

MYSTICISM AND CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY
CRC/LSN 6th November 2010

Morning Session

1. Julian of Norwich

At one time my mind was led down to the bottom of the sea, and there I saw hills and green valleys looking as if they were covered with moss and seaweed and sand. Then I understood this: that if man or a woman were under the wide waters, as long as he could still see God (and God is with us always), he should be safe in body and soul and take no harm. And over and above this, he would have more cheer and comfort than all the world can tell.

For he wills that we believe we can see him all the time continually, even though it seems to us we see him very little. When we believe this, he helps us all the time to get grace. For his will is to be seen and to be sought, his will is to be waited and trusted.

2. Mary Ward

I was sitting at work with the rest, reciting privately the litany of Our Lady, that she who wore what then I worked might never commit a mortal sin, when there happened a thing of such nature that I knew not, nor ever did know, how to explain it. It appeared wholly divine and came with such force that it annihilated and reduced me to nothing. My strength was extinguished and there was no other operation in me but that which God caused. The sight intellectually of what was done and what was to be fulfilled in me, I willing, of this only was I conscious. Here it was shown to me that I was not to be of the Order of St Clare; some other thing I was to do. What or of what nature I did not see, nor could I guess, only that it was to be a good thing and what God willed. To leave what I loved so much and enjoyed with such sensible contentment, to explore myself to new labours, which then I saw to be very many, to incur the several censures of men, and the great opposition which on all sides would happen: all this afflicted me exceedingly.

Afternoon Session

I. Beverly Lanzetta

It was October 1976, a coastal Autumn filled with early morning fogs that yawned themselves away under the noonday sun ...

I strode across the garden path and up the stairs to the porch, listening to the wood planks creak as I made my way toward the door. Inside the potbelly stove filled the cottage with warm hues, drawing the chill from the un-curtained windows. I remember doing nothing in particular, when all at once I had a piercing inner sight, as if I were jerked clean out of my own reality. In an instant I saw something, something I was not allowed to speak – or rather that I did not know how to speak. The sight came fast, almost too fast for my thoughts to grasp, of our wounded hearts that pour love out in blotchy drabs. I saw how daily we deflect each other from loving for fear of being unloved. We seem unable to fully love; we cannot give ourselves to love. I felt the pain of our 'no', a pain that pierced right into the core of my heart. I knew something about that fear; I had felt it before. It breathed upon my neck, skirting every attempt at evasion. It came right at me; it wanted to consume me. But in an instant, I knew it totally and grasped its essence.

At that moment, it seemed the room in which I was standing ebbed away and I was washed up with the tide onto another shore. My sight, so long cast down by the curtain of convention, was unveiled. I cannot tell you what happened then, for it happened so fast, but I was literally brought to my knees and then to the ground by the intensity of what I witnessed. When the veils of reality parted an intense suffering consumed my body. The wounded heart I saw became everyone's wound, and the sight of this suffering broke open *The Suffering*. In wave after wave, *The Suffering* flowed into me in a tidal wave of pain, passing through the pores of my soul...

In a kaleidoscope of brilliant darkness too immense to comprehend, I was shown the cause of suffering and the nature of suffering. No, *I* was the cause and nature of suffering. Every suffering was my suffering ... Tossed in the whirlwind of human violence, an unbearable pain wracked my heart and throat. I was God suffering. The Holy One suffered; God suffered the suffering. The suffering ravaged my soul. It annihilated me and left me vulnerable and spent. I died in the suffering. I died suffering. There was no me.

2. Elizabeth Gilbert

I fall asleep for a while (Or whatever. In meditation, you can never really be sure if what you think is sleep is actually sleep; sometimes it's just another level of consciousness.) When I awake, or whatever, I can feel this soft blue electrical energy pulsing through my body, in waves. It's a little alarming, but also amazing. I don't know what to do, so I just speak internally to this energy. I say to it, 'I believe in you,' and it magnifies, volumizes, in response. It's frighteningly powerful now, like a kidnapping of the senses. It's humming up from the base of my spine ...The pounding blue energy keeps pitching through my body, and I can hear a sort of thrumming sound in my ears, and it's so mighty now that I actually can't deal with it anymore. It scares me so much that I say to it 'I'm not ready yet!' and snap open my eyes. It all goes away. I'm back in my room again.

.... I don't want to say that what I experienced that Thursday afternoon in India was indescribable, even though it was. I'll try to explain anyway. Simply put, I got pulled through the wormhole of the Absolute, and in that rush I suddenly understood the workings of the universe completely. I left my body, I left the room, I left the planet, I stepped through time and entered the void. I was inside the void, but I also was the void and I was looking at the void, all at the same time. The void was a place of limitless peace and wisdom. The void was conscious and intelligent. The void was God, which means that I was inside God. But not in a gross, physical way ... I just was part of God.

Mysticism & Contemporary Spirituality Bibliography

Titles in bold particularly recommended

David Tacey: The Spirituality Revolution – The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality (Brunner-Routledge)

Gordon Lynch: The New Spirituality – An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the 21st Century (IB Taurus)

Harvey Cox: The Future of Faith (HarperOne)

Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead: The Spiritual Revolution (Blackwell)

Jeremy Carrette & Richard King: Selling Spirituality – The Silent Takeover of Religion (Routledge)

David Hay: Something Out There – The Biology of the Human Spirit (DLT)

Kenneth Wilbur: Integral Spirituality – A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Post-modern World (Integral Books)

Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh & Adrienne Thompson: Church Leavers – Faith Journeys Five Years On (SPCK)

Judy Cannato: Radical Amazement – Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe (Sorin Books)

Judy Cannato: Fields of Compassion – How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life (Sorin Books)

Raimon Panikkar: The Experience of God – Icons of the Mystery (Fortress Press)

Beverly Lanzetta: Emerging Heart – Global Spirituality and the Sacred (Fortress Press)

Anne Hillman: Awakening the Energies of Love – Discovering Fire for the Second Time (Bramble Books)

Diarmuid O'Murchu: Reclaiming Spirituality (Crossroad) plus other titles by same author

John Caputo: On Religion (Routledge)

Leigh Eric Schmidt: Restless Souls – The Making of American Spirituality from Emerson to Oprah (Harper SanFrancisco)

Rachel Kohn: The New Believers – Re-imagining God (Harper Collins)

Ursula King: The Search for Spirituality – Our Global Quest for Meaning and Fulfilment (Canterbury Press)

Ursula King: Christian Mystics – Their Lives and Legacies Through the Ages (HiddenSpring)

Dorothee Soelle: The Silent Cry – Mysticism & Resistance (Fortress Press)

Huston Smith: Why Religion Matters – The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief (Harper SanFrancisco)

Martin Laird: Into the Silent Land – The Practice of Contemplation (DLT)