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A WHITEHEADIAN INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Degree

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Frank W. Quillen

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Dedicated to my parents,
Owen and Sybil Quillen,
with affection

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ABSTRACT

Whitehead incorporates the data provided by religious experience to produce a system by means of which the full range of religious experiences may be understood. Whitehead does not build his doctrine of God on religious experience; however, he uses religious experience as the means of identifying his doctrine with that reality which is venerated by the great religions.

God is prehended in every occasion of experience making up the world, but most of our experiences of him are unconscious. All experience may be divided into three types: (1) mundane experience, in which no religious content is discerned; (2) religiously ambiguous experience, which provides only intimations of a higher reality; and (3) full-blown religious experience of a vivid kind.

In terms of the system, the third type of experience requires a muting or silencing of worldly prehensions. Ascetic and meditative practices of various religious traditions may be seen as attempts to achieve this goal.

According to Smart, two polarities may be discerned in vivid religious experiences. Numinous encounters are experiences of the "otherness" of the divine, while mystical experiences constitute a sense of "sameness" or identity. Whitehead's system can adequately account for both polarities of experience.

Nature mysticism presents special problems in that (1) it does not transcend the natural world, and (2) it contains elements of

both mystical experience and numinous encounter. It may be seen as a kind of "sacramental perception" in which the objective world becomes an outward symbol of an inner reality.

Naturalistic arguments against a cognitive dimension of religious experience are convincing only to the extent that one accepts the underlying metaphysical assumptions of naturalism.

"Neo-Whiteheadian" attempts to naturalize Whitehead's system produce an alternate system which is inadequate for accounting for religious experience.

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CHAPTER I

WHITEHEAD AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

The metaphysical scheme devised by Alfred North Whitehead and presented in its most mature and complete form in Process and Reality provides us with a comprehensive worldview in which religious experience plays a most important part. The system itself was constructed in such a way as to take the data provided by religious experience into account as an indispensable element in our total understanding of the world. Just as religious experience provides data for the system, the system in turn provides a valuable perspective from which to examine and analyze particular types of religious experience.

Subsequent chapters of this study will consist largely of attempts to utilize Whiteheadian concepts as they appear in the system for the purpose of focusing upon various religious phenomena. Before such a task can be undertaken, however, it is first necessary that a groundwork be laid. This first chapter will be concerned with presenting an overall exposition of Whitehead's views concerning religious experience and an assessment of the role such experience plays in the development of his cosmology. Attention will then be given to what is perhaps the most formidable problem in dealing with religious experience from a Whiteheadian perspective, the hiddenness or anonymity of God within ordinary experience which

must be overcome in order for religious experience, at least of an overt or dramatic type, to take place.

II. GOD AS SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The profound influence of William James upon Whitehead's thinking often has been acknowledged. Victor Lowe has pointed out that even so basic a Whiteheadian concept as the doctrine of occasions of experience was influenced by James' notion of "drops of experience,"¹ and indeed Whitehead himself appeals to James in presenting this concept in Process and Reality.² Whether or not Whitehead was substantially influenced by James' views concerning religious experience is uncertain. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable similarity in the thinking of the two men concerning this subject.

Both James and Whitehead took religious experience with great seriousness, and both understood such experience to constitute a disclosure of reality, having important metaphysical significance. For both thinkers religious experience is to be accepted for what the masses have always taken it to be, an experience of the divine, however differently that may be understood. In fact, Whitehead's acceptance of the common man's intuition of religious experience

¹Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 19.

²Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (Corrected Edition), David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne, Eds. (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 68. Subsequent references to this edition consist of the abbreviation PR followed by the page numbers.

is in harmony with the rather sophisticated kind of "naive realism" he favored in epistemological matters.

Whitehead was no doubt quite familiar with some of the popular attempts to explain religious experience by means of the kind of reductivistic and naturalistic interpretations so shrewdly refuted by James in The Varieties of Religious Experience. One such interpretation, which James calls "medical materialism," holds that what are taken to be experiences of God are in actuality only particular mental states which are brought about by bodily conditions. As James observes, to proponents of such a position "Saint Paul certainly had once an epileptoid, if not an epileptic seizure; George Fox was an hereditary degenerate; Carlyle was undoubtedly auto-intoxicated by some organ or other . . ."³ To cite another attempt at naturalistic reduction, there is the interpretation that religious experience may be attributed solely to misdirected sexual impulses. From this point of view, conversion experiences are seen as the result of hormonal changes brought about by puberty, and a nun devotes herself to Christ in compensation for the lack of an earthly lover.⁴

Although Whitehead would not have denied the roles that particular mental states and sexual deprivation may play in certain types of spirituality, he would have objected as strenuously as James to such purely naturalistic interpretations. The masses have

³James, p. 30.

⁴Ibid., pp. 27-28.

always believed religious experience to carry with it its own validation, and to disregard the integrity of the experience itself is, for Whitehead, to disregard our most direct and, therefore, our most trustworthy datum for interpreting reality. Whitehead writes that "The elucidation of immediate experience is the sole justification for any thought . . ." (PR 4). From a Whiteheadian point of view, naturalistic reductions of religious experience involve a high degree of abstraction, while at the same time they miss the main import of the experience. Later in this study I shall deal more fully with the major naturalistic objections to religious experience and attempt a refutation based upon Whiteheadian principles.

John B. Cobb, Jr. has argued in defense of the Whiteheadian position that a theistic interpretation of religious experience is the most natural one. Cobb justifies his use of the word natural:

By a natural interpretation I mean one arising most spontaneously out of the experience itself, one least dependent upon preformed intellectual convictions. A case could be made for this. Man does seem naturally religious, and this does mean among other things that he experiences life as in relation with superhuman power. It does seem that a thorough secularization of interpretation depends upon a high degree of intellectual sophistication in which rational objections to religious belief play a large role.⁵

Whitehead does not present explicit arguments in defense of a theistic interpretation. As the creator of a metaphysical system,

⁵ John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 228.

he is not concerned with presenting piecemeal arguments in the manner of analytic philosophers. His concern is rather to expound and defend his system as a whole. Since this system is a theistic one, a theistic interpretation of religious experience forms an integral part and blends coherently and consistently with his overall scheme of things. While one might argue that from other perspectives other interpretations might work as well, Whitehead assumes that a theistic interpretation is justified by the experience itself, or that, in Cobb's words "the grounding in God is susceptible to some dim manifestation within these experiences . . ."⁶ If this be the case, then the experience is self-validating.

As another possible defense of this position, we might focus upon a comment made by Whitehead himself in Religion in the Making:

The dogmas of religion are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience of mankind. In exactly the same way the dogmas of physical science are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the sense perception of mankind.⁷

The analogy between religious experience and sense perception which Whitehead advances in this quotation could have been developed into an argument that our experiences of a religious nature are as trustworthy as our sense perceptions. Here again we may detect

⁶Ibid.

⁷Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (Cleveland: World, 1954), p. 57. Subsequent references to this edition consist of the abbreviation RM followed by the page numbers.

the possible influence of James, or at least a remarkable similarity in the thinking of Whitehead and James. In a passage in The Varieties of Religious Experience, James provides the same analogy and goes ahead to develop from it an argument for the trustworthiness of religious experience, which in Whitehead is only implied:

Our own more "rational" beliefs are based on evidence exactly similar in nature to that which mystics quote for theirs. Our senses, namely, have assured us of certain states of fact; but mystical experiences are as direct perceptions of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us . . . that is, they are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist.⁸

Just how convincing is such an argument? Certainly it is true that we depend upon our sense perceptions to assure us of certain states of affairs, and that some persons depend upon their religious experience in much the same way. For those who share Whitehead's conviction that a direct experience of God is possible, this kind of argument would seem to carry considerable weight. For those persons whose first philosophical principles rule out such an experience, such an argument is likely to be unconvincing. One can easily anticipate refutations coming from other philosophical perspectives. From a Humean point of view, the universe is made up of perceptions, and these do not include perceptions of God. Likewise, a Kantian would hold that it is impossible to have any

⁸James, p. 332. James uses the word mystical to refer to any direct religious experience. I will make use of a more limited definition.

intuitions of a realm transcending our sensory experience. Perhaps the most that can be said for such an argument is that it carries persuasive power for those who may already be sympathetic to a world-view like that presented by Whitehead.

III. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN WHITEHEAD'S SYSTEM

Whitehead defines speculative philosophy as "the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (PR 3). Much of this study will be devoted to utilizing Whitehead's system as a tool for interpreting experience of a religious nature. Prior to undertaking such a task, however, it might prove advantageous to examine first the role that religious experience plays in shaping and informing the system. The Philosophy of Organism makes use of the data provided by religious experience to develop a system by means of which such experience may in turn be interpreted.

It is difficult to discern just how great a role Whitehead's own personal background and religious experiences play in the formation of his metaphysics, but his interpreters generally acknowledge that such data provide a considerable formative influence. As the son of an Anglican vicar, Whitehead was nurtured in the faith of the Christian Church. Although he continued in this faith for some time and once considered conversion to Roman Catholicism, he later lost the faith of his youth, and for a time took an agnostic position prior to the creation of his theistic system. While Whitehead may have drawn freely from his own personal religious background, there

is little ground for accusing him of a religious provincialism or of a lack of objectivity as concerns his dealing with experiences of a religious nature. It is to the universal religious experience of mankind that Whitehead appeals in his system, and he is quite explicit in declaring that these data must be taken into account in the construction of a metaphysical system.⁹

It must be stressed that the data of religious experience, important though they may be, are only one part of the data to be considered in doing metaphysics. Also important to Whitehead's system are the data provided by aesthetic, scientific, and moral intuitions.¹⁰ Although Whitehead refers to both religious and moral intuitions as "somewhat exceptional elements in our conscious experience" (PR 343), he holds that it is the fusion of religion with science that frees philosophy from what he calls "the taint of ineffectiveness." He goes on to say that philosophy's chief importance consists in this fusing together of "religion and science into one rational scheme of thought" (PR 15).

The data provided by our religious intuitions are understood by Whitehead to have a particularly important role to play in that the emotional and particular character of these data are effective in offsetting the general and rational nature of philosophy. As Whitehead expresses this conviction:

⁹Paul G. Kuntz, "Can Whitehead be Made a Christian Philosopher?" Process Studies 12 (Spring 1983), p. 233.

¹⁰William A. Christian, An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 285.

Religion should connect the rational generality of philosophy with the emotions and purposes springing out of existence in a particular society, in a particular epoch, and conditioned by particular antecedents. Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes; it is directed to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity. Philosophy finds religion and modifies it; and conversely religion is among the data of experience which philosophy must weave into its own scheme. Religion is an ultimate craving to infuse into the insistent particularity of emotion that non-temporal generality which primarily belongs to conceptual thought alone (PR 15-16).

Although the emotional character of religious experience serves a positive function for the philosopher, it also poses problems. It is necessary that religion be a rational enterprise, since the intensity of emotion fostered by religious experience tends to get out of hand in that it sometimes leads to formulations that are incapable of rational treatment, and cannot be integrated into a metaphysical system. In Whitehead's words, "The foundations of dogma must be laid in a rational metaphysics which criticises meanings, and endeavours to express the most general concepts adequate for the all-inclusive universe" (RM 81). It is for this reason that philosophy must modify the formulations derived from religious experience. Without such modification the philosopher cannot hope to fit such formulations into a consistent, coherent, and logically rigorous scheme.¹¹

¹¹Ibid.

It is important to note that it is the formulation of the experience or intuition which must be modified, not the intuition itself. While remaining true to the basic intuition, the philosopher maintains the right to question and amend the formulation through which the intuition has found expression in religious dogma and popular piety. It is to this procedure that Whitehead refers when he states that

if we attend to the general principles which regulate all endeavours after clear statement of truth, we must be prepared to amplify, recast, generalize, and adapt, so as to absorb into one system all sources of experience (RM 143-144).

As an example of such modification, we might consider the religious intuition which in Christian dogma and piety generally has been formulated as "the will of God." Whitehead takes the basic intuition behind such a formulation to consist of a prehending of God's direction and guidance in all things. In Whitehead's system this intuition finds expression in the doctrine of an initial aim provided by God for each occasion of experience. This philosophical formulation is a modification of the religious dogma in that it does away with the notion that God has a detailed plan for each human life that he expects to be carried out much the way the script of a playwright is carried out by an actor on the stage. The Whiteheadian formulation of the basic religious intuition allows for an open-ended state of affairs in which God's aim for any person in any moment is contingent upon the response received in previous

occasions from that person, as well as the responses received from other occasions prehended by that society of occasions constituting that person. The intuition of the agency of God in directing the world and working to bring about the best possible results is maintained in Whitehead's system, at the same time that it is amplified, recast, and adapted from the usual formulation.

Part of the value of this procedure is that formulations of religious intuitions that appear contradictory may be harmonized when modified in such a way as to find a place in Whitehead's system. We might consider as an example the many contradictions concerning the nature of God in dogmatic and popular formulations, and the manner in which such contradictions are resolved in Whitehead's doctrine of the di-polarity of God. Within the Christian tradition philosophers and theologians often have identified God with Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover," and have held that divine perfection consists partly of the qualities of immutability and unrelatedness. On the other hand, popular piety and scripture have understood God to enrich himself by entering into relationships with his creatures. Within the mythos of the Old Testament, God is portrayed as sometimes bargaining with human beings and even regretting decisions that he has previously made. Some thinkers, such as Pascal, have gone on record as strongly preferring the God depicted in scripture. Pascal declared, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars."¹² In Whitehead's metaphysics such a

¹²Morris Bishop, Pascal, the Life of Genius (New York: Reynal

choice is not necessary, since the religious intuitions behind both understandings of God are judged to be correct. The immutable and self-sufficient "God of the philosophers" is God prehended in his primordial nature as the ground of all possibilities, while the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is God in his consequent nature, totally related to the world and continually responding to it. By modifying the formulations of two different religious intuitions, Whitehead has managed to resolve what often has been taken to constitute a contradiction. From a Whiteheadian perspective, the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob turn out to be two polar aspects of the same divine reality.

Although the modification of certain formulations of religious intuitions is necessary for philosophical purposes, Whitehead is deeply sensitive to the intuitions themselves and insists upon taking them with great seriousness, as having important metaphysical significance. As Victor Lowe has stated,

One reason for prizing Whitehead's philosophical theology is that his language often reflects perfectly the peculiar character of those religious cognitions which have metaphysical meaning.¹³

IV. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

A difference of opinion may be detected among interpreters of Whitehead's philosophy concerning the role that religious experience

E. Hitchcock, 1936), pp. 172-173.

¹³Lowe, pp. 99-100.

plays in the development of the doctrine of God. Victor Lowe contends that in Science and the Modern World, Religion in the Making, Process and Reality, and Adventures of Ideas there is a common distinction made between a metaphysics founded upon general experience and additional metaphysical ideas which have their source in religious experience.¹⁴ That this is certainly Whitehead's position in the first of these titles, we have only to cite the following passage:

The general principle of empiricism depends upon the doctrine that there is a principle of concretion which is not discoverable by abstract reason. What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences and therefore rests on an empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind has differed profoundly. He has been named respectively Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it.¹⁵

John B. Cobb holds, seemingly in opposition to Lowe's position, that between Science and the Modern World and Religion in the Making there is a decided shift in Whitehead's thinking concerning the relationship between religious experience and the formulation of a metaphysical doctrine of God. Cobb holds that in the latter work religious experience, rather than simply contributing additional evidence or knowledge of God, is understood as contributing its own independent evidence which metaphysics must take into account

¹⁴Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁵Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: Signet Mentor Books, 1925), p. 179. Subsequent references to this edition consist of the abbreviation SMW followed by the page number.

in the development of a doctrine of God. Cobb believes that here can be found a more reciprocal emphasis which makes religious knowledge put less dependence upon previous metaphysical doctrines.

In defense of his position, Cobb quotes from the following passage in Religion in the Making:

. . . rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics for a scrutiny of its terms. At the same time it contributes its own independent evidence, which metaphysics must take account of in framing its descriptions (RM 76).

There is a possibility that there is not as much difference in the positions of Lowe and Cobb as there would appear to be at first glance. It may be that Whitehead understood religious experience as both providing data that must be incorporated into a metaphysical system and furnishing additional information that cannot lend itself to that kind of systematization. In Religion in the Making, Whitehead certainly suggests that the individual may need to supplement his metaphysical doctrines on the basis of "more special evidence, religious or otherwise, provided it is trustworthy" (RM 107). It seems likely that Whitehead would have understood religious experience and intuition to provide such trustworthy evidence.

It would appear that Whitehead did not fully think through the relationship between religious experience and his metaphysical doctrine of God until he finally came to give that doctrine its full systematic treatment in Process and Reality. In this work Whitehead, contrary to what we might have expected, does not begin with religious experience in introducing his concept of God.

In Part I, Chapter II of this most important of his works, Whitehead introduces his categoreal scheme. Here four sets of categories are set forth, including "The Category of the Ultimate" and three sets of what are termed "more special categories," which consist of Categories of Existence, Categories of Explanation, and Categoreal Obligations. In none of these is the doctrine of God introduced. The reason for this exclusion is that the categories are intended to deal with the generic qualities and relationships which hold true for all actual entities in general.

For Whitehead God is a particular actual entity having functions peculiar to himself. For this reason God is presented in Part I, Chapter III of the work as a derivative notion.¹⁶ In his presentation of the categoreal scheme, Whitehead has already established that every actual entity has a subjective aim. In going on to deal with the question of how the subjective aim of a temporal actual entity originates, he advances his doctrine of God:

The non-temporal act of all-inclusive unfettered valuation is at once a creature of creativity and a condition for creativity. It shares this double character with all creatures. By reason of its character as a creature, always in concrescence and never in the past, it receives a reaction from the world; this reaction is its consequent nature. It is here termed "God"; because the contemplation of our natures as enjoying real feelings derived from the timeless source of all order acquires that "subjective form" of refreshment and companionship at which religions aim (PR 31-32).

¹⁶William A. Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion," in William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman, Eds., Process and Divinity: Philosophical Essays Presented to Charles Hartshorne (LaSalle: Open Court, 1964), p. 185.

William A. Christian has called attention to the fact that the doctrine of God is introduced in a different manner from that of other derivative notions. In introducing other derivative notions such as succession, spatial extension, and endurance, Whitehead appeals to empirical experience. In introducing his concept of God, on the other hand, he begins with the problem of how subjective aims originate. One might expect him rather to begin with an appeal to religious experience as a justification for his theistic doctrine. According to Christian, this shift in method is due to the fact that in the case of derivative notions other than God, Whitehead is limiting himself to "common and public facts." Since religious experience is of a more private and individual nature, it simply does not provide this kind of fact. Therefore, Whitehead chooses another way to introduce his doctrine of God. In Christian's words:

He [Whitehead] thinks religious experiences are themselves, as experiences, genuine facts requiring interpretation. . . . We use both categoreal concepts and derivative notions to interpret religious experience. But religious experiences do not give us the kinds of facts which justify the introduction of a derivative notion into the system.¹⁷

Because religious experience does not furnish us with the kind of common and public facts which are provided by other kinds of empirical experience, Whitehead considers our religious intuitions along with our moral intuitions to constitute what he terms "somewhat exceptional elements in our conscious experience" (PR 343). While the exceptional

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

quality in no way lessens their importance, it does, nevertheless, make them more elusive and difficult to deal with in doing metaphysics.

We might note that although Whitehead is unable to utilize religious experience in introducing his doctrine of God, it is religious experience which serves to identify this reality with that reality which in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is called God. In making this identification, Whitehead appeals to the experiences or feelings which provide a subjective form of refreshment and companionship.

In not making use of religious experience as a means of introducing his doctrine of God, Whitehead at this point dramatically parts company with William James. We might recall that religious experience and what he termed "pragmatic usefulness" were precisely the elements to which James limited himself in arriving at a concept of God.¹⁸ James' "radical empiricism" and his strong bias against metaphysical systems influenced him to attempt a doctrine of God on quite different grounds from those available to Whitehead as a systematizer. Critics of James have sometimes maintained that James' doctrine of God fails because the elements he used are insufficient for developing a satisfactory doctrine.¹⁹ Perhaps it is Whitehead's strength that he does not depend upon religious experience for advancing such a doctrine.

¹⁸James, pp. 337-356.

¹⁹David Platt, "Is Empirical Theology Adequate?" International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion 2 (Spring 1972), p. 31.

V. THE RECEPTION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

What may appear a rather peculiar feature of Whitehead's metaphysics is that while God is always experienced by each concrescing occasion, there is usually no conscious awareness either of the experience itself or of God as the reality experienced. Consciousness is found only in high grade occasions such as those making up the regnant society of occasions which constitutes the self or soul of a living person. In these very sophisticated occasions there is found an entertaining of propositions which depends upon a contrasting of contrasts. It is only in such occasions that the reflection which constitutes consciousness is fostered.

Although God is prehended to some extent in each occasion making up the world, the role he plays seldom calls attention to itself. Even in the high grade occasions of human consciousness, God is ordinarily hidden or anonymous in everyday experience. I shall refer to this quality as the anonymity of God.

The notion of unconscious experience may at first appear to be a contradiction in terms. Upon further reflection, however, we can find that this concept is substantiated by empirical experience. As an example we might consider that often when we find ourselves with a headache, we may have an awareness that the headache did not begin all of a sudden. Rather, we know that it has been lurking below the level of our consciousness prior to finally surfacing

as a conscious experience.²⁰ A Whiteheadian description of such an experience is profoundly in keeping with the way it is empirically received. At first there is a dull discomfort which Whitehead would describe as "vague visceral feelings." This discomfort which is not at first localized soon evolves into the faint impression of a headache playing around the edges of our awareness. Finally the experience fully impinges into our consciousness. Upon reflection we know that the experience preceded our consciousness of it.

Our experience of God, from a Whiteheadian perspective, is received in the same manner that we receive sensory experiences. As Cobb has aptly pointed out, our failure to experience God in the mode of consciousness provides no more reason to think that we do not experience him at all than our failure to have a conscious experience of the many events going on in our brain provides us with a reason to assume that these are not experienced.²¹

Whitehead speaks of these unconscious experiences of God as constituting the "secular functions" of God. Since he has in mind primarily the provision of an initial aim for each occasion of experience, such a designation is appropriate, since there is no recognition of anything particularly religious in experiences which are not discerned by the consciousness. We might consider, however, that the same kind of experience when discerned either vividly or

²⁰I owe this example to Professor Robert Botkin.

²¹Cobb, p. 229.

dimly by human consciousness constitutes the intuition that in the Judaeo-Christian tradition has been formulated as "the will of God." Keeping this point in mind, I prefer to think of this function of God as constituting a religious content in each experience, rather than as a "secular function." By altering Whitehead's terminology on this particular point, the notion of a clear demarcation between the religious and the secular may be avoided. Such a distinction, after all, is uncharacteristic of Whitehead's thought taken as a whole. We may be justified, therefore, in understanding the religious content given in the initial aim as providing a groundwork for all experience, whether conscious or not.

As concerns the experience of human beings, there are three good reasons why God usually remains anonymous to human consciousness. In order to understand the first of these, it is necessary that we take into account Whitehead's description of the phases of concrescence which lead to the culmination or "satisfaction" of an actual occasion.

In the initial phase of concrescence, which is called the phase of conformal feelings, there is a carrying over of feelings from previous occasions. Simple physical feelings of the subjectivity of the previous occasion are acquired by the concrescing occasion. There is a negative prehension of those feelings incompatible for integration, while those feelings prehended positively are brought into a unity so that they are compatible for integration into one feeling (PR 164).

In the second phase of concrescence called the phase of conceptual feelings, there is a separation or derivation of conceptual feelings from the simple physical feelings of the first phase. In Donald Sherburne's words, such conceptual feelings are "'pried out' of their immanence and felt as transcendent, as a capacity for determination."²² Of these simple physical feelings, some are classified as "pure" and others as "hybrid." For a pure physical feeling there is an objectification of the datum by means of one of its physical feelings, while in the case of hybrid prehensions, the objectification takes place by means of one of its conceptual feelings. In the latter case the conceptual feeling originated has the same datum as its predecessor, although the datum may be felt in a different way, providing it with a different subjective form.

While some of these hybrid feelings reproduce for the concrescing occasion the conceptual feelings of previous temporal entities, others reproduce the conceptual feelings of God. Such feelings, reproducing for the concrescing subject both the data and valuation of God's conceptual feeling, constitute the initial or subjective aim for that occasion. These feelings may be contrasting or identical to those feelings derived from temporal entities. In the event that there is a contrast, the possibility for novelty becomes an option for the concrescing occasion. Thus God's aims, by providing the option of "proximate novelties," serves as a lure by which the

²²Donald W. Sherburne, Ed., A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 47n.

concreasing occasion may transcend previous occasions and attain greater value. Otherwise, the concreasing occasion would simply reproduce the past occasions so that change would be impossible (PR 249).

What is significant to note here is that the subject's initial or subjective aim derived from God and ordered by God is provided in this second phase of concrease, while consciousness and reflective consciousness are not brought about until the third and final phase, with the contrasts and contrastings of contrasts which make them possible. It follows that, at least under ordinary conditions, the derivation of the subject's aim from God is never brought into the province of consciousness, thereby assuring an anonymity of God in the provision of the aim.

As a second reason for God's anonymity in ordinary experience we might consider that although prehensions are received in the initial data to be integrated by the concreasing occasion, such prehensions provide only a part of the data. There are always feelings of other actual entities present as well as feelings of God.

A third reason for God's anonymity is constituted by the fact that since God is constantly experienced, we are ordinarily provided, as Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki has pointed out, with no "contrasting absence" which could serve to bring the experience of God to the level of consciousness.²³ Cobb makes the same point in declaring

²³Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology (New York: Crossroads, 1984), p. 62.

that "the constancy of God's presence militates against consciousness of him."²⁴

Still a fourth reason for the anonymity of God in ordinary experience can be discerned when we consider the purpose of the initial aim. God's aim directs us toward the best possibility for ourselves in relation to the rest of the world. As Suchocki puts it, the initial aim is toward "an optimum mode of existence in the world" rather than toward God himself.²⁵ There is a possibility that God's aim in particular instances might direct us toward a conscious experience of himself. I shall deal with the issue of religious experiences initiated by God more fully later in this study. The fact remains, however, that in ordinary experience our attention seems to be directed toward other occasions making up the world rather than to God himself; therefore, we are left with still another reason that God's presence in our experience is not consciously discerned.

Considering this anonymity of God in ordinary experience, we can easily account for atheism and agnosticism as intellectual options for mankind. Even for persons who experience some conscious impingement of the working of God in their lives, there is often no recognition that this reality which they dimly discern is in any way related to that reality which they hear described in the languages

²⁴Cobb, p. 232.

²⁵Suchocki, pp. 62-63

of religious dogma and metaphysical description. Often the kind of God-talk used by philosophers and theologians may seem irrelevant because the persons to whom it is addressed have had no conscious experience of God by means of which such language might evoke a response, or because those who have had such experiences are unable to recognize the subject of such discourse as the object of their experiences. Further complications arise when those persons having conscious intuitions of God formulate their intuitions in a manner other than a theistic one. It is not surprising that Whitehead even lists "chance" as one of the pseudonyms of God (PR 179). Cobb's comments are to the point:

Our self-experience can be interpreted in terms of "throw-ness" rather than as a gift of God. . . . The experience allows itself to be interpreted simply in terms of existential structure without reference to a ground. Likewise, we recognize an orderliness in the world as we experience it, but rather than attribute it to God, we may view it as grounded in nature itself or even in our experiencing processes.²⁶

We have noted that God's provision of an initial aim for each occasion may be understood as insuring a religious ground of depth for every experience. There is a kind of experience often taken to be of a religious nature, although God is not experienced in a direct or dramatic way. Such an experience might be labelled "religiously ambiguous," in that while it carries with it intimations of a transcendent reality, the anonymity of God is still maintained,

²⁶Cobb, p. 227.

since God is not experienced in isolation, but as only one of the data comprising the experience. Such experiences may be seen as occupying an intermediate position between mundane, ordinary experience in which God operates in what Whitehead calls a secular function, and the overt, dramatic experiences exemplified by numinous encounter and feelings of mystical union.

Although the intensity of God's presence in any experience is, of course, a matter of degree, and not all experiences will fall neatly into a particular category, nevertheless, for purposes of classification we might distinguish according to the intensity of God's presence felt, three types of experience: (1) what we shall call mundane experience, in which there is no recognition of any religious content; (2) the religiously ambiguous experience, in which there are intimations of a religious reality despite the anonymity of God; and (3) the vivid or full-blown religious experience.

It may well be that most persons never enjoy prehensions of God more intense than those found in religiously ambiguous experiences, since it would seem that only a minority of persons are given to those of a more exotic nature. From a Whiteheadian perspective the religiously ambiguous experience may be interpreted as constitutive of prehensions of God at such a level of intensity that a transcendent religious reality is intimated but not experienced directly in isolation, so that God makes his presence felt without necessarily calling attention to himself. The experience might surface in the consciousness as a general sense of well-being, a

conviction that life is worthwhile, despite its painfulness, a sense of some higher meaning vaguely discerned as seeming to transcend the mundane affairs of everyday life. William H. Halverson has, I believe, described this type of experience accurately:

I do not mean . . . anything odd or unusual--nothing in the way of an "ecstatic vision" or anything of the sort. I mean simply that our longing that life shall have some significance, our desire that the future shall have some hope, and our anxiety over the transitoriness and insecurity of everything that we perceive are somehow overcome. I do not think that any human being is without this experience. There is a need, a longing, an anxiety, a concern, an emptiness in human life. Somehow from deep within ourselves, these are overcome. The void is filled, and we find courage.²⁷

The religiously ambiguous experience will not be interpreted necessarily in a theistic manner; indeed, the religious content of the experience may be dismissed as illusory or credited to purely naturalistic sources. Persons who have received training in the theistic religious traditions may attribute such experiences to God, while others may suspect only psychological causes or such physical factors as exercise and diet. Psychologist Abraham H. Maslow, after much empirical research into the nature of religious experience, which he calls "peak-experience," came to the conclusion that while almost all persons have experiences of a religious nature, many persons seem to fear such experiences and, as a result, suppress,

²⁷William H. Halverson, A Concise Introduction to Philosophy, Third Edition (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 151.

deny, or attempt to forget them. Maslow labels such persons "non-peakers":

Any person whose character structure (or Weltanschauung, or way of life) forces him to try to be extremely or completely rational or "materialistic" or mechanistic tends to become a non-peaker. That is, such a view of life tends to make the person regard his peak- and transcendent experiences as a kind of insanity, a complete loss of control, a sense of being overwhelmed by irrational emotions. . . . For the compulsive-obsessive person, who organizes his life around the denying and controlling of emotion, the fear of being overwhelmed by an emotion (which is interpreted as a loss of control) is enough for him to mobilize all his stamping-out and defensive activities against the peak-experience.²⁸

Although Maslow's contention that religious experiences are to be accepted or rejected may seem somewhat peculiar at first, I believe that this notion makes sense from a Whiteheadian perspective. After a religious experience has been subjectively entertained, it passes away into objective immortality embedded in those perished occasions which it has helped to characterize. As such, the experience is translated into data for future occasions toprehend. In this way it can open up for an experiencing subject myriad possibilities for future actualization. Such data as the experience provides can serve to give rise to propositions, in the Whiteheadian sense of providing a lure for feeling leading to ever greater intensity of experience in the transcendent future. For Whitehead, propositions serve to lure the concrescing occasion to

²⁸Abraham H. Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences (New York: Viking Press 1970), pp. 22-23.

attain greater complexity and value. As "sentences" propositions join together the pure potentiality of eternal objects (predicates) with actual occasions (subjects), thus bringing into actuality new possibilities. Propositions influence the formation of the subjective aim of an occasion in that they make possible a particular way an occasion can attain satisfaction.²⁹

These propositions deriving from religious experience may be either accepted or rejected. In Whiteheadian terms, a decision is reached in that they are valued either up or down. The result of such valuation may determine whether the subject will face the future with the subjective form of hope on the one hand, or despair on the other. Acceptance or rejection of the propositions to which religious experience gives rise may prove a matter of great practical consequence in the ongoing life of a person.

From my reading of Maslow, I believe that most of what he terms "peak-experiences" fall within the classification I have identified as religiously ambiguous. This is to say that while strong intimations of a religious nature appear to be present, they generally lack the intensity of the kinds of numinous encounter and mystical union that characterize the really vivid religious experience. What we have called the anonymity of God does not appear to have been overcome to the extent that there is a clear and unambiguous sense of having experienced the divine. Certainly the experience of an Isaiah or

²⁹William A. Beardslee, A House for Hope: A Study in Process and Biblical Thought (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 150-151.

of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus would seem to constitute more than what Maslow means by a peak-experience.

Despite the dramatic intensity of the vivid experience, however, like the religiously ambiguous experience, it may be accepted or rejected. The experiencing subject must decide, consciously or unconsciously, the kind of response he will give to such an experience and the manner in which it will be allowed to influence his future life. He may allow the experience to give rise to propositions which will serve to open up new possibilities, or he may devalue it so that its practical impact upon his life is negligible. While a vivid experience may leave no doubt in the mind of the subject that it is of the kind ordinarily classified as religious, he may nevertheless choose to dismiss it with purely naturalistic explanations, or, difficult though it may be, simply ignore it.

The vivid religious experience differs markedly from the religiously ambiguous experience, however, in that the anonymity of God is overcome, at least to the extent that the divine is able to "stand out" directly as the primary datum informing the experience, and not simply as one individually indiscernable prehension among others. In order for such a state of consciousness to occur, it is necessary that other prehensions constituting data for the con-
 creting occasion be muted or silenced to the point that the pre-
 hensions of God can be realized with clarity. As Cobb has pointed
 out, such a muting or silencing may involve a de-emphasizing of

the prehensions of past occasions, of other living persons, and of bodily experience, the latter involving a dissociation with sight, sound, and touch. Since God is generally experienced only in the early phases of concrescence in what Whitehead calls the mode of causal efficacy, this particular aspect of experience, usually unconscious, must be allowed to impinge upon consciousness.³⁰

We may recall that God is prehended both in his contribution of the initial aim and also as one of the many initial data felt by the concrescing occasion. It is possible that certain different kinds of religious experience result in our prehending God in these two different modes. We have already noted that God cannot be discerned in his individuality as regards his contribution of the initial aim. Cobb makes this point forcefully:

. . . God's role in our derivation of the initial aim is unvarying, however much the aim may vary. The weight of atmosphere we constantly experience does not enter into our consciousness, although we would be aware of its sudden removal. In the case of our initial aim, God's abrogation of his constant role would mean our nonexistence; so consciousness by contrast is impossible.³¹

It would seem then that the vivid and dramatic type of religious experience cannot derive from our prehensions of God in his role of providing the initial aim. If we are to concur with Cobb, we must grant that there would be no way for God's anonymity to be overcome in his fulfilling of this role. Perhaps many of the

³⁰Cobb, p. 236.

³¹Ibid., p. 232.

experiences that have been classified as religiously ambiguous, however, might derive from these particular prehensions of God. Often these experiences seem to consist of an abiding sense of purpose and well-being, and these are the subjective forms one might expect from prehensions of God in his role of contributing perpetual guidance and direction.

The vivid experience of God, in which the divine anonymity is overcome, is most likely to derive from the prehensions of God that we receive along with the many other prehensions in the initial phase of concrescence. It is here that the experience of God may be cultivated by attempts to mute or silence those prehensions of entities other than God. Although the great spiritual giants of the past did not operate from the perspective of a Whiteheadian conceptualization, I believe that many of the traditional practices of contemplative prayer, meditation, spiritual exercises, and spiritual disciplines have been designed on the basis of an intuitive grasping of this principle and, consciously or unconsciously, with this purpose in mind. The next chapter of this study will consist largely of an attempt to examine certain techniques which serve the purpose of muting or silencing our prehensions of the world in order for God to be experienced with greater clarity.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have seen that Whitehead, like James, from whom he may have drawn inspiration, holds religious experience to have important

metaphysical significance. Such experience plays a prominent part in the development of Whitehead's cosmological scheme. While religious and moral intuitions are seen as "somewhat exceptional elements," in that their subjective and emotive qualities make them rather elusive to deal with in doing metaphysics, they must nevertheless be taken into account. Because of its exceptional quality, Whitehead does not utilize religious experience as a means of introducing God into his full-blown system as expressed in Process and Reality; he does, however, use religious experience as a means of identifying his metaphysical doctrine with that reality which in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is called God.

From the perspective of Whitehead's system, we can derive an understanding of the means by which religious experience is imparted to the individual subject. In this analysis the hiddenness or anonymity of God is seen as a formidable barrier preventing in ordinary states of consciousness any recognition of a transcendent reality at work, although at particular moments strong intimations of purpose and well-being may be interpreted as deriving from a depth dimension having religious significance; this experience has been identified as one of "religious ambiguity." For vivid religious experience to occur it is necessary that the quality of God's anonymity be overcome by a muting or silencing of worldly prehensions. It is to this problem that we shall next direct our attention.

CHAPTER II

THE INITIATION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

We have examined from a Whiteheadian perspective exactly what religious experience is and the manner in which it is received. It was established that if by "religious experience" we are speaking of our prehensions of God, then we must allow that every moment has some religious content, since God is prehended in each and every occasion of experience. In making such a claim, we must acknowledge that most of our experience of God does not impinge upon our consciousness. It is not a contradiction in terms to hold that from a Whiteheadian viewpoint we are able to speak of unconscious religious experience, since Whitehead shares with modern depth psychology the insight that consciousness constitutes only the "tip of an iceberg." In what we identified in the first chapter as "mundane experience," there is no conscious awareness of any experience of God; nevertheless, God is still present in that our prehensions of him constitute part of the data that make each occasion what it is.

In what we have identified as "religiously ambiguous" experience, there is a vague and unclearly defined sense of God's presence, but only in what we have called "vivid" religious experience may we consciously discern our prehensions of God "standing apart" from our other prehensions in bold relief. In order for such a conscious experience of God to occur, we have established that there must

be a silencing or muting of worldly prehensions, by which we mean that those prehensions that are not prehensions of God must be "played down."

In this chapter we shall focus attention upon certain means by which such a muting or silencing may be brought about in order to initiate experience of a vivid religious nature. Prior to this undertaking, however, we must first deal with an issue that has already been mentioned in passing. In the course of this study thus far, we have assumed that it is possible for human beings to initiate conscious religious experience by their own efforts. Is this indeed the case, or is it true, as many Christian theologians have claimed, that all such experience must come through supernatural intervention on the part of God, so that the experience is given as a gift of grace? To this question we shall now direct our attention.

I. GOD OR HUMAN PERSONS AS INITIATORS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In his A Christian Natural Theology, John B. Cobb gives what is perhaps the definitive defense of the doctrine that Whitehead's conceptualization allows for some religious experience to be initiated by God. Cobb claims rightly that "what is prehended depends not only on the prehender but also on the prehended occasion's intention that it be prehended in a certain way." He concludes that since God has the "freedom to differentiate his relations to particular occasions," we may assume that he sometimes takes "the initiative in presenting himself to human occasions with peculiar force and

specific efficacy prior to and quite independently of their self-preparation or desire for this occurrence . . ."¹

It may seem unusual for a theologian like Cobb, writing specifically from a Christian perspective, to feel the need to defend God's ability to initiate religious experience. From the perspective of many theologians and Christian writers on the subject of religious experience, such an ability on the part of God is simply taken for granted; it is rather our human ability to initiate religious experience which they would place in question.

Cobb notes that certain religious traditions hold that all the initiative must be taken by God, on the basis that human persons cannot hope to attain God by their own efforts.² What Cobb fails to note is that such a position constitutes the rule rather than the exception in most theological traditions which have been influential in shaping Christian orthodoxies. One can easily cite examples from both Protestant and Catholic sources.

In recent times the influential Protestant theologian Karl Barth, true to his Calvinist background, has made a decisive distinction between what he holds to be true religion initiated by God as a gift of grace on one hand, and what he considers false religion initiated by human beings on the other. For Barth all religious disciplines and spiritual exercises undertaken for the purpose of

¹Ibid., p. 237.

²Ibid.

initiating religious experience are seen as vain and sinful attempts to reach God. Barth interprets Christianity as God's reaching down to man; true religious experience must travel a one-way street.³

In the Roman Catholic tradition also we find a persistent insistence that true religious experience must be the result of God's initiative operating by means of supernatural grace. Joseph Maréchal, S. J., takes a position which is typical of Catholic writers on the subject. He holds that while the experience itself must be initiated by God, it is sometimes important that there be preparation for the experience on the part of human beings, consisting of certain ascetic practices. Marechal goes into some detail to provide a rationale for explaining why such practices are of importance:

It may be asked, indeed, since the essential of ecstasy depends upon God's free initiative, what role the psychological unification brought about by asceticism still has in it . . . God in ecstasy communicates himself, not to a soul separated from a body, but to a "man," whose spiritual form has not ceased to be the very act of the body and the principle of sensibility. It may be imagined then, that the repose of the ecstatic vision cannot fail to require a fitting adaptation of the lower functions; now is not the adaptation which will best favor it for the transcendent operation of the soul, a harmonious unification analogically realizing here in the lower parts in diversity the very type of unity which the summit of the organism enjoys? The whole man must be "prepared" for the divine communications by his natural dispositions or by the training of ascesis. And if God . . . choose suddenly to ravish to himself a soul still in prey to exterior agitation, to the conflict of tendencies and

³Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth, an Introduction (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 87.

the play of scattered impressions, it will never be without at the same time reducing that tumultuous diversity to harmony and silence.⁴

If we examine Marechal's position closely, I believe that a contradiction can be discerned. A person wishing to have a religious experience should, according to Marechal, prepare himself by means of ascetic practices in order to bring about a psychological unification which will help him to receive the divine communications. By ascetic preparations, or "the training of asceticism," Marechal probably has in mind such spiritual disciplines as fasting, prayer, and meditation. Marechal notes that such preparation may not be needed for certain persons who may possess a "natural disposition" to put themselves in a frame of mind suitable for communion with God. After one has achieved the proper unification of mind by means of preparation or natural propensity, he can only wait for God to act, if, in fact, God chooses so to act. If God does not wish to grant an experience of himself, then waiting for God may be like waiting for Godot: nothing will happen. Thus far, whether we agree with Marechal or not, we must concede that his position makes good rational sense.

It is at this point, however, that Marechal seems to introduce a contradiction. Marechal seems to realize that he cannot make ascetic preparation or natural disposition a criterion for one's

⁴Joseph Marechal, S. J., "Ontology and Theology of Christian Mysticism," in Richard Woods, O. P., Ed., Understanding Mysticism (Garden City: Doubleday Image Books, 1980), p. 473.

enjoying an experience of God without violating the traditional orthodox understanding of divine omnipotence. Traditionally, omnipotence has been understood as God's ability to do anything that does not involve a logical contradiction. Certainly, if all religious experience depends upon divine initiative, then according to this doctrine of omnipotence God's ability to grant a religious experience cannot be limited to anything a human being may or may not do. As if Marechal suddenly realizes this point, he goes on to suggest that if God really wishes to impart a religious experience he may do so, regardless of whether the person is prepared or not. God himself can create the proper conditions.

Since, from this point of view, it is impossible for human persons to evoke the presence of God, and since God will communicate with us if it is desirable to do so, one is left to wonder why a person should go to all the trouble to prepare himself by ascetic means. Since God has no need of any kind of voluntary effort on our part, why should we not be content to let God reach us when and if he so desires? Why should we put ourselves through the rigors of spiritual disciplines when, if God sees fit to grant us a religious experience, he will do so anyway, regardless of our preparation or lack of it? After all, Marechal is adamant in maintaining that true religious experience is a free gift of God which must be given by supernatural grace. He affirms that the great Christian mystics "insist . . . on the absolute powerlessness of the

contemplative to attain mystical union by his own strength."⁵

When Marechal goes on to consider world religions other than Christianity, he holds that here we find a different understanding of the efficacy of ascetic preparation. He believes that for Moslems, such preparation constitutes, "if not a proper and independent, at least an infallible efficacy." As for Buddhism, he believes that preparation is understood to constitute both a necessary and sufficient condition for the experience.⁶

Just what are we to make of the different ways these religions understand the role played by ascetic preparation in religious experience? Marechal seems to imply that the experience of God for the Christian is privileged and enjoys a special validity in that it is always the result of supernatural intervention. In the case of religions other than Christianity, the implication is that religious experience here must operate on a purely natural level, and therefore lack the validity and legitimacy of Christian experience. After all, Marechal seems to reason, religious experience that can be evoked by human beings cannot be on the same level as that which is granted by grace through means of supernatural intervention.

A similar view to that of Marechal is found in the writings of R. C. Zaehner. Also writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Zaehner makes a sharp distinction between what he terms "theistic mysticism" on one hand, and "monistic mysticism" on the other.

⁵Ibid., p. 474.

⁶Ibid.

Zaehner holds that for the theistic mystic, "it is always God who takes the first step, and it is God who works in the soul and makes it fit for union."⁷ Theistic mysticism is understood by Zaehner to operate through the supernatural intervention of God, being, therefore, always initiated by God. In contrast, monistic mysticism is understood as a purely natural experience. It is, according to Zaehner, not an experience of God at all, but rather the natural experience of the unity of a substantial soul.⁸ We shall return to Zaehner's alleged distinction later in this study.

I have briefly presented the views of Barth, Marechal, and Zaehner as typical of the treatment of religious experience one often encounters in Christian writers. From a Whiteheadian perspective, much can be said in criticism of such positions. First, we might charge that those who hold positions such as these are insufficiently aware of the extent to which their own doctrinal presuppositions color their analyses. Within the mainstream theological traditions of Christianity (Thomistic, Lutheran, Calvinist), there has persisted what from a Whiteheadian standpoint can only be seen as a regrettable tendency to exalt the initiative and all-powerfulness of God at the same time that human ability has been underplayed in contrast. As Whitehead himself so profoundly observed, thinkers within the Christian tradition have often been more

⁷R. C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 191-192.

⁸Ibid., p. 168.

concerned with "paying metaphysical compliments" to God than with developing a really viable theism. It would seem that many Christian writers hold presuppositions concerning the omnipotence of God in contrast to the complete powerlessness of human beings; it is no wonder then that they are found to believe that religious experience must always be initiated by God. Writers of other traditions which have not held such theological views would naturally be inclined to the alternative view that religious experience may be initiated either by God or by human persons.

As a second criticism of those Christian writers we have surveyed, we might note that there is presupposed in their thinking a sharp dichotomy between the realm of the natural on one hand, and the realm of the supernatural on the other. This kind of Thomistic demarcation, so typical of the mainstream theological traditions, is not supported by a Whiteheadian cosmology. From a Whiteheadian perspective, "God is in the world, or nowhere. . . ,"⁹ not in some transcendent realm intervening in the world to accomplish his purpose. This is not to deny God's transcendence which follows from his primordial nature. This transcendence does not require, however, a separate world over and above the one we know. From a process perspective we might follow Charles Hartshorne in speaking of the supernatural simply as God.¹⁰ The supernatural is then understood

⁹Whitehead as quoted by Lucien Price, The Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead (New York: Signet Mentor Books, 1954), p. 297.

¹⁰Charles Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological

as being intimately involved with the natural. The difference between the natural and the supernatural becomes then simply the difference between the world and God.

A Whiteheadian interpretation of religious experience stands in sharp contrast to the other positions we have considered. For Whitehead, God is experienced in every occasion, both as providing a datum for experience and as contributing an initial aim. There is, therefore, no lack of the experience of God. The problem lies in bringing this ever-present experience of God to the level of conscious awareness. There is no good reason why from this perspective a conscious experience of God may not be initiated by human beings. Ascetic practices, from a Whiteheadian perspective, may be seen not so much as preparations for religious experience as techniques for bringing the experience of God, already present, to the level of consciousness. In this light God no longer appears in the guise of a human potentate, willing to grant religious experience to some and not to others. Such a conscious experience of God is then understood to be universally available; no person or religion may be understood as having a monopoly on it.

What then can we say of the doctrine of grace from this point of view? Frits Staal has reasoned that since grace is generally postulated when no other source is known, the difference between

Mistakes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 49.

religious experiences that can be induced and others that cannot may well lie only in our degree of awareness.¹¹

Certainly, if grace is understood as the supernatural intervention of God, acting in an arbitrary manner from another realm, it would appear that a Whiteheadian interpretation would rule out such a concept. Another understanding of grace is possible, however, which is quite compatible with a Whiteheadian interpretation. Often within the Christian tradition, grace has been understood as God's giving of himself prior to any response on the part of human beings. Since our initial prehensions of God and our prehensions of the divine aim are given prior to our response, it appears that this theological concept is based on a sound religious intuition. From a Whiteheadian perspective, however, this "grace" must be seen as universally available to all. It can no longer be understood as being dispensed by God in a capricious, selective, or preferential manner. An understanding of grace compatible with a Whiteheadian stance is found in the writings of at least one Christian writer on the subject of religious experience. William Johnston, an Irish Jesuit who is Director of Oriental Religions at Sophia University in Tokyo, holds in Whiteheadian fashion that to believe in grace is to believe "that ultimate reality is dynamic, that it moves towards us as we move towards it, that it searches us out before we

¹¹Frits Staal, "Superstructures," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 94.

go in search of it."¹² Johnston goes on to argue that there is a universality to the concept of grace:

Something like "grace" has to be taken into account in the lives of all the great mystics whether they be Jewish, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist. Assuredly Zen Buddhism rejects such an idea and glories in its self-reliance, called in Japanese jiriki. Yet even here masters sometimes get second thoughts. At one of our Zen-Christian dialogues, an old and highly esteemed master compared enlightenment to the chicken emerging from the shell. Push as it may, he said, the tiny chicken cannot break out to freedom unless the mother pecks at the shell from outside. This, he went on, is equivalent to what Christians call grace. Something similar is found in the famous oxherding pictures which describe the Zen journey to awakening. Here the searcher must see the footprints and feel the attraction of the ox before he can set out on his arduous journey.¹³

If grace is understood then as the experience of God's love and guidance preceding our human response, such a concept can easily be maintained within a Whiteheadian frame of reference. It is unfortunate that such a legitimate religious intuition has often been formulated into the doctrine that God arbitrarily grants religious experience to preferential persons or groups while denying them to others. Most classical theologians distinguished between "special" grace available only to some and "prevenient" grace available to all. (Only the former was saving.) Whiteheadians can find no use for such a distinction.

¹²William Johnston, Silent Music: The Science of Meditation (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 49.

¹³Ibid.

II. THE ROLE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Since it has been established that a conscious experience of God depends upon a muting or silencing of worldly prehensions, we might do well to examine some particular practices and techniques by means of which mental states conducive to the conscious experience of God have been brought about. One of the first requirements for such experience appears immediately obvious: the distractions which would give rise to our prehensions of the world must be virtually eliminated by an environment characterized by stillness and solitude.

Whitehead had much to say about the necessity for solitude in his lectures on religion delivered at King's Chapel, Boston, in 1926, and published in book form as Religion in the Making. Here he makes a most important observation:

The great rational religions are the outcome of a religious consciousness which is universal, as distinguished from the tribal, or even social. Because it is universal, it introduces the note of solitariness. Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness (RM 47).

The last sentence of this quotation is perhaps the most often quoted dictum of Whitehead. It is sometimes misunderstood, and has left the mistaken impression that Whitehead lacked sufficient appreciation for the communal dimension of religion. What he means to suggest, however, is that an environment characterized by solitude (solitariness) is a starting point by means of which the religious consciousness can take root and start to grow. The desire for a

communal expression of religious feeling, important as it is, represents a later stage of religious development. Whitehead understands solitude to be a necessary condition for one's escaping from those particular demands that ordinarily claim his attention, so that he can seek out that which is universal, and, therefore, transcendent of any particular claim. Whitehead writes that "religious consciousness starts from self-valuation, but it broadens into the concept of the world as a realm of adjusted values" (RM 58-59). In other words, one must begin in a state of self-examination or introspection, but such a beginning eventually leads to a surrender of the self to those values which are derived from God, and which have the whole world as their focus.

Whitehead observes further:

In its solitariness the spirit asks, What in the way of value is the attainment of life? And it can find no such value till it has merged its individual claim with that of the objective universe. Religion is world-loyalty (RM 59).

Here Whitehead implies that a religious consciousness results in one's priority shifting from his own egotistic concerns to the concerns of the world as a whole. As we saw in Chapter I, Whitehead understands religion to serve the function of converting universal concerns into particular and individual ones. Universal values, which at first appear to the individual as aloof and impersonal, are converted by religious feeling into close personal values. The initial aim derived from God is for the best possible state

of affairs for the world, so the individual's will is brought into alignment with God's will to the extent that one's own egotistical values are converted into a loyalty for the whole world.

Whitehead speaks of the values of the world as "mutually intensifying or mutually destructive" (RM 59). The values of the world are derivative of God's values as expressed in the ideal aim offered as a lure to each occasion of experience. They differ from God's values to the extent that they part company with this aim. A constant adjustment of values is necessary, since the ideal aim provided for each occasion will depend upon the manner in which previous occasions have responded to God's lure. My response to God in any given moment will at least partially determine my aim for the next moment. The world then is indeed a "realm of adjusted values."

In the words of Whitehead:

This principle is not a dogmatic formulation, but the intuition of immediate occasions as failing or succeeding in reference to the ideal relevant to them. There is a rightness attained or missed, with more or less completeness of attainment or omission (RM 59).

In order to achieve the state of mind which leads first to self-examination and finally to a direct, conscious experience of God, it is essential that one be surrounded by the right kind of environment. We have defined such an environment in Whiteheadian terms as one in which worldly prehensions are devalued to the extent of being virtually eliminated. In more traditional terms, almost every writer on the subject of religious experience and the spiritual

life expresses a need for the same environmental conditions. Evelyn Underhill, an influential writer on the subject of religious mysticism, for example, stresses that "Even simple contemplation cannot be achieved without some deliberate stilling of the senses, a deliberate focusing of our vagrant attention."¹⁴ In much the same way, another writer, Margaret Smith, takes up the same theme in affirming that

Only when all images of earth are hushed and the clamor of the senses is stilled and the soul has passed beyond thought of self can the Eternal Wisdom be revealed to the mystic who seeks that high communion with the Unseen.¹⁵

It is important to notice in the preceding quotation that a stilling of our five senses is not sufficient criterion for attaining the proper state of mind. Inner turmoil and emotional upheaval are often cited as distractions in the spiritual life, and although Whitehead insists that self-examination precedes our conscious experience of God, it is nevertheless essential that concern for the ego must eventually be transcended.

Morton T. Kelsey, a theologian and Jungian analyst who has written extensively on the subject of religious experience, reiterates the necessity for both outward and inward stillness:

¹⁴Evelyn Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism" in Understanding Mysticism, pp. 40-41.

¹⁵Margaret Smith, "The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 21.

The first step in finding . . . contact with God is learning to be alone and quiet. This is the beginning of silence, of the process of introversion. There is just one aim to start with, to still the tumult of activity in mind and body and center down in a state of recollection. And this means shutting out the invading noises from both the outside world and the inner psychic one. To become really silent one has to halt outwardly and inwardly at the same time.¹⁶

Arthur J. Deikman, M.D., from a careful study of psychological and physical states upon religious experience, emphasizes that one must make "a very active effort . . . to exclude outer and inner stimuli, to devalue and banish them."¹⁷ Deikman not only recommends silence and solitude; he also believes that all the traditional ascetic practices are helpful. He warns, however, that the "renunciation" which such practices constitute must become an all-pervasive life-style, not simply disciplines confined to brief periods of meditation. In Deikman's own words:

Poverty, chastity, isolation, and silence are traditional techniques prescribed for pursuing the mystic path: to experience God, keep your thoughts turned to God and away from the world and the body that binds one to the world. The meditative strategy is carried over into all segments of the subject's life. The mystic strives to banish from awareness the objects of the world and the desires directed toward them. To the extent that perceptual and cognitive structures require the "nutriment" of their accustomed stimuli for adequate functioning, renunciation would be

¹⁶Morton T. Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence: A Guide to Christian Meditation (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 94.

¹⁷Arthur J. Deikman, M.D., "Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 245.

expected to weaken and even disrupt these structures, thus tending to produce an unusual experience.¹⁸

It is often assumed that those who pursue a contemplative spirituality have accepted a kind of body-soul dualism which compels them to practice the ascetic disciplines as a way of "mortifying the flesh." Within some Protestant Christian traditions, there is often found the suspicion that the contemplative tradition, inasmuch as it encourages ascetic practices, is the result of Gnostic and Neo-Platonic influence upon the Christian Church, and is, therefore, a heresy, although one that has been baptized by Catholic Christian tradition. Writers on the subject of religious experience are sometimes quite explicit in denying that such an assumption is correct. Underhill, for example, strongly asserts that such flesh-denying practices as fasting and sexual abstinence are, "for the true mystic," only a means to an end, and that these are "often thrown aside when the end is attained." She goes on to point out that such practices should be used only when they are of benefit to the particular person in a particular circumstance. Hence, they are only of relative importance. Such disciplines "might help one to dominate unruly instincts, and so attain a sharper and purer concentration on God; but make another so hungry and sleepy that he can think of nothing else." Underhill cites the case of Jacopone de Todi, a contemplative who later in his life credited his early disciplinary extremes with

¹⁸Ibid., p. 251.

bringing about no more than indigestion, insomnia, and colds in the head.¹⁹

Certainly a Whiteheadian interpretation of religious disciplines would serve to put them into such a perspective that Underhill's comments may be seen to make good sense. The function of such disciplines is to aid in the muting or silencing of worldly prehensions (including those caused by our own inner agitation), so that the experience of God, already present on an unconscious level, can begin to surface into consciousness. Ascetic practices which deny bodily appetites are valid only to the extent that they serve to reduce those prehensions which result from various physiological processes. Such an interpretation has the advantage of putting to rest any notions that the flesh must be abused because it is evil.

As a case in point, we might consider that while sexual abstinence has traditionally been considered an aid for the contemplative, it appears ironic and paradoxical that sexual activity is also sometimes credited with triggering profound religious experience. In the words of Deikman:

The capacity for a deep and satisfying sexual experience is related to a person's ability to relinquish control, to allow the partner to penetrate both physical and psychological boundaries, and to stay focused in the present. Furthermore, sexual climax in persons who are

¹⁹Underhill, p. 35.

thus able to "let go" is associated with heightened sensation, diffuse attention, and a decrease in the boundaries of the self (as in meditation); and in some cases profound experiences occur that may properly be termed mystical.²⁰

In addition to those ascetic practices which deny bodily appetites, there are other practices which are of use to the contemplative. When the prehensions caused by sensory data are muted or silenced, often there is a further need for stilling emotions and psychological distractions. Contemplatives often depend upon the rhythmic use of verbal sounds to produce this kind of stillness. A mantra is a word or sound that is recited or chanted as a means of halting our consciousness of self, as well as the plethora of "conscious ideas and plots and plans" which occupy our minds.²¹

From a Whiteheadian perspective, a mantra may be seen as providing a focus or center of harmony to that series of occasions constituting the meditation of the contemplative. In the concrescence of any given occasion of experience, a certain prehension may serve as an integrating factor in that it provides a focal point by means of which the other prehensions may find a proper means of integration. The use of a mantra may provide such an integrating focus, while also serving as a factor by means of which the series of occasions constituting the meditation may be harmonized, thereby attaining

²⁰Arthur J. Deikman, M.D., "Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 245.

²¹Kelsey, p. 103.

a certain unity. In his use of a mantra, the contemplative does not concentrate upon the meaning of the word used. Rather, the verbal sound is used to provide a kind of "anchoring" effect which keeps him bound to his meditation and prevents him from pursuing any of the fleeting impressions or sensory images that would compete for his attention.

Some persons, as a substitute for a mantra, prefer feeling a familiar object as a means of "anchoring" or centering the attention. While objects having religious symbolism, such as rosaries or crucifixes, are often used, it is not necessary that the object have any religious significance. A stone or a piece of wood might serve the same function. The important point is that some particular sound or feeling may be used to serve as a means of harmonizing the occasions of experience making up the meditation, and linking them in a harmonious unity.

As a further means of providing focus and harmony, breathing exercises are often found to be an aid in contemplation. Kelsey holds that "No other function of the body is as sensitive to our inner state as our breathing."²² He observes further:

One practice is to count slowly and rhythmically, "one," inhale; "two," exhale, "three," . . . and so on until a rhythm of breathing takes over. Once such a rhythm will start on its own, the practice of counting is usually dropped. Alternative methods are to allow the rhythm of the heart to establish the count, or sometimes even the ebb and flow of the waves if one is at

²²Ibid., p. 111.

a lake or an ocean. This kind of concentration on breathing not only quiets the body and emotions, but also helps to banish thought and reasoning for the moment. It can lead one away from the outer world to find a new point of beginning out of silence.²³

It is important to note that in the preceding quotation Kelsey understands the importance of breathing exercises to lie in their ability to bring us to a state of silence. While mantras, breathing exercises, and all of the traditional ascetic disciplines may be helpful to particular persons at particular times in particular circumstances, it would appear that only two disciplines remain constants in that they are always seen as essential for achieving the contemplative's goal. These are, of course, solitude and silence. While the first of these may be relatively easy to provide, one may need to employ other spiritual disciplines in order to achieve the latter.

Marjorie Suchocki provides an account of the manner in which solitude and stillness can serve to mute or silence our prehensions of the world. Suchocki holds that when one is in a state of solitude, or "loneliness," to use the word she prefers, there is a levelling that takes place in the ordinary contrasts between our worldly prehensions and our prehensions of God, so that a new contrast is brought about in which the divine presence is clearly discerned. As Suchocki explains this process:

As the contrasts of relationality are leveled, they

²³Ibid., p. 112.

are deemed insufficient, and their very variability becomes held as part of that insufficiency. We might speculate that in loneliness, we tend to categorize all relations alike, negatively valuing the variability in them which ordinarily is the source of richness and contrasts. Transmutation occurs, and the many relations are devalued for variability. Is there not then a natural contrast provided between the variable finite relations and the one invariable divine relation? And might this contrast suffice to lift the divine relation out of hiddenness into awareness?²⁴

Although she believes that a state of loneliness may function as the means by which ordinary people may experience the presence of God, Suchocki holds that a purposive loneliness like that of the contemplative (or "mystic," to use her term) has a special advantage in that the contemplative intends the divine presence in contrast to the ordinary individual who through loneliness may simply "stumble upon the divine presence, or sense it as an unnamed and haunting possibility at the boundary of loneliness."²⁵

The contemplative opens himself to God's presence by actively seeking it, or at least, opening himself up to it as a consciously entertained possibility. As Suchocki analyzes the situation, we might define loneliness in Whiteheadian terms as a "leveling of finite relationality, constituting all finite relations as variable and/or superficial." The contemplative experiences loneliness, not only in the sense that he cultivates an environment of solitude, but also in enduring "dark nights of the soul," periods of intensely

²⁴Suchocki, p. 63.

²⁵Ibid., p. 65.

felt alienation, during which he devalues finite relations as insufficient for his spiritual needs. Such a purposive opening of the self can, according to Suchocki, lead to a most dramatic experience of God "in a fullness of presence," such that the mystical experience of oneness may be brought about.²⁶ Exactly how one is to interpret such an experience of oneness from a Whiteheadian perspective is an interesting problem, and one to which we shall later return in our examination of mysticism as a particular type of religious experience. For Suchocki, the experience of oneness follows from our experience of God as copresent. She holds "that the consciousness of the mystic becomes one with the consciousness of God as the copresent one." In clarifying this position, she points out that our prehensions of the world are prehensions of occasions that have passed into objective immortality. Our prehensions of God, however, are of a different order, since God's concrescence is everlasting and, therefore, copresent with our own. Suchocki holds that the uniqueness of this particular relationship might be conveyed through the initial aim.²⁷

Suchocki has presented an impressive account of the role played by loneliness or solitude in religious experience. In response to her position, however, we might question whether or not the experience of God as copresent is sufficient to trigger the experience

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 64-65.

of "oneness" which mystics report. There are perhaps several modes of being united with God. Whitehead writes, for example, of the experience of God as "the great companion." Certainly being united with God in the mode characterized by companionship would differ markedly from the more extraordinary experience of oneness reported by mystics, in which the parameters separating the self from God seem to become vague or disappear altogether. Since, from a Whiteheadian perspective, we are always copresent with God, why then does the very dramatic experience of the mystic seem to be such a rare phenomenon, if indeed our copresence is an adequate explanation for it? Although Suchocki's account of the mystical experience may not be entirely satisfying, she has made a most important point in stressing the advantage of purposively cultivating an environment characterized by loneliness or solitude.

Solitude and stillness appear to be universal constants as requirements for the mindset of the contemplative, which leads to a vivid experience of God. Kelsey writes of the universality of the requirement of stillness or silence cultivated in solitude as prerequisites for religious experience:

No one in Eastern religions doubts the value of silence. The practice of being alone in stillness is certainly central in the Hindu religion. Yoga and also various forms of Buddhist meditation begin and end in silence. Throughout Zen the value of utter stillness is emphasized; the goal of satori is to reach this ultimate peace, and the novice begins searching while sitting still in the lotus position. There is a strong tradition in Chinese religious thought that the way of coming into harmony with tao, which is the ultimate

principle of reality, is by inner quiet, by stilling the inner confusion so that one comes to peace and harmony within. Almost the same approach is found in certain sects of Islamic religion.²⁸

Within the Christian tradition, the need for solitude and stillness has been emphasized by many different groups and individuals. Early Christian contemplatives became known as the Desert Fathers because they saw the desert as the ideal place for establishing solitariness. Precisely because the desert held no value for human beings, these contemplatives held it to be of great value for God. Since there was nothing in the desert to be exploited, it came to be considered the perfect place for persons to seek out their own deepest selves and to experience God. For these persons the desert itself became a kind of metaphor for the inner terrain which they explored. According to Ammonas, a disciple of St. Anthony, "It was by silence that the saints grew." In the words of Kenneth Leech, "The desert . . . is seen as a place of purification, or self-knowledge and self-control, of conflict and victory."²⁹

Rene Voillaume understood the value of the desert experience as involving a "subduing" of the senses:

The desert--the real desert--bears in its physical reality the sign of isolation not only from people and human life, but from any semblance of man's presence and activity. Being something that man cannot put to use, it likewise

²⁸Kelsey, p. 94.

²⁹Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 141.

bears the sign of aridity and consequently of the subduing of all the senses, including both sight and hearing.³⁰

It is not difficult to understand from this observation the value of the desert in providing an environment for muting or silencing our ordinary prehensions of the world, so that God may be prehended with greater clarity. Although most Christian contemplatives have not gone to such extremes as the Desert Fathers, the Christian Church in both its Eastern and Western manifestations has maintained the necessity for solitude and silence in the spiritual life. The ancient tradition of Hesychasm, the keeping of silence, is still practiced in certain Greek communities. Within the Protestant tradition, the value of silence has been maintained by the Quakers, as well as by other denominations and sects. It would appear that universal religious intuition supports Whitehead's contention that all religion begins with solitariness.³¹

Those who seek a contemplative spirituality by cultivating solitude and stillness in a purposive manner represent perhaps only a small percentage of the world's population. Why then, we might ask, are the experiences of contemplatives of concern to so many? Many persons read of such dramatic experiences without having any intention of cultivating religious disciplines for themselves, or any expectation of entertaining such experiences first-hand. From

³⁰Voillaume as quoted by Leech, p. 142.

³¹Kelsey, p. 95.

a Whiteheadian perspective, we might suppose that there is a great interest taken in the experiences because contemplatives come to know in a more conscious way that reality which we all know in the depths of our beings. As John Hick has speculated, the ordinary person tends to put credence in reports of profound religious experience because he has "some at least remote echo within his own experience of the much more momentous experience of the great religious figures."³²

Coming from a more distinctly Whiteheadian position, Charles Hartshorne makes much the same point:

The mystic is one who is aware of experiencing what we all do experience, whether aware of the fact or not. In mystics unconscious intuition, in the sense in which infants and the lower animals are unconscious, that is without introspective judgements, becomes also conscious. It hardly seems possible that our common human nature could embrace so absolute a difference as that between the presence and the sheer absence of That without which, there could, if mysticism is valid, be nothing at all.³³

Because we live in a time in which the spiritual aspects of life are devalued, it may be the case that many persons having the potential for developing a contemplative spirituality do not do so, either because our cultural environment does not encourage its development, or because such persons do not understand their

³²John Hick, "Mystical Experience as Cognition," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 436.

³³Charles Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 395.

potential. The poet W. H. Auden speculated that just as in the Middle Ages there were persons in monasteries and convents who would have been better off in more secular pursuits, so today there are persons in the secular world who are often driven into mental institutions because they really belong in the cloister.³⁴ The point is that a propensity for the contemplative life-style is more common and "natural" than we ordinarily suppose. Some Christian churches arrange retreats, many held in silence, for both clergy and laity who need to satisfy at least partially some hunger for the contemplative life.

The great examples of contemplative spirituality have been persons who cultivated solitude and stillness. Evelyn Underhill muses that such spiritual figures serve a kind of pioneering function in regard to the whole human race. She believes that in their direct, conscious encounter with God, contemplatives are able to explore that reality which for the rest of us is intuited in a vague and indefinite way. In Underhill's own words:

The great mystic's loneliness is a consecrated loneliness. When he ascends to that encounter with the Divine Reality which is his peculiar privilege, he is not a spiritual individualist. He goes as the ambassador of the race. His spirit is not . . . a "spark flying upwards" . . . from the mass of humanity, cut off. . . . It is more like a feeler, a tentacle, which life as a whole stretches out into the supersensual world which envelops her. Life stretches that tentacle out, but she also draws it in again

³⁴W. H. Auden, "Four Kinds of Mystical Experience," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 395.

with the food that it has gathered, the news that it has to tell of the regions which its delicate tactile sense has enabled it to explore.³⁵

Just what are we to make of such a quotation? At first glance such bold speculation in combination with the evolutionary implications seems more suggestive of a visionary like Teilhard de Chardin than a careful thinker like Whitehead. Underhill seems to suggest that the human race is always growing closer to the divine through the agency of certain extraordinary spirits who go before us to "feel out the territory," and bring us back reports of their findings. After reflecting for a time on the passage, we might decide that it is not really alien to the Whiteheadian spirit. We might remember that Whitehead called his philosophy "the philosophy of organism." If we consider the human race to constitute something like an organism in the sense that individual persons are not totally separate from the mass, but share an interrelatedness with the whole, it might not strain the credibility to conceive of a particular segment of the race as serving the function of "spiritual pioneers," by means of which humanity sends out "feelers."

The point is often made that Whitehead's "process" philosophy contains no guarantee that progress will be made in history. It is an often overlooked fact, however, that in the area of religion, Whitehead believed progress to be likely if not inevitable. He

³⁵Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic as Creative Artist," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 400.

speaks of religion as "our one ground for optimism." In his own words:

Religion has emerged into human experience mixed with the crudest fancies of barbaric imagination. Gradually, slowly, steadily the vision recurs in history under nobler form and with clearer expression. It is the one element in human experience which persistently shows an upward trend. It fades and then recurs. But when it renews its force, it recurs with an added richness and purity of content. The fact of religious vision and its persistent expansion is our one ground for optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience (SMW 191-192).

Whitehead has much to say about the necessity in life for what he calls "adventure." In one passage he defines adventure as "the search for new perfections."³⁶ Perhaps those who purposely choose the way of solitude and stillness are, after all, the greatest adventurers of all.

III. DRUGS AS INITIATORS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The youth subculture which surfaced in the sixties brought to the attention of the masses the potential of certain natural and chemical substances to bring about experiences of a mystical nature. Prior to this time, cultural anthropologists and specialists in world religions were already aware of the use of hashish and other substances in Eastern religions. By the same token, certain

³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 332. Subsequent references to this edition consist of the abbreviation AI followed by the page number.

American Indians in the Southwest and Mexico have long made use of the peyote cactus for the purpose of evoking mystical states and to keep them in touch with what they believe to be a spiritual world. The Native American Church of the United States, which blends Christianity with traditional Indian practices, employs the dried buttons of the peyote plant for sacramental use in its services.³⁷ During the nineteenth century, researchers Weir Mitchell and Havelock Ellis first identified the active ingredient in peyote as mescaline, an easily synthesized chemical of the amine group.³⁸

Two other drugs used to induce mystical experiences are lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25), which was first discovered by a Swiss pharmacologist, A. Hoffman, in 1938, and psilocybin, also known as teonanacatl or "the flesh of God," which is derived from a type of mushroom revered by certain Mexican Indians.³⁹

For writers on the subject of religious experience, the use of drugs for the purpose of inducing mystical states has always proven to be a controversial issue. They have disagreed not only over the desirability of employing drugs for such a purpose, but also over the legitimacy of the experiences which result from such employment.

³⁷Alan W. Watts, The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 13.

³⁸Ibid., p. 14.

³⁹Ibid.

R. M. Bucke, who authored the pioneering study of religious experience entitled Cosmic Consciousness, rejected the belief that drugs can be used to evoke genuine religious experiences. According to Bucke, "Just as the drinking of alcohol induces a kind of artificial and bastard joy, so the inhalation of ether and chloroform induces (sometimes) a kind of bastard and artificial cosmic consciousness."⁴⁰ The term "cosmic consciousness" was used by Bucke to denote any mystical experience.

William James, who greatly appreciated the work of Bucke, nevertheless parted company with him on this issue. James was willing to concede the possibility that genuine religious experiences can be initiated by certain chemicals. James himself experimented with nitrous oxide, following the lead of Benjamin Blood, as reported in his The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy. Commenting upon his experience, James cited "the tremendously exciting sense of intense metaphysical illumination" as constituting "the keynote of the experience."⁴¹

James' experimentation was cause for much controversy, because many persons were shocked and appalled to think that he could seriously consider a drug as potentially capable of initiating an experience of God. James' fellow philosopher Henri Bergson later wrote in defense of him:

⁴⁰R. M. Bucke as quoted by Raymond H. Prince, "Cocoon Work: An Interpretation of the Concern of Contemporary Youth with the Mystical," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 342.

⁴¹James as quoted by Prince, p. 342.

We know how William James was treated for having described as mystical or at least having regarded as such for purposes of study, the condition induced by inhaling protoxide of nitrogen. People took this to be a profanation. And they would have been right if the philosopher had made the protoxide a psychical equivalent of the "interior revelation," the protoxide then being, as the metaphysicians say, the efficient and sufficient cause of the results produced. But in his case the intoxication was presumably the occasion rather than the cause. The psychic disposition was there, potentially, along with the others, only awaiting the signal to express itself in action. It might have been evoked spiritually by an effort made on its own spiritual level. But it could just as well have been brought about materially by an inhibition of what inhibited it, by the removing of an obstacle, and this effect was the wholly negative one produced by the drug; the psychologist preferred making use of the latter, which enabled him to obtain his result whenever he wished.⁴²

Bergson makes a valid point in observing that there is no reason for a person's religious sensibilities to be offended by the notion of a drug initiating an experience of God if the drug is understood as the "occasion" of the experience, rather than "the efficient and sufficient cause." Much the same point is made by Alan W. Watts, who affirms that "mystical insight is no more in the chemical itself than biological knowledge is in the microscope."⁴³ Watts, like Bergson, also holds that drugs may constitute only one means of achieving the same result. According to Watts, drugs may open up "a glimpse of mystical insight . . . which can be matured and deepened by the various ways of meditation in which drugs

⁴²Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 218.

⁴³Watts, p. 26.

are no longer necessary or useful."⁴⁴

Following the work of James, most experimentation for the next forty years is to be attributed to Europeans such as Lewin, Beringer, and Kluver. The work of Philippe de Felice is of particular importance in establishing a link between drug ingestion and religious experience, in that the Soma plant mentioned in Vedic hymns was found to have played an important role in the development of Yoga.⁴⁵

It was the writings of Aldous Huxley which captured the attention of the youth subculture of the sixties, influencing it to experiment with chemical substances as a means of attaining mystical experience. In The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell, Huxley wrote with enthusiasm of his dramatic experiences using mescaline, and was so bold as to relate these interior adventures to the experience of the Beatific Vision. William Braden has attested to the "historical significance" of The Doors of Perception in that "what we refer to today as the drug movement may be said to date from that book."⁴⁶ After the pronouncements of Huxley, the desire for certain drugs, natural and synthetic, as a means of evoking religious experience was further intensified by the experimentations of Timothy Leary and Alan Watts, both of whom understood their experiences to be of a religious nature.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁴⁵Prince, p. 343.

⁴⁶William Braden, The Hidden Sea: LSD and the Search for God (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁷Prince, p. 343.

Perhaps the most challenging refutation of Huxley's position has come from R. C. Zaehner, who holds that although the experiences evoked by drugs may properly be termed "mystical," they nevertheless have no religious value. Zaehner has classified what he believes to constitute three different kinds of mystical experience. This typology is as follows:

1. What Zaehner terms "theistic mysticism" he holds to result from the loving union of the soul with God. In this type of experience, Zaehner believes that there is no annihilation of the ego. In his words, "something of the soul must clearly remain if only to experience the mystical experience."⁴⁸ Of his three alleged types, only this one can properly be labelled "religious" from Zaehner's point of view, since he holds that only this type constitutes an experience of God.

2. In what Zaehner terms "monistic mysticism," the soul is held to be "substantially and essentially identical with the unqualifiable Absolute."⁴⁹ This type of mysticism is like the first in that the phenomenal world is transcended. There the similarity ends, however, since Zaehner holds that "monistic mysticism" is not an experience of God at all, but rather the experience of the unity of a substantial soul.

⁴⁸Zaehner, p. 29.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 28.

3. Zaehner's term for a mysticism of nature is "panenhenic mysticism." Unlike the other two types, this one does not involve a transcending of the phenomenal world. Quite to the contrary, Zaehner holds that in this instance the mystic comes into such close rapport with the phenomenal world that his ego becomes one with it. All differences between the self and the sensory world seem to vanish.⁵⁰ Zaehner holds that such an experience is simply the result of the dispersion of the ego into the world of nature; hence, it is not really an experience of God at all.

We have seen previously in this study that Zaehner, in his evaluation of mysticism, assigns a superior value to what he terms "theistic mysticism." He holds that such experiences are of a supernatural origin and must be initiated by God as gifts of grace. Although one may prepare oneself to receive the experience by means of traditional ascetic disciplines, the experience, if and when it comes, must break in from God's side.

"Theistic mysticism" is the "sacred" kind of mysticism alluded to in the title of Zaehner's work, Mysticism Sacred and Profane. His other two types constitute what he would identify as the "profane." Zaehner holds that what he calls "monistic mysticism" is not an experience of God, but rather the experience of a substantial soul. We shall consider this allegation more thoroughly in the next chapter.

⁵⁰Ibid.

"Panenhenic," or nature mysticism, is understood by Zaehner as simply an attempt of the ego to disperse itself in the natural world.

Hence, neither "monistic" or "panenhenic" mysticism is understood as having any authentic religious value.⁵¹

Zaehner holds that drug-induced mystical experiences fall within the "panenhenic" classification. In support of his position, he cites this particular passage from Huxley's The Doors of Perception:

I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing--but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like Grace and Transfiguration came to my mind, and this of course was what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes travelled from the rose to the carnation, and from that feathery incandescence to the smooth scrolls of sentient amethyst which were the iris.⁵²

It is clear from this account that Huxley's experience involved the phenomenal world, since it is focused upon such sensory objects as carnations, roses, and irises. Yet Huxley, in commenting upon the experience, relates it to "The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss," and goes on to affirm that "for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to."⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., p. 29.

⁵²Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 18.

⁵³Ibid.

Zaehner holds that Huxley has been guilty of the serious category mistake of holding that all types of mysticism are the same. By establishing that his experimentation with drugs brought him to vivid preternatural experiences, Zaehner contends that Huxley erroneously jumped to the conclusion that these experiences were like those of the religious mystic, in that they also involved a transcending of our ordinary perceptions of space and time.

Zaehner comments on Huxley's claim:

Possibly I am wrong, but I had always understood that the Beatific Vision means a direct appreciation of God, not through a glass darkly, but face to face, with all the veils of sense stripped aside. . . . I am afraid that I cannot discern any likeness between what he [Huxley] experienced and what is generally understood as the Beatific Vision.⁵⁴

Zaehner concludes that Huxley's experience, like that of the nature mystic and the manic personality, is an example of "panenhenic" mysticism, in which the personality appears to dissipate into the natural, objective world. According to Zaehner, Huxley is mistaken in thinking that his experience has any true religious significance at all.⁵⁵

Zaehner's attack upon Huxley has evoked perhaps even more criticism than did Huxley's pronouncement of having experienced the Beatific Vision. Some of these criticisms have been directed

⁵⁴Zaehner, p. 193.

⁵⁵Ibid.

at Zaehner's categorizing of all drug-induced experiences as "panenhenic." William Braden, in a most perceptive treatment of the religious dimension of the so-called "drug culture," has charged that Zaehner is mistaken in thinking that all mystical experiences induced chemically are of the type which he fits into the "panenhenic" category. According to Braden, all kinds of mystical and religious experiences are sometimes triggered by drugs, including experiences of a transcendent God.⁵⁶ Frits Staal has likewise attacked Zaehner for presupposing that drug-induced mystical experiences are always of the same kind. Staal believes that Zaehner has made a major mistake in supposing that the effect of drugs upon our brain is independent of our state of mind, and completely determined in such a way that they are beyond our control. Staal believes that drug-induced experiences vary greatly depending upon the particular circumstances, frame of mind, and the amount (or lack of) self-preparation preceding the experience. He adds that conscious volition may have an importance, both in determining what the experience will be beforehand, and also in shaping the experience while it is in progress.⁵⁷

W. H. Auden directs a different kind of criticism at Zaehner. Auden does not challenge Zaehner's classification of all chemically induced mystical experiences as belonging in the same category as those of the nature mystic. Rather, Auden disagrees with Zaehner's

⁵⁶ Braden, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Staal, pp. 102-104.

insistence that those experiences he labels "panenhenic" have no religious significance, and also with Zaehner's contention that such experiences consist of the dispersing of the ego into the objective world of nature. In Auden's own words:

The natural mystic who speaks in pan-en-henic terms does not really mean that he becomes a tree or that a tree becomes him. No one, for example, was more convinced than Richard Jeffries, who does speak in these terms, that "there is nothing human in nature." He would certainly say that in the vision he feels capable of imaginatively entering into the life of a tree, but that no more means he becomes a tree than imaginatively entering into the life of another human being means that one ceases to be himself and becomes another.⁵⁸

When we turn to Whitehead to throw some light upon the Huxley-Zaehner controversy, we may be disappointed at first to find that nowhere in his writings does Whitehead specifically deal with the issue of drug-initiated experiences. Although Whitehead, as we have observed, was greatly influenced by James, he lacked the latter's keen empirical curiosity. Not only is there no record of Whitehead's having experimented with chemical substances as did James, there appears to be no evidence that Whitehead ever focused upon the problem of the influence of drugs upon religious experience. Nevertheless, from Whitehead's system as a whole we are able to derive certain principles which may throw light upon the problem. These principles will allow us to make some important observations in criticism of Zaehner's position:

⁵⁸Auden, p. 385.

1. As a first consideration, we might reiterate a most important principle which we derived previously. From a Whiteheadian perspective, the experience of God is always present; the problem with arriving at what we have identified as a vivid religious experience lies in bringing this ever-present experience of God to the level of conscious awareness. If we accept this principle, we must hold that Zaehner is incorrect in holding that God may arbitrarily grant religious experiences to some and not to others. Since the experience of God may be brought to vivid awareness through a muting or silencing of worldly prehensions, there is no intrinsic reason to suppose that certain drugs or chemical substances cannot accomplish such a purpose. It is a matter of common experience that drugs can quiet our senses and relieve our anxieties. By the same token, it should not strain our credibility to entertain the possibility that some drugs may have the ability to trigger a conscious and vivid experience of God. In such a case, Bergson would be judged correct in pointing out that the drug would serve as the "occasion" for the experience, not the cause.⁵⁹ While Whitehead's philosophy provides us with no certainty that chemical substances can open us to a conscious experience of God, it can provide us with a strong likelihood that such an occurrence is at least possible.

2. We have already observed that Whitehead's system will not support the kind of demarcation Zaehner wishes to make between the

⁵⁹Bergson, p. 218.

realms of the natural and the supernatural. From a Whiteheadian perspective, Zaehner is mistaken in attributing a privileged status to what he terms "Theistic" mysticism on the ground that such experience is of supernatural origin, while attributing other mystical experiences to purely natural origins. If we follow Hartshorne's suggestion in using the word "supernatural" to apply simply to God, then a supernatural content is present in every experience.⁶⁰

3. Our third observation is closely related to our second one. While reading Zaehner and certain other writers, one is often struck by realization that religious experience is being interpreted in the light of a worldview consisting of some kind of unspecified metaphysical Idealism. When Zaehner writes of what he terms "Theistic" mysticism, for example, he speaks of "the veils of sense" being "stripped aside."⁶¹ Often he speaks as if the phenomenal world is in coexistence with another realm beyond phenomena. Although such implications are never clarified, the effect is to suggest a noumenal realm of things-in-themselves (Kant) or an ideal realm of spiritual essences (Plato). Whitehead's metaphysics is a rejection of such a worldview as that implied by Zaehner. Whitehead's epistemological realism holds that the world is as it is experienced, and much of his cosmology consists of an account of the manner in which the microcosmic world of occasions and prehensions becomes transmuted

⁶⁰Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, p. 49.

⁶¹Zaehner, p. 21.

into the macrocosmic world of rocks, trees, persons, etc. Although Whitehead certainly posits another reality (God) in relation to the world, there is no attempt to posit two worlds in co-relation to each other. While Whitehead maintains a vestige of Plato's ideal forms in his doctrine of eternal objects, these are understood as having no ontological status in and of themselves. They are only possibilities until they "ingress" into particular occasions of experience.

In the light of these observations, it would appear that Zaehner's understanding of religious experience has grown out of a presupposed supernaturalist and idealist worldview. If one wishes to consider such experience within the context of another worldview, such as that of Whitehead, Zaehner's arguments along with his typology of mystical experience lose their power to convince. Nevertheless, some of Zaehner's criticisms of Huxley deserve careful consideration.

Zaehner is probably correct in holding that Huxley was guilty of gross exaggeration in comparing his drug-initiated experience to what Catholic theologians identify as the experience of the Beatific Vision. In traditional Catholic theology the Beatific Vision is understood to constitute the supreme eschatological possibility for a human being. This experience is seldom if ever entertained as a possibility during one's earthly life. As John H. Hick describes the experience, "in the beatific vision God will not be known as a presence over against ourselves, but as a reality

apprehended in the direct way in which we know ourselves."⁶²

Huxley's experience of roses, carnations, and irises, impressive though it may well have been, does not seem to constitute a direct contemplation of the divine as characterized by the term "Beatific Vision." Nevertheless, Zaehner may be mistaken in thinking that Huxley's experience was not a true religious experience at all. While Huxley does not make any mention of God or the divine in his account of the experience, he does speak of going "from deeper to ever deeper meaning," and he cites the words grace and transfiguration as terms that characterize the experience.⁶³ Certainly these are terms which suggest religious experience of a most theistic kind.

We might surmise that Huxley's experience, although it did not focus directly upon God, nevertheless, carried with it an overwhelming sense of divine presence. A Whiteheadian conceptualization, can, I believe, throw much light upon such an experience.

In attempting to understand how Huxley's experience could have been of a religious nature without focusing directly upon God, we might examine William James' account of the experience under ether of an individual named Frederick Hall:

When one of his [Hall's] doctors made a remark to the other, he chuckled, for he realized that these friends "believed that they saw real things and causes, but they didn't, and I did. . . . I was where the causes were and to see them required no more mental ability than to recognize

⁶²John H. Hick, Death and Eternal Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 206.

⁶³Huxley, p. 31.

a color as blue. . . . The knowledge of how little [the doctors] actually did see, coupled with their evident feeling that they saw all there was, was funny to the last degree. . . . [they] knew as little of the real causes as does the child who, viewing the passing train and noting its revolving wheels, supposes that they, turning of themselves, give to coaches and locomotives their momentum.⁶⁴

In reading the account of Hall's experiences. we may be struck by the fact that while there is a sense of awe and wonder typical of religious experience present, the experience does not focus upon anything particularly religious; rather, the predominate intuition is that of being at the source of causation and being able to discern causes as they occur.

We might recall that in Whitehead's account of perception, actual causation occurs as feelings in the mode of "causal efficacy," on a level ordinarily beneath that of consciousness. The mode of "causal efficacy" is only one of three modes of perception posited by Whitehead. When we perceive the world in the mode of "presentational immediacy," it is in Whitehead's words "consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations" (PR 61), which is to say that in this mode the world is experienced in terms of spatial relationships. As David Hume so adroitly demonstrated, in the mode of "presentational immediacy" there is no discernment of causation. In ordinary experience, however, we do not perceive fully in either the mode of "causal efficacy" or "presentational

⁶⁴William James, "A Suggestion about Mysticism," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 220.

immediacy"; rather, we ordinarily perceive the world in what Whitehead called the mode of "symbolic reference." This mode is a mixed one, in that the world is perceived as clearly fixed in a spatial sense (presentational immediacy), while at the same time it is perceived as persisting from the past and exerting an influence for the future (causal efficacy).

If we take Hall's experience under ether seriously, it would certainly appear that in this particular state of consciousness Hall was much closer to a pure discernment of the world in the mode of causal efficacy than would be possible for a person in a more mundane state. His intuition is clearly that of observing "real causes" so vividly that in contrast ordinary perception would seem to have no real experience of causation at all.

While Huxley, in relating his experience, does not specifically mention a heightened impression of causation, he uses language that suggests that he, like Hall, was more consciously experiencing in the mode of causal efficacy than is usually the case in our mundane experience of the world. He speaks, for example, of the light as "living," and the flowers as "breathing" in a kind of "repeated flow."⁶⁵ Such comments suggest a perception of the past as entering into the present and exerting a causal influence, which is in keeping with Whitehead's concept of perception in the mode of causal efficacy.

At this point we might recall that our prehensions of God also occur within the mode of causal efficacy, on a level beneath ordinary

⁶⁵Huxley, p. 31.

consciousness. It should not strain our credibility to entertain the possibility that a drug having the effect of bringing to vivid consciousness the experience of causation in the mode of causal efficacy might at the same time have the effect of bringing to vivid consciousness our prehensions of God. While God might not actually constitute the focus of such an experience, the experience would nevertheless be strongly colored by the feeling tones of our encounter with the divine. In reflecting upon such an experience the subjective forms of reverence and religious awe might well be all-pervasive, even though the actual focus of the experience might have been upon causation (Hall), or perhaps even upon the "breathing" of roses and irises (Huxley). In such a case an experience would clearly be discerned as religious without any direct focus upon God.

On the basis of this Whiteheadian interpretation, we can make the claim that Huxley's experience was authentically religious. Since his drug-induced state provided him with a more conscious access to the mode of causal efficacy than is usually possible, his prehensions of God were allowed to impinge upon conscious awareness. Although God was not the focus of the experience, nevertheless the sense of divine presence was palpable, and the intuition of having a religious encounter was unmistakable. Admittedly, Huxley's claim of experiencing the Beatific Vision was a gross exaggeration, but figurative language is almost always used in the description of religious experience, and we may charitably interpret such a claim as an instance of hyperbole.

Although from this interpretation it would appear that drugs may provide a means to authentic religious experience, it does not necessarily follow that this means is a particularly desirable one. In light of the enormous social ills that have derived from drug abuse since the establishment of the youth subculture of the sixties, it appears that society might do well to discourage experimentation with chemical substances as a means of arriving at religious highs. It has often been pointed out that persons having religious experiences of a drug-induced nature are sometimes "thrown" into a disorienting experience for which they have had no preparation. In contrast, those who arrive at the same kind of experience by following meditation and traditional ascetic practices are prepared gradually for such unusual states of consciousness so that the experiences do not prove such a shock to the psyche.

While the masses should perhaps be cautioned concerning the dangers of drug usage, there is no good reason that serious researchers should be prevented from cautious experimentation with chemical substances under supervised laboratory conditions. Even though some risk remains, there is risk to be found in the exploration of any frontier, and what is sometimes called "inner space" certainly qualifies as a frontier situation. Frits Staal's comments are very much to the point:

Nowadays we are warned by columnists, priests and government agents that a person who uses drugs risks his mind or even his soul; and it is useful to bear in mind that this might very well be true. But the same agencies induce

us to admire people who explore new continents, climb Mount Everest, go to the moon, experiment with radiation, germs, new medicaments, and devices designed for destruction, or risk their lives in many other ways. In fact, the greatest adventures of science are considered great partly because of the risks they involve. The scientific exploration of drugs should be evaluated in the same spirit.⁶⁶

Perhaps a responsible exploration of our inner beings would constitute one more instance of Whitehead's concept of adventure.

IV. CONCLUSION

Whitehead's insistence that religion begins with solitariness appears to be universally substantiated. Various religions stress the necessity for solitude and silence as prerequisites for religious experience, particularly that of a dramatic kind. Most of the traditional ascetic disciplines are intended to help bring about an inner stillness so that our prehensions of earthly realities may be muted or silenced. These disciplines, such as fasting, sexual abstinence, breathing exercises, etc. have value only insofar as they are of help in accomplishing their goal, which is conscious experience of the divine. They are means to an end and not ends in themselves; when they have served their purpose, they may be discarded. It is an error, perpetuated by such flesh-denying systems of thought as Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, that repression of natural bodily desires and appetites is of value in and of itself.

⁶⁶Staal, pp. 106-107.

Whitehead held that religious experience is our one ground for optimism, and it is not out of keeping with the spirit of his thought to think of humanity as analogous to an organism with certain extraordinary persons serving as "feelers" for the rest of us. The Whiteheadian spirit of adventure is much in evidence in persons charting new spiritual frontiers.

Having a vivid and conscious experience of God involves bringing the ever-present prehensions of God to the level of conscious awareness. Since God is always present in experience it is a mistake to believe that religious experience ever is granted by God in an arbitrary or capricious manner. Whitehead's metaphysics provides us with no support for the traditional Christian view that all religious experience must be initiated by God's intervening from a supernatural realm. Although we cannot deny to God the possibility of initiating a conscious religious experience, there is no reason to suppose that human beings cannot also initiate such an encounter. With this principle in mind, we cannot rule out the possibility that certain chemical substances may be used to bring about the stilling of worldly prehensions so as to initiate a vivid experience of God. Our ordinary empirical experience of the calming and quieting effects of certain drugs would seem to substantiate this assertion.

While social problems involving drug abuse give us good reason to discourage experimentation for the masses, there are always those responsible researchers who are willing to take the necessary risks in order to gain new knowledge. Such persons epitomize Whitehead's concept of adventure.

CHAPTER III

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND NUMINOUS ENCOUNTER

It is difficult to think of any words in the English language that are more abused than the words mysticism, mystical, and mystic. In popular parlance mysticism is used to refer to everything from paranormal phenomena and parapsychological investigations to occult practices and downright superstition. Even among religious thinkers there is much disparity in the way the term is used. While some with Thomas Merton would hold that mysticism constitutes the norm for the religious life, others regard the mystical emphasis as a kind of exotic aberration from authentic spirituality.¹

Evelyn Underhill provides an accurate account of the confusion associated with the word:

What then do we truly mean by mysticism? A word which is impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to "menticulture" and sorcery, dreamy poetry and mediaeval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism, and the tepid speculations of the Cambridge Platonists--even, according to William James, to the higher branches of intoxication--soon ceases to have any useful meaning. Its employment merely confuses the inexperienced student, who ends with a vague idea that every kind of supersensual theory and practice is somehow "mystical."²

¹Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism / An Essay on the History of the Word," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 42.

²Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), p. 72.

Research into the derivation of the word mysticism reveals that it is derived from a Greek word meaning "to close." The connection is easy to grasp, since persons initiated into certain esoteric mysteries were privy to knowledge that was closed to the uninitiated. When philosophy took over the word, it was used to apply to speculative philosophical doctrines. From philosophers the word was taken into the Christian Church, whose members believed themselves to be recipients of teachings not shared with those outside their fellowship. Eventually the word came to refer to the closing of the mind to external stimuli, so that spiritual truth could be drawn from within.³ Traditionally, it has been held that mysticism of the Christian type is a product of the Neo-Platonist influence upon the early Church. That assumption is now under attack by some scholars. Louis Bouyer, for example, holds that Christian mysticism derives from the Bible and from the liturgy, particularly the eucharistic liturgy.⁴

Part of the confusion associated with the word mysticism today stems from the fact that scholars in the field of religion disagree upon the proper usage of the term, and persist in using it in diverse ways. Some, like Rufus Jones, would hold that the word should be used to refer to any religious experience of a direct or firsthand kind:

³Smith, p. 19.

⁴Bouyer, p. 45.

I shall use the word mysticism to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine presence--it is religion in its most acute, intense, and living stage.⁵

Another philosopher of religion whose views are typical of those holding this position is John Hick:

Mystical experience . . . does not seem to me to be anything other than firsthand religious experience as such. This is, however, I believe, the core of religion. . . . Religion consists primarily in experiencing our life in relation to the Transcendent and living on the basis of that experience. And mysticism, I take it, is simply religion understood in that way.⁶

Other scholars would hold, more profitably, I believe, that such a definition of mysticism as that advocated by Jones and Hick is too broad to be of use. Underhill, for example, perceives a need to use the word in a more limited way. According to her,

mysticism in its pure form . . . is the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and . . . the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it.⁷

For the purposes of this study, the word mysticism will be used in this more limited way, to refer to the experience of union. In the preceding chapters I have attempted to limit my own use of

⁵Rufus Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan, 1936), XV.

⁶Hick, "Mystical Experience as Cognition," p. 422.

⁷Underhill, Mysticism, p. 72.

the word to those instances in which such a definition would apply. In quoting other writers, however, I have been forced to allow a broader use of the term. The following quotation provides, I believe, a workable definition for the purposes of this study:

The core trait [of mysticism] is the vision of all-encompassing unity. . . . The mystic experiences all-as-One with an absence of this and that. The fragmentary nature of ordinary experience is sheared away.⁸

If we limit ourselves to the notion that mysticism is confined to the experience of union, we can easily see with Ninian Smart that there is another polarity to religious experience, the encounter with God as the "Other" over and against us. This latter type of religious experience is usually designated as numinous encounter. According to Smart, "St. John of the Cross, Tauler, Eckhart, al-Hallaj, Shankhara, the Buddha, Lao-Tze (if he existed), and many yogis" all qualify as mystics, while such other religious figures as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Muhammad, Ramanuja, Nichiren, and Valvin do not.⁹ Martin Buber has articulated this polarity between the mystical and the numinous most profoundly:

Of course God is the "wholly Other," but He is also the Wholly Same, the wholly Present. Of course He is the Mysterium Tremendum that appears and overthrows; but He

⁸Patricia Davenport, Mysticism in the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, June 1973, p. 14.

⁹Ninian Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 78.

is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my I.¹⁰

Buber's reference to the Mysterium Tremendum is derived from the classic description of numinous encounter provided in Rudolf Otto's The Idea of the Holy. In this seminal work Otto speaks of the object of the numinous experience as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans. In Otto's words:

. . . the mysterious is something which is and remains absolutely and invariably beyond our understanding. . .
 . . The truly "mysterious" object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently "wholly other," whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.¹¹

Otto derives the word numinous from the Latin numen, meaning "spirit." At one time spirits, or numina, were believed to inhabit sacred groves and other religiously significant places.¹² Central to numinous experience is the sense of religious awe and fear, usually connected with a sense of one's own moral unworthiness. In this kind of experience, as Smart asserts, "God as a holy Being stands over against man; his exalted nature is symbolized by his distance."

¹⁰Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 79.

¹¹Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 28.

¹²Ninian Smart, The Religious Experience of Mankind (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 30.

This distance constitutes the radical transcendence or "wholly otherness" of God.¹³

Otto believes the encounter of the numinous to embody the very core of religious experience, but Smart takes issue with him on this point:

It is hard to accept Otto's judgment. The numinous is pervasive, important; but it is not, as he describes it, everything. One at least has to add as important a quieter, mystical, contemplative motif: the experience of the Cloud of Unknowing, the dazzling obscurity of which Ruysbroeck wrote, the Void of Buddhism. . . . whether we say there are one or many mysticisms they do seem different¹⁴ in style from much of numinous, prophetic religion.

For Smart then, the mystical and the numinous constitute the polarities of religious experience. They are opposites in that while one implies withdrawal, the other implies approach; while one implies distance, the other implies identity.¹⁵ They are two ways of experiencing the divine. Ian G. Barbour, in a masterful exposition of the positions of Otto and Smart, asserts that Otto's use of the word fascinans as the aspect of the numinous experience that fascinates and attracts might have led to a doctrine of mysticism as a related but opposite pole of religious experience

¹³Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴Ninian Smart, Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 52.

¹⁵Ian G. Barbour, Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 81.

had Otto developed it more fully. Barbour also observes that Otto came close to positing such a polarity in suggesting a dichotomy between the experiences of divine wrath and divine love. Nevertheless, Barbour believes that Smart's typology of the mystical and the numinous as polarities of religious experience represents an advance over the thinking of Otto.¹⁶ As Barbour criticizes Otto's position:

. . . a more universal typology might correlate the tremendum pole with the prophets' feeling of the unapproachability of God, the radical discontinuity of Creator and creation, and the response of humility and prostration; man must keep his proper distance, of which any violation is tabu. The fascinans pole, on the other hand, resembles the mystic's feeling of nearness of the divine, the continuity of all things, the participation of man in the ultimate identity. The polarity of withdrawal and approach, or distance and identity, seems to be present within the experience of the sacred, though for different individuals and traditions one aspect or the other may be more prominent.¹⁷

Smart points out several dichotomies in his positing of a polarity between the mystical and the numinous. He holds that numinous experience evokes the response of worship while mystical experience is more likely to give rise to meditation. Likewise, while numinous experience usually results in an interpretation of God as personal, mystical experience is more likely to inspire the use of impersonal images in describing the divine. While both types of religious

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

experience are found in all the major religions, Western religious traditions tend to be characterized more by numinous experience, while Eastern religion is chiefly mystical.¹⁸

Upon examining Religion in the Making, one might conclude that there is something of the numinous-mystical polarity in Whitehead's assertion that religion "is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion" (RM 16). Certainly, the feeling of enmity toward God would seem to suggest the numinous encounter, while the notion of divine companionship might be seen to constitute a kind of mystical union. John Cobb, writing from a Whiteheadian perspective, also seems to recognize something of this polarity, for he speaks of "intense experiences of the numinous, and ecstatic experiences of union and communion" as if these constitute two different types of religious experience.¹⁹

Ian G. Barbour, in his Myths, Models, and Paradigms, was the first person to relate Whitehead's philosophy in any detail to Smart's numinous-mystical polarity. Barbour seems to suggest that Whitehead's cosmology taken as a model can better be used to account for numinous encounter than for mystical experience. Barbour goes on to cite the philosophical theology of Paul Tillich as providing a model more suitable for the understanding of mysticism.²⁰ In the remainder

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 78-80.

¹⁹Cobb, p. 233.

²⁰Barbour, p. 90.

of this chapter, I shall examine the chief characteristics of both types of religious experience in order to demonstrate that Whitehead's system can account for both types equally well.

I. THE NUMINOUS ENCOUNTER

Before attempting a discussion of the manner in which Whitehead's system can provide an account of numinous encounter, we might first take a look at Whitehead's obvious distaste for some of the theological excesses to which this particular type of religious experience sometimes give rise. Although Whitehead did not, in the manner of Smart, conceive of the mystical and numinous experiences as comprising a polarity, he nevertheless understood both types of experience profoundly. Whitehead is not at all comfortable, however, with the feelings of guilt and unworthiness which often accompany the numinous encounter. He is sometimes critical of the Old Testament tradition and of the Revelation of St. John the Divine in the New Testament for presenting God in the guise of an oriental potentate:

What kind of deity is it that would be capable of creating angels and men to sing his praises day and night to all eternity? It is, of course, the figure of an oriental despot, with his inane and barbaric vanity. Such a conception is an insult to God. . . .²¹

In Religion in the Making Whitehead is critical of the early Christian Church for seemingly compromising what he discerns as

²¹Lucien Price, Ed., The Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead (New York: Signet Mentor Books, 1954), p. 224.

its central revelation of God as love in order to revert to a trinitarian version of the Semitic deity:

On the whole, the Gospel of love was turned into the Gospel of fear. The Christian world was composed of terrified populations.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," said the Proverb (i. 7). Yet this is an odd saying if it be true that "God is love." . . .

The populations did well to be terrified at such ambiguous good tidings, which lost no emphasis in their promulgation (RM 72-73).

In Science and the Modern World Whitehead cites two reasons for the decline of interest in religion: (1) the appeal to God as an all-powerful arbitrary tyrant, and (2) the fact that religion is understood as a sanction to right conduct. As concerns the latter of these reasons, Whitehead has the following to say:

Conduct is a by-product of religion--an inevitable by-product, but not the main point. Every great religious teacher has revolted against the presentation of religion as a mere sanction of rules of conduct. Saint Paul denounced the Law, and Puritan divines spoke of the filthy rags of righteousness. The insistence of rules of conduct marks the ebb of religious fervor (SMW 191).

Despite his objections to the excesses to which the numinous experience may sometimes give birth, it would be a mistake to assume that Whitehead lacks sufficient appreciation for the essence of such experience. Indeed, one might maintain that Whitehead's understanding of philosophy grows out of the same sense of awe and wonder which is present in numinous encounter.²² Although he reveals a

²²Davenport, p. 39.

distaste for exaggerated feelings of guilt and unworthiness, Whitehead is aware that such feelings have their source in the self-acknowledgement of finitude and imperfection in contrast to the overwhelming greatness of God. Whitehead certainly recognizes the religious significance of such a sense of imperfection:

. . . the imperfection of the world is the theme of every religion which offers a way of escape, and of every sceptic who deplores the prevailing superstition. The Leibnizian theory of the best of all possible worlds is an audacious fudge produced in order to save the face of a creator constructed by contemporary and antecedent theologians (PR 47).

To confront the imperfection of the world and of one's self may have great religious value, but such a confrontation does not justify a morbid response of masochistic self-condemnation. Certainly Whitehead has made a most legitimate point. We have only to consider a sermon like Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to be reminded of pathological excesses that may be brought about by an exaggerated response to the numinous encounter. The Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials might constitute still other examples.

If there is a lesson to be learned from such examples, it may be that the two poles of religious experience, the numinous and the mystical, operate in dialectical relationship, each needing to be complemented by the other. While an overemphasis upon the numinous pole might run the risk of reverting to religious barbarism, a corresponding overemphasis upon the mystical might lead to such

a sense of detachment from the sensory world that one might have a difficult time functioning from day to day. It is my contention that an examination of Whitehead's philosophy will reveal an ideal position which holds both polar extremes in balance.

As a procedure for dealing with the problem of whether or not Whitehead's system can serve as a model for the purpose of understanding the numinous encounter, I shall first focus upon the chief characteristics of this type of experience; I shall then attempt to demonstrate that these characteristics all find a grounding and justification in Whitehead's thought. In attempting to pin down the chief characteristics of numinous encounter, it would be difficult to improve upon Barbour's description:

Its characteristics include a sense of awe and reverence, mystery and wonder, holiness and sacredness, fascination and dread. Typical examples are the vision of Isaiah in the temple, the call of Paul or Muhammad, or the theophany of Krishna in which Arjuna is struck dumb in amazement. Numinous experience is often accompanied by moral demand and a response of humility. It is institutionalized as worship, and as ritual ascribing value to the object of worship and expressing the inferiority of the worshipper (often symbolized by bowing down).

Smart asserts that numinous experience is usually interpreted by personal models of God.²³

Drawing upon Barbour's description, I shall extract for discussion what I perceive to be the three most important characteristics of the numinous encounter: (1) its conception of God as personal,

²³Barbour, p. 79.

(2) its evocation of worship as a proper response, and (3) its accompanying sense of moral demand. While these characteristics do not exhaust the numinous experience, taken together they would appear to constitute the essence of it.

The first characteristic of numinous encounter we shall examine is that personal models of God are usually used in describing it. If Whitehead's philosophy can accommodate this type of experience, we should be able to demonstrate that Whitehead's God is personal, or at least that there is a personal element in the Whiteheadian doctrine of God. At this point we arrive at a certain amount of controversy among commentators on Whitehead. Some critics have mistakenly understood Whitehead's God to be totally impersonal. Typical of those taking this position is theologian Elton Trueblood. In his words:

The failure of a number of wise and good men to make the full deduction regarding Divine Personality is one of the most curious phases of the philosophy of the recent past. Of these, Professor Whitehead is characteristic. He says much about God, particularly in the concluding pages of Process and Reality, but he explains that he is thinking of God in terms of Organism rather than in terms of Personality. The curious feature is that, though the beautiful things he says are appropriate if God is personal, they are not appropriate if God is a mere organism without conscious purpose and affection such as we know, though imperfectly in our lives. . . . What is strange is that a man who put us so greatly in his debt and who saw so much did not see more.²⁴

²⁴Elton Trueblood, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), pp. 272-273.

In this instance Trueblood reveals a most unclear understanding of what Whitehead means when he refers to his philosophy as "the philosophy of organism." Whitehead's intention in using this label is to imply a rejection of the eighteenth century notion of the world as analogous to a machine. The label proposes an alternate model of the world as analogous to an organism in that it reveals a purposive interrelatedness of parts to the whole typical of an organism. Whitehead's implication that the world and God function in something of an organismic manner is not irrelevant to the issue of whether the quality of personhood is to be found in God if purposiveness is integral to personhood.

As a similar example of misunderstanding, Norman Pittenger cites the French philosopher Alix Parmentier, who also arrives at the conclusion that Whitehead's God is impersonal. Pittenger, taking sharp issue with Parmentier, has the following to say in refutation of her position.

She [Parmentier] does not observe that in speaking of the divine he [Whitehead] mentioned what are in fact the chief characteristics of "personality"--conscious awareness, freedom, purpose or intention, communication and relationship.²⁵

It is indeed difficult, as Creighton Peden has pointed out, to understand how such interpretations as those advanced by Trueblood and Parmentier could be seriously entertained after one has carefully

²⁵Norman Pittenger, Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 127.

studied the last chapter of Process and Reality. Peden provides several good reasons for judging such interpretations incorrect:

If by definition, a personal God is such a God who is conscious and responds to or relates himself to man through his conscious qualities, then Whitehead's God is a personal God. . . . The pronoun He is used to refer to God, which in no way can be taken to be neuter. In his consequent and superjective natures, God is conscious; he loves and suffers; his satisfaction is increased; and he works for an increase in the temporal order. God is personally good because he never thrusts a desire on an actual entity, while at the same time, he works with evil to cause good. Being personal, God is both efficient and final cause. Whitehead would assert that to be personal, God must be able to love and suffer; and to love and suffer means that a being is affected by that which causes him to suffer in his love.²⁶

While Peden is certainly correct in asserting the personal attributes of Whitehead's God, it is nevertheless true that Whitehead seems to avoid the word person in describing God. I would suggest that there are at least two good reasons for this avoidance of the word. Pittenger pinpoints the first of these in holding that to Whitehead words like person and personal

suggested or were taken to mean, limiting and unhappily anthropomorphic notions and neglected the place of im-personal "structures" in divine reality, as well as what he called "the secular functions of deity."²⁷

Certainly Whitehead, like any sensitive religious thinker, would

²⁶Creighton Peden, "Whitehead's Philosophy: An Exposition," in Charles Hartshorne and Creighton Peden, Whitehead's View of Reality (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), p. 92.

²⁷Pittenger, p. 127.

take pains to avoid the excessively anthropomorphic talk about God that pervades so much popular piety and literature. Such language carries the unfortunate suggestion of remaking God to human specifications and demoting him to the rank of "the man upstairs."

As a second reason for Whitehead's avoidance of the word person, I would suggest that it might be attributed to his having defined a living person in such a way that his doctrine of God will not fit the definition. We might remember that for Whitehead a living person (or self, or soul) is a serially ordered society of regnant or presiding occasions. God, on the other hand, is understood by Whitehead to be a single everlastingly concrescing actual entity. Although Whitehead's God, at least in his consequent nature, is certainly "personal," he will not conform to the concept of a "living person" as Whitehead has defined that term. Barbour states the matter quite succinctly:

Whitehead himself ascribes personal qualities to God (consciousness, purpose, freedom, and creativity); his God is by no means an impersonal principle as some of his critics have claimed. But Whitehead does refrain from calling God a "person," which he thinks of as a succession of moments of experience with a special continuity. He allows for real becoming in God, and yet wants to treat God's existence throughout time as a single occasion, since it involves complete self-identity and no loss of what is past.²⁸

One way of resolving this problem is taken by Hartshorne, who has revised Whitehead's doctrine of God so that God becomes a serially

²⁸Barbour, p. 165.

ordered society of occasions corresponding to the definition of a living person. There is good evidence that at times Whitehead himself entertained this alternative view. Although in Process and Reality he states that God is an actual entity rather than a society of occasions, in an interview with A. H. Johnson, he once agreed that God is a society of occasions. Hartshorne also affirms that Whitehead, once in the context of a private conversation, spoke of God as such a society.²⁹ Hartshorne has written much in defense of his own doctrine of God as a society of occasions comprising a living person. Perhaps the following passage contains his most persuasive arguments:

Whitehead characterizes God as "an actuality." But he scarcely notices that this makes God analogous, not as in most theologies to a person or individual, but to a single, momentary state or experience of an individual. In Whitehead's system a person is a progressively realized "society," an ordered but only retrospectively definite sequence of actualities. Clearly, Whitehead does not mean that God is like a member of such a sequence. In that case there would be a succession of deities! Moreover, actual entities do not change, they merely become, whereas God changes in the sense of acquiring new prehensions as new actualities emerge in the world. It seems obvious that Whitehead, without very clearly recognizing it, is conceiving deity on the model of a society of actualities as much as on the model of a single actuality. I personally would say that the latter analogy is the closer one.³⁰

²⁹Peter Hamilton, The Living God and the Modern World: Christian Theology Based on the Thought of A. N. Whitehead (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1967), pp. 168-169.

³⁰Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead in Historical Context," in Whitehead's View of Reality, p. 21.

Although I have gone to some lengths to demonstrate that Whitehead's God is personal, we may have to opt for Hartshorne's reworking of Whitehead's doctrine if we are to assert that he is actually "a person," at least, in the way that Whitehead defines the term person. Hartshorne's revision in no way appears to threaten the coherence or consistence of Whitehead's metaphysical scheme, so it can be accepted without the danger of losing a distinctly Whiteheadian worldview.

Perhaps still another reason that the "personhood" of Whitehead's God has been called into question is that some critics have been confused by his insistence in Religion in the Making that God is not experienced directly as personal. While this position might appear somewhat peculiar at first in light of the personal qualities which Whitehead attributes to God, it begins to make good sense upon close scrutiny. Whitehead's position is that while the quality of "personhood" is not actually given in experience, we can nevertheless infer the personal qualities of God from our prehensions of him, particularly from those prehensions by which we receive the divine aim. Whitehead holds that in our "intuition of immediate occasions as failing or succeeding in reference to the ideal relevant to them," we experience "a rightness attained or missed, with more or less completeness of attainment or omission." As concerns this "rightness," he goes on to assert that we receive a "revelation of character" much in the same way we experience character as revealed in our friends; however, this revelation of the divine character is

ontologically grounded. In Whitehead's words, it is "an apprehension of character permanently inherent in the nature of things" (RM 59-60).

Whitehead's contention is that our attributing of personhood to God is not a direct intuition, but rather an inference based upon experience. He alludes to "a large concurrence in the negative doctrine that this religious experience does not include any direct intuition of a definite person or individual" (RM 60). In taking such a position, Whitehead claims the support of mainstream Christian theology:

Christian theology has . . . in the main, adopted the position that there is no direct intuition of such an ultimate personal substratum for the world. It maintains the doctrine of the existence of a personal god as a truth, but holds that our belief in it is based upon inference. Most theologians hold that this inference is sufficiently obvious to all men upon the basis of their individual personal experience. But, be this as it may, it is an inference and not a direct intuition. This is the general doctrine of those traditionalist churches which more specially claim the title of Catholic; and contrary doctrines have, I believe, been officially condemned by the Roman Catholic Church: for example, the religious philosophy of Rosmini (RM 61-62).

It would appear that Whitehead's reason for contending that the "personhood" of God is an inference rather than a direct intuition is that this position accounts for the fact that the divine is not always held to be a person in the religions of the world. In Some religious traditions, the worship of a personal god, or bhakti religion, is considered an inferior religious expression, and the ultimate reality is regarded as impersonal. Whitehead obviously has reasoned that since he is attempting to account for universal

religious experience, he cannot take the position that God's personhood is directly intuited.

We may discern in Whitehead's thinking another way that he might have dealt with this issue. Since Whitehead's "dipolar" God is assigned both personal and impersonal natures, he might have held that the person and the impersonal comprise two ways of directly intuiting God. In keeping with this position, God may be prehended predominantly as personal by some individuals and traditions at the same time that he is prehended predominantly as impersonal by others. This interpretation would appear to complement Smart's position that those persons and traditions which stress numinous encounter are more likely to favor personal models for God, while those stressing mystical experience are inclined to prefer impersonal models.

Since Whitehead's era much thinking from the phenomenological and existentialist traditions has been brought to our attention which suggests that there is a radical difference between our experience of persons on one hand, and our experience of nonpersonal things on the other. Martin Buber provides a good example in holding that "It" and "Thou" constitute two different modes of relating to all realities outside ourselves. In discussing our relationship with God as a "Thou" relationship, Buber has the following to say:

God cannot be inferred in anything--in nature, say, as its author, or in history as its master, or in the subject as the self that is thought in it. Something else is not "given" and God then elicited from it; but

God is the Being that is directly, most nearly, and lastingly, over against us, that may properly be addressed, not expressed.³¹

We might say then that for Buber the personhood of God is not an inference, but rather an intuition derived from a particular mode of experiencing. Whether Whitehead realized it or not, there is in his doctrine of the "diplolar" nature of God the resource for taking a similar position, had he chosen to do so. We shall return to this point later in our discussion of mystical experience.

To sum up Whitehead's position concerning the divine personality, we might say that although Whitehead conceives of God as personal (at least in his consequent nature), the "personhood" of God is nevertheless an inference not directly given in experience. Lewis Ford states the position well in asserting that

We do not directly apprehend his [God's] consequent nature, but become aware of its presence by the subtle, dynamic shifts in the divine aims directly accessible to us as God responds to our actions.³²

By demonstrating that Whitehead's God is at least personal, if not precisely a person, we have shown that our first characteristic of the numinous encounter can be accommodated within

³¹Buber, pp. 80-81. Buber's thought shows an impressive affinity to that of Whitehead in several instances. Buber holds, for example, that God needs persons just as persons need God, and that there is real becoming in God.

³²Lewis S. Ford, The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 85.

Whitehead's system. We shall go on to consider as a second characteristic of numinous encounter the fact that the God experienced as the object of such an encounter is a God who evokes the response of worship.

An often-quoted passage in Science and the Modern World provides a succinct statement of Whitehead's understanding of worship:

The power of God is the worship He inspires. That religion is strong which in its ritual and its modes of thought evokes an apprehension of the commanding vision. The worship of God is not a rule of safety--it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure (SMW 192).

Certainly such a passage leaves no doubt that Whitehead understands God in such a way that he assumes that worship is a natural response to our encounter with the divine reality. Norman Pittenger is correct in affirming that worship for Whitehead constitutes "the chief religious activity and expression."³³ Nevertheless, some critics have questioned what has come to be called "the religious availability" of Whitehead's God. Among these criticisms there is the charge that only a necessary being may properly be worshipped, and that only an all-powerful being in complete control of the world constitutes a suitable object for worship.³⁴ Since Whitehead's God is not omnipotent, at least not in the same manner as the God of classical theology, the implication

³³Pittenger, pp. 127-128.

³⁴Barbour, pp. 167-168.

is that the Whiteheadian God does not merit worship. Ian Barbour has the following to say concerning these charges:

Process theologians have held that it is God's goodness, not his power, which justifies reverence and worship, though presumably a totally impotent deity would evoke pity more than respect. In any case, the process God, though not omnipotent, is not dependent on the world as the world is dependent on him; his ideal purposes are not contingent on events in the world. Every being is indebted to God for its existence as well as for the order of possibilities it can actualize. . . . Such a God is surely worthy of worship.³⁵

We might raise the question at this point as to what worship actually is from a Whiteheadian perspective. Whitehead's poetic designation of worship as "an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable" is certainly imaginatively provocative, but it will hardly serve as a definition. It has already been established that worship for Whitehead does not involve the kind of obeisance that the subjects of an oriental despot might render to their ruler. What then is it?

Charles Hartshorne provides one answer to this question in asserting that "Worship is the integrating of all one's thoughts and purposes, all valuations and meaning, all perceptions and conceptions."³⁶ He goes on to develop this assertion:

³⁵Ibid., p. 168.

³⁶Charles Hartshorne, A Natural Theology for Our Time (LaSalle: Open Court, 1967), pp. 4-5.

A sentient creature feels and acts as one, its sensations and strivings are all its sensations and strivings. So are its thoughts, if it has them. Thus one element of worship is present without worship, unity of response. The added element is consciousness: worship is a consciously unitary response to life. It lifts to the level of explicit awareness the integrity of an individual responding to reality. Or, worship is individual wholeness flooded with consciousness. This is the ideal toward which actual worship may tend.³⁷

For Hartshorne it seems that worship is the natural way of affirming one's wholeness in relation to God, to other persons, and to the whole of reality. This affirmation perhaps provides at least a partial answer to the question of what constitutes worship. It would appear, however, that Hartshorne has omitted one important factor which is essential, particularly to the religious point of view fostered by the numinous encounter. Whatever else worship is, it is surely a response to our sense of the holiness of God. It is a natural response to the sense of wonder and awe that Otto so accurately describes as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans. John B. Cobb reveals a mature understanding of this aspect of worship:

The experience of the holy . . . is widely regarded as coterminous with religious experience. He who dimly experiences the presence of God in his whole life is also dimly experiencing God as holy. The periodic intensification of the experience is at the same time an intensification of the sense of the holy. Indeed, holiness may be identified as the subjective form of the prehension of God in the mode of causal efficacy. Any particular prehension of God may involve other subjective forms, but

³⁷ Ibid.

this one is constant. Hence, God is the Holy One. The element of the holy does not disappear even in experiences of the most intimate union or communion.³⁸

For Cobb then, the sense of holiness goes beyond the numinous encounter. It pervades even the most mystical experience. If Cobb is correct, it may be that he has pinpointed a link which may serve to bind together the two polarities of religious experience. We shall return to this point later in examining the manner in which the two polar extremes may be seen as complementary to each other.

At this point we have established that our second characteristic of the numinous encounter, its perception of God as evoking a response to worship, is accommodated in Whitehead's thought.

Upon moving to the third characteristic previously cited, the sense of moral demand which accompanies experience of the numinous type, we may at first be surprised that not a great deal has been written from a Whiteheadian perspective concerning this point. Whitehead himself seems so to dislike the moralistic attitude often associated with the prophetic mood that he rarely focuses upon moral demand. Whitehead holds that ethics has to do with the harmony of the world, and therefore should be considered a part of aesthetics.

In one particularly memorable passage, Whitehead, after citing three ways of imaging God (as "imperial ruler," as a "personification of moral energy," and as "ultimate philosophical principle" in the

³⁸Cobb, p. 233.

manner of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover), makes the following comment:

The history of theistic philosophy exhibits various stages of combination of these three diverse ways of entertaining the problem. There is, however, in the Galilean origin of Christianity yet another suggestion which does not fit very well with any of the three main strands of thought. It does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements of the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love, and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals. It does not look to the future; for it finds its own reward in the immediate present (PR 342-343).

While moralistic persons may be shocked by such a statement, it is clear that Whitehead's intention in declaring that God as love is "a little oblivious as to morals" is to affirm that God is in no way concerned with petty rules or legalisms. From Whitehead's comments it is quite obvious that he had no sympathy for what Teilhard de Chardin once called "a juridical understanding" of religion. As Cobb and Griffin observe concerning Whitehead's rejection of God as a "cosmic moralist":

At its worse this notion [God as moralist] takes the form of the image of God as divine lawgiver and judge, who has proclaimed an arbitrary set of moral rules, who keeps records of offenses, and who will punish offenders. In its more enlightened versions, the suggestion is retained that God's most fundamental concern is the development of moral attitudes. This makes primary for God what is secondary for humane people, and limits the scope of intrinsic importance to human beings as the only beings

capable of moral attitudes. Process theology denies the existence of this God.³⁹

Just as there is no room in Whitehead's thought for considering God as a ruthless moral tyrant, similarly there is no provision for considering God as wrathful, if by the word wrathful we mean that God is vindictive and vengeful. Whitehead would have applauded such a religious giant as Dame Julian of Norwich for holding that wrath when applied to God is a human projection. The aim we derive from God in any moment is always in our best interest, regardless of our moral worth or lack of it. This principle is true whether the recipient of the aim is Mother Theresa of Calcutta or Adolf Hitler.

Considering Whitehead's distaste for moralism, we might raise the question at this point of just how the Whiteheadian system can provide a grounding for the intense desire for justice and social reform which usually accompanies the numinous encounter. Certainly Whitehead provides no justification for those religious leaders who would call down divine wrath and retribution from God upon persons who are guilty of perpetuating evil and injustice.

In attempting to answer the question we have raised, we might recall that in the initial aim which is derived from God we are constantly being lured by ideal possibilities. Our prehensions

³⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 8.

of these ideals, whether brought to the level of conscious awareness or not, should have the effect of creating in us a sense of the imperfect quality of life as it is in contrast with the goodness of life as it ideally could and should be. The more a person is in tune with his own inner life, the more this contrast between actual imperfection and ideal harmony may surface to impinge upon his conscious awareness. For one who concerns himself with society and social institutions, such a contrast would likely lead one to feelings of "righteous indignation" due to the sense of wrongness that may be discerned in the suffering and squalor which is the product of unjust social structures. The prophetic impulse might be, from a Whiteheadian perspective, attributed to such a state of affairs.

As we have previously argued, much of what is called "the wrath of God" may be seen as a human projection, an attempt in an anthropomorphic manner to locate human emotions in God. Lewis Ford holds that we may properly speak of the "wrath of God" from a Whiteheadian perspective in considering God's judgment upon "existing orders and structures as worthy of destruction." Ford seems to suggest that our aims derived from God may be directed against those structures which stand in the way of emerging values.⁴⁰ Likewise, if we take the phrase "wrath of God" as a symbol, we may interpret it to refer to the suffering and hardship we bring upon ourselves and others

⁴⁰Ford, p. 39.

by egotistically choosing our own narrow interests over those prehended in the ideal aim, which is directed to the welfare of the whole world.

It may be that we can discern the divine presence in the world as manifesting itself in its most dramatic way in the struggles for social reform and human liberation. As Norman Pittenger asserts in a theological declaration inspired by Whitehead:

It is my contention that these places, where God is indeed alive and working, are in any and every movement, personal and social, historical and natural, where good is being sought and accomplished and where men and women work for justice. This means that it is an error to think of him in the total process as uniformly and equally operative--in the bad and the good, the hateful and the loving, the ugly and the beautiful, the wrong and the right, injustice and the truly sound concern for righteousness. He is not the cosmic manipulator of a system in which everything, just as it is, directly reflects his purpose and expresses his will.⁴¹

In the foregoing discussion we have presented evidence that Whitehead's system is indeed suitable as a model for the purpose of understanding numinous encounter. Whiteheadian metaphysics can accommodate the major characteristics of numinous encounter in that (1) it conceives of God as personal, (2) it treats of worship as a proper response to the experience of God, and (3) its doctrine of God can be used as a basis for explaining the impetus of moral judgment and social reform.

⁴¹Pittenger, p. 56.

II. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

We have maintained previously that the core trait of mysticism is the experience of unity. This unity may be understood in different ways: as oneness with God, the All, or nature. We shall recall that R. C. Zaehner contends that these three different understandings of mysticism constitute three different experiences and involve three different realities: God, the All, and nature, respectively. The position developed in this study takes issue with Zaehner in holding that all mystical experience is essentially experience of the divine, however differently that reality may be conceptualized. In this chapter Zaehner's distinction between theistic and monistic mysticism will be challenged, while in the next chapter I shall refute Zaehner's contention that nature mysticism is simply the attempt to disperse the self into the natural objective world.

Barbour's description of mystical experience is most accurate:

Here [in mysticism] the typical expression is meditation and contemplation rather than worship and ritual. Discipline, and sometimes asceticism, leads to peace, serenity and bliss. Sacrament and scripture are left behind in enlightenment, immediacy of knowledge, realization of unity, and liberation from the illusion of separation. In identity with the One beyond time and space, all differences are obliterated. All dichotomies (human-divine, subject-object, time-eternity, evil-good) are transcended.⁴²

In addition to the above considerations, Barbour also points out that while the recipient of the numinous encounter makes use

⁴²Barbour, p. 80.

of personal models for God, the mystic may often make use of impersonal models. God may be described, for example, as the Abyss or as the Ground of reality.

In attempting to examine Whitehead's thought to determine if his metaphysical system can account for the mystical experience, we shall first deal with what we have taken to constitute the essence or core trait of the experience: the sense of union. We shall then deal with three additional characteristics of mystical experience: (1) the fact that impersonal models are used for describing the divine, (2) the sense of timelessness or non-temporality often reported by the mystic, and (3) the sense of ineffability the mystic feels concerning the experience.

As concerns our primary trait of mystical union, it would appear that there is little doubt that Whitehead allows for some kind of unity between human persons and God. Just what kind of union is possible from a Whiteheadian perspective? Whitehead himself writes of God as "the great companion," and certainly the concept of companionship involves a certain kind of unity. Many mystics have described their sense of union with the divine in much more dramatic terms, however. Sometimes mystics claim a loss of self to such an extent that the individual seems to be totally absorbed in God so that the two subjectivities are ostensibly merged into one.

Religions such as Christianity have serious theological problems with the kind of mysticism in which the self appears to be absorbed in the divine. Nevertheless, certain Christian mystics have gone

so far as to ignore orthodoxy in asserting that absorption into God is an accurate description of their experience. Meister Eckhart, perhaps the most notorious of these, affirms that "If I am to know God directly, I must become completely He and He I, so that this He and this I are one I."⁴³ As a more recent example of this kind of mysticism within a Christian context, we have the words of Thomas Merton:

Since our inmost "I" is the perfect image of God, then when that "I" awakens, he finds within himself the presence of Him whose image he is. And, by a paradox beyond all human expression, God and the soul seem to have but one single I." They are (by divine grace) as though one single person. They breathe and live and act as one. "Neither" of the "two" is seen as object.⁴⁴

We might notice in the preceding quotation that Merton seems to qualify the boldness of his assertion somewhat with the words "seems to." Likewise, in another passage which serves as a good example of what we might describe as a monistic tendency in Merton's mysticism:

The separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite Freedom, love identified with Love. Not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love Loving in freedom.⁴⁵

⁴³Eckhart as quoted by Barbour, p. 83.

⁴⁴Merton as quoted by James Finley, Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978), p. 96.

⁴⁵Ibid.

We might note that in this passage Merton obviously feels the need to qualify his assertions with both "apparently" and "seems to." In another passage Merton appears to realize that he is treading a narrow line between orthodoxy and heresy, so that he provides a standard orthodox disclaimer:

Even when the soul is mystically united with God there remains, according to Christian theology, a distinction between the nature of the soul and the nature of God. Their perfect unity is not then a fusion of natures, but a unity of love and of experience.⁴⁶

Upon examining this quotation, we might note that Merton cites Christian theology as insisting upon a distinction between the soul and God, but implies that such a distinction is not given in the experience itself. One might then be said to experience union with God as if it were an ontological union of subjectivities. This position is most intriguing in that it allows Merton to be theologically orthodox, while at the same time holding that the actual experience is identical to one of full ontological oneness.

As concerns the orthodox Christian position, Barbour sums up the issue well:

. . . Christianity has made room for mysticism but has preserved the dominance of the theistic framework. It has been critical of the extremes of pantheistic interpretation. It has found unacceptable any total identity which obliterates the gap between man and God. . . . As analogy for the union of man and God, Christian mystics

⁴⁶Ibid.

invoke the interpersonal unity of marriage more often than the impersonal merging of a drop in the ocean.⁴⁷

The position Barbour describes is exemplified by Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Etienne Gilson, who holds with St. Bernard that "union results rather from a concurrence of wills than from a union of essence."⁴⁸ As Gilson describes this mystical union:

Never in any event, will the substance of the mystic himself become the substance of God. Never, in any event, not even in that of the beatific vision--which otherwise would abolish the thing it is destined to perfect and fulfill--will any part of the human substance coincide with that of God; never, in any event, will that part of the substance of the soul we call the human will, coincide with this substantial Divine attribute: the will of God.⁴⁹

Gilson's position is that the human will may be in union with God's will in the sense that it is in accord (concurrence) with God's will; however, there is no way that the human will can become ontologically one with that of God. Gilson, writing from a traditional Thomistic perspective, attempts to deal with the problem in "substance" terms. In attempting a Whiteheadian interpretation of the same problem we are working within a very different conceptual framework. Played in another key, however, the problem is no less formidable, and some thinkers would maintain that any ontological union of subjectivities between a human being and God is as difficult

⁴⁷Barbour, p. 83.

⁴⁸Etienne Gilson, "Unitas Spiritus," in Understanding Mysticism, p. 503.

⁴⁹Ibid.

to maintain in "process" terms as in "substance" terms.

John B. Cobb, in undertaking a Whiteheadian interpretation of the phenomenon of mystical union, comes to the following conclusion:

In Whiteheadian terms, ontological union with God is impossible. Any occasion in a human living person remains such, and God remains God. . . . Nevertheless, the ecstatic experience often interpreted as union with God can be given a Whiteheadian interpretation. If the concentering occasion in the living person inherits primarily from God, the causal efficacy of God would exceed that of anything else. This would produce an ecstatic kind of union with God.⁵⁰

Cobb's position is that while Whiteheadian categories can provide an adequate account of the experience sometimes mistakenly interpreted as an ontological merging of one's individual subjectivity with that of God, there is no possibility from a Whiteheadian perspective of interpreting the experience as an actual merging of human and divine subjectivities. That Cobb feels a certain uneasiness about this position is indicated by a footnote in which he admits that his "dogmatic denial may not be warranted on strictly metaphysical grounds."⁵¹ He cites a passage from Process and Reality in which Whitehead allows for the possibility of an intersection between occasions of two enduring objects. The passage to which Cobb refers is a particularly intriguing one, and it might be advantageous to examine a portion of it here:

⁵⁰Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, pp. 233-234.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 234.

Let us return to the two truly simple enduring objects a and b. Also let us assume that their defining characteristics, a and b are not contraries, so that both of them can qualify the same actual occasion. Then there is no general metaphysical reason why the distinct routes of a and b should not intersect in at least one actual occasion. Indeed, having regard to the extreme generality of the notion of a simple enduring object, it is practically certain that--with the proper choice for the defining characteristics, a and b--intersecting historic routes must have frequently come into existence. In such a contingency a being who could consciously distinguish the two enduring objects a and b, so as to have knowledge of their distinct defining characteristics and their distinct historic routes, might find a and b exemplified in one actual entity (PR 198-199).

For the sake of speculation, let us for the moment adopt Harts-horne's understanding of God as a society of occasions. If we identify the society of regnant occasions making up the life of an individual human being as a and the society comprising the life of God as b, then let us suppose that these two historic routes were to intersect in such a way that the next member of society a would also constitute the next member of society b. The result would be that the individual person would be, for the period of intersection at least, completely one with God. It is interesting to speculate as to just what such a mode of existence would be like. The human identity would not be lost in God, since all the past occasions constituting that person's life would be preserved in God's consequent nature. Experientially there would be simply no difference between the ongoing life of God and the ongoing life of the individual person. To entertain such a possibility is to speculate very boldly. Cobb appears to believe that such a state of affairs is impossible, but he does

not dwell on the issue or give any reasons for holding such an opinion. Perhaps Cobb's reason for rejecting such an idea lies in the difficulty of conceiving of a person's consciousness merging for a moment of meditation with the consciousness of God only to return to a world of everyday mundane concerns. Certainly it strains the credibility to conceive of a person's ability to make such a dramatic transition from a finite state of consciousness to a state of universal consciousness and omniscience, followed by a return to the state of finite consciousness. Thus, while Cobb may be correct in maintaining what he calls a "dogmatic denial" of such a possibility, we might nevertheless entertain the idea as an interesting theoretical possibility.

The idea of a merging of one's individual consciousness with the consciousness of God may not appear so farfetched when considered as an eschatological possibility. It is interesting that the process theologians have not explored this line of thought more thoroughly as a possibility for the ongoing life of the individual person after the death of the physical body. In some ways such a state of affairs would resemble closely the doctrine of the beatific vision. One would find himself with a direct and intuitive knowledge of the world instead of the fragmented and finite seeing "through a glass darkly" that ordinarily constitutes human knowledge. While the beatific vision is usually understood in static terms, however, an ongoing life in the consequent nature of God would be dynamic. Likewise, while the doctrine of the beatific vision maintains a distinction of identities between the individual and God, such a

distinction would be destroyed or at least transcended in a life in God's consequent nature.

Writers on the subject of religious experience are greatly divided not only over the issue of whether an individual ego is completely absorbed in God, but also over the related issue of whether or not those persons who report such an ontological merging are describing the same experience as those who describe their union with the divine in more modest terms. It would appear that the consensus of opinion among authorities on the subject would hold that the experience of mystical union is the same, whether interpreted and described in monistic terms or not.

As representative of the minority opinion, we have already examined the position of R. C. Zaehner, who insists that the two interpretations represent two different mystical experiences. Zaehner, writing from an orthodox Catholic perspective, holds that only theistic mysticism experienced and interpreted as a union in terms of relationships has true religious value, since only this kind of mysticism is held to constitute an experience of God. On the other hand Zaehner holds that monistic mysticism in which the mystic experiences his individual ego to be lost or absorbed in a larger unity actually has no religious value at all. For Zaehner, this latter kind of mysticism, experienced and understood in terms of an ontological merging, is not an experience of God (even when theistic language is used to describe it); rather, it is held by Zaehner to be nothing

more than an experience of the unity of a substantial soul.⁵² A Whiteheadian interpretation would necessarily disagree with Zaehner on this issue, since from a Whiteheadian perspective there is no substantial soul to be experienced. The soul (or self) for Whitehead is not a substance enduring through time. To understand the soul in such a way is to commit what Whitehead termed "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The soul for Whitehead is a route of regnant or presiding occasions governing those other routes of occasions which comprise the human body:

Ninian Smart has written in refutation of Zaehner's position:

Not all Christians would accept the theory of a substantial eternal soul. But, in any case, it does not follow that this is what the monistic mystic realizes in his inner contemplative experience. The Advaitin would believe that he has realized the oneness of the Atman with the divine being; while the adherent of Yoga would not. This is a big difference of interpretation, and if we were to take it at its face value we might be inclined to say that the Advaitin and the Yogin have attained different states. But do we have to take their claims at face value?⁵³

Smart goes on to argue that the mystic interprets and describes his experiences in terms of the religious beliefs he already entertains. Thus, while the actual experiences of the various mystics may be quite similar if not identical, the differences in religious backgrounds will lead to very different descriptions and interpretations. Smart

⁵²Ninian Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," pp. 79-80.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 80-81.

attempts to analyze descriptions of religious experience on the basis of the theological presuppositions which are brought to bear upon them. As a result, he has worked out a theory of "degrees of ramification." A religious experience that is described largely in terms of presupposed beliefs is said by Smart to show a high degree of ramifications, while a description that depends very little upon such beliefs is said to have a low degree of ramifications. Smart contends that when the ramifications are removed from the descriptions of the respective experiences of what Zaehner would categorize as theistic and monistic mystics, the experiences themselves would be seen as quite similar, if not identical.⁵⁴

While we may judge Smart as quite correct in holding that Zaehner has "mixed up classification problems with theological judgements,"⁵⁵ Smart nevertheless seems to lack the insight of Steven T. Katz "that the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be."⁵⁶ It is not enough to hold that the experiences may be essentially identical, yet described in different ways. There is also the very real possibility, as Katz has so ably demonstrated, that the religious beliefs one brings to bear upon the experience may have the power to actually color and shape the experience itself.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 82-83.

⁵⁵Ninian Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," in Steven T. Katz, Ed., Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 13.

⁵⁶Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,"

One might contend, in opposition to Zaehner, that the experiences of the theistic and monistic mystics are both experiences of the same divine reality, while at the same time holding, in opposition to Smart, that the experiences of these two kinds of mystics are different from each other. As an alternative position to that of both Zaehner and Smart, we might hold that the two experiences represent two different but complementary ways of prehending God. In attempting such an interpretation, we might see Whitehead's theism, in the manner of Charles Hartshorne, as a panentheism. While Whitehead himself did not deal with the problem of how God is spatio-temporally related to the world, Hartshorne's solution to this problem is that God includes the world in himself. Thus, God is understood as the all-inclusive being; he is both a being in his own right, and also an all-encompassing reality in which we finite creatures "live and move and have our being," to borrow a biblical phrase. Such a panentheism strikes a compromise between a deistic understanding of God as totally transcendent and divorced from his creation on the one hand, and a pantheistic understanding which simply identifies God with the world on the other. In Hartshorne's panentheism God may be said to include the world at the same time that he transcends it.⁵⁷

in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, p. 26.

⁵⁷Hartshorne, A Natural Theology for Our Time, pp. 35-37. This is just one of several passages in Hartshorne's writings in which he argues that God is both individual and universal (all-inclusive).

In the writings of Whitehead himself we may discern an attempt to resolve the tension between monistic and pluralistic descriptions of the universe. For Whitehead there is truth in both descriptions, since in the concrescing of the actual entity there is perpetual movement from the many to the one and back again. As Whitehead describes this process:

The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the "many" which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive "many" which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one (PR 21).

In a similar passage more specifically related to God, Whitehead holds that it is God in his primordial nature who provides the unity in this on-going process, while the plurality is attributed to the world. In his own words:

God is primordially one, namely, he is the primordial unity of relevance of the many potential forms; in the process he acquires a constant multiplicity, which the primordial character absorbs into its own unity. The World is primordially many, namely the many actual occasions with their physical finitude; in the process it acquires a consequent unity, which is a novel occasion and is absorbed into the multiplicity of the primordial character. Thus God is to be conceived as one and many in the converse sense in which the World is to be conceived as many and as one. The theme of Cosmology, which is the basis of all religions, is the story of the dynamic effort of the World passing into everlasting unity, and of the static majesty of God's vision, accomplishing its purpose of completion by absorption of the World's multiplicity of effort (PR 349).

If we can accept a Whiteheadian-Hartshornean account as providing an adequate metaphysical description of God's relationship to the

world, it would seem to follow that we would be able toprehend God in at least two different modes. A theistic mysticism might be the result of prehendng God as a personal being in his own right, while a monistic mysticism would result from prehendng God as the unifying reality which encompasses all things and brings them into oneness. Since all occasions of experience prehend God, we experience God not only through direct prehensions of him, but also indirectly through his "embodiment" in other occasions of experience. This indirect experiencing of God through other occasions should constitute a common factor in all our experience that would account for our intuition of an underlying cosmic unity. While all persons would prehend God in both modes, particular persons might find themselves more influenced by one mode than by the other. The extent to which one is either a theistic or monistic mystic might be partially determined by one's natural inclinations and dispositions, and also, as Katz has suggested, by the religious and metaphysical presuppositions one brings to bear upon his experiences. Thus, what Smart refers to as the "ramifications" in our descriptions of our experiences may well have an important role to play in the actual coloring and structuring of the experience itself.

In arriving at an understanding of the manner in which Whitehead's system can account for the mystic's experience of union or oneness, we have noted that there is no problem involved in understanding such an experience in the more modest (and typically Western) sense as constituting a union analogous to that of two persons in friendship

or marriage. The difficulties arise when we consider this union in the more extreme (and typically Eastern) sense of a total merging of subjective identities. While even this latter type of union may be entertained as a logical possibility from a Whiteheadian perspective, on the basis of Whitehead's allowing for an intersection of occasions belonging to two societies, we have concluded that such a state of consciousness would seem highly unlikely except as an eschatological possibility. We have argued that perhaps the best way to account for what is often described as a merging of identities is to understand such an experience as resulting from the mystic's prehension of God in a particular mode as the unifying factor of all reality. In taking this position, we must take issue with Zaehner in our insistence that the experiences of what he calls the theistic and monistic mystics are both experiences of the same divine reality. At the same time, we would take issue with Smart in our holding that the experiences are not identical, but rather represent two different modes of prehending God. Our interpretation would make good sense of Alan W. Watts' assertion that for the mystic

It is not that he loses his identity to the point of feeling that he actually looks out through all other eyes, becoming literally omniscient, but rather that his individual consciousness and existence is a point of view temporarily adopted by something immeasurably greater than himself.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Alan W. Watts, This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1960), p. 20.

Having examined the experience of unity or oneness as constituting the core trait or essence of mysticism, we shall continue by considering three subsidiary characteristics. As the first of these, we shall deal with the fact that mystics often conceive of the divine reality in impersonal terms. While those mystics of the Judaic and Christian traditions follow the teaching of their religions in thinking of God in personal terms, it is nevertheless true that those religions which most emphasize the mystical and are least given to numinous encounter are also those which are least likely to conceptualize the divine in personal terms. This assertion holds true particularly in examining the great religious traditions of the East. Whitehead himself notes this fact:

Throughout India and China religious thought, so far as it has been interpreted in precise form disclaims the intuition of any ultimate personality substantial to the universe. This is true for Confusian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and Hindoo philosophy. There may be personal embodiments, but the substratum is impersonal (RM 61).

In writing of the mystical experience, Evelyn Underhill also declares that the conception of God as a person is sometimes considered inadequate for the mystic. In her own words:

. . . [for the mystic] the overt recognition of that which orthodox Christians generally mean by a personal God is not essential. On the contrary, where it takes a crudely anthropomorphic form, the idea of personality may be a disadvantage; opening the way for the intrusion of disguised emotions and desires. In the highest

experiences of the greatest mystics the personal category appears to be transcended.⁵⁹

Part of the advantage of Whitehead's dipolar doctrine of God is that it provides a justification for both personal and impersonal interpretations of the divine reality. In our discussion of the numinous encounter, it was emphasized that God in his consequential nature is personal. The other side of that coin is equally true, however. For Whitehead, God in his primordial nature is impersonal and unconscious. As Whitehead describes God's primordial nature:

. . . When we make a distinction of reason, and consider God in the abstraction of a primordial actuality, we must ascribe to him neither fulness of feeling, nor consciousness. He is the unconditioned actuality at the base of things; so that, by reason of this primordial actuality, there is an order in the relevance of eternal objects to the process of creation (PR 344).

As Lewis Ford aptly points out,

If this [primordial nature] were the only side of his character, the primordial nature of a personal God could easily become the impersonal standard of values such as Plato's Form of the Good.⁶⁰

We might recall here that Whitehead takes the position that God is not directly prehended as personal even in his consequent nature. Rather, divine "personhood" is an inference that is made on the basis of our interaction with God. As we have pointed out previously,

⁵⁹Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism," p. 27.

⁶⁰Ford, p. 85.

Whitehead's intention in holding this position is to account for the fact that the divine is not conceptualized as personal in all the religions of the world. We have suggested that Whitehead's cosmology provides the resources for taking the alternate position that God may be directly prehended in two modes, the personal and the impersonal. Whitehead's doctrine of the impersonality of God in his primordial nature is sufficient ground for accounting for the conceptualization of God as impersonal in Eastern religions. There is thus no need for denying that God may be directly prehended as personal in his consequent nature. As an analogy of the two modes of prehending God, we might consider that two persons may view different sides of the same object and see very different things.

Since weprehend God in both of his dipolar natures, weprehend both personal and impersonal structures. While those religions which stress numinous encounter are more likely to emphasize our prehensions of God in his consequent nature, it would appear that those religions which stress mystical experience are more likely to emphasize our prehensions of God in his primordial nature. Whitehead's cosmology is broad enough to justify adequately both personal and impersonal experiences of the divine.

As a second subsidiary trait of mysticism, we will consider the fact that what is often described as the timelessness or non-temporality of the mystical experience appears at first glance to be most difficult to account for in Whiteheadian terms. Since creativity is for Whitehead the ultimate principle operating in

the universe, and since creativity is dependent upon a temporal advance, it would follow that time in the sense of temporal succession is part of the very essence of reality from which there is no escape.

In attempting to account for the sense of timelessness from a Whiteheadian perspective, we shall explore two possibilities: (1) the possibility of grounding the experience of timelessness in the mental state of the mystic, and (2) the possibility of grounding the experience in Whitehead's doctrine of God.

In exploring the first possibility, we might note that much has been written concerning the affinity of Whitehead's cosmology with the metaphysics of Buddhism. If the similarity in the two systems is indeed as great as has been claimed, it would seem that a promising way of arriving at a Whiteheadian account of the sense of timelessness might lie in examining the manner in which writers on the subject of Buddhist mysticism explain the experience. This procedure would appear promising, since both Whitehead and Buddhism understand the world to be made up of momentary events. As Ninian Smart describes the Buddhist conception of reality:

One of the main attractions of Buddhism is the modernity of its ideas about events and causality: for in reducing the visible world to a vast interconnected swarm of events it echoes the findings of modern science. . . . Its [an event's] coming into being is due to a set of conditions, themselves similar events. In Hua-Yen's extension of this picture each event is a result of the total conditions of the universe and likewise is itself

part of the conditions which brought about the state of the total universe.⁶¹

One philosopher writing on the subject of mysticism, Ben-Ami Scharfstein, holds that the sense of timelessness in Buddhist meditation is to be attributed to the mystic's ability to direct his attention to one of the instantaneous events making up the world. Since time follows from the temporal order of such events, and the events themselves cannot be said to be in time, there is, according to Scharfstein, a resulting sense of timelessness. As Scharfstein himself describes this phenomenon:

The Buddhist with full insight, the Saint . . . sees reality pure and strong, for the object of his meditation is the instantaneous flash. He occupies the pure, vivid, timeless moment. In it, he is cut off from the past with its accumulated guilts, and from the future, with its endless anxieties. He is in a state of ecstatic contemplation, the life of the unattached moment, the dimensionless paradise.⁶²

There is a great difficulty involved in Scharfstein's account, in that he is most unclear as to just how one is able to focus upon a single instantaneous event (or "occasion." to use Whitehead's term) when these are constantly perishing and being replaced by other events in temporal succession. It would appear that one can no more "catch the moment" by attempting to concentrate upon one passing event than one can stop the temporal flow by breaking a

⁶¹Smart, Beyond Ideology, p. 69.

⁶²Ben-Ami Scharfstein, Mystical Experience (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 53-54.

watch, like the character Quentin Compson in Faulkner's novel The Sound and the Fury.⁶³ Even after much reflection, it is most difficult to relate to such an account of the manner in which the mystic achieves a sense of timelessness. As Whitehead once remarked to William Ernest Hocking, "You can't catch a moment by the scruff of its neck: its gone, you know."⁶⁴

Perhaps there are more promising ways to understand the mystic's sense of timelessness as grounded in the mind of the mystic. One possibility might be found in the lack of novelty intruding upon the stream of regnant occasions making up the meditator's consciousness during his time of meditation. Since in this mental state there would be no experience of flux or change, the meditator would be unaware of the passing from one regnant occasion to another. The occasions constituting the mentality of the meditator would, for the most part, simply reproduce themselves like the occasions making up a corpuscular society. It is possible for a regnant society to exhibit a diversity of data that does not change. Another possibility might be found in the emptying of all content from the mind with the result that the occasions of experience comprising the meditation would be empty of worldly prehensions. As we have already established, at such times when worldly prehensions are

⁶³William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Modern Library, 1946), p. 98.

⁶⁴William Ernest Hocking, "Whitehead in Mind and Nature," in Paul Arthur Schilpp, Ed., The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 386.

muted or silenced, prehensions of God, which usually do not call attention to themselves, begin to make themselves known. This latter explanation is perhaps the more likely, since it accounts for the sense of timelessness or nontemporality, the impression of a pure unity (derived from God), and the accompanying conviction of the mystic that the experience was of a religious nature.

If we explore the alternate possibility and attempt to ground the mystic's sense of timelessness in God, we would need to consider Whitehead's original doctrine of God as a single everlastingly con-
 crescing actual entity. Conceived in this way, Ford is correct that "Apart from the world God has neither past nor future, but is pure presence."⁶⁵ As Ford remarks concerning God's concrescence:

. . . in the divine instance this concrescence is nontemporal, independent of the particular temporal passage of the world. "Before all worlds," as Augustine recognized, symbolically refers to an activity outside of time, whether or not the world has a temporal beginning. Time is part of the world, and there is no time "before" the world in which such begetting could take place.⁶⁶

Toprehend God in such a way that he becomes the focus of those regnant occasions comprising our consciousness would be to experience something of this "pure presence" of God which is nontemporal. It seems that such a state of consciousness could only be realized, however, if God is a single entity as Whitehead originally held. If God is a serially ordered society of occasions as Hartshorne

⁶⁵Ford, p. 40.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 102.

claims, then there would be temporal succession within God himself, so that this interpretation would not work.

Regardless of which of the explanations one might prefer, it is important to note that Whitehead's system provides the resources for explaining the mystic's sense of timelessness as grounded either in God or in the mind of the mystic.

The third and last of the subsidiary characteristics of mysticism we shall examine is what is often called the "ineffability" of the mystical experience. It is a rather humorous paradox that the mystic often insists that there are no words adequate for describing his experience, and then goes on to fill page after page attempting to describe it and rhapsodizing about it. Whitehead is understanding of the mystic's inability to find sufficient words to articulate his experience. In the words of Julius Seelye Bixler:

Whitehead is more sympathetic than many to the view that our religiously significant experiences include more than can be conveyed by our formal statements and that their loss in definiteness is offset by their richer quality. Whether we like it or not, we are more sure that we have religious moments than we are that we know how God should be defined. Like James, Whitehead is a defender of these moments in spite of their inarticulate nature, and even, one feels, because precision in some cases may distort the truth.⁶⁷

Ninian Smart points out that we cannot take the mystic's pronouncements concerning the inadequacy of language to mean that God

⁶⁷ Julius Seelye Bixler, "Whitehead's Philosophy of Religion," in The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead pp. 489-490.

is utterly incomprehensible, since if that were the case, we could know nothing at all about him, not even enough to give us a reasonable basis for calling him God.⁶⁸ Linguistic philosophers have written much about the functions of religious language, and it is generally acknowledged that mystics use language on several different levels. Mystics, by stressing the insufficiency of language, seem to be attempting to articulate the truth that literal language alone cannot serve to communicate the full import of the experience itself. They may also wish to affirm that language at best can only serve to point one to the experience, or at least to a partial sense of what the experience was like. Often there is also the accompanying implication that insights gained in a mystical state are of such a noetic quality that they transcend the possibilities of discursive thought. For Whitehead, philosophy as a whole may be seen as an attempt to articulate in a rational way those insights derived mystically:

If you wish to phrase it so, philosophy is mystical. For mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism: not by explaining it away, but by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations, rationally considered.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," p. 17.

⁶⁹Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 174. Subsequent references to this edition consist of the abbreviation MT followed by the page numbers.

Whitehead's philosophy can easily account for the ineffable quality of religious experience, since his system recognizes that the wellsprings of discursive thought lie deeply within ourselves, on the level of what Whitehead sometimes identifies as "visceral feelings." Our prehensions of God occur in the mode of causal efficacy, beneath the threshold of discursive thought. For this reason, language may often prove inadequate for the full expression of visceral experience. Our experience of God proves particularly difficult to articulate, since, according to Whitehead:

This intuition [of God] is not the discernment of a form of words, but of a type of character. It is characteristic of the learned mind to exalt words. Yet mothers can ponder many things in their hearts which their lips cannot express. These many things, which are thus known, constitute the ultimate religious evidence beyond which there is no appeal (RM 65).

We should therefore take the mystic seriously when he declares that there is an element in his experience which cannot be communicated. Between the "feeling" of the experience on the level of causal efficacy and the higher stages of concrescence, there is a loss: a content which defies translation into discursive thought. Although Whitehead's system cannot help us in communicating this lost content, it can provide the "novel characterizations, rationally considered" that are necessary for our understanding of the manner in which religious experience is received.

After the foregoing considerations, we must take issue with Ian G. Barbour, who holds that Whitehead's system is somehow deficient

in serving as a model for understanding mysticism. We have argued that a Whiteheadian metaphysics can provide us with an understanding of the experience of union, which we have taken to constitute the core trait of mysticism, at the same time that it can throw light upon three subsidiary characteristics of mystical experience: (1) the tendency of the mystic to describe the divine in nonpersonal terms, (2) the sense of timelessness or nontemporality reported by the mystic, and (3) the ineffability of mystical experience.

III. THE MYSTICAL AND THE NUMINOUS AS COMPLEMENTARY

When Whitehead speaks of religious experience as evolving from the perception of God as enemy to the perception of God as companion, he is speaking primarily in terms of historical development. If we attempt to understand the same kind of dynamic within the religious experience of an individual, we might contend that to move from an experience of God as enemy to an experience of God as companion is to move from the numinous pole of religious experience to the mystical pole.

Perhaps nowhere is this movement from the numinous to the mystical more in evidence than in the experience of conversion or metanoia. When one reads the many conversion experiences cited by William James in his two chapters of The Varieties of Religious Experience devoted to conversion, one is struck by a recurring pattern: the experience which begins with a sense of awe, religious fear, and unworthiness finally evolves into a sense of union, culminating in a pervasive sense of peace and joy. To cite just one example:

I was taken to a camp-meeting, mother and religious friend seeking and praying for my conversion. My emotional nature was stirred to its depths; confessions of depravity and pleading with God for salvation from sin made me oblivious to all surroundings. I pleaded for mercy, and had a vivid realization of forgiveness and renewal of my nature. When rising from my knees I exclaimed, "Old things have passed away, all things have become new." It was like entering another world, a new state of existence. Natural objects were glorified, my spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every material object in the universe, the woods were vocal with heavenly music; my soul exulted in the love of God, and I wanted everybody to share in my joy.⁷⁰

Experiences such as this one suggest a decided movement from the numinous to the mystical in the perception of the individual. At the beginning of the conversion experience, God is perceived in terms of the numinous encounter. While this phase of the experience is characterized by awesome fear and a sense of the wholly "otherness" of God, there is an accompanying sense of fascination which draws one to God as a moth is drawn to light. In Otto's phrase, God is experienced as mysterium tremendum et fascinans. When the person is fully drawn to God, the sense of God's "otherness" disappears and is replaced by a sense of union and oneness which characterizes what we might call the mystical phase of the conversion experience. The experience concludes with an abiding sense of peace and fulfillment.

While such experiences of conversion or metanoia are properly seen as the work of God, there is good evidence that the possibility

⁷⁰James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 203-204.

for such an experience is brought about by natural processes at work in particular phases of individual development. In the words of William Johnston:

In the contemplative life as conceived by Buddhists and Christians alike, there are ordinary periods of joy and consolation together with periods of darkness and boredom. There are also flashes of insight or illumination when one comes to understand some words of scriptures or revelation. But there may also be times of upheaval and inner revolution, times of momentous change when conversion is likely to occur. In other words, there are natural turning-points, crossroads or periods of crisis when the human psyche demands a conversion in its process of growth.⁷¹

Since, as we have seen, the numinous and mystical poles of religious experience appear to work dialectically and in conjunction with each other, it would seem likely that both poles of experience are at work in each and every individual. Therefore, our classification of a person as having prophetic or mystical spirituality may depend to some extent upon the religious tradition from which one derives, and also upon one's personal disposition and inclinations. It cannot be denied, however, that a great difference in spirituality exists between those who emphasize one extreme and those who emphasize the other.

Since the dynamic, particularly within the conversion experience, moves from the numinous to the mystical, it would appear that the mystical expression may be seen as the more mature. There is some

⁷¹William Johnston, The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 146.

evidence that in the lives of very saintly persons the sense of fear which characterizes the numinous expression tends to die away completely. As Etienne Gilson writes of St. Bernard:

Throughout the course of all St. Bernard's meditations we watch the gradual elimination of the fear of Divine chastisement by certitude of the possession of God in love. Insofar as the thought of the contemplative is still busied with consideration of Divine Providence, or of Divine judgment on our conduct, it has not yet arrived at its term; it has not yet attained to pure love.⁷²

It must be admitted that Whitehead's choice of the symbol of "companionship" reveals the Western bias of understanding union with the divine in terms of person-to-person relationships. Eastern mystics would be more inclined to speak in terms of absorption or a merging of identities. In speaking of peace, however, Whitehead becomes somewhat bolder in his assertions and alludes to a loss of the self. He defines peace as "a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, un verbalized yet momentous in its coordination of values." He continues with a description:

Peace carries with it a surpassing of personality.
 . . . Peace is self-control at its widest--at the width where "self" has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality. Here the real motive interests of the spirit are meant, and not the superficial play of discursive ideas . . .
 (AI 235).

⁷²Gilson, p. 509.

This peace which follows an experience of "deep metaphysical insight" certainly suggests the state of consciousness associated with the illumination or enlightenment of which the great religions speak. It is "the peace which passes understanding." While it cannot be precisely verbalized, since words are inadequate for the task, it can be preserved in the inner life of the individual as a vision with rich sustaining power.

IV. CONCLUSION

If the word mysticism is defined according to its core trait as the experience of oneness with the divine reality, then it may be easily discerned that there is an opposite and contrasting pole of religious experience which has been described as numinous encounter. Just as the mystical experience involves a sense of union and "sameness," the numinous encounter involves a sense of estrangement and "otherness." Of religious philosophers, Ninian Smart has developed most adequately this concept of polarity between the mystical and numinous experience.

Ian G. Barbour, in his Myths, Models, and Paradigms, has related Smart's thought to Whitehead's metaphysics. He concludes that Whitehead's thought can better serve for providing a model for interpreting numinous encounter than for providing an appropriate model for the understanding of mystical experience. We have taken the position that Whitehead's system can account for both kinds of experience equally well. In support of this thesis, we have taken

the chief characteristics of each of the two types of experience and have attempted to explain how they can be understood and clarified within the context of Whitehead's cosmology.

We have suggested that the two poles of religious experience are involved in something of a dialectical and complementary relationship. They both come into play quite clearly in the experience of conversion or metanoia, which begins with a sense of religious fear, evolves toward a state of union or oneness, and is consummated in a pervasive intuition of peace.

CHAPTER IV

TWO RESPONSES TO NATURE

In this fourth chapter we shall examine two quite different responses to nature. The first of these, nature mysticism, is essentially a religious response to nature. As a philosophical position it grows out of a particular kind of religious experience. Like other forms of mysticism, nature mysticism derives from a sense of unity; it involves a feeling of oneness, an attitude toward nature that is participative and communal. For the nature mystic, it is more important to experience a sense of our unity with nature than to attempt to understand it in an objective way. In fact, the manner in which the nature mystic relates to nature is the antithesis of the kind of detached objectivity fostered by science. Considered as a variety of mysticism, nature mysticism reveals certain qualities which make it something of a peculiarity. For this reason it deserves special consideration.

As a second response to nature, we shall consider naturalism. Although there are religious expressions of naturalism, it is often understood to be nontheistic and even anti-religious. Naturalism, in sharp contrast to nature mysticism, encourages a scientific objectivity toward nature. The philosophical naturalist sees nature as an object to be understood rather than as a unitive reality to be experienced. Naturalists, beginning with their own metaphysical

assumptions, usually dismiss any claims that one might wish to make about a cognitive dimension to religious experience. We shall take a look at the naturalistic objections to religious experience and attempt an analysis of these arguments in order to determine just how convincing they may be. We shall then examine the efforts of certain "Neo-Whiteheadians" to naturalize the metaphysical system of Whitehead in order to arrive at a nontheistic and decentered revision of Whitehead's cosmology. As we have previously affirmed, religious experience for Whitehead is exactly what it is understood to be by "the man on the street": it is an experience of God. In a nontheistic revision of Whitehead's thought, how could we account for the phenomenon of religious experience? We shall attempt to deal with this question.

I. NATURE MYSTICISM

While Whitehead reveals an understanding and sympathy for the various kinds of religious experience examined thus far, the type for which he seems to have the greatest affinity is that which is usually identified as nature mysticism. For this reason, and because nature mysticism as a form of religious experience involves certain peculiarities, special consideration will here be devoted to it. Of those philosophies which compete for our attention, Whitehead's process system is one of the few that can justify religious feeling associated with nature. The truth of this assertion becomes all too obvious when one examines other viable schools of

philosophical thought. While language philosophers simply ignore nature in their endeavor to determine the meaningfulness of statements and the levels of language usage, Idealists, representing the other end of the philosophical spectrum, posit the natural world as merely a projection of mind, however that may be understood.

Existentialism of the Sartrean variety holds that the world of nature (being en-soi) is simply a mass of brute, inert matter, which, although the source of human consciousness, is alienated from it.¹ It has been said that Sartre himself so disliked nature that he avoided going into the country because here he had a claustrophobic sense of pure being closing in on him. Here we have an extreme example of a philosophy hostile to nature.

Even some of those philosophies otherwise sympathetic to religion and religious experience have little room for a religious view of nature, due to an excessive anthropocentrism. The philosophy of Personalism as exemplified by the thought of Edgar S. Brightman is a case in point. In the words of one critic:

Brightman accepts the basic principle of pluralistic personalism that the term "reality" has no basic meaning except "in, of, or for persons." . . . It follows from this principle that the universe is ultimately a realm of persons, and that any beings that are lower in the hierarchy of realities than persons exist only "in, of, and for persons." If one could conceive of all persons

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

being completely obliterated, including the conceiver of the fatality, the universe would thereby pass into nothingness.²

This excessive anthropocentrism of Brightman is also a characteristic found in other philosophies. Some forms of humanism exalt man to the extent that all value is understood to reside in human beings, while the subhuman world is regarded as valueless except insofar as it serves the needs of humanity. V. F. Calverton expresses such a sentiment when he affirms that

Man will find a new strength and a higher form of courage in viewing it [nature] as neither friend or foe, but simply as an outer force or substance that he can convert into malleable forms.³

Charles Hartshorne has pointed out that from a process perspective religious supernaturalisms and nontheistic humanisms share the same common error of believing "that nature, in her non-human portions and characters, is wholly subhuman." In Hartshorne's words:

Not finding the superhuman in nature, the supernaturalist seeks it "beyond" nature, the humanist in the unrealized potentialities of man. Could both perceive the living divinity which in a certain sense is nature, the one would cease to locate the object of his worship in a vacuum,

²David Sommer Robinson, "Philosophy of Religion in the United States in the Twentieth Century," in Marvin Farber, Ed., Philosophic Thought in France and the United States (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), p. 643.

³Calverton as quoted by Charles Hartshorne, Beyond Humanism: Essays in the Philosophy of Nature (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 2.

and the other would cease to deify man and romantically to exaggerate the good and underestimate the evil in man. Theoretically and practically both would, I believe, have reached a superior position.⁴

Whitehead's metaphysical system shares some of the insights of nature mystics and provides a congenial environment for religious feeling associated with nature. One theme common to the writings of nature mystics and to the cosmology of Whitehead is the perception of nature as being somehow "alive." The term generally used in philosophy for the doctrine of the "aliveness" of nature is panpsychism. Paul Edwards defines this term as

the theory according to which all objects in the universe, not only human beings and animals, but also plants and even objects we usually classify as "inanimate," have an inner or "psychological" being.⁵

We must be careful in applying the term panpsychism to Whitehead's system, since the word is often associated with crude notions of animism and nature spirits. Whitehead may appropriately be considered a panpsychist, however, in his insistence that there is a subjective mentality found in all the occasions of experience making up the world. While this subjectivity culminates in consciousness only in human beings and some other of the higher sentient forms of animal life, it is nevertheless present in different degrees

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁵Paul Edwards, "Panpsychism," in Paul Edwards, Editor-in-Chief, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. Six (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), p. 22.

in all actual entities. "Nature Alive" is the title of a chapter in Whitehead's Modes of Thought, and the phrase serves to characterize his system as a whole. For Whitehead, the natural world is truly alive, since each occasion appropriates or prehends every other, and the term life, in Whitehead's words, "implies the absolute individual self-enjoyment arising out of this appropriation" (MT 150).

Whitehead, in rejecting both a Cartesian mind-body dualism and the doctrine of epiphenomenalism allows for no "bifurcation" in nature. This is to say that the concept of "dead matter" has no place in Whitehead's system. All actual entities are interpreted by Whitehead as having both a mental and physical pole; it follows that even in the lowest grade of occasion (such as those making up a rock or other corpuscular society), there is some minimal degree of subjectivity, although it may be so trivial as to be almost non-existent.

Howard L. Parsons has pointed out that it would not be amiss, from a process perspective, even to think of nature as having rights, if we interpret the word right as "a claim to be and to become." As he continues his speculation:

. . . animals, plants, and even stones have their rights. This is not so merely because stones, for example, can become the foundation on which first lichens, then moss, then ferns, then flowering plants, and eventually animal life and man arise. The rights of these "lower" things are not contingent on man's rights or his welfare, though man's own enlightened self-interest would alone dictate a concern for them. Their rights reside in the things

themselves because they are forms of being--centers of experience, if you will, which are affected by, and which act upon, the world. They were here in the universe before man came on the scene, and probably will be here after he is gone or has been superseded by higher forms.⁶

From a Whiteheadian perspective then, it is a mistake to think that the world of nature is dead and lacking in value. Since all reality is made up of "centers of experience" (to use Parson's terminology), there is value in the form of self-enjoyment being realized at all levels. This insight is often found in the writings of nature mystics, particularly the nineteenth-century Romantic poets for whom Whitehead held such high regard. As just one of many possible examples, we might consider the words of William Wordsworth:

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:-But the least motion
which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.⁷

⁶Howard L. Parsons, "Religious Naturalism and the Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne," in William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman, Eds., Process and Divinity: Philosophical Essays Presented to Charles Hartshorne (LaSalle: Open Court, 1964), p. 542.

⁷William Wordsworth, "Lines Written in Early Spring," in The Complete Poetical Works of Wordsworth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), pp. 81-82.

Whitehead shares with Wordsworth the insight that value is not confined to the sphere of humanity alone. While human beings, because of their self-reflective consciousness, may represent the highest achievement of the creative process that we know, they are not the only valuable inhabitants of the earth. Millions of years passed before humanity appeared on this planet; surely there was more of value present during that time than simply the potential to bring about humankind.

As a second reason that the Whiteheadian system is particularly conducive to nature mysticism, we might keep in mind that for Whitehead the world of nature is real. Whitehead's naive realism brings him into agreement with the ordinary "man on the street" that there is a real, objective world. The existence of this world is in no way dependent upon a perceiver, and it is not simply a projection of mind, either divine or human. As William Ernest Hocking comments on Whitehead's naive realist position:

The naive realist conceives mentality as adventuring amid realities, not amid dreams. Mind is inside its images, not its images inside the mind. I am "immersed in a topic" in mathematics, not the reverse. We are actors in scenes, not the scenes inside us.⁸

By the same token, Whitehead holds that our perception deals with the actual world and not simply with a representation of the actual world. As he once remarked to Hocking, "I never could see

⁸Hocking, p. 385.

why we should be born dreaming of another world."⁹

Whitehead's rejection of representative realism rests largely on his rejection of Locke's doctrine of primary and secondary qualities, concerning which he provides a description dripping with irony and sarcasm:

Thus [given Locke's doctrine] nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves; the rose for its scent; the nightingale for its song; and the sun for his radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellence of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly (SMW 56).

We have seen already that one way in which nature has been "bifurcated," to use Whitehead's term, is demonstrated by the sharp delineation some thinkers have drawn between life and non-life. While the term "bifurcation of nature" is appropriate in describing this distinction between living things on one hand, and "dead matter" on the other, another way that nature has been split dualistically is precisely in this doctrine of primary and secondary qualities, which Whitehead so scathingly repudiates. Philosopher William Barrett champions Whitehead on this particular issue:

The philosopher Whitehead has spoken of "the bifurcation of nature" as a fundamental event in human thought. What happens in this bifurcation is that experience is split into two separate domains: the immediate and qualitative on the one hand, and on the other

⁹Ibid., p. 386.

hand the quantitative dimensions that enter into the calculations of physics. These latter--the so-called "primary qualities"--are declared to be "really real"; the other qualities, on the contrary, are assigned a secondary and merely "subjective" reality. But these immediate qualities of perception and feeling--the red of the rose, the blue of the sky, the sigh of the breeze--make up the domain of our aesthetic intimacy with nature. It is there and nowhere else that we are aesthetically aware of the physical world. Now, however, that realm is to be shut up inside the human mind--declared a peculiarly and purely "human" affair.¹⁰

Like Whitehead, the nature mystic knows no such bifurcation. He delights in the immediacy of his encounter with nature, deriving value from its sights, sounds, and smells. He assumes (correctly, from a Whiteheadian perspective) that these moments of ecstatic intimacy with nature provide him with the most dependable data for interpreting the world. The nature mystic, in childlike innocence, trusts his senses to tell him about a real, objective world; furthermore, he experiences a oneness and kinship with nature, and he believes these moments to be fraught with metaphysical implications: they are taken to be disclosures of an ultimate and all-pervasive reality.

As a third reason for Whitehead's system providing a congenial environment for nature mysticism, we might consider that it constitutes a philosophy of organism. This emphasis in Whitehead's metaphysics, more than any other, provides an explanation for the mystic's sense of unity and oneness. Like the work of the English

¹⁰William Barrett, Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1986), p. 99.

Romantic poets, Whitehead's system can be seen as a rebellion against the analogy of the world to a machine. The analogy of organism allows for the interrelatedness of all entities making up the world, as well as for the panpsychist insight that nature is alive.

Andrew J. Reck attributes Whitehead's designation of his thought as "the philosophy of organism" to the influence of Darwin and biological evolution. Reck points out that the term "organism" is used in both a microscopic and macroscopic sense. While the macroscopic use of the word applies to entities encountered in ordinary experience (animals and plants), the microscopic use of the word applies to the basic units comprising the macroscopic entities. Whitehead applies the term in its microscopic sense. In the words of Reck:

The term "organism" in its systematic usage never signified for Whitehead the full-bodied natural organism encountered in ordinary experience, recognized by common sense, and studied by the sciences in their descriptive and classificatory stages. That full-bodied natural organism is rather a society of more basic organisms.¹¹

Reck is correct in noting that Whitehead is primarily concerned with the organismic interactions which make up the microcosmic world. On this level, the individual occasions come into concrescence through feeling past occasions and appropriating the data they provide. Whitehead's basic concept of the occasion of experience may be seen

¹¹Andrew J. Reck, "The Fox Alone Is Death: Whitehead and Speculative Philosophy," in Michael Novak, Ed., American Philosophy and the Future (New York: Scribners, 1968), p. 151.

as an attempt to reunite mind and nature. We have already noted that panpsychism is an element which Whitehead's philosophy shares with earlier, more primitive views of the world. While Whitehead's type of panpsychism may be far removed from that of uneducated primitives with their crude notions of animism and nature spirits, it nevertheless may be seen as a judgment that the basic instincts of the primitive were correct. William Ernest Hocking's remarks seem to suggest something of the kind:

As an hypothesis, the "occasion" carries us in the direction of earlier views of the world in which animation was presumed to be widespread. The direction of mental progress, broadly speaking, had been to restrict the area of nature taken as animate. The substitution of "forces" for mental agents, and of "laws" for forces, is indeed of no definitive philosophical meaning: it indicates an intention to examine nature by exact measurement and for the rest a mere resignation of knowledge.¹²

It is the interaction of the various occasions on the micro-cosmic level then, which makes Whitehead's worldview an organismic one. Unlike the monads of Leibniz, which were self-sufficient and unrelated ("windowless," to use Leibniz's term), Whiteheadian occasions are relational and totally open to the experiences of those which have previously concresced and passed into objective immortality. While each actual entity has its own identity, it relates itself to all other entities making up the world, much in the way the cells of the human body come together to form the

¹²Hocking, pp. 394-395.

various organs and bodily systems which ultimately comprise the whole bodily organism. In Whitehead's words:

The philosophy of organism is a cell-theory of actuality. Each ultimate unit of fact is a cell-complex, not analyzable into components with equivalent completeness of actuality (PR 219).

Such an organismic worldview as that advanced by Whitehead provides the most congenial environment possible for a mysticism of nature. Alan W. Watts' remarks are much to the point:

There is much evidence to show that for anyone who passes through the barrier of loneliness, the sense of individual isolation bursts, almost by dint of its own intensity, into the "all-feeling" of identity with the universe. One may pooh-pooh this as "nature mysticism" or "pantheism," but it should be obvious that feeling of this kind corresponds better with a universe of mutually interdependent processes and relations than with a universe of distinct, blocklike entities.¹³

It seems quite remarkable that Watts was not thinking specifically of Whitehead's system when he wrote these words. There can be no doubt that Whitehead provides a worldview of just such "mutually interdependent processes and relations" as Watts describes.

Having noted that Whitehead's system is most compatible with nature mysticism, we might at this point examine some of the traits which make this particular kind of mysticism something of a peculiarity. One characteristic which distinguishes a mysticism of nature is

¹³Alan W. Watts, Nature, Man, and Woman (New York: Pantheon, 1958), pp. 31-32.

that, unlike other forms of mysticism, it appears to focus upon the natural objective world. While in other forms of mysticism the mystic seems to transcend the sensory world, the nature mystic's experience is usually evoked by natural surroundings, and the sense of unity and oneness felt by the mystic is inclusive of the world of nature. Zaehner understands this aspect of the nature mystic's experience:

. . . in strictly religious mysticism, whether it be Hindu, Christian, or Muslim, the whole purpose of the exercise is to concentrate on an ultimate reality to the complete exclusion of all else; and by "all else" is meant the phenomenal world or, as the theists put it, all that is not God. This means a total and absolute detachment from Nature, an isolation of the soul within itself either to realize itself as "God," or to enter into communion with God. The exclusion of all that we normally call Nature is the sine qua non of this type of mystical experience. . . .¹⁴

While Zaehner is certainly correct in holding that the nature mystic does not transcend the phenomenal world in his experience, we have good reason to question the contention that nature mysticism is not of a religious nature. We shall return to this point shortly.

Another peculiarity of nature mysticism is that while there is a strong intuition of unity and oneness in the nature mystic's experience typical of other types of mysticism, there is also an accompanying sense of awe and wonder, which is more suggestive of numinous encounter. This quality is so pronounced in the nature

¹⁴Zaehner, p. 168.

mystic's experience that Ninian Smart holds that this kind of experience belongs to the numinous category rather than to the mystical.¹⁵ Certainly there would seem to be no other type of religious experience in which the mystical and numinous elements are so conjoined. Although I shall follow convention in using the term "nature mysticism," we might think of this type of religious experience as something of a hybrid in that it is a meeting place for both mystical and numinous feeling.

Ronald W. Hepburn points out that while some mysticisms are introvertive, the nature mystic's experience is extroverted. In Hepburn's words, "The subject looks out upon the multiplicity of objects in the world and sees them transfigured into a living, numinous unity, their distinctions somehow obliterated."¹⁶ What makes Hepburn's description particularly interesting is his use of the term "numinous unity," which brings together the mystical and numinous characteristics of religious experience. Hepburn goes on to note correctly that, for the nature mystic, "the items of nature are seen with unusual vividness," rather than being lost to consciousness, as in other forms of mysticism.¹⁷

¹⁵Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," p. 13.

¹⁶Ronald W. Hepburn, "Mysticism, Nature and Assessment of" in Paul Edwards, Editor-in-Chief, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. Five (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), p. 429.

¹⁷Ibid.

We might for a moment return to a consideration of Zaehner's position. As we have seen earlier, Zaehner does not believe that nature mysticism has any real religious value. For him it is a "profane" type of mysticism, which he labels "panenhenism" (all-is-one-ism). He holds that nature mysticism arises from the mystic's desire to disperse himself into the objective world of nature.¹⁸ Zaehner seems somewhat puzzled by the experiences of the nature mystic. In an attempt to find a more satisfactory solution, he examines Jung's early view that the state of the nature mystic is triggered by "a dim memory of childhood, that state of consciousness not yet born in which the infant is still unable to distinguish itself from the mother who gave it life and who continues to maintain it alive."¹⁹

As Zaehner goes on to describe this theory:

This nature mysticism then, according to this school of psychology, is nothing more than an attempt to realize a prenatal and prehistoric state. The commonest symbols of mysticism--the sea, the air, trees, water--are nothing more than symbols of the eternal feminine both in mythology and psychology; and the mystical experience, figured in practically all mystical traditions as a drop of water or a river dissolving into the sea, is simply a sign of infantilism in the adult, the desire to be unconscious once again in the security of the womb, a desire that the adult must overcome if he is ever to grow up at all.²⁰

¹⁸Zaehner, p. 168.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 39-40

²⁰Ibid., p. 40.

Although he finds some attraction in this early theory which Jung shared with Freud, Zaehner ultimately rejects it as insufficient. He believes that Jung's later theories concerning the collective unconscious and the existence of the anima and animus as alter-egos might provide more fruitful explanations, but he does not attempt an analysis along these lines.²¹

As we have already seen, Zaehner's denial that nature mysticism is of a religious quality is shared by some other Catholic writers on the subject of religious experience. They are uneasy with nature mysticism, since it seems to have little or nothing to do with institutionalized religion. Since Catholic writers wish to hold that true religious mysticism is a gift of divine grace, they have problems with granting religious status to a form of mysticism which derives its impetus from the natural world.

There are other Christian writers who do not hesitate to find true religious significance in the experience of the nature mystic. Poet W. H. Auden is a case in point:

Though the Vision of Dame Kind [nature mysticism] is not specifically Christian, there is nothing in it incompatible with the Christian belief in a God who created the material universe and all its creatures out of love and found them good: the glory in which the creatures appear to the natural mystic must be a feeble approximation to their glory as God sees them. There is nothing to prevent him from welcoming it as a gift, however indirect from God.²²

²¹Ibid.

²²Auden, p. 386.

Despite his approval of the nature mystic's experiences, however, Auden points out two potential dangers that might face the nature mystic. The first of these is that the mystic might come to mistake the encounter with a creature in nature for an encounter with deity. This mistake could lead to "animism, polytheism, idols and magic." The second danger is that the mystic might come "to idolize the experience itself," so that he tries to prolong the experience by means of drugs or alcohol.²³

Evelyn Underhill provides what is perhaps the most profound religious justification for nature mysticism. She holds that nature mysticism is a discovery of the immanence of the divine in the natural world. She goes on to assert that

this characteristically immanental discovery . . . occurs chiefly in two classes: in unlettered men who have lived close to nature, and to whom her symbols are more familiar than those of the churches or the schools, and in temperaments of the mixed or mystical type who are nearer to the poet than to the true contemplative, for whom as a rule the Absolute hath no image."²⁴

The nature mystic discovers the divine through nature, rather than beyond nature. Underhill is correct in identifying nature mysticism as "sacramental perception." In her own words:

The flowery garment of the world is for some mystics a medium of ineffable perception, a source of exalted joy, the veritable clothing of God. I hardly add that such a state of things has always been found incredible by

²³Ibid., p. 387.

²⁴Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 191-192.

common sense. "The tree which moves some to tears of joy," says Blake, who possessed in an eminent degree this form of sacramental perception, "is in the Eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way."²⁵

We shall argue that Underhill's term "sacramental perception" offers the best concept for understanding the experience of the nature mystic. Upon examining quotations from the nature mystics themselves, one cannot help but be impressed by the fact that they often express a sense of an all-pervasive presence or unity in nature. It is usually quite obvious that their concern is not really with nature itself, but rather with a reality discerned in and through nature. The things of the natural world become for the nature mystic what the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer describes as "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace."²⁶ This well-known quotation from Wordsworth is a case in point:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., p. 191.

²⁶The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1977), p. 857.

²⁷Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, p. 92.

It is important to notice here that there is no desire on the part of the mystic to disperse himself into the objective world of nature. It appears then that Zaehner's attempt at an explanation will not work in this case.²⁸ Wordsworth's perception is one of a spiritual presence that includes the world of nature and transcends it. Underhill's term "sacramental perception" would seem to provide the appropriate interpretation.

As another example, let us consider the writings of a particularly fascinating nature mystic, Richard Jefferies. While Jefferies rejected the idea of a personal God and would have nothing to do with organized religion, which he considered little more than superstition, he nevertheless was the recipient of some vivid mystical experiences in nature. The following is an account of just one of many examples:

One midsummer I went out of the road into the fields, and sat down on the grass between the yellowing wheat and the green hawthorne bushes, The sun burned in the sky, the wheat was full of a luxuriant sense of growth, the grass high, the earth giving its vigour to tree and leaf, the heaven blue. The vigour and growth, the warmth and light, the beauty and richness of it entered into me; an ecstasy of soul accompanied the delicate excitement of the senses: the soul rose with the body. Rapt in the fullness of the moment, I prayed there with all that expansion of mind and frame; no words, no definition, inexpressible desire of physical life, of soul-life,

²⁸Zaehner argues that Wordsworth was not really a mystic, since what he felt in nature was not an experience of unity, but rather a "dim perception" of a "unifying principle" (Zaehner, p. 35). It is difficult to understand how anyone could doubt Wordsworth's having a deeply felt mystical experience.

equal to and beyond the highest imagining of my heart.²⁹

The many experiences of Jefferies led him to attempt something of a theology for himself:

I conclude that there is an existence, a something higher than soul--higher, better, and more perfect than deity. Earnestly, I pray to find this something better than a god. There is something superior, higher, more good. For this I search, labour, think, and pray. With the whole force of my existence, with the whole force of my thought, mind, and soul, I pray to find this Highest Soul, this greater than deity, this better than god. Give me to live the deepest soul-life now and always with this Soul. For want of words I write soul, but I think that it is something beyond soul.³⁰

This certainly is a curious theological position for an atheist to hold. One is reminded of Paul Tillich's writing of the "God above the God of theism."³¹ For Dom Cuthbert Butler, Jefferies recalls the words of Dionysius: "the all-transcending super-essentially super-existing super-deity."³² Certainly Jefferies may be seen as a religious mystic malgre-lui. We should note that Jefferies' accounts of his experiences, like those of Wordsworth, in no way indicate any desire for the mystic to dissipate himself into the natural world.

²⁹Jefferies as quoted by Dom Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism (London: Constable, 1926), p. 231.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 186.

³²Butler, p. 232.

A particularly intriguing aspect of Jefferies' thoughts concerning his experiences is that he at no time entertains any inclination to deify nature itself. Quite to the contrary, he sometimes seems to take a negative view of nature. As Zaehner describes Jefferies' attitude to nature:

Nature is totally indifferent to the lot of man, and the rapture Jefferies derives from the contemplation of it, he derives, as he believes, from quite another source. The earth, the sea, the sun, and the trees, all of which are the "matter" of his raptures, are, as objective entities, not only indifferent but hostile. For a "nature mystic," the occasion for whose ecstasies were precisely the sun, the sea, and the earth, Jefferies has refreshingly few illusions.³³

As a third and final example of nature mysticism, we might examine the experience of R. M. Bucke, author of the pioneering work concerning religious experience, entitled Cosmic Consciousness. Bucke's experience is of particular interest, since it involves certain alleged metaphysical revelations. As Bucke describes his own experience from a third-person point of view:

It was in the early spring of his thirty-sixth year. He and two friends had spent the evening reading Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and especially Whitman. They parted at midnight, and he had a long drive in a hansom. . . . He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around as it were by a flame-colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some sudden conflagration in the great city; the next, he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense

³³Zaehner, p. 46.

joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. . . . Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of everyone is in the long run absolutely certain. He claims that he learned more within the few seconds during which the illumination lasted than in previous months or even years of study, and that he learned much that no study could ever have taught.³⁴

From a Whiteheadian standpoint, Bucke's revelation that there is no "dead matter" is particularly of interest. We might recall that the rejection of the notion of dead matter is one of the major themes in Whitehead's philosophy. It appears obvious that this insight which Whitehead achieved through philosophical speculation was gained by Bucke through mystical intuition.

It is important to note that in the three examples of nature mysticism which we have examined, there is no indication of desire on the part of the mystics to disperse their egos into the natural world; neither is there any attempt to deify nature as such. In all three examples, we see rather a discernment of divine presence in nature. This presence is not identical to nature; rather, nature is seen as the vehicle through which the divine presence manifests itself. While it may be possible to provide examples of experiences

³⁴Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., Cosmic Consciousness (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1923), pp. 9-10.

which conform to Zaehner's description of "panenhenism," none of the cases we have examined appear to do so. Underhill's description of such experiences as examples of "sacramental perception" appears to be much more appropriate for understanding the accounts of Wordsworth, Jefferies, and Bucke. W. T. Stace reveals a similar understanding when he writes that

The extrovertive mystics see the world around them, the grass, the trees, the animals, and sometimes "inanimate" objects such as rocks and mountains as God-impregnated, or as shining from within with the light of a life which is one and the same life flowing through all things.³⁵

Having examined these experiences of nature mystics, we might ask ourselves what kind of metaphysical undergirding is needed to explain this particular way of perceiving the world in relation to God. Many nature mystics have lacked the kind of philosophical sophistication that might have provided them with more precise terms for describing their experiences. Often they show a tendency to waver between theistic and pantheistic language. As Stace has pointed out, nature mystics sometimes seem to hold to the paradoxical position that the world both is identical with God and yet distinct from God.³⁶ What are we to make of this theistic-pantheistic tension that has driven many commentators on religious experience to a state of despair?

³⁵W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1960), pp. 219-220.

³⁶Ibid., p. 212.

Let us consider once again Hartshorne's interpretation of Whitehead's theism as a panentheism. It would seem that here we are provided with a metaphysical model which serves admirably to explain the experience of the nature mystic and to resolve the tension between theism on one hand and pantheism on the other. For Hartshorne, God includes the world in himself at the same time that he transcends the world as a being in his own right. Nature may be perceived then, as in Underhill's phrase, "the veritable clothing of God."³⁷ Hartshorne's interpretation of Whitehead's theism can serve to undergird the notion of nature mysticism as "sacramental perception." At the same time, Hartshorne provides no justification for the deifying of nature in and of itself. We might remember that nature mystics like Jefferies are most explicit in affirming that it is a higher reality in and through nature--not nature itself--which is experienced by the mystic. For the nature mystic as for Hartshorne, nature serves as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality.

II. NATURALISM

As a second response to nature, we shall examine naturalism. We shall first attempt to define naturalism, we shall then examine the naturalistic arguments to the effect that religious experiences have no cognitive value, and finally we shall examine the attempts

³⁷Underhill, Mysticism, p. 191.

of some "Neo-Whiteheadians" to transform Whitehead's system into a thoroughly naturalized, nontheistic system. At this point we shall raise the question as to just what religious experience can mean in this kind of context.

Broadly speaking, naturalism is defined as the belief that nothing exists outside the realm of nature. This definition implies a rejection on the part of naturalists of any belief in the existence of God, unless the word God is redefined in such a way that deity is equated with some principle, value, or process discerned as working in the natural world. Our definition of naturalism implies a rejection of supernaturalism. The naturalist repudiates the traditional two-world understanding of supernaturalism, which holds that there is a transcendent spiritual world operating in conjunction with the world of natural processes, and somehow interacting with it.³⁸

Some naturalists have considered themselves religious in a nontheistic and often humanistic way. These "religious naturalists" often have advocated a transference of religious feeling to some more natural focus of concern than deity. Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century provides a good example of such an attempt. In his writings, Comte advocates a religion dedicated to the service of humanity, with services of worship patterned after those of the Roman Catholic tradition. As William P. Alston describes one such service:

³⁸William P. Alston, "Religion, Naturalistic Reconstruction of," in Paul Edwards, Editor-in-Chief, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. Seven (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), p. 145.

. . . in the analogue of baptism, the sacrament of presentation, the parents would dedicate their child to the service of humanity in an impressive public ceremony. Public observances were to be reinforced by the regular practice of private prayer, on which Comte laid the greatest stress. A person was to pray four times daily, with each prayer divided into a commemorative and purificatory part. In the first part one would invoke some great benefactor of humanity; by reflecting greatly on his deeds, one would be inspired to follow his example, and one's love of humanity would then be quickened. The purificatory part would give solemn expression to the noble desires thereby evoked; in it the individual would dedicate himself to the service of humanity.³⁹

Comte's new religion would include rituals, festivals, and a calendar of "saints" who have made a contribution to humanity. While a few churches devoted to Comte's religion of humanity were erected, none of them have managed to endure. In the twentieth century such philosophers as John Dewey and Julian Huxley have advocated that religious feeling be channelled in a naturalistic way.⁴⁰

Many naturalists do not share the desire of the "religious naturalists" to reconstruct religion along naturalistic lines. Some would simply prefer dropping religion altogether as representing an outmoded phase of man's cultural evolution.

As a general rule, the attitude that naturalists take toward nature is a study in contrast to the attitude taken by the nature mystic. While the mystic experiences a unity with nature in the form of an all-pervasive presence flowing through it, the naturalist

³⁹Ibid., p. 146.

⁴⁰Ibid.

usually assumes an aloof attitude based upon the ideal of scientific objectivity. He seeks to understand nature purely by means of the scientific method. At times this stance may be somewhat deceptive. Although naturalists tend to give the impression of being ametaphysical, the truth is that the basic assumptions upon which most naturalists would agree are of a metaphysical nature; as such, they are no more scientifically substantiated than the assumption of alternate metaphysical systems.⁴¹ Rem B. Edwards lists the following assumptions as the "family traits" of naturalism:

(1) only nature exists, (2) nature as a whole is nonpersonal, (3) the basic stuff of nature is eternal and necessary, (4) all natural events have natural causes, (5) only scientific method yields knowledge, and (6) ethics and the humanistic philosophy of man are adequate.⁴²

It is important that we understand the underlying assumptions of naturalism if we are to deal with the two primary arguments that naturalists often give for rejecting the claims that religious experiences contain a cognitive content. The first such argument is that vivid religious experiences are of a non-veridical character; like dreams and hallucinations, they have nothing to tell us about the nature of reality. Often naturalists hold that religious experience is non-veridical because it is private.⁴³

⁴¹Rem B. Edwards, Reason and Religion: An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 141.

⁴²Ibid., p. 138.

⁴³Ibid., p. 318.

Since the naturalist assumes that nothing transcending nature exists, he must hold that religious experience is something other than what it is taken to be by the masses. Certainly if there is no God to experience, then religious experience cannot be interpreted as an encounter with the divine. The desire to label certain kinds of private experience as non-veridical also appears to rest upon an underlying assumption that only public, shared experiences can tell us anything about reality. While this principle may be upheld as true from the perspective of a naturalistic metaphysics, there is some evidence from other perspectives that the principle is false.

From the standpoint of Jungian psychology, for example, dreams are interpreted as symbolic communications which tell us much, both about our own inner selves and about an underlying religious reality. As one Jungian describes how Jung himself came to this insight:

He [Jung] saw that if he were to allow his patients' dream experiences to speak for themselves as facts, then he had to treat his own dreams in the same way. As he did, it became evident how little was actually known about the contents of the unconscious and the almost incredible realm that was opened. . . . From this fact came the certainty that reality, and frequently the best of reality, is found in these depths. This is also reality that demands a religious attitude from man, and it is found only when he allows himself to be led by the thinking of the unconscious, symbolic thinking that can be found in fantasy and dream, and myth and story.⁴⁴

It is not our concern here to inquire into the intricacies of Jungian psychology, but the Jungians provide a challenge to the

⁴⁴Morton T. Kelsey, God, Trearms, and Revelation: A Christian Interpretation of Dreams (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), pp. 198-199.

naturalistic assumption that private experiences are non-veridical. For the Jungian, dreams and visions are entranceways into the unconscious, which is also the realm of religious reality. Like many mystics of the introvertive type, Jung held that the way to God is from within. John B. Cobb makes much the same kind of claim from a Whiteheadian perspective in holding that "The foundation of all experience, certainly the experience of God, lies in the non-sensual prehension of individual entities."⁴⁵ He goes on to affirm the possibility of mental telepathy, and holds that we can understand God to speak to man "according to the same principle of the immediate impression of meanings upon the human occasion. . . ."⁴⁶

Cobb focuses upon dreams as providing a proper analogy:

That experience of this type is nonsensuous does not mean that it may not be accompanied by sense experience. The analogy of dreams may be considered. In dreams new stimulation of eyes and ears by the outside world is not what is productive of the dream experience. . . . Dreams are to be understood as primarily nonsensuous experiences in the sense that they derive from nonsensuous perceptions. Nevertheless, we can and do describe the content of dreams in sensuous terms. . . .⁴⁷

Cobb goes on to assert that "the direct impression of a meaning by God upon the human occasion might stimulate physiological activity such that there would be accompanying experiences of

⁴⁵Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 240.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 241.

vision or audition."⁴⁸ Therefore, according to Cobb, we cannot rule out the possibility that such experiences as dreams and visions may provide channels through which God communicates to man. The point is that our underlying metaphysical assumptions determine what we consider possible. What is considered non-veridical from a naturalistic perspective may be understood, from a Jungian or Whiteheadian perspective, to provide significant cognitive content. We must be careful not to turn our metaphysical biases into ironclad dogmas. The naturalistic contention that religious experience is non-veridical is convincing only to the extent that one shares the metaphysical assumptions of the naturalist.

A second argument often advanced by naturalists is that religious experience tells us nothing because the recipients simply read into the experience their own religious beliefs and presuppositions. In dealing with this argument, we must first admit that there is some truth to be found in it. We have noted earlier that often religious experiences are described in terms of the particular beliefs of the recipient ("ramifications," to use Smart's term). We have also found agreement with Katz that one's beliefs may actually play a role in shaping the experience itself. Nevertheless, despite these concessions to the naturalist's position, it would seem that there is some content which cannot be accounted for on the basis of individual religious beliefs. After we have removed the

⁴⁸Ibid.

interpretation from the experience in an attempt to understand the experience itself, and even after we have allowed for some shaping of the experience by one's particular religious convictions, there remains some "given" by which the experience may be identified with certain categories of religious experience that are universal.

In this study we have divided religious experience into the two broad categories of mysticism and numinous encounter. We have then proceeded to do even more categorizing, for example, in making a distinction between nature mysticism and other types. It is important to note that these categories are universal. Persons given to each particular category of experience may easily be cited from many different geographical locations and historical periods. We have emphasized that the mystical experience of an all-encompassing unity, and the numinous experience of standing in awe and fear of an "Other" infinitely greater than oneself are universal types that transcend differences in time, geography, and culture. It would be difficult indeed to account for these standard "archetypes" of experience on the basis of particular religious traditions and convictions. On the basis of these considerations, this second naturalistic argument begins to appear naive and overly simplistic.

The naturalistic arguments against interpreting religious experience as a source of knowledge are, like the naturalistic worldview taken as a whole, the products of certain underlying metaphysical assumptions. Although naturalists like to give the impression that their tenets are grounded in scientific knowledge, we have taken

the position that the metaphysical undergirding of naturalism is no more scientifically substantiated than other rival options. Much of the popularity of naturalistic philosophies, however, would seem to derive from their appeal to science, an appeal that has sometimes been branded "scientism" by some of naturalism's critics.

It is not surprising, considering the prevalence of naturalistic philosophies in our present-day Western culture, that someone would eventually attempt a naturalization of Whitehead's system. Whitehead himself took a modest view of his metaphysics, encouraging eventual revision and modification. As a result of this modesty, Whiteheadians are a varied lot, sometimes emphasizing some portions of the system at the expense of others, and often advocating major revisions. As William L. Reese has aptly remarked concerning the present situation:

The enemies of process philosophy simply leave Whitehead's system alone, maintaining a dignified silence about man's last effort to frame a system of metaphysics in the grand manner. But Whitehead's friends have little disposition to leave the system alone. Each improves it according to his taste. We are given neo-Whiteheadian analyses in which we have Whitehead without God, Whitehead with substance reintroduced, Whitehead with Anselmic overtones, and Whitehead without feeling. Scarcely anyone interested in the system is content merely to accept it intact.⁴⁹

The possibility of naturalizing the system was perhaps first voiced by Victor Lowe in his classic study of Whitehead:

⁴⁹William L. Reese, "Process Philosophy and Metaphysics," in Robert E. Wood, Ed., The Future of Metaphysics (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), p. 50.

The experiment of naturalizing Whitehead's metaphysics of nature might well be tried. The idea has long been attractive to a few students of Whitehead, but I know of no attempt to carry it out full-scale.⁵⁰

These words of Lowe became an inspiration to Donald W. Sherburne of Vanderbilt University, who quotes them as an epigraph to his article "Whitehead without God." Sherburne states in the article that he is in the process of carrying through the project of a complete naturalization of Whitehead's system. He goes on to suggest particular ways in which Whitehead's philosophy might be altered to eliminate the concept of God, which he believes to be outmoded and unnecessary. Theologically, Sherburne is in agreement with Paul M. Van Buren, one of the "Death of God" theologians. Sherburne holds with Van Buren

that the essence of Christianity is an ethical message about how to live a life and that "God" talk is a dated, misleading, unhelpful, obscure way of saying what Christianity wants to say about what it is to be a man and to live a moral life.⁵¹

In a more recent article entitled "Decentering Whitehead," Sherburne takes up the same theme. He correctly understands the naturalizing of Whitehead's system to involve a transition from a cosmic center (God) to all the many individual finite centers

⁵⁰Lowe, p. 88.

⁵¹Donald W. Sherburne, "Whitehead without God," in Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reese, Eds., Process Philosophy and Christian Thought (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 305-306.

of value making up the world.⁵² In making this change, it would appear that Sherburne sacrifices Whitehead's unique balance between pluralism and monism (at least in Hartshorne's interpretation) for a radical pluralism.

Certainly the system Sherburne outlines would appear to have the consistence and coherence required for a metaphysical system. As a rival metaphysics it might hold up very well. Yet it is far removed from Whitehead's original intention. As Norman Pittenger has written concerning this point:

Theoretically it might be possible to construct a "process metaphysic," largely along Whiteheadian lines, which would not require a concept of deity; but this would not be Whitehead's metaphysic but another one. Despite the argument of Donald Sherburne, in his essay "Whitehead without God," God is no mere addendum to his metaphysic. . . . He is the necessary reason for novelty in the creative advance, through his supplying of new "initial aims"; he is the "chief exemplification" of the principles required to make sense of the world and not an unnecessary feature stuck on as a pious addition but with no indispensable function; he is the lure in and behind all "prehensions"; he is the ultimate recipient of the achievements in creation as well as the chief . . . causative agency. To drop God from Whitehead's metaphysical vision is to fail in respect to the integrity of that vision--which was all that Whitehead claimed his metaphysic to be. It would be to substitute another vision for Whitehead's own.⁵³

Sherburne would be the first to admit that he is not an orthodox Whiteheadian; he uses the term "Neo-Whiteheadian," as do certain other writers whose views are similar. Nevertheless, we might recall

⁵²Donald W. Sherburne, "Decentering Whitehead," Process Studies 15 (Summer 1986), p. 83.

⁵³Pittenger, p. 131.

that Whitehead's system was constructed partly to combat a sterile "scientistic" worldview in which religious and aesthetic feelings are sold short and value is divorced from science. In making the kind of transition Sherburne advocates, one might find himself falling into the same trap Whitehead's original system was intended to get him out of.

We are not concerned here with the reasons Sherburne advances for preferring a naturalistic and nontheistic metaphysic over Whitehead's original system. Since our proper concern is religious experience, we might ask ourselves how such phenomena as mystical rapture and numinous encounter might be interpreted from the standpoint of a naturalized reworking of Whitehead's system. We might recall that Whitehead considered religious experience to be exactly what most persons understand it to be, an experience of the divine, however differently that concept may be understood by different persons in different cultural settings. Since in Sherburne's naturalized system there is no divine to experience, then obviously another explanation seems to be in order. Although he does not go into great detail, Sherburne provides a clue as to how he might begin to deal with our concern:

Interestingly, I think, my decentered process metaphysics nevertheless has a strong religious thrust to it, in precisely Whitehead's sense of "religious." In Whitehead's view there is a sharp conceptual distinction between being religious and being a theist. As Whitehead says in Religion in the Making, the basic religious intuition is the insight that there is a "character of permanent rightness" that permeates the nature of things; as he notes, however,

"There is a large concurrence in the negative doctrine that this religious experience does not include any direct intuition of a definite person, or individual" (Ch. II, Sect. II). The challenge is to ground the intuition of permanent rightness in the general categories one uses for an understanding of reality, i.e., so to relate the intuition to the structures of the real that its integration into those structures validates the intuition while giving it specific content.⁵⁴

This passage as an explanation for religious experience seems to leave much to be desired. In the first place, it is understandable that an intuition of "rightness" might be sufficient to account for the relatively mild experiences which Maslow labels "peak" experiences, and which we in the first chapter designated as "religiously ambiguous" experiences. This explanation seems a weak one indeed, however for dealing with the kind of vivid experiences reported by outstanding religious figures in history. Secondly, without a center of reality, what ground do we have for judging "the nature of things" to be essentially "right"? Indeed, what ground do we have for judging anything right or wrong apart from our own arbitrary opinions? Thirdly, while it is true that Whitehead holds that religious experience does not include a direct intuition of divine personhood, it is also true that for Whitehead the experience does derive from a personal divinity. Whitehead holds that the personhood of God is a correct inference from the experience. For Whitehead, there is a real, objective basis for religious experience, and without this "grounding," there would be no such experience.

⁵⁴Sherburne, "Decentering Whitehead," p. 84.

Sherburne's attempt to replace religion (at least in the theistic sense) with a humanistic ethics simply does not leave us with the kind of grounding which religious experience taken as a "given" seems to require. Like other naturalists, Sherburne must reduce religious experience to some lesser status than it is given by Whitehead. If it cannot be an experience of the divine, it must be an experience of something else, whether brought about by the functioning of our own psyches or by some purely natural object, principle, or force operating in the world.

Another "Neo-Whiteheadian," Nancy Frankenberry has attempted a detailed naturalistic interpretation of religious experience, using Whiteheadian terms and concepts. Her insights seem to complement and expand upon those of Sherburne. As Frankenberry defines religious experience:

Religious experience can be defined in the broadest sense as an emergent from the fusion of physical and conceptual feelings wherein both poles of the individual's feelings are embedded in a wide generality of relationships and reflect the primacy of the physical.⁵⁵

Frankenberry notes that her definition "carries no mystical connotations," and she appeals to Whitehead's dictum that "in human nature there is no separate function as a religious sense (RM 123)."⁵⁶

⁵⁵Nancy Frankenberry, "The Empirical Dimension of Religious Experience," Process Studies 8 (Winter 1978), p. 260.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Frankenberry proposes to identify God with the "totality."⁵⁷ Religious experience then becomes, in her words, "an integral fusion, a response to the whole appetitive, emotional, and conceptual life of the individual to a sense of the value of the universe in its totality and its diverse parts."⁵⁸ This assertion may be understood as roughly equivalent to Sherburne's insistence that religious experience is an intuition of "rightness." Although Frankenberry's analysis is complex and profound, she brings us no nearer to a solution for the problems we encountered in examining the position of Sherburne.

Although the naturalist attempts to evoke a positive impression with his analyses, philosophers of a more optimistic persuasion continue to find naturalism a sterile and unattractive option. William James' reaction to naturalism is typical of this attitude:

For naturalism . . . mankind is in a position similar to that of a set of people living on a frozen lake, surrounded by cliffs over which there is no escape, yet knowing that little by little the ice is melting, and the inevitable day drawing near when the last film of it will disappear, and to be drowned ignominiously will be the human creature's portion. The merrier the skating, the warmer and more sparkling the sun by day, and the ruddier the bonfires at night, the more poignant the sadness with which one must take in the meaning of the total situation.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Nancy Frankenberry, "The Emergent Paradigm and Divine Causation," Process Studies 13 (Fall 1983), p. 202.

⁵⁸Frankenberry, "The Empirical Dimension of Religious Experience," p. 261.

⁵⁹James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 124.

We have already recognized the close affinity between the views of Whitehead and James concerning religious experience, and we have suggested that James' work on religious experience might well have been a major influence upon Whitehead's thinking. It is likely that Whitehead's reaction to naturalism would have been similar to that of James. It is also likely that Whitehead would find a naturalistic interpretation of his metaphysics a radical departure from his original intentions and an inadequate context for explaining religious experience.

III. CONCLUSION

Nature mysticism and naturalism considered as two responses to nature provide an interesting contrast. While the former derives from a sense of unity with nature, the latter, taking its cue from science, appears to foster a detached, objective attitude toward nature.

Nature mysticism reveals certain peculiarities which set it apart from other forms of religious experience. While mystics of the introvertive type seem to transcend the world of nature in their experiences, the nature mystic experiences a sense of unity with nature and discerns an all-pervasive unifying principle within it. Nature mysticism, unlike other forms of mysticism, entertains a strong sense of religious awe more typical of the numinous encounter.

R. C. Zaehner has argued that nature mysticism or "panenhenism" is a profane or nonreligious form of mysticism in that the mystic

seeks to disperse himself into the natural world. We have argued in opposition to Zaehner that the nature mystic more typically expresses the experience of an all-pervasive divinity. As a result, we have opted for Underhill's interpretation of nature mysticism as "sacramental perception."

While to some writers on the subject of religious experience, a paradox arises due to the wavering of nature mystics between theistic and pantheistic language, we have argued that a Hartshornean interpretation of Whitehead's theism as a "panentheism" can resolve this paradox. For Hartshorne, God includes the world at the same time that he is a being in his own right. This scheme seems to provide a perfect model for understanding the claims of the nature mystic.

The naturalist, in sharp contrast to the nature mystic for whom the world is saturated by the divine, discerns a world from which the divine is absent. Only the natural world is held to exist. The naturalist denies any claims the mystic would make concerning a cognitive dimension to his experiences. We have examined the naturalistic arguments in this regard.

Whitehead's system was designed to explain the full range of our experiences, including those of a religious and aesthetic nature. For Whitehead, religious experience is an experience of the divine. We have briefly examined some attempts to naturalize Whitehead's metaphysics, noting that such a radical departure from Whitehead's original intention would necessitate alternative ways of interpreting religious experience. Certainly Whitehead's original system is

more adequate than the naturalistic reworkings for providing an account of religious experience.

CHAPTER V

IN SUMMATION

The thesis of this study is that Whitehead incorporates the data provided by religious experience to produce a system with the capacity to explain the full range of such experiences. The study begins with a consideration of the role played by religious experience in the actual formation of the cosmological system. For Whitehead, although religious and moral intuitions are given a place of great importance, they nevertheless are considered to constitute "somewhat exceptional elements in our conscious experience" (PR 343). Religious and ethical intuitions, because of their emotional and personal nature, prove somewhat elusive in doing metaphysics. For this reason, Whitehead does not use religious experience as a basis for developing his doctrine of God; rather, he develops a doctrine in which God is presented as the "chief exemplification" of his metaphysical principles. Religious experience serves as a means, however, by which Whitehead identifies his philosophical doctrine of God with that reality which is discerned and venerated in the great religions of the world.

While God is prehended in each and every occasion of experience making up the world, the divine presence ordinarily does not call attention to itself. God usually remains anonymous in human experience for at least four reasons: (1) Prehensions of God occur

in the early phases of the concrescence of an occasion, the phases which Whitehead designates as constituting the mode of causal efficacy, so that our experience of God precedes conscious awareness; (2) Our prehensions of God make up only part of those prehensions to be integrated in the concrescence of the occasion; (3) Since God is constantly experienced, there is no contrasting absence by which the experience of God may be brought to the level of consciousness; and (4) the initial aim directs us toward the best possibility for actualization, rather than toward God himself. This quality of anonymity on the part of God can only be overcome by a muting or silencing of our worldly prehensions so that our prehensions of the divine are able to "stand out" in bold relief. This is exactly what happens in religious experiences of a vivid, dramatic type.

Since God is part of the data incorporated into every experience, there is a sense in which every experience is of a religious nature. In the first chapter a typology of experience was developed according to the intensity of the presence of God felt: (1) Mundane experience is that in which there is no recognition of religious content; (2) "Religiously ambiguous" experiences are those in which there is an intimation of some transcendent reality, although the anonymity of God is maintained (Maslow's "peak experiences" are of this type); the full-blown or vivid religious experience is that in which the divine content stands out in a dramatic way.

The second chapter was devoted largely to examining some religious disciplines by means of which a muting or silencing of worldly prehensions may be brought about, allowing the presence of God to be felt distinctly. Many of the traditional ascetic practices employed by the great world religions appear to be techniques designed for accomplishing this purpose. Anything which can bring about such a muting or silencing can open the way for a conscious and vivid experience of the divine. While chemical substances may not provide the best means of achieving an experience, we nevertheless cannot rule out their possible efficacy in this regard. In this discussion, we have been critical of the tendency of Christian theologians to pay a "metaphysical compliment" to God by attributing solely to him the power to initiate a vivid religious experience. This traditional one-way path between God and man, when seen from a "process" vantage point, becomes a two-way path. Likewise, the traditional demarcations between the natural and the supernatural belong to a "supernaturalist" worldview, and lose their power to convince when seen from a "process" perspective.

The third chapter of this study is devoted to an examination of those vivid experiences making up the third category of our typology. Ninian Smart's distinction between numinous encounter and mystical experience is helpful in discerning a polarity within religious experiences of a dramatic nature. While the mystical experience is one of unity and sameness, sometimes culminating in what is described as a merging of identities, numinous encounter

is characterized by a sense of "Otherness." The subject of the experience feels estranged and insignificant in the presence of a divine "Other" who is felt to be infinitely greater and more powerful. While mystical experience evokes a response of meditation and contemplation, numinous encounter evokes a response of corporate worship. Although both types of spirituality may be found in all the major religions, one type usually predominates in each. As a general rule, Eastern religions stress the mystical, while Western traditions tend toward the numinous.

Ian G. Barbour in his Myths, Models, and Paradigms implies that Whitehead's system may best serve as a model for understanding experiences of the numinous type. We have argued that the system may serve equally well as a model for understanding mystical experience. Whitehead's doctrine of the di-polarity of God and Harts-horne's reworking of Whitehead's theism as a panentheism provides us with a system that is broad enough to serve as a context in which the full range of religious experience may be explained. It can also enable us to harmonize religious intuitions that previously have been judged as contradictory.

In the fourth chapter we have proceeded to consider a kind of religious experience which presents special problems. Nature mysticism is a most controversial form of spirituality. Theologians sometimes dismiss it as having no real religious significance at all. Sometimes nature mystics are accused to deifying nature; at other times they are accused of desiring to disperse their egos

within the natural world. We have argued that Underhill's term "sacramental perception" is most appropriate for this kind of mysticism, since the nature mystic most often discerns the realm of nature as an outward and visible symbol of an inward and spiritual reality. Nature mysticism as religious experience may be seen as something of a hybrid. Like other mystics, the nature mystic feels a sense of unity and oneness, but there is an accompanying sense of awe and wonder more typical of numinous encounter. Unlike other mystics, the nature mystic does not transcend the world of nature, but experiences the divine in and through it.

Whitehead's love for the English Romantic poets is reason to think that he felt a special affinity for this type of spirituality. Hartshorne's interpretation of Whitehead's theism as a panentheism provides the perfect model for interpreting this kind of experience, in that it explains the nature mystics' tendency to alternate between theistic and pantheistic language in attempting to describe their experiences.

A much different way of responding to nature from that of the nature mystic is found in naturalism. While nature mysticism delights in oneness with nature, naturalism fosters an objective attitude toward nature borrowed from science. Despite the naturalists' distaste for metaphysics and their desire to create an impression of scientific objectivity, their philosophical viewpoint is founded upon certain metaphysical assumptions that are no more scientifically established than rival options. "Neo-Whiteheadian" attempts to reduce Whitehead's

system to a naturalistic one stripped of its doctrine of God are such radical departures from Whitehead's original intention that they amount to attempts to transplant another metaphysic for that of Whitehead. Such naturalistic systems are inadequate for explaining the phenomenon of religious experience.

Those who embark upon research concerning religious experience will be impressed by the abundance of material available on some aspects of the subject; at the same time they will be disappointed by the paucity of material on others. It is difficult to explain, for example, the relatively little amount of research that has been done on the subject of nature mysticism. This "black sheep" among religious experiences has not received the kind of careful, in-depth scholarship that it deserves. Perhaps someday a full, definitive study of the subject will be undertaken by a competent scholar. Until then the researcher will be confused not only by the lack of work done in this area, but also by the frustrating and often contradictory judgments that are made concerning nature mysticism by writers on the subject of religious experience.

Thanks to Charles Hartshorne and the "process" theologians, there is now much material available concerning Whitehead's doctrine of God, and some of this work relates the doctrine to the dynamics of religious experience. There are still many fruitful avenues open for exploration, however. As just one example, there is a real need for someone to attempt a synthesis of some of the ideas of Whitehead with those of Carl G. Jung. While both thinkers share

the insight that consciousness is only the tip of the mental iceberg, Jung, more than anyone else, has attempted to provide a key to the symbolism of the unconscious and to give an account of the role it plays in myth, ritual, dreams, visions, etc. Since Whitehead never directly deals with these problems, there is a real need to supplement any Whiteheadian interpretation of religious experience with something of this kind.

Finally, there is also a need to examine some of the more exotic manifestations of religious experience in a Whiteheadian context. Experiences popularized by the "charismatic renewal" within the mainstream churches, such as tongue speaking, spiritual healing, etc. need to be explored from a Whiteheadian perspective. The "process" theologians, coming primarily from the tradition of liberal Protestantism have, for the most part, ignored these phenomena.

We can hope that much more valuable work in both the areas of religious experience and Whiteheadian scholarship will be forthcoming.

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