

## MYSTICISM AND GENDER

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### **Abstract**

Lene Sjørup considers the somewhat problematic construct of women's religious experiences, more specifically, the mystical experience within women's lives. Mindful of womanist, mujerista, and Asian feminist theologies challenges to white feminists that feminist theology is often white and ethnocentric, she uses a qualitative sociological approach. Sjørup begins with the hypothesis that the interviewees' religious experiences would tend toward mystical experiences that she understands to be ineffable, noetic, transient, and passive. This is not intended to limit the possibility for other forms of mystical experience, however. Sjørup draws on the work of Charlene Spretnak, Carol Christ, and Hallie Iglehart to help provide methodological and theoretical foundations for her study. She also explores the differences in the religious experiences of men and women and uses object relations theory as a way to understand how research on mysticism has been influenced by gender-specific attitudes. Finally, Sjørup questions the efficacy of continuing to follow traditional theological paradigms to understand the mystical and how it functions in the lives of women and men.

From 1982 to 1985, I conducted qualitative interviews with ten north American and Danish women about their religious experiences. Among the interviewees were Hallie Iglehart, Carol P Christ, Charlene Spretnak, and Michelle de Beixedon, as well as six Danish women.<sup>1</sup> The interviews were analysed and the results compared with accounts from the Alister Hardy Research Centre in Oxford, where more than five thousand accounts from women and men about their religious experiences are gathered.<sup>2</sup> When I began this investigation, critical discussions about the concept 'women's religious experiences' had not yet arisen. I was inspired by Mary Daly's call to 'hear our *own* words, always giving prior attention to our *own* experience, never letting prefabricated theory have *authority* over us.' Furthermore, I felt, like Carol Christ, that '[s]tories give shape to experience, experience gives rise to stories.' I also agreed with Rosemary Radford Ruether's claim that '[t]he use of women's experience in feminist theology ... as based on *male* experience.' I also affirm the following quotations from Sallie McFague. '[M]odels of God are not definitions of God but likely accounts of experiences of relating to God. [A]ll our texts, including Scripture and the classics of the theological tradition, are 'sedimentations' of interpreted experience ... We will have to do the same risky, adventuresome thing that it [Scripture] does: interpret the salvific love of God.'<sup>3</sup>

My conclusion was, however, that to examine women's experiences, and women's *religious* experiences in particular, one would have to take a sociological approach. This, to my mind, is the consequence of the purported liberationist claims of white feminist theology, as well as womanist, *mujerista*, and Asian feminist theology's challenge to white feminists: that feminist theology is not only white but also ethnocentric.<sup>4</sup> In my view, qualitative investigations with well-defined groups of women can illuminate differences between women and can challenge male universalist pretensions of defining theology as a field.<sup>5</sup> By taking a qualitative approach to women's religious experiences, we may have a chance in the long run of demonstrating how religious discourses not only differ but also change and interact. Such an approach can only complexify and enrich feminist theology. In the following discussion, I shall briefly present the results of my investigation of the religious experiences of a group of women.<sup>6</sup> I shall describe this group as 'women' with the explicit understanding that although this group of interviewees was white, North American and European, middle and upper class, other and different groups of women might - and should - make contesting claims on 'women' in another context.

The main hypothesis of the investigation was that the interviewees' religious experiences would tend toward mystical experiences. This hypothesis was based upon my personal experiences and interactions with very many women during numerous speaking engagements in more than twenty years. It was also connected to my belief that the harsh critique of mysticism from objectivist scholars was due to an implicit gendering of mysticism. I set out to investigate this gendering to indicate how 'objectivist' scholarship is deeply biased as well as flawed. Not only is objective scholarship not objective, but the binary of subject and object presents problems for understanding religious experiences, particularly mysticism. Mystical experiences suggest the need for different epistemologies. The one I explore here is that of 'trans-subjectivity'.

Mystical experiences may be defined as experiences of union with the holy, experiences that are ineffable, noetic, transient, and passive.<sup>7</sup> This definition was not applied as a strict criterion that all accounts of religious experiences had to meet for an experience to be accepted as mystical; rather, it served as a guideline for characterising experiences. The reason is that in judging what is a mystical experience and what is not, the interaction between the researcher and the material that is researched becomes crucial. The researcher

- as in all research - will be judging on the basis of the person she is, including the experiences she has. When the object is mystical experiences, the basis for her judgements will be personal experiences, including her own faith and its pre-rational, intuitive elements. I doubt that researchers who have not had mystical experiences are able to see them in others, unless a very close relationship with the informers exists. This is because of the many pre-rational elements, including ineffability, in mysticism. It is very difficult to explain this category to nonsympathetic 'observers.'<sup>8</sup> It may therefore be even more difficult to claim 'objective' scholarship in relation to mysticism than in relation to other topics.

I decided to use a qualitative interview method to obtain knowledge about women's religious experiences, but a quantitative element was added through the studies at the Alister Hardy Research Centre,<sup>9</sup> which gave some indications about the generalisability of the findings. The ten interviewees chosen were highly articulate, well-informed, and, in a cultural sense, high-status women. Since my hypothesis was that women's religious experiences tend toward mysticism, which among other characteristics is described as ineffable, some women who work at registering what is barely perceivable had to be selected. Therefore, a number of artists were chosen.

The elitist bias of my study was to some extent corrected through the investigation of my research group at the Alister Hardy Research Centre.<sup>10</sup> The Alister Hardy informants, however, had been resourceful enough, and articulate enough to write to the Centre, which probably in turn screened the informants. Therefore, the entire investigation does have a certain elitist bias, which may be defended by the type of investigation conducted: an exploration of the qualitative content of religious experiences, which demands articulate informants. Moreover, since the purpose of qualitative investigations is to explore hypotheses, not to confirm them, representativeness is not necessarily a claim. The data presented here should be compared to similar studies of other groups of women to broaden the perspective.<sup>11</sup>

The methods for obtaining information from the two groups differed. The interviewed persons were asked the following three filter questions and encouraged to elaborate freely on them:

- Have you had a religious experience?
- Do you think men have similar experiences?
- What is your relation to institutional religion?

My role as an interviewer was to mirror feelings, show empathy, and ask deepening questions. The Alister Hardy informers, by contrast, having been informed with examples of religious experience, had been asked to report their own religious experiences to the centre. In my research among the responses, I used the centre's classification system as an introduction to the archive but mainly focused on the actual accounts. I was kindly allowed to copy more than 150 accounts, and these became the basis for my work.

Because the method for obtaining information from the two groups differed, the groups are not formally comparable. However, the qualitative content of the experiences shows so many similarities that a comparison is obvious. As the number of investigations of women's religious experiences increases, the methods for obtaining information also will differ. For each investigation, the limited scope must be clearly indicated. This investigation was limited to white middle- and upper-class women, as well as being limited by the methods used. Because we are interested in the qualitative and not the quantitative, the methodological plurality may be defended. Nevertheless, many more investigations of this kind are needed.

## The Investigation Data

The hypothesis that women's religious experiences tend toward mysticism was supported in the interview material. An analysis of this material showed that unitive experiences with something larger and holier than the self were prevalent in all the interviews. Unitive experiences for some interviewees began very early, when the women were very small children, but they occurred in different settings. The following experience is exemplary.

One night when I was about, oh, probably about ten years old, maybe a little younger. It was raining outside. And water has always been very powerful for me. I could just smell it in the air, and I would sense it all around me. I was writing at my desk, and I decided that what I wanted more than *anything* else was to take off all my clothes and be completely naked, and go out into this warm rain and lie down with my face and my body against the ground in the hills. And I did that, and good thing I did not let my mother know what I was doing - she probably would have had me locked up! I was not afraid. I was not afraid of the darkness, and I was not afraid of the cold, or the night, or the nakedness - it was absolute fullness and bliss for me. So I do not remember how long it lasted, but I felt very, very full, and very wise, and very sure that I was *loved*, and I somehow had the sense that I had a mission, and that mission was to carry it on - to somehow translate to others that same kind of feeling of fullness, the same kind of assurance I had, that life was a gift and that we *are* all one. (de Beixedon).

For Charlene Spretnak, giving birth was an experience of connectedness. 'I talked louder than I needed to, and I saw everything from different perspectives in the room. It was as if I was not only in my body, but I was the whole room.' This experience imparts to Spretnak an awareness of connectedness to others. 'When something is grown out of your flesh, the boundaries between me and not-me become a little blurry ... Because a mother is connected with her child, she then feels connected with all mothers and all children. That is my experience.'

Sometimes this religious experience of unit takes place in an explicitly political context. Carol Christ recalls:

I can remember being in Washington with 500,000 or 1 million people at the antiwar demonstrations and feeling that I was with this massive group of people who were all individuals but who all shared something of the feeling I came with, which was a deep feeling for the people of Vietnam and for their suffering: a desperate longing for them not to be bombed, a not wanting babies to be napalmed. I felt that we were all united in something that was very heartfelt, very deep.

Hallie Iglehart relates her sense of connection and relation even in the midst of very different cultures.

One thing I experienced with the Tibetans was what it was like to be in a culture where everything is integrated - spirituality, economics, social life - everything is totally integrated. I have only been in one other culture like that, which is the Balinese, where there is an intangible feeling that things are in harmony, that you are right in the centre of things.

These very different contexts of women's mystical experiences, e.g. giving birth and political protest, challenge conventional understandings of religion, sacrality and authority. Suzanne Brøgger says that 'If you experience the wholeness and the interrelation between everything, then I guess it is religious. But this is so concrete. I mean, it has nothing to do with confession and dogmatics.'<sup>12</sup>

In the Alister Hardy material, unitive experiences are also crucial.<sup>13</sup> One female informant writes,

At the age of 10 I went with my father into Firth Park, Rotherham, Yorks. It was June and very early on a lovely summer morning. The rhododendrons were in full bloom, and there were

swans and ducks on the pond. The grass and plants sparkled with dew. I felt, like Sir Julian Huxley that I was at one with the Universe. A great crowd of people belonging to past ages suddenly lived with me; past and present fused; and I loved them all and EVERYTHING WAS ALL RIGHT. Truly a kind of cosmic harmony. (2113, F, age 60)<sup>14</sup>

Other Hardy informers convey this sense of unity and wholeness in the following descriptions: 'A light shone, and I felt myself enveloped in it, part of it' (2006, F); 'The Power seemed to take hold of me, or I went into it' (2136, F, age 38); 'I would be lifted out of myself and suddenly be at one with the Universe' (2456, F, age 39); 'I knew, I was also held in this unity, every bit of me .... I was the same as what was opening up before me (Or I was opening up to)' (2366,F).

These unitive experiences appear to be new and hesitant attempts at formulating the holy. There is a tendency in both the interview material and the Alister Hardy material to describe the divine in terms of interconnectedness and boundlessness, and in terms of subtle exchanges between the realms of the holy and the human, nature and cosmos. The imagery in both instances is much more abstract than conventional anthropomorphic descriptions. Terms such as 'energy,' 'power,' and simply 'it' are used. The following account provides a vivid example of this language.

It is something that I cannot ultimately control. It is not there fore my willing it, or any of my efforts. It is simply something that sort of graciously is realised through some deep part of my being, participating in it. I am definitely participating in it. I am not a spectator. It is not something that just *happens* to me. There is some sort of interpenetration where the power and myself are one; and yet there is a difference, because I am limited by a lot of other factors ... I feel almost as if I could break apart, or burst, or be shredded by the sheer energy of it. It is as if I am too small to contain it ... I am part of it, because I am part of creation, all creation, and I feel that this same power is in the leaves, and in the branches of the trees, and in the rocks, and in the ground, and in the air, and in the light, and I am part of it. I have often felt when I die and my human consciousness connected with my central nervous system and brain and all does not exist any more the way it does in this form, that the cells of my body will still carry that same kind of energy. Only it will not be a life force that is living as we understand it. It will be transformed into another kind of energy, almost as if the universe is a huge, organic recycling mechanism where all energy simply takes on forms, dissolves in those forms, re-enters the cycle, and goes eternally in this kind of matter-and-energy, matter-and-energy dichotomy. (de Beixedon)

These descriptions of unity are paradoxical; there *simultaneously* is unity and difference. The connection to all of creation does not necessitate an annihilation of the self. The self is empowered in this experience of unity. Even as borders and boundaries are experienced as permeable, an awareness of distinction and difference is maintained. In the third section of this essay, I examine how the gendering of the study of mysticism has obscured the implications this paradoxical unity and difference has for both gender relations and for theological epistemology.

Although both my interview material and the Alister Hardy material evidence a recurrent narrative of paradoxical unity, the issue of gender highlights a difference between my interviewees' accounts and those of the Alister Hardy informants. Some Alister Hardy informers depict the divine as male whereas none of my interviewees did so. These Alister Hardy informers see the divine as an almighty male presence who holds everything in his hand and will use his power regardless of human wants and needs. God is the omniscient, omnipresent power that demands obedience but is also a comfort in times of trouble. Alister Hardy informers also talk about Jesus.<sup>15</sup> And in these accounts, Jesus quite often is seen as a contemporary figure:

I was in labour with my only child. I had been in pain and alone for many hours with an unsympathetic nurse and doctor popping in occasionally. In desperation I call out 'Christ, won't you hold my hand.' Then, just behind my right shoulder (I had to turn my head to see properly) I saw Christ, white and smiling. He took my hand in a strong grasp. I fell asleep peacefully. (2456, F, age 39).

Jesus comes today, these informers say, and comforts during pain, in nervous breakdowns, or when a job is lost. Jesus is also seen in the poor and suffering.<sup>16</sup>

Gender comes into play in accounts of religious experience not only in the various images of the divine but also in the differences between women's and men's reporting of religious experiences. The Alister Hardy material is a rich resource for analysing these differences. Prior to my research project, there was no attempt to examine the possibility of differences between women's and men's accounts of their religious experiences.

### **Differences in the Religious Experiences of Women and Men**

Among the first 3,000 people who reported religious experiences to the Alister Hardy Research Centre, according to Alister Hardy, 2,080 were women, 895 were men and 25 did not state their sex.<sup>17</sup> This suggests a greater interest among women to report their religious experiences. According to Alister Hardy, the greater number of women reporting to the centre is no indication that women are more religious than men. It shows only that men are occupied with too many other things to spend their time writing down their religious experiences. That a larger group of women do spend their time describing their religious experiences, however, seems to indicate that these experiences are important to them. A closer look at the accounts, furthermore, reveals that a number of the male informers were ministers, which indicates that a personal interest influenced the reporting of religious experiences to the centre. An examination of the actual accounts further shows that a number of the informants who are registered as men actually did not state their sex; the British researcher assumed that they were men. My interviewees, all women, stated that they thought men must have the same kinds of religious experiences they themselves have, but that they never met men with whom they were able to exchange such experiences.<sup>18</sup>

Gender differences have not been systematically investigated before at the Alister Hardy Research Centre. A closer look at the descriptions mailed to the centre shows not only that more women related religious experiences than did men, but also that the men's descriptions tend to be qualitatively different from those of women:<sup>19</sup>

1. At about 14 years of age recall standing on top of hill overlooking Clyde watching sunset. Much struck by experience which was 'significant' and not simply aesthetic.
2. Similar experiences - all at night - in Africa.
3. Most important category, and all connected with historic places, not necessarily famous. Feelings of significance, and not in the romantic sense. Important thing is that on each occasion one is aware of an 'atmosphere' which is as different from the others as, let's say, those in categories 1 and 2 and are of frequent recurrence. The whole point is that one feels that life is significant, that one is part of something great, universal and enduring. (2514, M, age 44; informer's numbering)

Although both women and men reported experiences of unity with the holy, the differences between women's and men's religious experiences tend to surface first, in the narrative structure; second, in the imagery of the divine; and third, in the settings they reported for their experiences. Whereas the women narrated their experiences in a plain, everyday language, the men were more likely than the women to rationalise systematise, number and

interpret their experiences, sometimes with great verbosity and sometimes summarily and abruptly. They might stress what the experience is *not*, and they often produced a conclusion:

I do not ever remember having admired mountain, sea or forest, and having entered fully into the enjoyment of it, without feeling that there was a life energy or power behind it that was part of the living universe. I do not remember having admired a sunset, the clouds and colours as such. There always seemed to be a breathing, pulsating force which was awe-inspiring, yet closely akin to the life within me, but yet infinitely greater than I. It was this that I admired, almost worshipped ... It was not the life energy as such that made me want to worship. It was its kinship, and mine, with the great divine Being who was creator of all that led me to adore, not the natural object, or the life energy, but the creative Intelligence behind it all. (217, M, age 80).

At times the preconditions for having these experiences were defined:

1. I must be alone. 2. I must be in the presence of some beautiful natural scenery or of a clear night sky. 3. I must not be suffering from any mental or bodily discomfort. 4. A certain, but not excessive, amount of heat (summer or noonday) is necessary. 5. A monotonous, but pleasant, sound is also important; such as the singing of cicadas, the wind among the pines or fir trees, flowing water or the murmur of the sea. 6. Natural scenes also have considerable influence, especially that of thyme, sage and myrtle. Also narcissus flowers and orange and lemon blossom. (904, M, age 75).

This informer added that the last time he had had one of these experiences was in Italy in 1937, and that conditions since then were not conducive to them. (It is possible that the constant rational pondering of what might lead to these peaceful religious experiences gets in the way of actually re-experiencing them.) This tendency toward an objectivist approach to the experience is often followed by imagery of the divine as a supreme intelligence:

There is an Intelligent Consciousness, not limited to a man's present concept of space and time, interested in man's progress and development, in a moral and ethical, religious existence. A graph of my life would show a definite progression and development beyond my own planning ... Man is a free will agent and can refuse the help, sometimes at his peril and to his degeneration. To this Infinite Intelligence, everything is recorded, past, present and future in the present NOW. (217, M, age 80).

Despite this tendency among the male informers to rationalise and objectify their religious experiences, they did have experiences of unity similar to the ones that my interviewees and the women informers to the Alister Hardy Research Centre reported.

The men's religious experiences also tended to take place in settings different from the settings of women's religious experiences. This may be demonstrated through looking at some gender-specific trigger differences.<sup>20</sup> War was mentioned as a trigger of religious experiences, including experiences of unity, by male informants.<sup>21</sup> For some, this feeling is related to the fear of war, which suddenly is replaced with intense religious feelings. For others, the battle itself is ecstasy. Informer number 35 tells how, during World War II, he read William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in between two battles, wishing for a religious experience. He went for a walk and experienced how the river and the trees became 'numinous' and increased in intensity:

Then it happened. The experience lasted, I should say, about thirty seconds and seemed to come out of the sky ... a glimpse of luminous bodies - meteors or stars - circulating in predestined courses emitting both light and music ... I dropped onto one knee and thought: How wonderful to die at this moment. I put a hand over my forehead as if to contain the tumult and fend off something. Wonder, awe and gratitude mounted to a climax and remained poised for a few seconds like a German star shell. Then began the foreknown descent. (35, M, 74 years).

It seems that the fear of combat leads to a wish for and an ability to open up to a religious experience. Informer 35 never again had a similar experience.

For another informer, the religious experience was part of the battle:

The clearest and greatest example of this awareness of what I believe was the Presence of God came to me during the night of August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915 - the landing of thousands of troops at X-bay. Under fire for the first time was a very trying time, and at first I was as afraid as most men were. As man after man went down however a Presence came to me which took away all my fears and replaced them with a feeling of ecstasy. Everything was overwhelmed with this feeling and I was for the time a brave man, without a fear or anxiety in the world. During that night I was seriously wounded and disabled in consequence of further military service. The memory of this night however and the few other occasions when I have been favoured with this nearness of God, have been the outstanding experiences of my long life. (15, M, age 81).

Men's religiosity is not generally triggered by the ecstasy of battle. The tendency in the material is that the most astonishing accounts of war are related by rather old men. However, since the religiosity connected with war might be only one end on a larger scale, some of the categories in the centre's classification system that could be seen as similar to war were investigated from the point of view of gender.

Because the centre's category 'The prospect of death' might contain experiences similar to the experiences of war, for example, it was investigated further. This category includes the responses of a rather high number of men, considering that there are almost twice as many female as male informers overall. Nineteen men and twenty-four women related religious experiences in connection with the prospect of death. The difference between the women's and the men's accounts is striking. On the one hand, all the women except one tell serene stories about how they themselves or loved ones were close to dying but were helped by larger powers. One prayed that her dog who had had a heart attack would survive the crisis! The men, on the other hand, tell about terrible disasters: dramatic sicknesses and astonishing near-death experiences, some during war, including action-filled and threatening dramas on land, in the sea, in the air and through fire.

Women too, seem to have a gender-specific sombre side to their religiosity. Depression/desperation is the most common trigger in the three thousand accounts at the Alister Hardy Research Centre.<sup>22</sup> Although male informers also relate religious experiences triggered by depression/desperation, the majority of the informers in this category are women. Many of these women do not tell why they are depressed or desperate: 'In a moment of despair I knelt beside my bed and cried out, "Oh, God, give me something to live for!" As clearly as if the voice was in the room I heard the words "Live for me." Shortly after that, an opportunity arose for taking on what has become a form of social service and my life's work' (2006, F). The desperation has to do with the whole life situation of the woman, of having nothing to live for and the consequent lack of zest for life. Many of the female informers of this groups suffered as a result of the death of husbands, parents, or children, or as a result of divorce and sickness. But for many, the problem was the emptiness of life in general, and the depressions often are non-specific. Depression can have a religious aspect, however, as my interviewee Elsa Gress noticed:

For me it has always been, after terrible depressions, so awful that one cannot see colours, and you cannot read, you cannot hear, you cannot see, you cannot do anything. And then you get through. Suddenly everything is there again. You could say that this is just because you were so low, that seeing a window suddenly can become a mystical experience.

The few male informers who told about depression or desperation as the basis for religious experiences knew why they were unhappy. One, for example, was depressed in connection with war, one with losing his job, one with being mentally ill, and two because of loneliness



and coldness. There seemed to be no depressions or despair that they were unable to explain. The men also seemed to have much more robust ways of solving their problems. The following male informer, who was praying in despair of losing his job, is an example:

I was at home, and had been praying selfishly about my personal affairs the previous night. Just before I awoke I heard a voice say 'Stop bleating.' I knew it was Jesus. I told my wife. Later that afternoon we went walking. About a mile away, amongst many houses, was a very small field. It was filled with sheep, dashing about and bleating. Never before had we heard such concentrated bleating. They had just been put there and residents were complaining about the noise. We had never known the field to be used so before. When praying to Jesus I have been very conscious of his personal response. (2070, M, age 50).

There is a gender difference in the content of depression and desperation, as well as in how the difficult situation is solved. The depressions are deeper for the women and have to do with their very identity - or lack of it. The answer, therefore, has to do with the total life situation of the women. The men know why they are desperate; some pray or receive an order, and the experience is over with - or at least this is how they describe it.

Thus, my interviewees' observation that they were unable to share their religious experiences with men seems not to be due to the men not having religious experiences. My material seems to indicate that the problems are, first, that fewer men than women have such experiences; second, that women and men narrate their religious experiences differently; and third, that women's and men's religious experiences tend to be triggered in different settings. Gender differences such as these may be relatively common.

### **Phenomenology, Epistemology and Object Relations**

A brief look at some of this century's research on mysticism within the psychology and sociology of religion will show how research on mysticism has been influenced by gender-specific attitudes. Based on this survey, I will discuss phenomenological and epistemological aspects of mysticism and analyse them in the light of object relations theory.

At the end of the last and the beginning of this century, mysticism was treated mainly under the heading 'hysteria' by the emerging psychology of religion.<sup>23</sup> Hysteria was characterised by anesthesia, hyperesthesia, paralysis and contracture, and it could be located in the *globus hystericus* (the thyroid gland). According to James Henry Leuba, it broke out 'in connection with the activity of the reproductive functions; it is, for instance, relatively frequent at puberty, in pregnancy, in diseases of the uterus, and the climacteric change.'<sup>24</sup> Needless to say, these so-called sicknesses were considered typical for women. This discussion was a late extension of previous medical discussion in which women's nervous diseases, in particular hysteria, were connected with the uterus, which was said to wander about in the body and cause neurotic behaviour, especially if the woman was not sexually active (with a man). What was new was the connection with mysticism.

According to George Albert Coe, mysticism had a lot in common with hallucinations, automatism, self-hypnosis, nervous instability, fatigue, hunger and sexual longing. Not surprisingly, Coe, like a number of other scientists who researched mysticism, denounced any personal knowledge about the subject: 'My life has been as free from mysticism as it has been free from dogmatism ... Life seems to me an ethical enterprise.'<sup>25</sup> Mysticism and ethics, according to Coe, were antithetical. Evelyn Underhill conversely said that the existence of pathological explanations 'no more discredits the sanity of mysticism or the validity of its results than the unstable nervous condition usually noticed in artists - who share to some extent the mystic's apprehension of the Real - discredits art.'<sup>26</sup>

Whereas some researchers associated mysticism with women, self-annihilation, unity, and absorption, sociologists of religion at the beginning of this century tended to associate mysticism with individualism, separateness and being cut off and asocial. This development was due to misconceptions about what mysticism is, mixed with methodological problems. Methodologically, the description of groups in their purest manifestations tended to lead to ahistorical and analytic categories to which actual social institutions and groups were applied at a later step. Thus, in Ernst Troeltsch's ideal typology of church, sect, and mysticism, the church is seen as an institution preoccupied with giving salvation to all, the sect as groups engaged primarily in ethical questions, and mystics as individualists, disintegrating cult, dogma, and tradition.<sup>27</sup> However, these categories are ahistorical: the church always has been engaged in ethics, and mystics always have existed inside as well as outside the church. Mystics generally are not and never have been asocial. And both the church and mystics always have been deeply engaged in ethical questions. The typology is too narrow and, indeed, is intended to be narrow in order to obtain analytical results.<sup>28</sup> Mysticism thus becomes an ideal typical category denoting asocial individualism, and although this is a purely analytical result, it continues to shape much research on religion.

Max Weber distinguished between asceticism and mysticism, seeing mysticism as nonacting and nonthinking, an emptying of everything that might remind one of the world and a minimising of actions, all with the purpose of reaching an inner state of *unio mystica*. Weber considered this an emotional state that seemed to communicate 'knowledge'.<sup>29</sup> Weber's social reductionism, where attitudes of waiting for the holy are confused with lack of social abilities, has been quite common in the social sciences, but why was mysticism chosen as the target?

Lacking personal knowledge about mysticism, some sociologists of religion tended to define mysticism in terms of their reductionism. Thus, Joachin Wach claimed that the Greek word *myein* meant 'to close one's self up against the outer world and with it against society, as against all distracting and disturbing influences.'<sup>30</sup> The late Neoplatonists used the word in the way Wach suggested. However, *myein* simply means 'to close'. In Koine Greek, however, it means 'to initiate'. Originally it probably was used to remind initiates to keep quiet about 'the mysteries'. It might also be used about somebody whose eyes still were shut but who was about to be initiated.<sup>31</sup> These sociologists were objectivists,<sup>32</sup> and their approach to mysticism led to reductionism. Living faith was ridiculed.

The research of Ralph W Hood Jr. is an example of more recent objectivist research on mysticism. Hood conducted experiments concerning what he termed religious experiences, experiences of transcendence, intense religious experiences, reported mystical experiences, mystical states of consciousness, and mystical experiences.<sup>33</sup> Hood's experiments were conducted with students, using scales constructed on the basis of former research, mostly the definitions of William James and W T Stace.<sup>34</sup> In 1977, Hood worked with '*eliciting Mystical States of Consciousness with Semi-structured Nature Experiences*,' wanting to measure the relation of stress and mysticism. Since he thought that 'mystical experiences in nature are generally recognised as quite common,' Hood chose twenty-three men from 'a highly selective, prestigious, private, all male school in the South [of the United States].'<sup>35</sup> This group of students planned an outdoor trip, including canoeing, rafting, backpacking, obstacle courses, rock climbing and rappelling, jogging, swimming, and 'solo experiences.' Hood measured the stress anticipated and felt by the students on a 'Subjective Stress Scale' devised by Berkun and others, observing the 'psychological and physiological responses in observers of an *atomic test shot*.' Immediately after the students' experiences in nature, he

tested them on his 'M-scale,' which he constructed on the basis of Stace's characteristics of mysticism. Although Hood admitted that people might 'rationalise this experience as "mystical" ... if they can only express their feelings on a scale to measure mystical reactions,' he nevertheless repeated his experiment in 1978, since 'attempts to *manipulate* mystical experience within solitary nature contexts in terms of quasi-experimental designs have not been common.'<sup>36</sup>

Why did Hood feel that a scale designed to measure responses to atomic test shots would make an adequate measure for responses to mysticism? Are all feelings, whether they be fear, stress, a deep peace, or universal love, identical? And why was he so strongly interested in reiterating and manipulating mystical experiences experimentally? In Hood's praise of the work of W T Stace we may find an answer:

Stace in *cold, dispassionate logic* carefully demarcated the phenomenological characteristics of mystical experience and did so with such *effectiveness* that *operational categories* can easily be developed. This, of course, means that mysticism as a human experience can be studied much in the same way as *any other* human experience ... [R]aters can be easily trained to reliably classify intense human experiences according to their degree of mystical quality.<sup>37</sup>

Hood's attitudes as a researcher are illuminating: research into religious experiences can and should be conducted coldly and objectively, like a military action, and mystical experiences should be studied in the same way as any other area of life. However, was Hood not passionately engaged in his research? And why should mystical experiences, which are experienced as extremely unusual, be studied like any other area of life?

A number of sociologists and psychologists of religion have had strongly objectivist and sometimes quite condescending attitudes toward mysticism. Nevertheless, many of these researchers have been deeply fascinated by and have spent a lifetime researching mysticism, possibly because the phenomenology and epistemology of mysticism particularly challenged them. Mystical experiences often are characterised as unitive experiences that are ineffable, noetic, transient, and passive. Such experiences, of course, are accepted only with difficulty by those who obtain their wisdom through hard, intellectual, verbal, day-to-day work. The reactions of some philosophers to this kind of epistemology are illustrative. Steven Katz, for example, reacts with exasperation to the ineffability of mysticism: 'If the mystic does not mean what he says and his words have *no* literal meaning whatsoever, then not only is it impossible to establish my pluralistic view, but it is also logically impossible to establish any view whatsoever.'<sup>38</sup> Katz also rejects the ineffability and the paradoxicalness of mystical experiences because they 'do not provide *data* for comparability, rather they eliminate the logical possibility of the comparability of experience altogether.' Thus, Katz is preoccupied primarily by the lack of logic in mysticism.<sup>39</sup>

Peter Moore makes a similar claim: 'There is ... no evidence that mystics are forced by their experiences to break the law of non-contradiction.'<sup>40</sup> According to Moore, radical ineffability is characteristic mainly in non-autobiographical reports on mysticism; that is, ineffability is stressed by researchers, whereas those who describe their own mystical experiences have no trouble expressing them verbally. Moore presents very little evidence for this latter fact, however. The autobiographical material in the present investigation clearly shows that ineffability is an authentic characteristic of the mystical experiences. It seems that Peter Moore is unable to accept that the law of non-contradiction could be broken.

Another much-debated problem among philosophers is the question of 'raw experiences'. Although Moore accepts the existence of some raw experiences (i.e., experiences that are unaffected by the mystic's prior beliefs, expectations, or intentions), this for Katz is

unthinkable. He stresses, 'There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.'<sup>41</sup> Peter Donovan claims that 'the words we can use and the interpretations we can make may very much *govern* the kind of experience we are able to have,' adding that '[p]eople who lack all familiarity with the language, imagery or world-view of the religious system can hardly be said to be capable of having religious experiences, for they lack the habits of a mind and the awareness of significance which make religiously-interpreted experience possible.'<sup>42</sup>

This clearly is not the case. Even without previous familiarity with religion, people suddenly may have mystical experiences, which may be as original and as raw as, for example, the experiences of love. A seventy-two-year-old woman, one of the Alister Hardy informers, tells how a harebell 'revealed itself' to her when she was five years old in 'a moment of pure magic.' This experience was remembered because of its unexpected and unexplainable quality, which 'etched itself on my memory.' Of course, the informer does try to express her experience through culturally transmitted images, and it may be difficult to distinguish between these two layers. However, she and mystics generally are very aware of how traditional language does not suffice for describing such 'raw' experiences. What Donovan and Katz overlook is, first, that new religious experiences arise, and, second, that mystical experiences may be a reminder of how we know something, even though we have difficulties expressing it verbally. This was the case for many of the interviewees.

W T Stace's characteristics of mystical experiences as being trans-subjective and paradoxical may help in understanding that particular epistemology of mysticism.<sup>43</sup> Mystical experiences are located, he says, in what he names the trans-subjective sphere. They have a certain order and repeatability that make them understandable for those who have had similar experiences, but they cannot be commonly verified. As the locus of mystical experiences thus lies between the objective and the subjective, Stace coins them trans-subjective experiences.

The paradoxical nature of mystical experiences, that neither a dualism nor a monism exists between the holy and the mystic, is evident in my material.<sup>44</sup> The mystical experience should be defined as *an experience of paradoxical unity* with the all or with the holy, because this definition remains in the area between the holy and the person, which is exactly where it belongs. The unity is paradoxical because it is an experience neither of identity with the holy nor of alienation from it. It is paradoxical because it lies *in between*, and both sides must be contained. Thus, the experience is simultaneously transcendent and immanent.

Trans-subjectivity and paradoxicalness both seem to call for a non-objectivist science that will be open toward transcendent yet at the same time immanent experiences in nature, in the body, in social circumstances, in aesthetic situations, in the flow of everyday life, and in negative situations where fear and depression grow uncontrollably. What is needed is a scientific revolution in which the current objectivist paradigm is supplemented by a new epistemology.<sup>45</sup> The relevant questions are why objectivist science has been so pervasive within the research on mysticism and whether this area lies within the psychology and sociology of religion or within the philosophy of religion. The entrenchment of an objectivist paradigm is, in part, due to its gendered bias both at an experiential and a scientific level,<sup>46</sup> and it may be explained through object relations theory. This theory, however, should not be seen as ahistorical. Rather, it describes some elements in the classic white bourgeois upbringing, which is the background of most objectivist scientists.

According to object relations theory, the process of separation and individuation is not identical for boys and girls.<sup>47</sup> Girls have to disidentify with the mother to become a self. Boys also disidentify with the mother as an individual. But they also have to disidentify with the mother as feminine and identify with the father as masculine. To become a man, the boy must stress autonomy, difference, and separation from nature, woman, body. He must secure the freedom of the spirit and its exaltation over the flesh.<sup>48</sup>

This *double disidentification* of boys vis-à-vis the mother may help to explain why men generally seem to have fewer mystical experiences than women and why male researchers have trouble with the epistemology of mysticism. If mysticism has its roots in the earliest relation to the mother as this relation is being played out at this moment in history, and if the double misidentification from the mother sends boys and men out on a quest wherein they must slay the dragon and become completely free and independent kings of their own realms, it is no wonder that the mystical experiences of paradoxical unity become more difficult to return to for men than for women. These experiences may be perceived as a threat to men's masculine identity, which probably is why many of the male Alister Hardy informers tried to objectify, categorise and define them, let alone why fewer men report religious experiences. Mysticism, being located in the trans-subjective and paradoxical area in which there is a unity and yet a difference between the holy and the human, may arise from the same area that men fought so hard in order to establish a gender identity. The biological unity that at first is a necessity for mere survival later becomes a religious ability to experience unity. Science may be considered a typically masculine, bourgeois, objectifying activity that particularly appeals to men because of its clear demarcated boundaries of subject and object.<sup>49</sup> According to Evelyn Fox Keller, 'a science that advertises itself by the promise of a cool and objective remove from the object of study selects for those individuals for whom such a promise provides emotional comfort.'<sup>50</sup> Objectivism thus may be seen as a comfort for those who suffered strongly from double misidentification.

A brief look at R C Zaehner's description of nature mysticism will reveal what the scientist's fear is. The sea, the air, trees, water - the commonest symbols of mysticism - are, according to Zaehner, 'nothing more than symbols of the eternal feminine ... [This mysticism] is simply a sign of infantilism in the adult, the desire to be unconscious once again in the security of the womb.'<sup>51</sup> When the unconscious invades consciousness, Zaehner says,

it will plunge right down to the level of the Great Mother, in which case it will see itself as being at one with Nature ... or it will be overcome by the shadow, the Devil ... [A]lternatively it may plunge right down to the bottom where, religion tells us, we should find the God who makes his dwelling in our inmost depths, just like the Incarnate God chose to reside in the womb of a Jewess, 'a narrow and filthy place' as a Zoroastrian polemicist observes.<sup>52</sup>

There seems to be no reason for quoting the Zoroastrian racist, except to express Zaehner's own views in a seemingly detached way. The fear of re-engulfment in the feminine is here masked not only by objectivism but also by overt deprecation of the female. Not surprisingly, Zaehner finds that the soul in 'true mysticism' is

comparable to a virgin who falls violently in love and desires nothing so much as to be 'ravished,' 'annihilated,' and 'assimilated' into the beloved ... The sexual image is, moreover, particularly apt since the man both envelops and penetrates the woman, is both within and without her, just as God Who dwells at the deepest point in the soul also envelops it and covers it with His infinite love. It is for this reason that the Virgin Mary is a perfect image of the soul in grace and in love as it is possible to find - Mary, enveloped and penetrated through and through by the Holy Ghost and made pregnant of the eternal Wisdom of God.<sup>53</sup>

Note that Zaehner inverts the gender roles in 'true mysticism.' Rather than being dissolved into the Great Mother, the female soul is annihilated by a Father God. The sexual and theological inversion expresses the male fear of connection with the feminine, the Great Mother. The 'filthy' Goddess who threatens to engulf the male is transformed into the perfect soul 'enveloped and penetrated through and through.'<sup>54</sup>

### **Theology as an Academic Discipline**

There are several indications that the religious experiences found in this study are quite characteristic for current spirituality among a number of women and some men.<sup>55</sup> Women working with theology will therefore have to question whether theology as an academic discipline can follow the paradigms it has tended to follow so far, or whether a change of paradigm and epistemology is necessary. It seems to me that the traditional theological paradigms of creation, fall, redemption and Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be set aside for a while as the knowledge of our fathers. Although these paradigms may be valuable in a lot of contexts, they also are limited by their particular historical underpinnings. New theological paradigms arise out of new experiences, which do not just contest the religious experiences of the fathers and their theological paradigms but also call for entirely new theological thought patterns.

The dissolution of traditional theological paradigms is already happening within much of feminist theology. However, theologians who investigate women's religious experiences and who wish to construct new theological paradigms, even though these might be more in accord with the actual experiences of women and men, tend to be vehemently criticised, if not marginalised and outright rejected at universities and seminars, especially if their positions depend upon a nihil obstat from local Catholic bishops, or if their work is evaluated by the male colleagues who mainly employ them.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that the 'trans-subjective' epistemology of mysticism is crucial to theology in general. Theology cannot be 'objective' and maintain a binary opposition between subject and object, the divine and the human, just as theology cannot in its deeper aspects be distinguished from the faith of the scientist. Deeper theological discoveries are revelatory. Personal belief and theological results are intertwined, and they develop and change according to developments in personality, life stages,<sup>56</sup> and social situations. A theologian who is willing to see the radical implications in this idea (and I am not just speaking about the hermeneutical problem, although this of course has similar dimensions) will acknowledge that she is engaged in the very slippery zone between the holy and the personal that is typical for mysticism. She must work with her own faith.<sup>57</sup>

I have thus come full circle: I see us as both theologians and believers engaged in an area in which the holy and the personal meet and mix. If the holy is taken seriously, its reality must be taken seriously as well. It will reach us with the love that is characteristic of it, and it will not be controlled through any method but may be approximated through a plurality of methods and attitudes. Qualitative and quantitative, objectivist and holistic, rational and intuitive methods thus are supplementary means for reaching what we are reached by. Elsa Gress's statement in my interview may illustrate this by way of conclusion: 'You receive it [the mystical experience] as a gift. Or rather, it is there all the time, but you are closed off from it ... Sometimes you suddenly receive a pair of binoculars or this hearing aid, and you hear the heartbeat in there in the big uterus. Bom. bom, bom, bom.'

## NOTES

1. Hallie Iglehart is the author of *Womanspirit: A Guide to Women's Wisdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) and *The Heart of the Goddess: Art, Myth, and Meditations of the World's Sacred Feminine* (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1991).

Carol P Christ is the author of *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980) and *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), and is editor, with Judith Plaskow, of the important anthologies on feminist theology *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York and San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) and *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (New York and San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

Charlene Spretnak is the author of *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), *Green Politics: The Global Promise* (with Fritjof Capra) (London: Grafton, 1985), *The Spiritual Dimensions of Green Politics* (Santa Fe: Bear, 1986), and *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), and the editor of *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1982).

Michelle de Beixedon was a theology student at the Graduate Theological Union at the time of the interview and is now a doctoral student there.

The six Danish women were four authors, Suzanne Brøgger, Elsa Gress, Ulla Ryum, and Charlotte Standgaard; Nynne Koch, the instigator of the Royal Library's Women's Department and also an author; and the film director Irene Stage.

I thank the interviewees for sharing their experiences with me. Excerpts from the interviews are indicated parenthetically in the text. The points made in the article are mine, not the interviewees.

2. Alister Hardy was a professor of zoology at Oxford University. After his retirement in 1969, he tried to confirm his hypothesis that emotions and spirituality might be explained through biology (see his *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience* [1979; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985], by gathering a large pool of material on religious experiences. In radio, newspaper and TV interviews, he asked people to report their religious experiences to the Alister Hardy Research Centre, and as a result, the centre received a number of accounts, some very brief, some small novels, some handwritten, some typed. After the first one thousand accounts were received, a pamphlet was printed in which examples from the first accounts were quoted, and people were again asked to report to the centre. On the basis of the first three thousand accounts, Hardy and his assistant Vita Toon devised a classification system that, to a high degree, is inspired by his background as a zoologist. Thus, sensory or quasi-sensory experiences, such as visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory experiences are distinguished from extrasensory perceptions, such as telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance. Other categories are behavioural changes, cognitive and affective elements, the development of the experiences, their dynamic patterns, dreams, and triggers, and the consequences of the experiences.
3. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 189 (Daly's emphasis); Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing*, 5; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 13 (Radford Ruether's emphasis); Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 39, 42, 44.
4. See, for example, Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 195; Consuelo Del Prado, 'Yo siento a Dios de otro modo,' in *El rostro femenino de la teología*, ed. Clara Bingemer et al. (Costa Rica: DEI, 1985), 73-83; and Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1990), 111-12.

5. See Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
6. My book *Oneness: A Theology of Women's Religious Experiences* (Kampen, Holland: Kok Pharos, in press) contains a more in-depth analysis of this group.
7. Among the very many definitions of mysticism, the definition of William James has been chosen (see *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902; New York: Mentor Books, 1958], 292ff). Not only is James' definition commonly accepted, but his pragmatic philosophy, which is grounded in empiricism, may give some clues to understanding the phenomenology of mysticism. Passivity as an element in mysticism has been criticised by some feminists mainly for ideological reasons: 'strong women' are not comfortable with passivity. However, mystical experiences are received for free, as a grace; they cannot be possessed or conquered. In this respect they are 'passive'.
8. I do not agree with researchers who claim that science is science and that anything human may be examined by any scientist (see, for example, Ninian Smart, 'Understanding Mystical Experience,' in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 20. It seems to me that the scientist, to be able to establish confidence and to get full information about an experience, must be able to contain it. Quite a lot of valuable information may be lost if the researcher is unable to show a degree of mirroring and empathy. See Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
9. The accounts at the Alister Hardy Research Centre are qualitative because they are people's own written words, but in the context of this investigation they add a quantitative element because of the large number of accounts.

Formerly, quantitative and qualitative methods were considered mutually exclusive and were defended by their respective schools. However, a researcher who applies quantitative methods is not necessarily a positivist, and one who uses qualitative methods is not necessarily a phenomenologist. Today, most sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnologists apply a combination of methods. Quantitative methods have been developed mainly to verify or confirm theories, whereas qualitative methods have been developed mostly to discover or develop theories. See Thomas D Cook and Charles S Reichard, *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Evaluation Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979).

10. Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1984), talk about three typical biases: the holistic fallacy, that events are interpreted as more patterned and more congruent than they really are; the elite bias, that data from articulate, well-informed, and usually high-status informants is overweighed while data from intractable, less articulate, and lower status informants is toned down; and going native, wherein the researcher loses perspective or 'bracketing' ability and is co-opted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants (230).
11. For example, my present project, 'Religion and Democracy: Poor Chilean Women Speak Out,' is an investigation of the theological repertoires of resistance against the military theology of Augusto Pinochet, among about three hundred poor and marginalised women living mainly in the shantytowns of Santiago and Valparaiso.
12. These statements do not reflect experiences in the sense of *oplevelse/Erlebung* (raw experience). They are experiences built up over time after very many *oplevelser/Erlebungen*. Getting at this idea is what was intended with the filter question about interviewees' attitude toward institutional religion, as well as with the question about whether the interviewees thought men had religious experiences similar to their own. Thus, not only is this investigation engaged with raw experiences, but the interviewees also function as partners in debate. Steiner Kvale, in 'The Primacy of the Interview,' *Methods: A Journal for Human Science* (Spring 1989), calls the interview situation a locus of knowledge: '[T]he



interview is an interpersonal situation, a dialogue taking place in the medium of language. It is conversation between two partners about a common theme of interest to both where the knowledge develops in the dialogue' (33).

13. Unitive experiences in the Hardy material are much more important than indicated in the subcategory title 'Feeling of unity with surroundings and/or with other people,' which is contained within the larger category 'Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: visual.' An independent reading of the accounts in the centre shows that this category is too limited to contain the unitive experiences of the material, which are neither just sensory nor just visual.
14. In parenthetical citations from the Alister Hardy material throughout the essay, the number corresponds with the archive number of the Alister Hardy Research Centre, the gender of the informer is indicated by F or M, and the age is stated if the informer supplied it.
15. Because their categorisation system was based mainly upon biology, Hardy and Toon did not establish any category for statements and experiences about Jesus. Considering the centrality of Christianity in the British context, this is a weakness of their system.
16. Experiences such as these are documented in other investigations, such as G Hillerdal and B Gustafsson, *De si og hørte Jesus: Kristusibebaringer i vor tid* (Copenhagen: Strube, 1988).
17. Hardy, 30.
18. Women's statements about men's religious experiences are no source of men's religious experiences. They do, however, tell us something about gender relations seen from the point of view of one sex. This is true for the long tradition of male theological statements about the nature of women as well.
19. This is a tendency and cannot be demonstrated in all accounts. Some female informers are more systematic, whereas some men's accounts are more narrative.
20. Marghanita Laski, in her book *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), coined the term *trigger* for the context in which religious experiences arise. The Toon and Hardy categorisation of triggers is accessible only at the centre, although it is briefly explained in Hardy's *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (cited in n. 2).
21. The first 500 accounts reported to the centre were researched. Among these are 152 male informers, of whom 33 mention war. War is not included in the categorisation system of the centre. Again it should be stressed that I am pointing at tendencies, not absolutes.
22. Among the first 1,000 informers, depression and/or desperation was reported by 127 women and 38 men. Among the 3,000 informers categorised, depression was a trigger for religious experiences for 551.
23. See G Hahn, 'Les phénomènes hystériques and les révélations de sainte Thérèse SJ,' *Revue des questions scientifiques* 13-14 (Brussels, 1893), in which he concluded that Teresa of Ávila was the great Hysterian. The French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, in *Major Symptoms of Hysteria* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), named Teresa 'La célèbre patronne des hystériques.' His work was extensively used by psychologists of religion. George Albert Coe concluded that 'a close relation may be found to exist, in individual cases, between mystical religion on the one hand, and hysteria, or epilepsy, or delusional insanity on the other' (*The Psychology of Religion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917], 278). J B Pratt called the mystics 'at least incipiently hysteric' (*The Religious Consciousness* [New York: Macmillan, 1921], 371). James Henry Leuba concluded that 'St Catherine of Genoa, Santa Theresa, Mme Guyon and St Marguerite Marie suffered from hysterical attacks' (*The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* [London: Kegan Paul, 1925], 191), and claimed that 'a prolific, if not the most prolific, source

of psycho-neurosis is an abnormal sexual life. None of our great mystics enjoyed a normal sex-life' (193). The 'hysteria' of the mystics, in other words, could have been cured through active heterosexuality.

24. Leuba, 192.
25. Coe, xiii-xiv.
26. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1917; New York: Meridian, 1974), 60. William James shared this attitude. See *Varieties of Religious Experience* (cited in n. 7), 317.
27. Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1912), 967.
28. The analytical results obtained, of course, often mirror the views of the researcher. The tendency within sociology to obtain blatantly wrong results through analytic methods may be observed today in, for example, J Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), where Yinger finds that 'the modal response ... [for] upwardly-mobile but insecure middle-class Japanese city dwellers may be high-intensity, revivalistic mysticism' (151). Yinger characterises mystics 'in sharply analytic terms': 'The mystic sees himself outside the usual motivational system: he feels alienated from himself and lonely; he lacks morale; he feels guilty and baffled. He may join with others, without reference to the world around them, to achieve poise, insight, and control over their spiritual and physical malaise' (275).
29. Max Weber, *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik III: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1922), 312.
30. Joachin Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (1944; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 163.
31. See William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1899), 3-4. *Myein* also might refer to a spiritual technique of squinting the eyes to see spirits, animals, and so on from another world.
32. Briefly, objectivism may be defined as a belief system that is deeply rooted in Western philosophy and culture, encompassing the beliefs that there is a rational structure to reality independent of place, time, and the body, and that correct reason mirrors this rational structure. See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ix ff.
33. See Ralph W Hood Jr, 'Religious Orientation and the Report of Religious Experience,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (JSSR)* 9 (1970); 'Religious Orientation and the Experience of Transcendence,' *JSSR* 12 (1973); 'Forms of Religious Commitment and Intense Religious Experience,' *Review of Religious Research (RRR)* 15, no. 1 (1973); 'Psychological Strength and the Report of Intense Religious Experience,' *JSSR* 13 (1974); 'The Construction and Preliminary Validation of a Measure of Reported Mystical Experience,' *JSSR* 14 (1975); 'Differential Triggering of Mystical Experience as a Function of Self Actualisation,' *RRR* 18, No. 3 (1977); 'Eliciting Mystical States of Consciousness with Semi-structured Nature Experiences,' *JSSR* 16 (1977); and 'Anticipatory Set and Setting: Stress Incongruities as Elicitors of Mystical Experience in Solitary Nature Situations,' *JSSR* 17 (1978).
34. James (cited in n. 7); W T Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1960; London: Macmillan, 1980).
35. Hood, 'Eliciting Mystical States of Consciousness,' 156-57; emphasis mine.
36. Hood, 'Anticipatory Set and Setting,' 280; emphasis mine.
37. Hood, 'Construction and Preliminary Validation,' 30; emphasis mine.

38. Steven T Katz 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience,' in Katz (cited in n. 8), 40.
39. Ibid., 54. Katz's comparison between Jewish and Christian mysticism shows that culturally conditioned differences between mystical experiences exist. Here, however, I am concerned with Katz's underlying values as a researcher.
40. Peter Moore, 'Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique,' in Katz, 107.
41. Katz, 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience,' in Katz, 26.
42. Peter Donovan, *Interpreting Religious Experience* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979), 23-24.
43. Stace, 148, 212, 272.
44. 'There is some sort of interpenetration where the power and myself are one, and yet there is a difference, because I am limited by a lot of other factors ... It is as if I am too small to contain it' (de Beixedon); 'It comes, meets in you, and disappears. Sometimes I feel that it is not I who made it. Yes, it is me, but yet it is not ... [O]f course it is me, it is my self. And my self, where does it come from? What is it?' (Stage).  
  
Describing this experience as a pantheistic paradox, however, as Stace does (212, 234, 253), leads to two problems: first, it locates mysticism in the romantic period; and second, it fixates the holy linguistically and thus does not respect the trans-subjective and paradoxical area between the holy and the human. These experiences are human experiences; what the divine per se is we cannot know.
45. See Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
46. Once again I am pointing at tendencies. Some male scientists, such as W T Stace and William James, have stressed the non-objectivist aspects of mysticism. The main scientific *thrust* in the study of mysticism, however, is objectivist. According to Mark Johnson (cited in n. 32), objective assumptions may be challenged first of all because imaginative and bodily elements in objectivist categorisation go unrecognised. According to Johnson, the body should be put back into the mind, since bodily and imaginative elements structure meaning (xii-xiii). Mysticism, on the other hand, seems to demonstrate how the body *is* knowledge, which is known from specifically female experiences: the child cries, and the breast soaks the blouse.
47. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
48. The patriarchal nuclear family is breaking apart, and a big part of the world's children are living in one-parent families and feminised poverty. Men's abandonment of their children probably will result in a stronger identity crisis in the children, especially the boys, who must distance themselves tremendously from the mother and the family to establish a male identity. This might mean that they also will move far away from the mystical unity with the all. Some male theologians are aware of how the prevailing norms of mothering and fathering are crucial for consciousness changes. See Guyton B Hammond, *Conscience and its Recovery: From the Frankfurt School to Feminism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); and Mark Finn and John Fartner, eds., *Object Relations Theory and Religion: Clinical Applications* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Press, 1992).
49. This does not mean, of course, that some women, like me, will not also find science appealing. See Brian Easlea, *Science and Sexual Oppression: Patriarchy's Confrontation with Woman and Nature* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981).

50. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 124. See also Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Gender and Science,' in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B Hintikka (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D Reidel, 1983).
51. R C Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (1957; London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 40.
52. *Ibid.*, 148.
53. *Ibid.*, 151-152.
54. See Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), 124.
55. See Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self: A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991).
56. See James W Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). The last stage Fowler identifies, universalising faith, is most interesting in a mystical context. However, Fowler seems to neglect personal images of the transcendent and the relational dimension in faith, especially changes in self and object representation; cf. John McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion: On Faith and the Imaging of God* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), 43-44.
57. According to McDargh, 66ff., faith may be defined as an act of self-becoming and has six aspects: the sense of being real; the sense of being in relationship to a real and meaningful world; the capacity to be alone; the capacity to tolerate dependency; the capacity to tolerate ambivalence; and the sense of oneself as available for loving self-donation. A double paradox may be observed in faith: by giving up infantile wish fulfillments, the most fundamental wishes of the self are revived and fulfilled (58).

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In 1998, Lene Sjørup published *Oneness: a Theology of Women's Religious Experiences* (Peeters) which is a revised version of the Danish *Enhed med Altet*. It is also based on qualitative interviews and reports from the Alister Hardy Research Centre Archives.