiences of faith out of which the community originally formed.

There are at least two critical reasons for the devaluation of prophecy. From the perspective of social change within a community, if a prophet or the prophecy can be discredited, change is effectively prevented. Second, prophecy is often identified with a certain visionary mystical tradition in which the visionary seems to be predicting the future or literally interpreting these symbolic communications in ways that prove to be patently false. Karl Rahner argues in his *Visions and Prophecies* (1963) that the decisive criterion for determining the validity of prophetic utterance is its compatibility with the entire thrust of biblical faith rather than its accuracy in foreseeing concrete particular details. Later scripture scholars characterize this activity of prophets as "interpretation" rather than "prediction."

The possibility and the fact of false prophecy do not thereby invalidate the whole phenomenon of prophecy or render unimaginable a mystically grounded version of prophetic speech and action in the service of renewal, reform, and even innovation within a religious tradition. The biblical model of the prophet offers a variety of examples of men and women who enjoyed both friendship and communication with a divine revealing Other. In fact, the prophetic task requires friendship with God—an authentic intimacy with God. It is this intimacy with God that eventually overcomes the would-be prophet's resistance to both speech and action, which are born of contemplation. How else does one hear God's word spoken in the heart or in dreams and visions? How else can one be confident it is God's word and not merely

one's own? The mysticism of the prophets is what frees their imaginations and desires from the defining and constraining power of the world as it is, the world as it stands.

Walter Brueggemann's brief classic book *Prophetic Imagination* (1978) describes in detail the dynamics of this prophetic task. The prophets suffer in their own hearts the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be. They are somehow unable to maintain the "false consciousness"—Brueggemann calls it "the royal consciousness" in the case of ancient Israel—that is essential for the perpetuation of unjust social structures and that benefits those most invested in maintaining the status quo. However, the prophet is more than a complainer. Denunciation is only one part of the task. The prophet's heart is broken: there is a work of grieving and mourning the prophet must initiate— lamenting the suffering wrought by injustice and numbness. What is the origin of both the perception of discrepancy and the compassion that impels the prophet to speak? It is a deep and expansive appropriation of the vision, values, and moral responses inherent in the community activated by the divine Spirit, by the summons and mission of God.

The prophet's criticism is grounded in deeply held shared convictions about the way, for instance, a Jew ought to behave and about the way the community ought to order its life. The prophet is able to convince others only from the perspective of shared memories and norms. The prophet appeals to something the community already knows and wants to value but has managed to hide from itself or keep separate from the domain of its present behavior.

To be effective, the appeal of the prophet needs to be poetic and symbolic. It needs to reenergize its listeners and help the community remember its own history and promises and possibilities in a way that will inspire conversion and fresh resolve. According to Michael Walzer, "Prophecy aims to arouse remembrance, recognition, indignation, repentance" (1987, 75). Moshe Greenburg points out that such prophecy is based on "an appeal to their audience's better nature, confronting them with the demands of God that they know (or knew) but wish to ignore or forget" (1983, 56). In the end, prophets deeply trust that their desires and their words will find advocates in the hearts of their own people.

Prophetic speech is the creation of a fresh interpretation of that part of the tradition that has slipped from view and thus is failing to make an effective claim for action in the community or in the larger society. Prophetic speech also is full of amazement and wonder. It cannot criticize without also evoking a positive vision of the people's realization of their original calling and covenant. Something better, more just, something more fully human, more full of praise and God's shalom, is possible if only the leaders and the commu-

nity will change their ways. The prophet's words mediate the possibility—in spite of everything—of a truly desirable future.

Walzer claims this prophetic pattern of discourse is the standard form of social criticism involving "the identification of public pronouncements and respectable opinion as hypocritical, the attack upon actual behavior and institutional arrangements, the search for core values (to which hypocrisy is always a clue), the demand for an everyday life in accordance with the core. The critic begins with revulsion and ends with affirmation" (1987, 87).

The prophet, according to Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973, 1988), both denounces and announces, both criticizes and engenders hope. But hope emerges not only from limit situations, but also from positive experiences. Hope arises from experiences of joy and gratitude, of solidarity and festival, of love and friendship. The experience of joy is "one that opens the heart, quickens the human spirit and ultimately brings about a movement of self-transcendence" (Lane 1996, 61). Equally important are experiences of meaning, however provisional or fragmentary, and the felt sense of the positive worth of human life—the conviction that human lives are simply worth living. And finally, the experience of friendship and of passion awaken hope and engender a selfless love that in turn enables others to hope.

The prophet works with all of these sources of hope, but especially with the process of interpretation and emergence of new meaning—the process of *reimagining* meaning—which makes possible both trust in God, with all the struggle that may entail, and trust in the resources of faith, whether in times of darkness or in times of abundant life. The remembrance the prophet evokes encompasses all of those fragmentary experiences of spaciousness, harmony, bliss—the shalom that God desires and promises, and that fleetingly makes its appearance in the lives of individuals and communities.

Christian traditions have historically developed contrasting relationships to the mystical and to the prophetic, creating a false dichotomy that functions differently within the diverse traditions. Protestant scholars in the early twentieth century espoused prophecy and rejected mysticism. The assessment by Karl Rahner above aptly describes the Roman Catholic position of accepting but taming mysticism and largely rejecting prophecy. Yet social movements have often had mystical roots, and without mystical depth, it is impossible to discern between the products of one's own inflated consciousness and the impulses of the divine Spirit mediated through a prophet's personality. Without contemplative depth, it is extremely difficult to sustain ongoing resistance, which so often entails suffering at the hands of the very community the prophet serves.

Contemporary theories of mysticism that rely too heavily on William

James's analysis of religious experience uncritically accept an idea of the self that tends to be decontextualized, divorced from the resources and social support of a religious community and tradition. As Grace Jantzen pointedly observes, this reliance on James

> plays directly into the hands of modern bourgeois political and gender assumptions. It keeps God (and women) safely out of politics and the public realm; it allows mysticism to flourish as a secret inner life, while those who nurture such an inner life can generally be counted on to prop up rather than to challenge the status quo of their workplaces, their gender roles, and the political systems by which they are governed, since their anxieties and angers will be allayed in the privacy of their own hearts' search for peace and tranquillity. (1995, 346)

When connected to adequate theories of social change, an understanding of the social construction of the self, in which postmodern thinkers are particularly interested, can lead to a more contextualized understanding of the relationship of mystical consciousness and social transformation.

McGinn's account of the mystical element as an entire process, extending through a lifetime, hints at this possibility. Mysticism is a transformative process that supports self-transcendence, the overcoming of too small a sense of self. This limited self may be understood as being both self-centered and isolated, as well as being defined by the conventional—a self programmed for a socially determined form of "normality." In other words, the conventional isolated self with its anxious self-preoccupations takes for granted current social arrangements as "given" and uncritically conforms to the requirements of the dominant culture. Late-capitalist and postmodern culture tends to foster a self that is rootless in relationship to community and place, closed in on itself and essentially nomadic, uncommitted to projects beyond employment and the multiple diversions that make such rootlessness provisionally tolerable.

Mystical consciousness calls into question both of these conceptions of the self. It reveals something more to life. The self discovered in mystical consciousness is a self related to Ultimacy, a self that is more than the self can imagine itself to be and surely more than any society conventionally wants it to be.

In a distinctively postmodern approach such as Michel de Certeau's, the confrontation of scientific and theological discourse with mystical discourse, according to Bruneau,

> allows [the contemporary individual] to retrieve a space in which the heterogeneity and irreducibility of lived mystical experience can at least partially

emerge and which scientific epistemology makes impossible to conceptualize. De Certeau states that we cannot say any more than the mystics themselves what indeed the mystical experience is. We can only accept that, according to them, it opens up "a space that the mystic can no longer live without," that it is "like throwing open a window into one's dwelling," and allowing "a new sense of ease . . . a breath of fresh air to enter one's life," and that "it seems to rise up from some unfathomable dimension of existence, as from an ocean whose origins precede mankind." Mystical experience seems indeed to bring deep transformation to existence itself.

What emerges is a radicality that consists in an unrelenting resistance to and an undoing of procedures of reification. Mystical experience . . . becomes the repository of "that immense remnant" of everything in human experience that has not been tamed and symbolized by language. (1998, 6)

Hermeneutics

This place of resistance is not yet social change, but it can lead to and support such change. Theories of social change can be used to get at the approaches to mysticism that are insufficiently hermeneutical, insufficiently political, and insufficiently historical.

Hermeneutical theory is extremely helpful here as long as it does not adopt the option of a hermeneutics of mystical texts that reduces them "to nothing but a form of linguistic practice, one that is worth studying for its disruptive and gender-inclusive character" (McGinn 1998b, 16).

Questions about how to interpret mystical texts are of utmost significance, and they raise all the standard questions relevant to the distinctions and relationships among explanation, understanding, and interpretation. Paul Ricoeur (1976) painstakingly describes the unfolding dialectical relationship of explanation and understanding that results in adequate interpretation, which is always a provisional and ongoing process between a reader and a text. Ricoeur describes the process of explanation through which unfolds "the range of propositions and meanings, whereas in understanding we comprehend or grasp as a whole the chain of partial meanings in one act of synthesis" (72). These activities always overlap with one another in practice. Ricoeur associates "explanation" with the scientific method, which discerns recurring patterns of motion in material objects, and "understanding" with the human sciences, which have more to do with subjects and their distinctive intersubjective complexities.

Within the field of mysticism, the interpreter confronts an amazing array of texts that both conceal and reveal the experience of the mystic and the teaching of the mystic about living in a particular way that facilitates mystical

consciousness of and response to the divine Other. For academics to generate successful theories about mysticism, they must take into account a sufficient number of instances of the mystical element expressed sometimes in poetry, at other times in narratives, and at other times in treatises, along with descriptions and analyses of likely mistakes and dangers along the way. Considerations of genres, biographies, original audiences, the cultural and historical circumstances embedded in the texts (including power structures)—all require attention in developing adequate theories that can provide "explanations" that chasten and guide and correct the process of our understanding.

Theory and text interact with one another through the reader. This process allows a validation of the theory in relationship to a particular case, or it results in a judgment of its inadequacy, in turn requiring a more sophisticated theory to encompass features of the text not engaged by the original theory.

Both Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, each in his own way, introduce the idea of *horizon* in their accounts of interpretation. Ricoeur discusses this idea from the perspective of "multiple meaning" and "meaning belonging to the margins" (1976) determined by the horizon of the text. In this sense, *horizon* refers to an assumed background for the metaphoric and symbolic language of the foreground of the text. Gadamer describes horizon as that which one sees from a given perspective (1975). For Gadamer, the reader and the text have quite different horizons. Understanding occurs when a "fusion of horizons" can take place. Readers, with their own horizons, allow the horizon of the text to affect and change them.

Thus, multiple readings of a given text are possible and desirable. It is not purely a matter of the horizon of the text being ignored when read in a significantly different contemporary horizon, but a matter of creative, interactive possibilities that emerge by keeping both horizons in tension. Historical texts question contemporary assumptions in any authentic interpretation and are, in turn, questioned by contemporary thought and experience.

Amazing things happen when texts that have become dislocated from their original temporal and cultural milieus are read by persons who live in other times and cultures but who may share some elements of hope or fear or longing with the world the text projects as possible. Biblical texts are instructive here. In the case, for example, of third-world peasants who read, say, the New Testament, originally produced in a poor and largely agrarian society, and who then reflect on their social reality and faith experience, they may recognize themselves and their own situation in these texts in ways that metropolitan middle-class people in capitalist nations do not.

Thus, Ricoeur and Gadamer, each in his own way, have taught us that reading a text is not such a straightforward event. Texts disclose their mean-

ings to us in complex and interactive ways. They "mean" or "produce meaning" in different ways. Different kinds of texts make different kinds of claims upon their readers.

Mystical texts emerge from the matrix of an encounter between the divine and the human. The profundity of this encounter often results in incredibly nuanced, rich, and paradoxical uses of language—sometimes ornately allegorical, sometimes sparse and demanding, sometimes full of sensual and erotic metaphors, and often extravagant and yet elusive. Frequently, the internal structure of these mystical texts defies explication or systematic ordering. McIntosh observes that this complexity is "all part of their *performance* as mystical texts"; that is, they "work precisely by means of this metaphorical language which cannot simply be abstracted" (1998, 142, emphasis in original).

They work as texts by inviting the reader into the divine/human encounter. Their purpose is to bring the reader into an aliveness and a stance of receptivity toward God in which God can supply the meaning the text does not offer directly. Thus, these texts are oriented not simply to a meaning "behind" the text, back in the past, or even to an experience of God "behind" the text, back in the past, but toward the future of the reader and his or her potential encounter with God. The text, in other words, opens up the possibility of a new divine/human encounter for the reader.

These kinds of texts cannot be adequately understood without some affinity for the practices and ways of living that an enacted reading of such texts require. Gadamer is fond of using law and medicine as examples of understanding and of how the work of interpretation is related to practice. A doctor has correctly interpreted and so understood a medical text when he or she can treat a patient appropriately. It seems that a certain way of life is probably required of the student of mysticism if he or she is to understand mysticism with any adequacy.

In some sense, the truth disclosed in a mystical text can be appropriated only if the reader is willing to allow the text to evoke a response—a response that entails a changed view of reality, a willingness to try out through participation his or her own understanding of the text as a guide for his or her own living.

Gadamer's conversational model of hermeneutics includes the notion of a relationship between tradition and experience that is also very helpful in reflecting on the themes of this volume. In mystical texts, contemporary persons are not only addressed by a tradition that makes particular and stringent claims on them, but also invited to contribute in a creative fashion to the ongoing tradition itself. Later members of their community and the heirs of their tradition are shaped by what is given and disclosed in these texts, but they also contribute to their history and the expansion of their meaning.

This process occurs in at least a couple of different ways. The horizon within which one experiences some aspect of the tradition may impel a retrieval and reinterpretation of some neglected aspect of the tradition (Gadamer 1975, 245–74). The relationship between mysticism and prophecy is one example of such a possible reinterpretation and retrieval actually going on among some contemporary communities of Christians. A second possibility is what Gadamer names the capacity for "new experiences." For him, new experiences are those that resist our established mind-sets or interpretive frames of reference. They simply do not fit. They are something completely other than what we expected and already know how to name (1975, 317–21). The person who is truly experienced is particularly adept at ongoing learning because human experience is acquired only historically.

Mystical texts can certainly be explained on some level without a corresponding faith vision or mystical horizon. But these interpretations may not adequately account for the full range of meaning and possibility in such texts. These more restricted interpretations of mystical texts would most likely confound their creators, who wrote primarily for mystical purposes.

These texts may also be politically charged. The politically destabilizing potential of mystical discourse has long been recognized. Why else would Eckhart's writings, for example, have been condemned? Why were so many women who heard voices, such as Joan of Arc, and who faithfully discerned and heeded them, burned at the stake? Steven Ozment (1973) was among the first historians of mysticism to suggest that mystical consciousness is one of the primary resources for social or religious dissent. He saw in his historical examples "dissent, rebellion, or revolution" (8). But the possibility of *reform* and *reinterpretation* within a tradition is also present as well.

For instance, some of the developments within Christianity that are not represented explicitly in this volume are those that have taken place within the liberating praxis of base communities in Latin America. Built on the political-mystical theology of European post-Holocaust experience (represented by Metz and Dorothee Sölle) and on the suffering, celebration, and insight of the Latin American poor in dialogue with their pastoral workers, these liberationist communities live and articulate a politically active, communitarian mysticism, uniting the contemplative and the prophetic in their everyday lives. Segundo Galilea offers this preliminary sketch of such a mysticism:

> When Christ and all the apostles revealed the presence of God in every human being, and with it the dignity and absolute destiny of man, they not only expressed their own contemplative vision of man, but endowed this prophetic announcement with a sociopolitical content, making it incompati-

ble with the prevailing social system and with pagan attitudes toward human beings.

> By giving the poor and little a privileged place and identifying himself specially with them, Christ called the poor to the Kingdom of God and mobilized them. This is not only a mystic act—"to intuit" the presence of Jesus in the dispossessed, so discovering their dignity—but leads to social commitment and to political consequences, since this incorporation of the poor in the Kingdom of God passes through history and implies a progressive liberation of the same poor and little from concrete social systems.

> Jesus proclaimed the beatitudes. It is impossible to announce and live this message without living in hope, in other words, without being a contemplative. But the beatitudes themselves form the ethical attitude of the contemplatives. This radical modality of living the gospel is a prophecy which invariably questions individuals and societies.

> Thus, the Biblical message from Moses to Jesus shows us the two aspects of the liberating commitment of faith. In Moses, liberation takes on a temporal, political expression, and in Christ it shows forth the full sense of liberation.

> This full meaning is established in Jesus. Liberation is seen as decisive, eschatological, saving and transforming from within man and society. It implies a sociopolitical transformation, just as the liberation of Moses implied the conversion of the heart and the eschatological vocation of Israel.

> We have here incarnate the mystic-prophetic dimension of faith and contemplation. Latin American Christians live out these dimensions in varying degrees in their daily lives, but they always complement each other. (1980, 539–40)

These new experiences of Spirit—a mysticism experienced within the concrete social location of love of neighbor, especially the neighbor who is poor or suffering—are retrieved from the tradition as foundational through the narratives of call and deliverance, of prophecy and courageous action.

Action is a central category here that has to be framed in narrative. John S. Dunne in *The Search for God in Time and Memory* (1969) describes one form of the story of the self as a story of "deeds," for which he uses the missionary apostle Paul as his prime exemplar. Paul is shown speaking and acting, not reflecting on his interior states of soul. Ignatius of Loyola, sixteen centuries later, on the basis of a narrative of the life of Christ and a set of stories about the lives of saints, imagines himself doing heroic deeds in the service of his God imaged as an enthroned monarch.

These kinds of Spirit-filled narratives exist in all religious traditions. They are the stories of the founder and of the founder's concrete acts of love, his or

her personal calling or awakening or transformation, and finally the articulation of a teaching, of guidance on a path or "way."

Usually, in the Hebrew Bible, God calls the person to do something. Persons are commissioned to go on journeys, to talk to Pharaohs, to address their people, to write things down or rip things up—to do all kinds of things. In the experience of being called, one is also commissioned. In the process of acting, the neophyte and veteran alike complain, question, and test out if this act is what they really are supposed to do.

Narratives of such experiences inspire like kinds of responses in entirely new situations if these possibilities for action have not been eliminated from enactment by the way a given community has chosen to interpret such texts. If mystical consciousness provides "a radicality that consists in an unrelenting resistance to and an undoing of procedures of reification" (Bruneau 1998, 6), it leads naturally to the prophetic action that brings about the emergence of something genuinely new, an alternative social reality constructed by people whose minds and hearts and wills have been transformed.

Social Change and Social Transformation

Narratives of action are often stories about change. They are stories about individuals who change their minds and change their hearts and change their behaviors. They are stories about individuals who change their communities or the circumstances of their people's lives. Sometimes they are stories about the arising of new communities of people who have participated in a common experience. Stories of religious foundations are like this.

The Hebrew people were once a group of nomads whose identity and history dramatically changed as the result of God's making an appearance in their lives. The Exodus narrative recounts this process of community formation and remains a powerful story motivating liberation movements throughout history (see Walzer 1985).

When the term *social transformation* comes into play in modern contexts, it usually refers to intentional attempts to change a particular social group or some aspect of an entire society for the better according to some kind of shared norms. In situations of representative government, the "prophetic" becomes the "political" through popular education and through mobilizing coalitions.

Of course, social groups change whether or not this change is intentionally chosen or orchestrated. Anytime two societies or social groups come into contact with one another, for example, some kind of mutual influence occurs, resulting in some kind of change. Individuals and groups within those soci-

eties become more or less adept at benefitting from social change and at creatively responding to the surprising possibilities presented by such changes.

However, the process of unconscious or unintended social change is not what the phrase *social transformation* ordinarily implies in modern usage. In a modern context, it suggests the conception that social arrangements are habitualizations of behavior created and agreed to by a given social group and that these arrangements can be changed. For this kind of change to happen, the change agents must analyze the mechanisms at work in the maintenance of the existing order and share that reflection in a compelling fashion with others in order to persuade them to join in a project of intentional remaking—usually of some law, behavior, or way of imagining and acting—because of the perceived negative effects of the status quo.

Traditional or premodern societies do experience some forms of intentional social change, but the ways of bringing about this change are more limited. The combination of prophetic denunciation and annunciation is one such way. In a traditional society, the agent of change must usually persuade the people in power to change. Thus, frequently in Israel, for instance, the king or the high priest was addressed by the prophet. If such persuasion fails, another possibility is to mobilize a sufficient group of people to resist or revolt or overthrow the offending people in power.

If both of these strategies fail, subversion or some form of wider resistance may be employed. In the Hebrew scriptures, the story of the Israelite midwives is an example. The midwife in the case of Moses did not kill the boychild as decreed by Pharaoh. Miriam developed an amazing alliance with Pharaoh's daughter instead, ensuring the boy's life despite Pharaoh's command. This kind of resistance is frequently the only option available to the group with the lesser social power, such as a conquered people, slaves, women, or anyone not granted the full status of a person in a given social situation.

Various social theories developed during the Enlightenment and postmodern periods provide heuristic tools with which to analyze present situations and to search history for examples of social change in the light of such theories. In general, social theory envisions a dialectical relationship between individuals and social institutions, including religious ones. Social institutions are created and shaped by a collectivity of persons on the basis of their current values, habits, and power arrangements. Thus, people encode or embody in their practices and institutions both positive values and negative biases. These institutions then take on a life of their own, dictating to those who participate in them what their respective roles are and what their dreams and attitudes should be. This social conditioning results in unconscious bias that prevents both those who benefit from the existing social institutions and those who

maintain it by playing their accepted roles from acknowledging either their responsibilities or their moral failures. Certain biases toward injustice, the dehumanization of certain people or categories of people, destructiveness toward nonhuman life forms may simply become tolerable and taken for granted. The first steps toward conscious social change, then, require four basic assumptions about the self and society:

> (1) that the institutions we inhabit predispose us to think and act in certain ways, (2) that some of these ways are unjust and oppressive, yet mainly unconscious, since they all seem "natural" to us, (3) that sometimes we do, nevertheless, become conscious of these injustices (but how?), and (4) that in the process of trying to understand what is practically required to change these structures, we are made conscious of some of our own (cultural) "blind spots." (R. Egan 1987, 2)

How, then, do individuals and groups see through and resist such forms of structurally based injustice? The answer to this question is neither easy nor self-evident. Bernard Lonergan expressed it this way: "No problem is at once more delicate and more profound, more practical and perhaps more pressing. How, indeed, is a mind to become conscious of its own bias when that bias springs from a communal flight from understanding and is supported by the whole texture of a civilization?" (1958, xv).

Historically, the kind of conversion wrought by the mystical element—experiences of the Spirit, releasement, and abundance—open a person's heart, making possible such insight. Religious renunciation of wealth, family, or power was born historically of such insight. Such were the eremetical movements of the fourth and fifth centuries and the radical poverty movements of the Middle Ages: refusals to participate in the injustice of existing power arrangements or economic systems. So, too, were various pacifist choices maintained by followers of the radical reformers. Individuals who make these breakthroughs often attract others who join with them in creating alternative communities. The members of these new communities engage in practices that help them maintain these breakthrough realizations, which eventually, if successful in the larger scheme of things, develop a countervailing trend in the wider culture. It is this oppositional influence that helps shift the consciousness of the dominant group in the direction of insight and toward the possibility of change of heart and behavior in relationship to a particular issue.

Some religious groups do not intentionally work for social change, but instead become separatist groups. They attempt to leave the "world" as it is socially constructed and simply live apart from it, hoping it will leave them alone. The rub is that they may simply re-create elsewhere what they tried to

leave behind, conforming themselves to simply another version of authoritarianism or oppression or economic exploitation.

Robert Egan suggests there are three primary ways to help individuals become conscious of their communally created bias. The first "is symbolized by 'the stranger,' the point of view of someone who is other, who is from somewhere else, and who, in a related way, reveals something of 'God's radical otherness' when the stranger breaks into one's world" (1987, 13). For an experience of such "otherness" to facilitate insight, a person has to be willing to relate to the stranger in such a way that he or she can get some sense of what life is like seen and lived from a completely different social location. It can be quite a shock to cross over the threshold, empathically, into the world of "the other."

The second way is "symbolized by the 'philosopher' or the 'saint' or perhaps in the modern period by the 'intellectual' and the 'artist,' someone . . . who is, in some positive and profound way, 'detached,' either at the level of mind or at the level of heart" (R. Egan 1987, 13). Such people have, through dedication and fidelity to an arduous spiritual practice, freed their minds and hearts from numbness and routine, creating the possibility of fresh perception, deep attentiveness, and passionate clarity. Such people have made *themselves* "strangers" and developed their capacity for seeing through to the heart of things.

The third way is symbolized by negative experiences—misery, deprivation, suffering, protest, conflict. These experiences are sometimes called *contrast experiences* by theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx and others. In a contrast experience, some people actually *experience* the absence of what ought to be. The contrast experience violates their expectation of how things should be on the basis of espoused commitments. In addition, "this premonition of otherness, of something *more*, of justice, or of joy, of fullness of life, is linked also with the experience of *hope*" (R. Egan 1987, 14). Without hope, there is no possibility of protest or wholehearted "looking forward" or any "real possibility of a better future" (Schillebeeckx 1968a, 136).

The process of moving from the breakthrough in consciousness of some individuals to changing social structures and changing those ways of picturing reality that maintain the legitimacy of the status quo is not a matter of simply pointing out some fundamental injustice such as slavery or genocide or sexism or ecological devastation. "This consciousness . . . is something that has to be *developed* socially. It is uncovered or constructed through tracts and novels, speeches and assemblies, family arguments and . . . thousands of small acts of personal integrity, reflection, judgment, risk, and commitment, that then, somehow, become the basis for public acts. It requires, in other words, that people change their minds" (R. Egan 1987, 15).

For this to happen, an education toward justice is required—together with various types of evocation imaginatively representing fresh possibilities in which others might want to participate, even though it will also mean some kind of relinquishment.

All of this is what might be meant by social transformation. It is impossible to show the varied history of these ideas about social change in the various religious traditions both represented and not represented in this volume. These essays make small attempts to mend some of the habits of thought and action that have tended to relegate social theory and change to a secularized and decidedly nonmystical public life. Yet they remain provisional.

Overview of the Volume

The catalyst for gathering these essays was a group of papers given at the meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1995. Five papers were presented in the session of the Mysticism Group; they evoked lively responses from the participants and the presenters. When a Syracuse University Press editor expressed some interest in publishing these papers, the idea for this volume was born. The original five papers were interesting and suggestive, but in themselves did not encompass the breadth of the questions required by the topic even at the time. Invitations to additional contributors well known in their particular fields were issued in three separate rounds in order to treat more of the major questions related to the topic.

Even so, it is with regret that we present this volume without treatments of major non-Christian religious traditions and with no treatment of the topic within third-world liberation theology or of such important contemporary figures in Roman Catholic social thought and action as Thomas Merton or Dorothy Day. Nevertheless, a fine group of essays was collected in the end.

The volume is divided into three major sections. Part one offers some current theoretical perspectives on the main theme of the volume. Grace Jantzen's work on Marguerite Porete provides a careful political reading of Marguerite's texts that highlights the destabilizing power of mystical writing, perceived in its own day to be so transgressive as to merit Marguerite's execution. Jantzen not only explicates this historical exercise of religious and royal power that effectively silenced a woman who did not fit in the authorized scheme of things, but also contests the contemporary construction of religion that persists in maintaining such a potent warning to women who might dare to speak a truth politically and religiously at odds with established authorities.

Dorothee Sölle shares with us a new pattern for describing the mystic path, which for her begins in amazement and ends in ongoing resistance. She offers an example in the figure of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe of this re-

constructed pattern of mystical development that assumes the unity of mysticism and resistance. This unity includes the "letting go" of false needs and wishes that impede praise and prevent responses of compassion and work for justice in the face of all that is awry.

The middle section of the volume offers a rich presentation of individual Christian mystics or traditions of Christian mysticism, organized in chronological order. Paul Lachance opens the section with a creative treatment of Clare and Francis of Assisi. He restores Clare to her place of significant leadership in the Franciscan movement and highlights major aspects of the mystical teaching of both founders and the way their subjective experiences are reflected in their texts. He traces three major themes in their social practices. The first is poverty as both an inward and outward path related to the relinquishment of wealth and power and prestige. This joyful practice of poverty, second, leads to a peaceful life, including the capacity for reconciling disputes, and creates a universal brotherhood and sisterhood. Third, Lachance characterizes their social message and action as "exemplary"; that is, they communicated their vision and purpose through who they were and how they lived rather than through the intentional creation of a social program.

Amy Hollywood's treatment of Meister Eckhart's preaching "as a social practice" relates Eckhart to the Beguine women to whom he preached and by whom he was influenced. She focuses her analysis on Sermon 86, Eckhart's famous reflection on the story of Martha and Mary in which he works out his own distinctive teaching on the relationship of contemplation and action. It is through mystical transformation that the human being "becomes capable of truly just and efficacious activity in the world." Hollywood engages linguistic theory to show that preaching, a particular use and abuse of language, is itself a way of transforming social worlds through its catalytic effects, which engender new possibilities for further social transformation that can be enacted by its audiences.

Treatments of two Spanish mystics follow. Carole Slade develops a treatment of Teresa of Avila precisely as a social reformer rather than as a purely religious reformer. She shows that Teresa's mystical experience gave her a new identity that required her to act in the world, a practical knowledge of politics that enabled her to work effectively within the established system, and a profound understanding of the principles of eternal justice. Slade's treatment of Teresa's use of the Mary Magdalen and Martha of Bethany stories exemplifies the influence of "dangerous memories" carried in a narrative tradition of saints' legends. Slade gives an extensive treatment of Teresa's innovations in relationship to women of "mixed blood" whom she fully integrated into her community.

My own essay on Ignatius of Loyola and Ignatian "service mysticism" is

also situated in the Golden Age of Spain. This essay describes a type of mystical path originating in divine initiative and focused on action for the sake of others. Ignatius inspired and gathered a community around himself based on the personal transformation of each man under his spiritual guidance. This Spirit-filled community became a social embodiment of the Catholic reforming spirit that multiplied itself many times over through its members' disciplined and passionate "apostolic" activity. In this essay, Ignatius is paired with a twentieth-century Jesuit, Pedro Arrupe, who demonstrated the vitality of the Ignatian charism in leading a revitalization movement within the Society of Jesus and within a reforming church.

Margaret Benefiel and Rebecca Phipps offer a lively account of two Quakers, John Woolman and Catherine Phillips, who exemplify major themes in Quaker practice. The authors highlight the prophetic and charismatic quality of these two figures. Of particular interest is the way in which the Quakers' practical mysticism gave rise to a clear form of social criticism, which they embodied in their way of living and in their reasoned tracts. Woolman's conscience led him to radical acts of solidarity with persons he recognized to be in situations of oppression. Phillips was an abolitionist, a prophet who denounced economic injustice and poverty, analyzing the economic causes for the poverty she witnessed and offering other women the possibility of an alternative social role by her own witness.

This historical section concludes with Joy Bostic's "womanist" treatment of nineteenth-century African American women and their own distinctive religious traditions. She begins with the situation of racism and its strategies of demonarchy, then develops her analysis of the narratives of Black women's spiritual autobiographies to show their strategies of resistance and their transformation into radical subjects as a result of their spiritual experience.

The final two essays are grouped around the general theme of emerging contemporary approaches to social transformation. Donald Rothberg's essay on socially engaged Buddhism treats a number of important theoretical issues and describes a contemporary movement in Buddhism intent on supporting social change. Rothberg gives a very clear account of the way the Western philosophical tradition actually created the split that opposed mysticism and the interest in social transformation. He then shows how the emphasis in early Buddhism was primarily on personal transformation through meditation in the context of the monastic *sangha* rather than on social change through types of social action in the public world. He follows this discussion with an account of the development of an explicitly socially engaged Buddhism in both the East and the West that claims that spiritual and social transformation are not truly separate. His account highlights the development of a meditative tradi-

tion through extension of the traditional teaching into a social ethics and practice.

The volume concludes with Roger Gottlieb's thoughtful exposition of the social and mystical dimensions of *deep ecology*. The first section of the essay reprises many of the definitions and characteristic features of mysticism discussed throughout the volume. Gottlieb recognizes the potential for self-transcendence in mysticism, its presence in most major religions, and its potential for deteriorating into self-deception or escapism. He identifies the paradox of both transcendence and social construction that runs all the way through mystical traditions. He documents the neglected theme of communion with nature in several religious traditions and offers a phenomenological account of deep ecology as a kind of mysticism. With regard to the particular interests of deep ecology, Gottlieb remains critical, social, and political in his assessment of its potential for contributing to social transformation. He evokes the promise that "political solidarity blossoms into a kind of selfless love" at its best: the struggle for justice can yield a joy in service and an expansive care that extends beyond the human to the whole family of life that surrounds us.

Of course, there is much more work to be done on this topic of mysticism and social transformation. The present social constructions of religion, politics, mysticism, and philosophy have not yet managed to envision mysticism and social transformation together as two sides of one coin or as interrelated aspects of one process. The essays in this volume attempt to vindicate the claim that this interrelationship is possible. Building on the theories, histories, memories, and desires available to us, they try to steady our vision and hope and to illuminate a "way."

But there is more work to do in bringing these very different conversations and forms of discourse together into a more unified and integrated understanding. It is, surely, a *sign* of hope that scholars want to do so and that this problematic is of such passionate interest to the contributors to this volume and, we hope, to you, its readers.