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# The mystical approach to reality in St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE MYSTICAL APPROACH TO REALITY  
IN  
ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND RAMAKRISHNA

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. The Problem of the Thesis

The problem of this thesis is the investigation of the nature of mysticism as it is represented in St. John of the Cross and in Ramakrishna. The problem will be developed in three stages. First there will be presented a discussion of mysticism according to St. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Christian mystic from Spain. Following this, mysticism will be considered in the context of Ramakrishna, a nineteenth century Hindu mystic. In the final chapter of the thesis mysticism as such will be analyzed directly and presented as a philosophy of mysticism. The components of this philosophy are intended to be sufficiently comprehensive so that they will at least account for the data from Christian and Hindu mysticism as these traditions are exemplified in the mysticism of both St. John and Ramakrishna.

#### 2. Sources

The source material for this thesis is broad in scope. It can be divided into distinct classifications. The first among these is that material dealing directly with St. John of the Cross. The Spanish saint was a prolific writer. Students of his thought and experience are indebted to the work of E. Allison Peers. He has translated The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, using as the basis of his work the earliest documents which were published by those interested in the Spanish mystic. Other than this important collection of St. John's works, this writer has only briefly appealed

to commentaries which provide material for discussion on the Spanish saint.

The second classification of source material is that dealing with Sri Ramakrishna. For students of Hindu mysticism this material is readily attainable. Almost entirely this writer has used The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna which is an English translation of the conversations of Ramakrishna with his disciples as recorded by Mahendranath Gupta, one of the "Master's" most beloved devotees.<sup>1</sup> As an introduction to this work Swami Nikhilananda has written an introduction to the life of Sri Ramakrishna in which an interpretation of the saint's life is offered and various influences on his life are discussed at length.

Third among the classifications of source material are general works on mysticism as such. In this field the authors considered for the most part are those contributing to the notion that mysticism is in reality a universal philosophical position distinct from a discussion of mysticism simply as an aspect of a particular historical religious tradition. Among those whose work has been tempered by the above conviction are Aldous Huxley in The Perennial Philosophy, Rudolph Otto in The Idea of the Holy, Evelyn Underhill in Mysticism, and Friedrich von Hugel in The Mystical Element of Religion.

The final two classifications of source material used for the writing of this thesis are the general areas of Christian and Hindu mysticism. In both these religious traditions basic scriptural writings have been valuable as background material. Otherwise interpretative works on the mystical

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1. Sri Ramakrishna, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. and ed. by Swami Nikhilananda. (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), p. vii.

element in each of these two religious traditions have been consulted. One of the chief exponents of the mystical element in Christianity was William Ralph Inge in Christian Mysticism. In the Hindu tradition the work of S. N. Dasgupta in Hindu Mysticism has been of valuable assistance.

### 3. Scope

The scope of this thesis is outlined by the major problems which are discussed throughout. The problematic approach taken in this consideration of mysticism deals in the main with two basic questions - the question of the sources and validity of mystical knowledge, and the question of the idea of the nature of reality derived in each case from the degree of mystical knowledge which has been attained. In the chapters dealing with St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna this approach is concerned with the way of approach to reality, the mystical epistemology, and the mystical report, in these cases the metaphysics of mysticism. Other aspects of the thought of these two religious figures will not be directly considered unless they have a certain significant bearing on the problems noted above.

In the final chapter, "What is Mysticism?", the discussion is contained by the data of the religious traditions of St. John and Ramakrishna as well as the particular schools of thought they adhered to within their religious traditions. Also as noted above the scope will be determined by the problematic approach to the subject. In this case as well as in the former chapters this approach will be in the context of epistemological and metaphysical inquiry.

### 4. The Methodology of the Thesis

The methodology of this thesis is manifest in the development of the argument which is carried forward along the lines of two basic problems:

the question of knowledge and the fruits of this knowledge known in experience and expressed in a view of the nature of reality. Throughout, the argument in this thesis will follow the same general outline. It will be empirical; that is, on the basis of data of experience and of knowledge which is investigated will a theory of reality be formulated. In terms of both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna the investigation will commence with a discussion of their respective theories of knowledge; in both cases it will conclude with a presentation of the metaphysical conclusions derived from these theories. Although no specific mystic will be considered in the final chapter, the methodology will be the same.

## CHAPTER II

### ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

#### 1. Biographical Statement

##### i. Outline and Interpretation of Life

St. John of the Cross, whose family name was Juan de Yepes, was born at Fontiveros, Spain, in the year 1542.<sup>1</sup> Although he was born into a family of high social and economic standing, his father, who married a poor orphan girl, had brought the family to a state of minimal possessions. Thus early in life Juan de Yepes learned the meaning of sacrifice and poverty. As an apprentice in a hospital in Medina del Campo, he earned his living; it was there that he decided to train for Holy Orders in the Roman Catholic Church. After attending the College of the Society of Jesus at Medina, he took the Carmelite habit at St. Anne's, a convent also located in Medina.

Juan de Yepes received his academic training at the University of Salamanca where he took three years in the arts, and after receiving his priest's orders, one year in theology. During this time the young Friar met St. Theresa of Jesus, with whom he was to have a long and spiritually oriented relationship. Under her direction Friar Juan took a leading role in the reform of the Spanish Carmelite order. In pursual of this and other pastoral duties he traveled, sometimes under conditions of hardship and poverty, over much

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1. Saint John of the Cross, The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, trans. and ed. by E. Allison Peers (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1935), Vol. 1, p. xxv.

of the Spain of his day, spreading effective reform throughout many houses in the order. There were, however, those in the Roman Catholic Church who were opposed to the Carmelite reform movement, and particularly the effective work of Friar Juan within that movement. Under their direction he was imprisoned in Toledo for a period of nine months until he escaped into the sanctuary of the Carmelite nuns in that city. From that time until his death on September 12, 1591, the small statured Friar, with an inexhaustible supply of spiritual energy, worked in the Carmelite reform movement in Baeza, Granada, Madrid, and many other Spanish religious centers of the day.

The spiritual record of Friar Juan did not end its influence after his death. He received recognition by the church in the following order: January 25, 1675, Beatified by Clement X; December 26, 1726, Canonized by Benedict XIII, and August 24, 1926, declared Doctor of the Church Universal by Pius XI.<sup>1</sup>

Certain comments can be made at this point which will serve to interpret the life outlined above, and secondly which will contribute to some extent to an understanding of the character of this significant religious figure. The life of St. John of the Cross had a decidedly active character.<sup>2</sup> The portrait of this reformer is one of untiring energy and dedication to God, and to instruction into the manner of the spiritual life. On foot or perhaps with the aid of a donkey, he constantly traveled, preaching the way of approach to God, and the fact of the reality of the spiritual world in the lives of men.

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1. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. xxviii.

2. Bede Frost, Saint John of the Cross (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), p. 6.

Yet this exhaustive activity, which covered the majority of sixteenth century Spain, seemingly had little relevant connection with a century known as one of the greatest eras in European history. During the forty-nine years of Friar Juan's life there occurred many events which had far reaching influence on Christianity and the Church. Among these developments was the breaking up of the Church. Although the Roman Catholic Church remained virtually dominant in southern Europe during this period, the Protestant revolt divided the Church throughout the remainder of the European continent and the British Isles. Besides these events of primary importance to the Church there were others including the Christian defeat of the Muslim invasion at Lepanto, and the massacre of Huguenots by Catholics on St. Bartholomew's Day of 1569 in Navarre, France.<sup>1</sup>

Also apart from activities of importance to the Christian scene in Europe during the latter half of the sixteenth century were those in the context of the emergence of nationalism. Spain drove the Moors from their last stronghold on the European continent. She thus secured for herself a position of national importance which reached its conclusion with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Likewise was there an evident national spirit among the English, French, and Dutch. English colonial expansion saw the enlargement of the empire under the protection of the "sea dogs" who were monumental in the naval defeat of Spain. The French, under the monarchy of Henry IV and the leadership of Richelieu and Mazarin, became predominant on the European scene. The Dutch, having been freed from Spanish rule, sought to expand their power and world influence under the efforts of the Dutch East

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1. Ibid., p. 1.

India Company.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot reasonably be assumed that the Spanish Friar was unaware of these momentous activities which profoundly influenced the Church and affected political and social currents in Europe. Friar Juan was not primarily interested in politics nor in social or political movements of the Church on the continent. His activity and thought found its fulfillment in a purely religious goal. Contemplation of God was the common denominator of his life. For the Spanish Friar this involved the active life process of being "crucified with Christ;" secondly it entailed the theological conviction of the high majesty of God in comparison to which all creatures are as nothing. Activity in this sense is directed towards the realization of God's presence by all of his creatures. Contemplation includes activity as one of its indispensable components. Friar Juan was active because he needed to find God and help others to do the same. This single-minded goal caused his work to be unaffected by those social and political currents which were dominant in his day.

ii. Works and Their Characterization.

St. John of the Cross did not intend to publish a systematic statement of his theological position. His religious role was that of pastor and reformer, and his writings were "in response to the insistent and repeated demands of his spiritual children."<sup>2</sup> Not only do these works meet the specification for spiritual instruction, but they also stand as a record of the

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1. Chester Penn Higby, History of Europe (1492-1815) (New York: Houghton Mifflin Compnay, 1927), p. 140.

2. Saint John of the Cross, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. 218.

personal experience of the Saint himself. It is for these two reasons that they are of such great spiritual value.

A list of works of St. John of the Cross would include the following:

Ascent of Mount Carmel (1578-1579 & 1582-1588)  
Dark Night of the Soul (1578-1579 & 1582-1588)  
Spiritual Canticle (1577-1578)  
Poems<sup>1</sup>  
Living Flame of Love (1585)  
Cautions (1579)  
Counsels of a Religious for the Attainment of Perfection<sup>2</sup>  
Spiritual Sentences and Maxims<sup>3</sup>  
Letters and Documents<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter on the mystical approach to reality in St. John of the Cross the major documentation for the investigation into his thought and experience will come out of what are undoubtedly his four major works - Ascent of Mount Carmel, Dark Night of the Soul, Spiritual Canticle, and Living Flame of Love.

The first of these treatises was Ascent of Mount Carmel. This was begun

1. St. John's four major works - Ascent of Mount Carmel, Dark Night of the Soul, Spiritual Canticle, Living Flame of Love - are poems in their original form. Other poems of St. John are not listed separately here because they do not, for the most part, represent an essential contribution to the mystical approach to reality according to St. John.
2. No accurate date can be given for the composition of Counsels. It is thought that this document was written at Baeza to a novice in the charge of St. John.
3. In the manner of St. John's religious instruction he was wont to create sentences and maxims to aid his charges in their pursuit of the experience of God. No accurate date could be affixed to any one of these statements. They range probably over his entire teaching career from 1570-1591.
4. E. Allison Peers has translated in this set of St. John's works a selection of "Letters" and "Sundry Documents." They are of assorted character and content. Also no single date can be attached to them as a collection. They range over virtually all of St. John's active career.

at El Calvario in 1578 and completed at Granada between the years of 1582-1588. In its original form this work of Saint John's is a poem of eight stanzas. The stanzas represent the stages along the mystic way "from the starting point of the beginner to the very summit of perfection."<sup>1</sup> The way to perfection is graphically described as a mountain - the "Mount of Perfection" - or Mount Carmel. Along the pathway up the mountain are the various hindrances which represent the difficulties of the ascent of the mystic way.

It is in the Saint's commentary on this poem that the basis for a philosophical discussion of the mystical approach to reality is provided. This discussion is entertained in the context of the dark night of the soul wherein the mystic realizes his utter separation from God. In terms of the "Mount of Perfection"<sup>2</sup> God is at the summit while the mystic who has not yet traveled along the way of approach is at its base.

Dark Night of the Soul, although published as a separate treatise, is in reality a continuation in the spiritual thought of the Ascent. In the Ascent the purgation of the contemplative is considered in terms of the active nights of the sense and the spirit, while in the Dark Night the passive nights of the sense and spirit are analyzed. All this is in the context of the dark night, which is a "series of purifications during which it (the soul) is walking, as it were, through a tunnel of impenetrable obscurity and from which it emerges to bask in the sunshine of grace and to enjoy the Divine intimacy."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Saint John of the Cross, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. xxxii.
  2. Ibid., p. xxxii.
  3. Ibid., p. 2.

It was in the darkness of the Toledo dungeon (1577-1578) that St. John composed at least the substance of Spiritual Canticle. This treatise is, to admirers of St. John, the "song of songs." Applying the metaphor of the spouse and the bride, St. John outlines a series of dialogues between God and the soul,<sup>1</sup> in which is manifest the entire spiritual way from the awakening to God's presence to spiritual union with his nature.

Lastly among these four major works is Living Flame of Love, which is the shortest of the treatises, but which in certain ways is the most subtle. Here the saint attempts descriptions of the still deeper mysteries of union of the soul with God, and of the unitive life. Particularly strong in this argument are the considerations of the Holy Trinity and the statement of spiritual knowledge which results from the unitive experience.

Certain further general characterizations of his works can be drawn. At the University of Salamanca, where Friar Juan was trained in theology, there was a strong influence in the direction of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. This influence is evident in the methodological clarity of the saint's works, as well as in the metaphysical structure of his thought. Another strong influence remains dominant throughout the entirety of the above-mentioned works. This is the constant justification of mystical states in dogmatic theology as manifested in the doctrines of the Trinity, the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Redemption. And further, this dogmatic theology is firmly rooted and justified in Holy Scripture.

## 2. The Way of Agency

### i. The Awakening

It is of fundamental importance to an understanding of St. John of the

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 1.

Cross to note the point at which he begins. This beginning, not to be considered in its relation to his life, is a matter of emphasis. In this case it may be characterized as an awakening to the way in which the "Spouse" and the "Bride", that is, God and the soul, will attain to union, in which union the soul will be elevated to a godly plane of life and understanding.<sup>1</sup> Out of such a spiritual state of being the soul will then be prepared to manifest its union with God in life, and to report its understanding of the nature of God in an intelligible manner. In this sense the beginning is the awakening to the nature of the way, which way will in turn result in and determine the report of the attainment of the end of that way.

In the case of St. John of the Cross the starting point is characterized by the dynamic separation of the soul from God, or better of God from the soul. In this sense the "Divine Essence" is hidden from every mortal eye and from all understanding.<sup>2</sup> And the awakening of the way includes this realization. The soul should not persuade itself that it possesses God<sup>3</sup>, for there can be no reasonable assurance of this. Can any mortal soul know if it be worthy of the grace or hatred of God?

In a certain sense this awakening appears as a conversion - that is, a discovery of a supernatural realm, a spiritual essence, which stands in a transcendent relation to all natural phenomena.<sup>4</sup> Within this conversion experience there is an awakening not only to the transcendent spiritual realm,

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1. Ibid., p. 186.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

3. Ibid., p. 32.

4. Ibid., p. 31.

but also to the way in which that other realm can be brought into the experience of that conscious being who has been awakened. And this way appears as a kind of path of spiritual knowledge or transformation, in which knowledge situation the subject is experiencing consciousness, and the object the Divine Essence of God.<sup>1</sup> Because God is considered as transcendent, the path of knowledge, which is the way of approach to God, is considered as a way of agony; the experiencer is forced to transform himself, and in the final analysis to be transformed in the image of God, or the end of the way. Knowledge in this sense is realized in the progressively intensive participation of the subject in the object, to that point therein both become one in union. It is this aspect in St. John's thought which has raised much controversial speculation. Is St. John advocating literal union of the soul and God, or in its stead a kind of communion? Below this question will receive direct analysis.

Now in the beginning of the way there is a consciousness of the absence of God on the part of the seeker.

Far away in the beginning,  
Dwelt the Word in God Most High.<sup>2</sup>

In a real sense this conversion experience is empty, because in the knowledge situation which characterizes the conversion, the emphasis is on the absence of the object from the experience of the subject. In the main, therefore, the process of knowledge in the way is a process of purification on the part of the subject, the seeker, so that in transformation he may attain unto the nature of that which is sought.

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1. Ibid., p. 188.

2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. xxxi.

According to St. John the context of this purification is in terms of love in which the mutual attraction between the soul and God is most strong.<sup>1</sup> In this sense God is the Beloved and the soul the lover, and in the purgative way

the absence of the Beloved is a continual sighing in the heart of the lover, because apart from him she loves naught, rests in naught, and finds relief in naught; whence a man will know by this if he have indeed love toward God - namely, if he be content with aught that is less than God.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of this principle in the context of love inevitably leads the seeker through the purgative life to an illuminative state called by St. John the "spiritual betrothal."<sup>3</sup> This illuminative condition of the soul is manifest in a degree of purification, which results to a corresponding degree in the attainment of the spiritual life. Through the purification of the self, in memory, will and understanding, God has communicated to the soul in the context of love the strength to deny all that is not in accordance with His nature. The soul, on the other hand, has given his life to God without reservation. This communication between the seeker and that which is sought is known as contemplation. Contemplation is the watchword of this illuminative state.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, as has been argued above, it is composed of two indispensable aspects, thought and life. Both are necessary for the attainment of progress along the way of approach.

#### ii. The Ascent.

Clearly the most significant aspect of the thought of St. John of the

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 33.
  2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 33.
  3. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 320.
  4. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 321.

Cross begins at this point. His two treatises, Ascent of Mount Carmel and Dark Night of the Soul, the second of which was unfortunately never completed, mark a major contribution to the field of mysticism. Here the way of approach is graphically described in terms of the ascent of a mountain, which ascent is marred and at times seemingly blocked by the strictness of spiritual requirements. At this point the nature of the mystical report is directly implied. The soul, awakened to the way, is at the base of the mountain; God, with which the soul aspires to union, is at the very top. Clearly a transcendence theory is here postulated. God is over and against creation. Also implied in the figure of a mountain is the importance of the way in the determination of the report which the mystic will give of the goal of the way. In this sense the extent and success of the seeker along the way of approach will in reality give meaning to the report of that seeker.

Along the way of approach the illuminative life has been attained in that state of the spirit which St. John calls "spiritual betrothal." Now the seeker must enter into a new phase of the way which is characterized by darkness. Darkness in this sense refers to a renewed act of purgation in which the seeker receives a final purification. All that is not God is denied, the ascent of Mount Carmel is real, and the final state of the way, union, is attained.

The reality of darkness is imminent to the seeker after God. Darkness is a night which is characterized, like the awakening to the way, by separation. God, the Divine Essence, is separated from the understanding of him who has given himself to the realization of the nature of God. And so all is dark. St. John discusses darkness in terms of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Spiritual knowledge is

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 321

the possession of the art of being transformed according to the nature of God. If the absence of God is a fact of experience in the seeker after God, then the path of knowledge wherein the seeker realizes the nature of God is a path of denial and transformation along which the nature of the seeker harmonizes to a higher degree with the nature of God. This path of knowledge is manifest in darkness or spiritual ignorance until union, the experience of like nature with God, occurs.

According to St. John this path of transformation is a path of agony.<sup>1</sup> It is not easy to transform oneself and in the final analysis to become transformed in the image of that which by definition is hidden from the understanding. Darkness or night implies this agony; it must become progressively more intense until the entire personality has been transformed. In a parallel sense so must the night become progressively more dark until the darkness receives the light of the experience of union with God.

According to St. John this night of the spirit has two separate and definable aspects. They are the active and passive nights.<sup>2</sup> The active night refers to two aspects of the personality, which if not silenced in darkness prove to be the outreach of the self for that which is not God. Accordingly this night is divided into the nights of the sense and the spirit. This first aspect of the dark night is considered in Ascent of Mount Carmel.

In Dark Night of the Soul the second or passive night is considered. This night, like the first, is divided into the nights of sense and spirit.<sup>3</sup> At this point the basic distinction between these two nights becomes manifest,

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 193.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 18.

3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 330.

as well as a principle of dogmatic theology on which this division is based. The theological principle is ". . . that by himself, and with the ordinary aid of grace, man cannot attain to that degree of purgation which is essential to his transformation in God."<sup>1</sup> Man in this second of nights needs God. According to this principle the active night represents man's own efforts to silence both his sense and his spirit to all that is not God; the passive night is the aid of God in darkness to those who by their efforts are adequately prepared.

The cause of the active night of sense is the conscious effort on the part of the seeker after union with God to deprive himself of the pleasure of the senses and of the fulfillment of his desires towards anything<sup>2</sup> - that is, towards any aspect of creation which is by definition less than God. As this is accomplished to a certain degree, darkness, that is, lack of occupation in sensual pleasure, results.

An immediate qualification is required. Why is it necessary for the soul to pass through the dark night of sense in order that it may attain to the end of the way of approach, or union? The answer to this question is significant as later will be evident in the discussion of the mystic report. It is based on the two-fold idea that God must be one, and that in any seeker after union with God singlemindedness, or that quality of mind or spirit in which all is suppressed in favor of one dominating idea, must prevail in accordance with the nature of God which is sought. Two contraries cannot exist in one person,<sup>3</sup> and what communion can there be between God, as Divine

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 316.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 21.

3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 24.

Essence, and the fulfillment of the sensual desire towards an aspect of God, or rather towards that which is by definition less than God? Also these contraries would defy the mutual affection and attachment in the context of which, as mentioned above, the soul can meaningfully attain to mystical union.

In this sense it is clear that the soul as seeker after union with God must be free from sensual desire, however slight it may be. A distinction must be drawn between natural desires, those basic to any conscious creature, and voluntary desires, those desires which result in mortal or venial sin. If there is to be a union at the end of the way of approach, then these desires, both natural and voluntary, must be completely silenced.

Concerning the manner in which the active night of sense is accomplished, St. John has certain counsels. These are summarized and written on the Saint's graphic representation of Mount Carmel. The lines are as follows:

In order to arrive at having pleasure in everything,  
Desire to have pleasure in nothing.  
In order to arrive at possessing everything,  
Desire to possess nothing.  
In order to arrive at being everything,  
Desire to be nothing.  
In order to arrive at knowing everything,  
Desire to know nothing.  
In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure,  
Thou must go by a way wherein thou hast no pleasure.  
In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not,  
Thou must go by a way that thou knowest not.  
In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not,  
Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.  
In order to arrive at that which thou are<sup>1</sup> not,  
Thou must go through that which thou are not.

The saint concludes this section with the comment that such detachment results in profound quiet and repose.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 59.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 60.

The second aspect of the active night is the darkness of the spirit, which is a "stripping (away) of all spiritual imperfections and desires for the possession of spiritual things."<sup>1</sup> At this point St. John seems to be using "spiritual things" to signify natural faculties of the soul - that is the three major aspects of the personality - understanding, memory, and will. As these faculties of the soul are natural elements of the personality they are attuned to the natural world. Herein lies the meaning of the active night of the spirit, for the seeker, if he is to attain to union with God, must actively darken these natural aspects of his personality so that they are only receptive to supernatural or Godly knowledge.

The process of the active night of the spirit is in the main a process of the perfection of the three faculties of the soul. According to this the three theological virtues may be applied. These virtues cause emptiness in the faculties: faith in the understanding darkens the intellect, hope in the memory darkens thought towards all possessions, and charity in the spirit causes emptiness in the will and a sense of detachment from all affections which are less than God.<sup>2</sup>

This is a summary of what St. John refers to as the active night of the spirit. By this darkening activity the seeker after God along the way of agony attains to the "proximate means of ascending to union with God."<sup>3</sup> This is faith as trust in God's providence, that is in His attracting love which will incorporate the seeker who successfully completes this active night of the spirit. In such darkness the natural faculties are at rest, and the personality awaits the grace of God.

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 63.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 80.

3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 63.

Much more subtle than the active night are the passive nights of sense and spirit, which St. John analyzes in Dark Night of the Soul. The character of this night is passive. The agonizing active purgations of the sense and spirit as described above have left the seeker purified outwardly. But now by the manner of contemplation the seeker must passively await that night of both his sense and his spirit, after which he will attain to spiritual perfection, or union with God.

According to St. John there are certain signs by which the passive night of the sense may be recognized. The first of these is the test of whether the soul finds any pleasure in anything other than God - that is in anything created. A second sign coming out of the first is the test as to whether the seeker can any longer reflect upon the sphere of sense, even if he endeavors to do so.<sup>1</sup> St. John says that these two signs of the passive night of sense should be manifest in an evident passive contemplation. The seeker, outwardly silenced by the active night, should assume a demeanor of quietness, which might serve as a fitting spiritual reception for the final passive night of the spirit.

"This dark night is an inflowing of the spirit of God into the soul."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly it is purged of ignorance and imperfection, as it expresses itself in knowledge and habit of life. In this, the darkest of the nights, the deepest afflictions and torments are known in the complete silence of the sensual, spiritual, and mental aspects of the personality of the seeker after union with God.

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 355.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 381.

From this point of silence a spark is born and a progression occurs. The spark is a complete psychological acceptance of darkness and a corresponding dependence on or faith in God. The process is the ascent from darkness of ignorance into the spiritual light of the knowledge of the nature and meaning of God. Here St. John refers to a ladder, the form of love,<sup>1</sup> or that mutual force which makes progress along the way of approach manifest. This ladder has ten steps from the silence of the passive night of spirit to the assimilation of the soul into God.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to here note that this figure of the ten stairs is an articulation of the "mystic ladder of Divine love", which was formulated in the tradition of Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas.<sup>3</sup> At this point it is only necessary to comment on the tenth stair, for it is here that the way of approach reaches the state of union. On the tenth stair the soul is wholly assimilated into God.<sup>4</sup> This assimilation is by virtue of the immediate vision of God afforded to the soul, and it is manifested in the unitive life which results from this vision.

### iii. The Goal.

From the awakening which was the realization of the absence of God's presence, along the way of approach, which was manifest in the agonizing purification and darkness necessary to cleanse the seeker of all that was not God, to union, there has been a continual goal. That was the attainment of the experience of union with God in the seeker after God. Resulting from

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 432.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 434.

3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 435.

4. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 441.

this experience is the unitive life which in itself is a report of the nature and meaning of that experience.

But an immediate qualification is necessary at this point. What is the nature of said union, and how may it be described? The answer to these questions will be fundamentally important as they relate to the mystic report which inevitably follows such a transfiguration in love. Also the answers to these two questions will be a prime determining factor in any statement as to the nature of God which has now been realized in the unitive experience.

In the first place union as indicated above is not the experience of the identity of the essence of the seeker and that which is sought. The soul is not absorbed into the nature of God. As noted in the former section St. John says that the soul is "wholly assimilated" into God. But according to his continued description it must be stated that this does not imply total absorption; St. John continues to qualify the state of union. It is a union of wills in love.

There is a union of love, that it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover, and the lover in the Beloved; and such a manner of likeness does love make in the transformation of the two that are in love that it may be said that each is the other and that both are one.<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be a subtle conflict of terms at this point in St. John's argument. Union needs further explanation. Are the two statements of St. John's which describe union compatible? He has stated that the soul is "wholly assimilated" into God in the experience of union as the end of the mystic way of approach. Then he has stated that the experience of union is to be described in terms of a union of wills in love. If the soul were

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 237.

wholly assimilated into God then there would necessarily be more than a union of wills unless St. John would argue that the soul is wholly composed of will. It already has been concluded that this is not the case, for in the discussion of the passive night of the spirit St. John referred to the necessity of the silence of three aspects of the soul, namely understanding, memory, and will. The argument here appears to justify the above stated conclusion of this writer that wholly assimilated cannot be equated with totally absorbed.

St. John makes further qualification when he states that it is impossible for the soul to have the capacity of God. This would on the one hand justify his conclusion that union be only a union of wills in love, but on the other hand it would be incompatible with the idea that the soul is wholly assimilated into God. One wonders whether this confusion in the terms of St. John is explicable in terms of faulty logic or whether the forces of the Church, which were particularly strong in the Spain of his day, influenced his evident indecision on this point.

No matter what the answer is to the above question, union remains a "union of wills in love." As a matter of participation and willed activity, the soul, the subject in the situation of spiritual knowledge made manifest in the awakening, is at one with God, the object. A metaphysical dualism remains as both the soul and God although united in will remain essentially separate and intact. It is not the explicit effort of the saint to explain this dualism. Only in terms of an implied theory of the nature of God does this point receive further consideration.

### 3. The Theory of Emanations

Nowhere in the works of St. John of the Cross does the nature of God

or reality as such receive direct consideration and analysis. Yet it cannot be denied that a theory is implied in the language of those of his works which are in existence. To say this forces the consideration of at least two points.

These points are concerned with the relationship in thought and experience between the way of approach, in this case the way of agony, and the mystic report. Is such a report necessary? Surely it would not be necessary or accurate to insist that a theoretically oriented system be formulated with an account of God as supreme spiritual reality in a focal point in the argument. Such a statement would necessarily assume that a theory of God is possible. Also it would rest on the assumption that the only valid kind of report of the mystic experience is that of a theoretical nature. How can a theory of God be possible when by definition the "Divine Essence" is hidden from all understanding? Secondly, how can it be asserted that a report is not manifest in the obvious transformation which must have occurred in the active and passive nights of the sense and spirit of the seeker who would attain to the mystic goal? Any mortal being, having undergone such an experience, would most necessarily report said experience in one valid sense by the very fact of his continued life, which would be lived in terms of his transformation.

Further qualification needs to be made concerning the experiential relationship between the way of agony and the mystic report. St. John makes no effort to render a systematic account of the nature of God. Throughout the entire discussion noted in the former section the emphasis of the saint's writing has been from the point of view of explication and instruction into the nature of the way of approach to God. Yet this does not necessarily

imply that no view of reality can be formulated in terms which will not be out of harmony with the explicit considerations of St. John. Indeed the nature of God provides a foundation for the entire discussion of the way to God. A systematic view of the nature of God or reality is determined, at least in part, by the nature of the way of approach to God.

A distinction is evident at this point between the nature of God as a basis for a discussion of the approach to God and the approach to God as the determining factor in the discussion of the theory of God. It is clear that unless the existence of God were a fact the approach to God would be a meaningless delusion. In this sense the nature of God underlies the entire consideration of the way to God. But this dependence of the way upon the existence of God is not of basic importance to this entire argument. This chapter as well as the existing works of St. John are concerned with the mystical approach to God. The starting point is based on the absence of God's presence in the experience of the seeker. The knowledge situation imminent in this approach is described in terms of darkness - this in terms of spiritual ignorance, which ignorance only turns to knowledge according to the degree to which the seeker after God progresses along the way of approach. Thus from the point of view of experience and of knowledge the way determines the report. If this were not the case the report, in whatever form it was given, would be based on the lack of experience of God and ignorance of God's nature.

This argument rests on the basis of a fundamental fact of experience and thought. In order to report God in theory one must know God in experience. To the degree that one's experience is in harmony with God as supreme spiritual reality can that reality become the valid basis for a metaphysical statement. If one's theory of God is detached entirely from the experience of the

theorist then it may be accurately stated that the theory derived under these conditions, although it can be of interest and of influence in the fields of systematic construction and analysis, can never be of lasting importance or contributory influence to man's understanding of the real. Conversely a theory of reality based on experience of the real will, to the degree of the validity of that experience, can be of corresponding contribution to human understanding of reality.

This argument presupposes the contention that any final understanding of God must be realized in a union of thought and experience. On the one hand God is inexplicable according to the disciplines of thought structure simply because explanation rests on the coordination of limited and definable terms to which God as such has no reference. On the other hand experience of God must always be subject to reasonable disciplines, in order that this experience may be validated by certain critical tests. This presupposition will receive further consideration in the final chapter of this thesis.

Further objections might here be stated in opposition to the argument that the way of approach determines the report. It may be said that the way must be confirmed in being - that is in the existence of God. This argument can hardly be denied. However, confirmation according to the being of God is meaningful according to the degree to which one has experienced God and has a corresponding knowledge of his nature. This experience and knowledge is manifest along the way of approach. And the confirmation of the experience and knowledge results from the degree to which progress is known along this way.

According to the above argument it is valid to derive a theory of the real from the thought of St. John of the Cross, which almost entirely is

directly concerned with the mystical way of approach to God. Basic to this theory is the transcendence of God. Even in the awakening it was the dominantly evident presence that God is wholly other, and that the way to God is a way of agony. Because the way is traveled in darkness, in which darkness the absence of God is known, the seeker becomes increasingly aware of the fact of God's transcendence. And this is confirmed in the experience of union, in which the seeker has realized an entire transformation. In no other way would the experience of union be meaningful, according to St. John, except that the seeker has denied himself of all that is not in accordance with or that is less than God. In other words the seeker must transform himself in terms of that which is other and apart from all sensual and limited experience. In such a sense is God transcendent.

At this point the character of the unitive life is once again relevant. This relevance is in terms of a paradox. It is stated above that in union the soul is wholly assimilated into God. Now it is stated that God is transcendent. This gives justification to the character of union, which was described as a union of wills in love, while that character gives further support for the transcendence of God. It is impossible to experience essential union with God, because God is basically transcendent in nature.

A second point, basic to this theory of the real, is focused on the question as to whether God and reality are synonymous. In the discussions of St. John on the way of approach it is accurate to insist that the end of that way, God, is the ultimate principle in the nature of things, or reality. Although St. John does not directly consider this question, certain of his statements contribute to the issue. God is "Infinite Being."<sup>1</sup> The existence

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1. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 25.

of God is manifest in Being, the character of which excludes the existence of any other Being by the fact of its infinite nature. God is without limitation.

On the basis of these statements there is implied an issue which is significant in the question as to whether God and reality are synonymous. If God in Infinite Being can there be two Gods; is it not a self-defeating description of reality to suggest that there are two or more realities? How can two Infinite Beings relate? In this case neither being would be infinite because each would be limited by the existence of the other, or that which was by definition beyond the bounds of the existence of each. Again there must be only one reality, as the ultimate principle in the nature of things, because if there were two realities so described then the ultimate principle in the nature of things could not by definition be ultimate.

Therefore, in this sense God, as Infinite Being, and reality, as the ultimate principle in the nature of things, are synonymous. Out of this consideration St. John immediately refers to the "being of creation."<sup>1</sup> But what is the import of this distinction between Infinite Being and the "being of creation" if the former is to be perfectly equated with reality? Is not St. John subjecting himself at this point to the justifiable charge of pantheism? In the order of his argument this charge will be evaluated below.

The identity of God and reality and the necessity of God's oneness is further supported by St. John's insistence that the seeker of God along the way of approach darkens and silences all that is not in harmony with God. This same seeker must also endure both the active and passive nights of the sense and spirit as discussed above. In other words in comparison with the Infinite

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 26.

Being of God the being of creation is as nothing. In both the world of sense and that of spirit all creation, that is all finite entities of matter and mind, must be darkened. Only the light of God must shine in the soul of him that would attain to union.

In this sense God as One is the supreme spiritual principle of meaning. When all else is silenced, when there is only faith in the ever-real all-inclusive spirit of God, then there is only God. God as One is light; all else is darkness. Only God is so all-inclusive in Being so as to be able to bring about such a transformation in silence in the seeker after God. If this be interpreted as the principle of meaning, it further documents the argument for the identity of God and reality.

The second principle to be derived from the evident contrast between the Being of God on the one hand and the being of creation on the other is the third point in this theory of reality which is implied in St. John's discussion of the way of approach to God. This point is focused in the mutual relationship in the experience of the seeker after God between God and creation, or between the one and the many.

According to St. John this two-fold mutual relationship is to be considered on the one hand in the context of the yearning of creation for the Infinite Being of God,<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand the attraction felt in the Infinite Being of God for union with creation.<sup>2</sup> And this relationship is in effect St. John's implicit rebuttal to any charge of pantheism. That God as Infinite Being and reality are synonymous does not negate the possibility of a further distinction within reality. That distinction is to be drawn in terms of dynamic aspects

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 24.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 396.

of reality, or in other words creative or dependent realities. In this sense to say that God as Infinite Being and reality are synonymous is not necessarily to suggest that the Infinite Being of God is fully identical with every aspect of reality. That would negate not only the point from which St. John commenced, namely the transcendence of God, but also the knowledge situation in the context of which the soul seeks union with God. The charge of pantheism cannot hold in the face of St. John's clear distinction between the Infinite Being of God and the being of creation. Looking ahead St. John documents this distinction by way of his theory of creative emanations of God to all dependent realms of creation that are in reality less than God. Looking back the distinction is implicit in the seeker's experience of union with God, in which experience the central character of both the Infinite Being of God and the being of creation remain separate and intact.

As noted above there is in the Infinite Being of God a compelling force of attraction in the context of which the progress of the seeker along the way of approach to God is manifest. This attraction was particularly noted in the second section of this chapter or in the discussion of the passive night of the spirit. This night is manifest as an "inflowing of the spirit of God into the soul,"<sup>1</sup> of that seeker of God who has been adequately prepared by the active and passive nights of sense and by the active night of the spirit. As a result of this inflowing the soul makes its progression from the deepest darkness of night into the light of the experience of union.

This inflowing of the spirit of God into the soul of the seeker after union with God is in reality the creative outpourings of a transcendent God to all dependent realms of creation that are less than God. In theological

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 381.

terminology this phenomenon is described as the grace of God. In terms which refer to an earlier discussion these outpourings are conceived in terms of love. In this context love is manifested in emanations or the coming forth of God from the rest of his Infinite Being into the limited realm of creation.

From the rest of the Infinite Being of God or reality emanations pour forth into certain realms of creation which have been discussed in the previous section on the way of agony. Farthest away from the Being of God is the realm of sense which must be silenced in the active and passive nights of sense.<sup>1</sup> In the scheme of reality which is to be derived from implications out of the writings of St. John on the way of approach to God the realm of sense is conceived as the second emanation from God.

The first emanation is the realm of spirit. Like the realm of sense, the spirit must be silenced both actively and passively in that seeker after God who would attain to the experience of union.<sup>2</sup> It is in the passive night of the spirit that the outpouring of God into creation is most evident. For at this point the seeker, silenced completely in his sensual aspect, and actively in the spiritual aspect of his personality, is passive in his condition of darkness. It is only by the emanations from God that this silenced spirit is prepared to receive God's grace.

A final aspect of this brief sketch of a theory of the real which is validly deduced from the above discussion of St. John is now imminent. This is the reverse side of the point just discussed. It is based on the fact that there is a constant yearning of creation for the Infinite Being of God. According to St. John this yearning is to be understood as a matter of knowledge.

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 21.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 374.

In the preceding section knowledge was discussed in terms of transformation in which the subject of the knowledge situation, the seeker, is transformed in terms of the object, the transcendent God. In this sense knowledge is a kind of experiential participation of the seeker into that which is sought. As the seeker progresses along the way of approach towards the goal, the experience of union, he is participating to a progressively more intense degree into the Being of God, until at union he is at one with God in will.

The yearning of the seeker for union with God considered as a matter of knowledge is at once the final point in this theory of the real drawn from the thought of St. John and the summary characterization of the whole of the way. Even from the awakening yearning for knowledge was evident. The seeker was awakened to the reality of God's existence and to the way of knowledge along which his yearning could be consummated in union. Although God is absent, love is real and attraction is present. Purgative trials are met; spiritual betrothal is attained. Yearning increases into the progressively intense blackness of the dark night, in which night seeker and sought, although separate in experience, progress towards the realization of their oneness of wills in union.

## CHAPTER III

### RAMAKRISHNA

#### 1. Biographical Statement

##### 1. Outline and Interpretation of Life

Sri Ramakrishna was born in the small village of Kamarpukur in the Bengal region of India on February 18, 1836.<sup>1</sup> Upon birth he was given the name of Gadadhar by his family, whose name was Chattopadhyaya, and whose class was the Brahmin or priesthood. Intelligence, precociousness, and sensitivity were said to be the dominant characteristics of Gadadhar as a boy. When only six years of age he experienced the first of many ecstasies. This experience was inspired by a wave of artistic feelings for nature and a passionate instinct for the beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

Gadadhar's early years were tremendously influential to his life. When he was seven years old his father died. In the grief resulting from this loss the impermanence of physical life became a reality to him.<sup>3</sup> A second of these influences coming in his early life was the reception of the sacred thread of the Brahmin lineage which he received at the age of nine.<sup>4</sup> This ceremony conferred upon him the privileges of the Brahmin class as well as

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1. Swami Nikhilananda, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), p. 3.
  2. Romain Rolland, The Life of Ramakrishna (Mayavati: Almora, Himalayas, 1947), pp. 25-26.
  3. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 4.
  4. Ibid., p. 4.

giving him the opportunity for a life of worship of Hindu gods, of meditation on the nature of the real, and of instruction to others into the nature of the way of approach to reality.

When Gadadhar was sixteen he went to Calcutta, India, to learn the duties and functions of the priesthood.<sup>1</sup> At this time Hindu India was passing through a "period of decadence."<sup>2</sup> Under Muslim rule there was confusion and anarchy in both social and political orders. Conflicting religious traditions and ideas out of those traditions caused further confusion in the ranks of the priesthood. Superstitious rites and rituals, which formerly were indicative of true spirituality as formulated in the ancient Vedas, now became in themselves the recognized essence of spirituality.

Further confusion in thought was added via two sources.<sup>3</sup> From Europe and most especially from the British Isles there was an influx of empirical philosophical speculation. To many hungry native minds of the day these speculations were particularly attractive. No longer was the supreme spiritual reality of primary importance in the thought and experience of many intelligent men. Knowledge was manifest in fluctuating variations of sensation and impression. Atheism and agnosticism were rampant.

From Europe and Britain also came Christian missionaries who preached the "best of all religions." There was a compelling attractiveness to Christianity, the religion which offered the unique road to salvation through Christ, and the religion which also was accompanied by western ideas and

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1. Ibid., p. 6.

2. Ibid., p. 7.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

technology. Most important to the interests of this investigation was the fact that the preaching of Christianity tended to reduce the significance of the ancient Indian scriptures in the minds of many native thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

One of the particular character traits of Gadadhar becomes relevant at this point in the argument. His thought and experience remained within the framework of native Indian traditions.<sup>2</sup> To all this intellectual and spiritual confusion, produced in the main by the impact of western ideology on Indian thought, Gadadhar paid little attention. Under the sponsorship of a wealthy widow the young priest was sent to work and live at a newly constructed temple garden at Dakshineswar, a village not far from Calcutta. Here the priest, Sri Ramakrishna, was to spend his life in worship and contemplation. Here the disciples and devotees would come to learn from their master. The contents of worship at this temple were distinctly Hindu. The whole symbolic world was composed of a trinity of Hindu gods - the Nature Mother (Kali), the Absolute (Siva), and the bridge of love spanning the two (Radhakanta).<sup>3</sup>

Ramakrishna began to master the duties of the priesthood. Spiritually he became more enmeshed in the all-pervading spirit of the Mother Kali, who stood for the creative power of Sakti inseparable from the Absolute or Siva.

"She is the highest symbol of all the forces of nature, the synthesis of their antinomies, the Ultimate Divine in the form of a Woman. She now became to Ramakrishna the only Reality, and the world became an unsubstantial

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1. Ibid., p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 47.

3. Ibid., p. 9.

shadow."<sup>1</sup> Because Ramakrishna had the personal qualities of passionate intensity of emotion and sensitivity he gave of himself completely to his worship. This resulted in frequent experiences of ecstatic intuition in which the form of the Divine Mother was most real to him.

During the years Ramakrishna stayed at the temple garden at Dakshineswar. In harmony with Indian custom he married a child bride of five years of age. Her name was Sarada Devi. Being a woman she was to Ramakrishna a symbol of Kali or the personal God, the form of the Divine Reality or Siva. During Ramakrishna's later years Sarada Devi became a respected and revered woman who was known as the Holy Mother.<sup>2</sup>

Ramakrishna never studied for advanced degrees, nor wrote religio-philosophic treatises. His life and thought were summarized in the acts of meditation and worship and instruction into the nature and meaning of the spiritual life. To the little temple garden on the banks of the Holy River Ganges came many persons. Some, becoming ardent disciples, never left Ramakrishna's presence. Others, being noted thinkers of the day, came to discuss topics of mutual interest with the Bengalian priest. Notably these visits of the scholars resulted in a two-fold influence: Ramakrishna always wanted to learn from the people who confronted him, and those who did seemed to be profoundly influenced by the simple yet deep spiritual perception of the village priest, whose main body of teaching was the manner of his life and the example of his undoubtedly valid spiritual experience.

Near the end of Ramakrishna's life he became more and more consumed in the practice of spiritual experience or ecstasy. In April, 1885, his throat

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1. Ibid., p. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

became inflamed. After diagnosis it was discovered that he was suffering from cancer. Prolonged conversation aimed at nothing else than the well-being of his disciples and repeated periods of intensely religious experience left the teacher weakened and sick. Under medical care and the immeasurable love of his disciples Ramakrishna lived until Sunday morning, August 15, 1886.

Narendra (his spiritual successor) took his feet on his lap and began to rub them. Again and again the Master repeated to him, "Take care of these boys" (disciples). Then he asked to lie down. Three times in ringing tones he cried the name of Kali, his life's beloved, and lay back. At two minutes past one there was a low sound in his throat and he fell a little to one side. A thrill passed over his body. His hair stood on end. His eyes became fixed on the tip of his nose. His face was lighted with a smile. The final ecstasy began. It was Mahasamadhi, total absorption, from which his mind never returned.<sup>1</sup>

#### ii. Religious and Philosophic Influences on his Thought and Experience.

It has been stated above that the majority of Ramakrishna's life was spent in the cloistered atmosphere of a Hindu temple garden. In accordance with this life the religious and philosophic influences on his thought in the main came from outside sources. All visitors who came to Dakshineswar were treated in equal fashion by the Master. From each he sought to learn new lessons in thought and experience; to each he sought to convey the conviction of his belief in a Divine Reality.

Ramakrishna was neither the author of a great system of thought, nor was he educated in the schooled sense. He was a simple village Brahmin who possessed great sensitivity in matters of the spirit. Because of his spiritual humility and because of the tremendous variety of influences which were made upon his life, it is difficult to place his thought into any one

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1. Ibid., p. 72.

philosophical system. In a real sense he was a product of those ideas which made an impact upon his thought and his experience; yet in another way this statement would be unfair. For the life and thought of this saint surely bear the product of his own individuality.

In accordance with the above, the variation of ideas which influenced Ramakrishna is of particular importance in a discussion of his thought and experience. These influences are manifest mainly in certain philosophical systems and thought currents which held a significant position in nineteenth century Hindu India.

One such influence was the philosophy of the Tantra.<sup>1</sup> According to this the Ultimate Reality is Chit or Consciousness which is identical with being or bliss. In essence man - or any conscious aspect of creation - is identical with this reality. However, under the power of maya (illusion) he is ignorant of his true nature.<sup>2</sup> He considers the apparent world of subject and object to be real; this is the cause of evil and suffering. In this context the goal of spiritual discipline is the release from evil and suffering, which release is accomplished in true knowledge - that is, in the realization of the supreme identity between all conscious aspects of creation and Ultimate Reality.

In the Tantra scriptures Divine Reality is not described entirely as a static entity. Basically there are two principles: one active and one passive.<sup>3</sup> One is considered indispensable from the other. Siva, the Absolute,

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1. Ibid., p. 20.

2. Ibid., p. 20.

3. Ibid., p. 21.

is the passive principle; Sakti is the creative force in the universe. In the context of this force creation is manifest. According to the Tantra this creative power is symbolized by woman, which symbol takes tangible form in Kali, the Divine Mother.

A fundamental aspect of this philosophical position is the theory of knowledge which in reality is the path by which one may gain release from evil and suffering. Herein lies a main focal point of difference between the Tantra and other philosophical positions which influenced Ramakrishna. The theoretical tension between these schools at this particular point is of great significance in his thought.

The way according to the Tantra has as its underlying purpose the realized identification of the aspirant with the Ultimate Reality.<sup>1</sup> Because man has natural weaknesses, such as appetites and desires, and because these weaknesses are accepted in man, the path for him need not be one of stern negation. There is some positive content along the way. The Tantra bids the aspirant enjoy material objects of the world yet at the same time discover in them the "presence of reality."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly outward renunciation is not necessary. Identification with reality is to be realized according to certain disciplines which are graded to suit aspirants of all degrees of temperament and intensity. The aim of these is yoga - or union with consciousness.

Another position in contrast to the Tantra, but of similar influence on the thought and experience of Ramakrishna is that of Vaishnavism.<sup>3</sup> According

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1. Ibid., p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Ibid., p. 22.

to this Indian school of philosophy Vishnu is the all-pervading Supreme God who has several incarnations including Rama and Krishna.

One concept dominates this school - that is Bhakti. Bhakti "is intense love of God, and of him alone."<sup>1</sup> It is the cultivation of higher forms of love through which the mind is purified and the ecstasy of God-vision is realized. This God-vision is felt immediately. It is a process of knowledge wherein the aspirant is purified through love. But this process of knowledge according to the Vaishnavic position is not to be confused with a process of logic or reason. That Bhakti must transcend the human mental process is made clear by the very fact that when pure it is reality - the all-pervading Supreme God.

There are two stages of Bhakti, and three kinds of formal devotion through which the aspirant for the God-vision is elevated to a true knowledge of Vishnu.<sup>2</sup> The first stage or level is a love of God "qualified by scriptural injunctions."<sup>3</sup> One must pass through three kinds of devotion before he may be elevated to the most comprehensive level of Bhakti. The first kind of formal devotion is characterized by tamas - the quality of inertia. This passive principle suggests dullness of spiritual sensitivity or of knowledge. The aspirant filled with this attitude of mind reflects it in such mental attitudes as jealousy, anger, or arrogance.

Secondly among the three kinds of devotion is rajas. This attitude of mind is characterized by the quality of activity or restlessness. It is an implied contrast to tamas. Those whose minds are immersed in rajas worship

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1. Ibid., p. 23.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 24.

God from a desire for fame or from some like worldly ambition. Lastly there is sattva or the quality of harmony which brings into accord both the quality of tamas and that of rajas. This harmony of attitude manifests itself in friendship or single-minded love of God.

After having passed through these three kinds of devotion the aspirant after a realization of Vishnu enters into the highest form of Divine love or Bhakti - that of prema. This is manifested in an uninterrupted inclination of the mind towards God which is the inner soul of all beings. This highest love exists potentially in all hearts. It is an end in itself.

As an aid to the aspirant after God Vaishnavism postulates a two-fold conception of Vishnu. On the one hand Vishnu is humanized.<sup>1</sup> He becomes the Supreme Person as distinguished from an intangible Absolute. In such a sense God, the Inner Being of every creature, is to be regarded as being manifest in all persons.

Another philosophical system was of great influence on the experience and thought of Ramakrishna. This was the Vedanta philosophy brought to Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar by a wandering monk named Totapuri.<sup>2</sup>

This ancient Hindu philosophical system designates the Ultimate Reality as Brahman, also referred to as Satchidananda.<sup>3</sup> Brahman is the only real existence. It is Existence - Knowledge - Bliss - Absolute. Other than Brahman all else is illusory.<sup>4</sup> There is no description nor definition; no time nor space; no causality nor multiplicity. In a strict sense Reality is

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1. Ibid., p. 24.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

4. Ibid., p. 26.

an absolutely unqualified monism apart from which there is nothing.

Yet within the Existence of Brahman there is an inscrutable power known as maya under the influence of which creation is manifest.<sup>1</sup> Now the categories or reason are evident. The changeless undergoes change. Pain and pleasure, form and relationship become part of conscious experience, which experience is based on the duality of the subject-object relationship. All experience under this influence of maya is in reality illusory. Ignorance is the character of such experience. In this context - that framed in multiplicity - no real existence is evident. According to strict Vedantists even the concept of personality is in the final analysis illusory.

Man is born into the condition of maya. However, in reality his spirit is identical with Brahman. The realization of this identity is true knowledge, in the possession of which knowledge is realized ineffable peace. Towards this realization there is a path of knowledge - or Jnana.<sup>2</sup> There is no more direct way of approach to reality. By a process of stern negation, formulated in terms of "nete, nete" (not this, not this) all that is unreal is both negated and renounced.<sup>3</sup> Thought, duality, maya - all are transcended. The relative ideas of pain and pleasure, and good and evil are annihilated in the face of the Absolute Brahman.

The effects of such an experience on the mind are devastating. In this experience of total absorption, or nirvikalpa samadhi, the conscious self is annihilated and absorbed into Brahman. All qualified experience, all illusion

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1. Ibid., p. 27.

2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. Ibid., p. 28.

is gone; only Brahman remains.

Ramakrishna was profoundly influenced by this school of thought as it was directly presented and revealed to him by Totapuri. To cultivate the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi was, however, the most difficult spiritual task in Ramakrishna's experience. In order to do so he was forced to withdraw his mind from all objects of the relative world including his beloved mother Kali, who was relegated to the relative and illusory world by virtue of the fact that she was the symbol of personality. But he was filled with her presence. According to Vedanta she was a hindrance in an effort of man to gain the experience of Brahman. Except for the dominating presence of the mother Kali the Bengalian could become free.

When at last the spiritual destruction of the mother Kali was accomplished and Ramakrishna realized his ultimate identification with Brahman, the Absolute, a new lesson was evident to him, which became at once both his interpretation and contribution to the Vedanta system. At this point can also be seen certain influences brought upon Ramakrishna by the two philosophical systems discussed above.

The relative world was in reality a manifestation of the Divine Mother.<sup>1</sup> This was symbolized in the form of woman, which form was the symbol of perfection. Maya on the other hand became Brahman. Maya now works in the relative world in two distinct ways.<sup>2</sup> The first of these is characterized by Avidyamaya which represents certain created forces such as sensuous desires, evil passions, and cruelty. In this context is the round of birth

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1. Ibid., p. 30.

2. Ibid., p. 31

and death to be understood. Vidyamaya is the higher force of creation. While elevating man to higher planes of consciousness this manifestation of maya in the relative world is displayed in spiritual virtues and enlightening qualities. These two aspects of maya are the two forces of creation which in turn are the two powers of Kali.

Beyond Kali is the featureless Absolute, even Brahman. The two aspects of maya or the relative world as noted above are in effect stages towards the realization of Brahman. All together they represent the particular and individual contribution of Ramakrishna to Vedantic thought.

Of the many and various influences which contributed to the thought and experience of Ramakrishna none was more important than the influence of "the builders of unity" in nineteenth century Hindu India.<sup>1</sup> The original movement, known as the Brahma Samaj was started by Raja Rammohan Roy, a Hindu priest who found tremendous validity and worth in other religions, particularly in Christianity and Islam, but who always returned to the ancient Hindu scriptures for his individual inspiration. The movement that he started sought to find truth in any known tradition. It ". . . was dedicated to the worship and adoration of the Eternal, the Unsearchable, the Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe."<sup>2</sup>

The organizational ability of Devendranath Tagore, father of the poet Rabindranath, brought this movement into prominence. Under his influence the

Brahma Samaj professed one Self-existent Supreme Being who had created the universe out of nothing, the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Power, the Eternal and Omnipotent, the One without a Second. Man should love Him and do His will, believe in Him and worship Him, and thus

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1. Rolland, Op. Cit., p. 91.

2. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 40.

merit salvation in the world to come.<sup>1</sup>

Keshab Chandra Sen succeeded Devendranath Tagore as leader of the Brahmo Samaj. Under his influence certain Western Christian ideas were introduced to the Indian movement. Among these were the uniqueness of Christ as saviour and the inspirational writings of St. Paul. Keshab began to preach the harmony of religions. In this context truth could be found in any of the major religious traditions. This he called God's newly revealed law or the New Dispensation. In certain areas of India Keshab's ideas brought a great influx of western culture upon Indian custom.

In opposition to the Brahmo Samaj came the Arya Samaj.<sup>2</sup> According to this movement the Brahmo was essentially a compromise with European culture. It, therefore, tacitly admitted western superiority. The Arya Samaj was dedicated to the opposition of all ideas foreign to traditional Indian thought and practice. Accordingly the Vedas were the ultimate authority in religion. Other religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, were rejected.

Out of this discussion came Ramakrishna whose individual thought appears as a curious combination of the above two positions. On the one hand he preached the harmony of all religions.<sup>3</sup> This has become known as at least one important aspect of the Ramakrishna mission. "All religions are true in their essence and in the sincere faith of their believers."<sup>4</sup> Ramakrishna favored unity of all aspects of God regardless of tradition or any other

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1. Ibid., p. 41.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

3. Ibid., p. 34.

4. Rolland, Op. Cit., p. 189.

particular relative barriers. He would have endorsed with enthusiasm the profession of the dedication of the Brahmo.

But on the other hand Ramakrishna was not contrary to the spirit of the Arya Samaj.<sup>1</sup> In every aspect of this thought, experience, or instruction Ramakrishna remained thoroughly Indian. Western ideology, or non-Hindu terminology, was foreign to his thought or utterances. Although certain valid experiences were known by him in the context of other religious traditions, it cannot be denied that in every sense the final and complete meaning of his experience was felt under the shadow of the mother Kali in the temple garden at Dakshineswar.

The philosophy of the Tantra, the system of Vaishnavism, Vedanta, and the movement towards religious unity stand as four important religio-philosophic influences on the life of Ramakrishna. Surely other influences on his thought and experience could be cited at this point. But it is the opinion of this writer that in the theoretical tension between these various positions are summarized the vital issues which serve as a background on the one hand and as an introduction on the other to Ramakrishna's thought.

## 2. The Way of Realization

For Ramakrishna thought and experience are basically identical. No system of thought is of any significant importance or relevance unless the experience of the thinker is in harmony with the essence and meaning of that system. In order to know and to understand reality, both in the cosmological sense and in the order of being, one must have first had an experience of that reality. The degree of the real which one has harmoniously incorporated

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1. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 39.

into his experience is the precise degree to which he has a knowledge of the real.

Now out of this statement comes at least one relevant implication, which if analyzed will contribute to an increased understanding of Ramakrishna. For him the structure of the real is determined by the experience of the real.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the way of approach to reality and the report of reality, in whatever form this report may be presented, the latter is determined by the former.

In a significant sense this dynamic relationship between thought and experience contributes to a particular relationship between philosophy and religion. If philosophy may accurately be described as the attempt to formulate a rationally constituted system of reality in which no element of experience is unaccounted for, and if religion be contained in its broadest sense in the mutual striving between God (reality) and man (that is, less than the real) to realize their identification, then in the manner stated above the inner side of philosophy becomes a religion. Thought about reality becomes inextricably mixed with the effort to experience that reality. Indeed without any experience of the real, thought of the real is without meaning. On the other hand the experience of the real rationally constituted becomes a philosophy of the real.

With this in mind the consideration of the way of approach according to Ramakrishna is characterized. It is manifested in certain systems of thought which have been formulated according to certain levels of experience. A progression is seen in both instances from the lowest to the highest - that is, from the lack of accurate knowledge of the real to an absolute

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1. Ibid., p. 39.

knowledge known in an experiential identification with reality.

1. Dvaita - Dualism.

According to Ramakrishna the plane of ignorance is that which may be called Dvaita or Dualism.<sup>1</sup> This state of inadequate knowledge is that condition of man in which he lives and experiences entirely within the context of multiplicity and relationship. There is no single principle of meaning in harmony with which he orders his life, no principle, theoretical or experiential in nature, which is his goal to understand or to serve.

This state of dualism finds its natural opposition in two other systems of thought. Together with qualified non-dualism and absolute non-dualism, dualism stands as one of the three great metaphysical systems of thought.<sup>2</sup> In each the identity of thought and experience as discussed above is essential; towards the end of each there is a way of approach, at the conclusion of which reality, of a nature described in any one of the three systems, or any particular combination of any parts of the three, is manifested in and through the life of him that is prepared to live in harmony with his realization.

According to Ramakrishna these three metaphysical systems represent three stages in man's progress towards Ultimate Reality.<sup>3</sup> In this sense these systems are not contradictory to one another. Rather they are mutually complementary and represent in the final analysis a progression of knowledge. For the progress towards reality is in one important sense a matter of knowledge. In other words dualism represents the level of ignorance;

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1. Rolland, Op. Cit., p. 190.

2. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 39.

3. Ibid., p. 39.

qualified non-dualism represents an intermediary level of knowledge, while absolute non-dualism signifies enlightenment or complete knowledge. Because thought and experience must be identical in true knowledge these three systems stand as a comprehensive theory of knowledge in which the seeker after enlightenment participates to a progressively more intense degree in the contents of his thought. Where thought and experience unite reality is manifest in true knowledge.

Ramakrishna characterizes the state of Dvaita as one of attachment.<sup>1</sup> In the main these attachments are to objects of the senses which to Ramakrishna are summarized in the two words "woman and gold."<sup>2</sup> On the one hand woman represents sensual attachments of pleasure, lust and the like. On the other hand gold represents worldly achievements and status, and in particular a sense of dependence upon economic comforts.

Accordingly this level of knowledge is characterized as ignorance, or that life of thought and experience lived apart from God-consciousness. God-consciousness in this sense represents that supreme principle or unifying factor, which if present in the condition of Dvaita would incorporate some sense of unity amid constantly fluctuating attachments. Also the life of an ignorant or worldly man is declared to be hypocritical.<sup>3</sup> It cannot be guileless. Although man professes to love God he constantly is attracted to worldly objects. Under such circumstances man does not give God even a very small part of the love he feels for "woman and gold."

At this point the significance and meaning of Dvaita becomes clear.

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1. Ibid., p. 200.

2. Ibid., p. 327.

3. Ibid., p. 401.

Things, lives, and minds exist separately from Ultimate Reality. In a matter of speaking Reality underlies all phenomena which are conceived and experienced within an ever changing pattern of multiplicity and relationship. Basic attractions do not find their rest and fulfillment outside the context of "woman and gold."<sup>1</sup> According to this the aspirant after true knowledge lives in the context of worldliness, enjoyment, and the fulfillment of desire. He is deviated from the path of yoga by his wish for pleasures; in this sense true knowledge, found in an experience of Reality, and ignorance, found in experiences lived entirely within multiplicity and relationship, are separate. This is Dvaita.

A significant aspect of this state of knowledge, which represents the first stage of the way of approach to Reality, is the way along which man can rise out of ignorance. Here in a forceful sense is manifested the essence of the Ramakrishna mission.<sup>2</sup> Ramakrishna was absorbed in the idea that any one religious path to God, or any one philosophical structure of Reality which excluded all others, was invalid. All religions - that is, every doctrinal religious system and tradition - represents a path to God. Likewise philosophically all is to be known as one. There must be realized "the union and unity of all the aspects of Reality, of all the transports of love and knowledge, of all forms of humanity."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly Ramakrishna never preached any one way of approach to Reality which was exclusive of all others. His way in the main appeared to be a particular and individual Hindu version of the way made manifest in theoretical and experiential ten-

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1. Ibid., p. 112.

2. Ibid., p. 39.

3. Ibid., p. 192.

sions between at least the above four summarized positions.

Thus the way of approach to Reality according to Ramakrishna, as it is manifested on the level of Dvaita, is characterized by certain spiritual aids. For the ordinary aspirant living on the level of Dvaita a dualistic form of religion, prescribing a certain amount of material support, such as music and symbols, is helpful.<sup>1</sup> In other words to this scale of thought there is a corresponding scale of duties.

At this point in the thought of Ramakrishna two of the above mentioned influences are relevant. According to the Tantra philosophy, natural sensual attractions in man are recognized. In this sense it is the effort of the aspirant to find among and through his appetites and desires the presence of Reality. In this context Ramakrishna advises "Householders,"<sup>2</sup> or those attempting to carry on their natural and active lives while finding higher knowledge at the same time, to employ certain aids. Among these are chanting of scriptural forms of worship or holy sounds, like Om. (This signifies the presence of the Brahman of the Vedanta.)<sup>3</sup>

Other spiritual aids offered by Ramakrishna to those aspirants after true knowledge whose thought and experience dwells on the level of Dvaita indicate the influences of Vaishnavism on the Hindu saint. In response to a beginner as to the way to perfectly realize God, Ramakrishna replies that "Bhakti is the one essential thing."<sup>4</sup> Lower Bhakti is a love of God aided by scriptures. Accordingly the three characterizations of worship in lower Bhakti -

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1. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 39.

2. Ibid., Chapter 4.

3. Ibid., p. 403.

4. Ibid., p. 111.

tamas, rajas, and sattva - incorporate all possible attitudes and thoughts of the aspirant who lives and experiences on the level of Dvaita. Undisciplined spiritual disciples who fail to detach their minds from the senses and from their desires, even though they practice the art of worship, are unaffected by the meaning of their worship. They display rajastic and tamastic natures.<sup>1</sup>

But those who practice spiritual discipline, which is necessary for spiritual knowledge, and those who cultivate detachment display the attitude of sattva. Sattva begets Bhakti.<sup>2</sup> This harmony of attitudes and thoughts breeds wisdom and spiritual insight and prepares the aspirant after true knowledge for elevation out of the ignorant level of Dvaita.

#### ii. Visishtadvaita - Qualified Non-Dualism

Along the way of approach to Reality there is an organic progression in which the seeker thinks in a certain system of thought and attempts to live in harmony with the substance and meaning of his thought. To the degree he succeeds in doing this, reality is identified with his nature. Ramakrishna notes a continuous progression in knowledge through the three above mentioned schools of thought from the level of ignorance to true knowledge, in which knowledge the aspirant realizes his essential identity with the Ultimate Reality. The second of the systems referred to by Ramakrishna as being the intermediary position in the way of approach to reality is Visishtadvaita or Qualified Non-Dualism.

In Dvaita or Dualism the knowledge situation was characterized by

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1. Ibid., p. 250.

2. Ibid., p. 255.

attachment to the fluctuating sensual aspects implicit in a world wherein reality is described entirely in the context of multiplicity and relationship. This is ignorance. Amid the many there is no ultimate object to which the seeker is dedicated, no spiritual principle of meaning within experience. In qualified non-dualism this basic knowledge situation is altered. God-consciousness, which transcends the idea of worldly duties, becomes the basic factor in knowledge. It is the ultimate principle in thought; the highest moment in experience. Reality, so described, is characterized by things, lives, and minds, not separated from the supreme spiritual principle, but part of this principle as accidental manifestations.

Immediately certain qualifications must be imposed upon the qualified non-dualistic level of knowledge. Among these is the place and significance of reason. According to Ramakrishna the mind can understand and explain the scope of thought and experience up to the Visishtadvaita level and no further.<sup>1</sup> Above this intermediary level of knowledge the categories of reason are transcended. Rational judgments in which the subject is always a reference to reality and in which the object is equally a qualification of said reality are applicable only to this level of knowledge and below. As will be noted below higher knowledge cannot be discussed in terms of a subject and object distinction.

Ramakrishna's attitude towards rational analysis is almost one of sheer disdain. "There is nothing in mere scholarship."<sup>2</sup> Scholarship in this sense is the rational analysis or manipulation of the world of multiplicity. In this sense analysis is in the main carried on in ignorance or Dvaita.

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1. Ibid., p. 39.

2. Ibid., p. 104.

The attitude born of knowledge, at least as it is manifest, on an intermediary level, is expressed by the following. "O God, Thou art the Master, and all these things belong to (and are manifestations of) Thee."<sup>1</sup>

In another aspect of his attitude concerning intermediary knowledge Ramakrishna speaks of suffering. Suffering in this context is not to be considered in its existential or psychological aspects. Suffering is an inevitable and natural outcome of inadequate knowledge. Ramakrishna expresses this with extreme force. All our suffering is due to ignorance - that is, to a belief in a reality described most accurately in multiplicity.<sup>2</sup> Basic to suffering in multiplicity is the ego or the "I". Qualified non-dualism is just such because of the qualification of the I. The ego is the reason in experience for thought in multiplicity. I causes separation. The mind cannot transcend the I simply because in true knowledge the individual mind or ego does not exist.

As in the preceding section a significant aspect of the characterization of this level of knowledge is the way in which one is to proceed along the way of approach to a higher level of knowledge. Here as before the religious and philosophic tensions between the schools of thought which were of major influence on Ramakrishna are relevant. Much importance at this level is placed upon the way according to the Vedanta.

The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and that the world in all its various forms is illusory.<sup>3</sup> Now the way one differentiates between Brahman and all other forms of existence is by a process of rational

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1. Ibid., p. 105.

2. Ibid., p. 149.

3. Ibid., p. 544.

discrimination. This is Jnana which signifies a process of reasoning and discrimination by which the Ultimate Reality is both conceived and experienced.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand is Brahman; on the other is any other particular form of existence. The eternal rational question is the following: is there any real existence outside the existence of Brahman? On the level of knowledge manifest in Visishtadvaita this rational question is valid; above it is not.

Although Ramakrishna was profoundly influenced by the Vedanta, and although he experienced the full effects of its philosophy in his life there are, at least on this level of knowledge, certain aspects of his thinking which a strict Vedantist would hesitate to admit. This tension is focused in the concept of love or yearning. Discrimination is secondary in importance to the yearning of the seeker after God.<sup>2</sup>

As has been noted above Bhakti was a significant and important aspect of the "Master's" teaching. It is in Bhakti that yearning is to be understood.<sup>3</sup> Without the intense love of God known in Bhakti the yearning for God is a meaningless delusion. But another fact indicates the significance of Bhakti over that of Jnana or rational discrimination. Bhakti does not have to undergo a change in kind in order that it become the Ultimate Reality itself. This is one of the most important tenets of Vaishnavism as noted above. The highest experience, according to this school of thought, is prema. In other words pure Bhakti is an end in itself. Jnana on the other hand is a means to an end. Jnana signifies the way according to which the

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1. Ibid., p. 1036.

2. Ibid., p. 636.

3. Ibid., p. 638.

Vedantist gains his experience of identity with Brahman. In that experience Jnana is by definition transcended. In this way would Ramakrishna signify the level of knowledge in Visishtadvaita as the highest realm of knowledge in which the subject and object distinction is relevant. On a higher level such a distinction is non-applicable.

### iii. Advaita - Absolute Non-Dualism

Along the way of approach the seeker after the Ultimate Reality has progressed in a two-fold manner. According to a certain system of thought and a certain pattern of experience he has possessed a certain level of knowledge. Ignorance was manifest in the conception of an ultimate multiplicity in the nature of things, and in the characterization of experience according to sensual type attachments. On a higher intermediary level of knowledge the presence of reality became manifested in and through sensual phenomena, and experience on its highest level, according to this system of thought, found its fulfillment in the transcending of reason and the incorporation of prema.

Now the end of the way of approach is imminent. The sign of this end is perfect knowledge in which the Ultimate Reality and its manifestations in the world of phenomena are equally real.<sup>1</sup> Multiplicity and relationship, which on the level of ignorance served as a fitting description of reality, now are reduced to differences and relations in form only. In essence everything is spirit, and all is One.

As there is a sign of the end of the way, so is there a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Multiplicity is empty; reason has been transcended in pure Bhakti. All phenomena that once appeared in certain senses to be real has

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1. Ibid., p. 39.

been lost.

There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the I, which may be likened to the salt doll, melts in the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left.<sup>1</sup>

This is a statement of the essence of Advaita. Although the formulation of the statement as it has been expressed by Ramakrishna is brief and complete in itself there are at least two considerations which follow the above. The first of these is the explanation of Perfect Knowledge. The second is the application of the statement to the various schools of thought which influenced Ramakrishna, and in the context of which he instructed his disciples. The explanation will be considered first.

In the life and thought of Ramakrishna one condition of his experience was tremendously significant to himself and equally as influential to those disciples who considered him their Master. This condition is known as samadhi.<sup>2</sup> In the temple garden at Dakshineswar where Ramakrishna worshipped God, meditated on the essence and meaning of reality, and gave even his life to his disciples and devotees, samadhi was a not infrequent occurrence. Certainly it cannot be denied that the utterances of Ramakrishna were of profound importance to his disciples. But the example of samadhi on the part of the Master must have left the most forcible and significant impression on their minds. Samadhi was the living testimony of the validity of the Master's teachings.

In the variations of the meanings of this term there also lies the

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1. Ibid., p. 148.

2. Ibid., p. 639.

substance of the explanation of Advaita. Generally samadhi refers to religious experience.<sup>1</sup> It is synonymous with ecstasy, trance, or direct communion with God. But immediately certain qualifications are relevant in the significance and meaning of this condition of experience.

According to Ramakrishna there are four types of samadhi, the explication of which types are at once an abstract of the positions of Dvaita, Visishtadvaita, and Advaita, and an explanation of Advaita. Just as these positions represent a comprehensive theory of knowledge which is a way of approach to reality, so do the various kinds of samadhi represent a progression to an experience in the context of Advaita.

In order that samadhi be experienced a certain degree of illumination in spiritual knowledge is necessary. In this context samadhi is out of harmony with the experience of the seeker who dwells in Dvaita or the level of dualism or ignorance. But as God-consciousness is attained and as the world of phenomena becomes a sensual manifestation of this consciousness there is the opportunity for immediate contact with reality of the ultimate principle described in this intermediary stage of knowledge. Such a contact is known as chetana samadhi.<sup>2</sup> In this experience there is communion with God; however, I-consciousness is retained and the seeker is aware of relationship - that is, relationship between his ego and God and the phenomenal world.

On a higher plane of experience the presence of reality is more firm, and God-consciousness attains to a higher degree of reality in sthita samadhi.<sup>3</sup> Because true knowledge has not as yet been realized, and because experience

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1. Ibid., p. 1044.

2. Ibid., p. 1033.

3. Ibid., p. 476.

is still valid within the context of the subject and object distinction a third kind of samadhi, that called savikalpa, is experienced.<sup>1</sup> I-consciousness and God-consciousness are still separate.

It is only in the highest kind of samadhi, that called nirvikalpa, that this distinction is annihilated.<sup>2</sup> In this experience all traces of dualism, which existed on lower planes of knowledge, are transcended. Advaita is attained. "The mind completely takes the form of Reality."<sup>3</sup> This is total absorption in which nothing exists as real except Satchidananda or the Ultimate Reality.

This experience known in the condition of Advaita finds harmony in certain of the systems which were of significance for the thought and experience of Ramakrishna. Outstanding among these is the Vedanta, in which system the Ultimate Reality is described in precisely the same terms as Advaita—that is, Absolute Non-Dualism. Only Brahman exists as real. Brahman is to be realized only in such an experience of absorption as is described by nirvikalpa samadhi. That this is necessary is justified by the fact that unless absorption were manifest separateness would still exist and Brahman could not be Brahman.<sup>4</sup>

Within the Vedanta system a certain doctrine is here to be introduced which will give further clarity to the absorption experience. This is the Atman. According to Vedanta philosophy the Atman is the Brahman; that is, within the existence of Brahman there is a "Supreme Soul" or "Self".<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 1030.

2. Ibid., p. 1024.

3. Ibid., p. 639.

4. Ibid., p. 476.

5. Ibid., p. 1030.

Along the way of approach, which way is a process of discrimination or jnana, the seeker after the absorption experience reaches the point in experience at which his individual self is identified with the Atman. Because the Atman is the Brahman a "supreme identity" is realized. This is the significance of the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi; this is the meaning of Advaita according to the Vedanta.

The experience of Advaita also finds interesting connections with the philosophy of the Tantra, which as noted above was also a profound influence on the Master in this as well as in the other aspects of his thought. Theoretically the essence of Reality, Consciousness, is identical with all aspects of creation which display any degree of consciousness in their natures. In order that pure Consciousness, or Chit, be realized, the aspirant after Reality proceeds along the pathway of Yoga.<sup>1</sup> According to this way of approach all lower aspects of creation, symbolized most perfectly by the Mother Kali, must be transcended and the unity of Siva and Sakti must be realized in the experience of him who would attain to Pure Knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This is the meaning of Yoga, which in effect is a means of realizing unity in and through separateness.<sup>3</sup>

It is primarily at this point in the progression to higher forms of knowledge that the Tantra and Vedanta philosophies become mutually interdependent and influential in the thought and experience of Ramakrishna. It was through the spiritual presence of the Mother Kali that the force of Reality was symbolized. It was through the destruction of Kali that the totality

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1. Ibid., p. 20.
  2. Ibid., p. 330.
  3. Ibid., p. 1048.

of the Being of reality was realized in the experience of the absorption of the Atman and the Brahman into an absolute non-dualism. But finally it was again in the Tantra that Ramakrishna turned to realize the identification of Reality as passive, Siva, and Reality as active or creative, Sakti. This identity adds a final qualification to the meaning of Advaita. The way and the end are One. Absolutely no separation remains.

### 3. The Supreme Identity

From the level of ignorance through an intermediary stage of knowledge to true knowledge, which is called Advaita or Absolute Non-Dualism, there has been a continual progression. At first separateness was manifest as reality was appropriately described entirely within the constant change which characterizes multiplicity and relationship. Subject and object were distinct in the knowledge situation. As the pattern of experience and the content of thought more closely approximated God-consciousness, in the context of which multiplicity and relationship gained their meaning, an intermediary stage of knowledge was attained. Actually thought and experience were themselves gaining a closer harmony; in effect they were progressing towards their eventual identification in the life of the aspirant who adequately prepared himself for even higher forms of knowledge. Reason and its categories found the limit of its applicability, as God-consciousness became, in effect, the totality of subject, object, and the necessary knowledge gap between them. The end is attained in Advaita or Absolute Non-Dualism. This experience is known in the total absorption of all elements of knowledge and experience which were once distinguished by separateness. In a word this state of experience is to be characterized by the Supreme Identity.

Certain qualifications are immediately required in the explanation of the Supreme Identity. Ramakrishna, like many other saintly religious figures in any of the various historical religious traditions, never produced a systematic metaphysical statement of his position. He spoke only of knowledge and experience; he knew that in the final analysis these were to be absolutely identified with one another, and his life was a testimony to this belief. Knowledge for him was the way the seeker would approach Reality; experience was the medium through which Reality would most appropriately be expressed by him who had found an exalted level of knowledge. But apart from his instruction of the way in which he naturally attempted description of the end of that way, he never offered an explanation of the total structure of the real or of the nature of its Being.

The Supreme Identity, however, is a name not out of harmony with the implications of Ramakrishna's thought as it has been considered in the two preceding sections. In fact it is not inaccurate to state that the end of the way is in effect the Supreme Identity. Thus the Supreme Identity finds its meaning in Advaita in which condition of experience all that was once separate in existence is now one in experience. The many have become the One in Ultimate Reality which is an absolutely unqualified monism.

The documentation for this metaphysical statement, which follows from the above theory of knowledge according to Ramakrishna, is once again to be found in those systems and currents of thought which were of such a meaningful influence on Ramakrishna. Perhaps most directly relevant at this point in the argument is a restatement of the Ramakrishna mission: that Reality is to be realized immanently, in all its various aspects and manifestations as unqualifiedly One; that all the "transports of love" and the forms of

knowledge and traditions of man, whether they be in the form of historical and doctrinal religious traditions or philosophically oriented schools of thought, be viewed as various and equal ways to identically the same end - the realization of the One Eternal, Immutable, Ultimate Reality, and the absolute identification of all forms of existence with It.

In terms of the Tantra this would be according to a process of Yoga to a realization of Chit or Consciousness. According to Vaishnavism this absolute Oneness is in the context of prema or complete love. And finally the Vedanta would designate this absolute identification of all aspects of Reality as the supreme identity of the Atman with Brahman, in which identity Reality is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute.

CHAPTER IV  
WHAT IS MYSTICISM?

Mysticism, at least as it has been considered in the light of St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna, cannot entirely be explained according to the disciplines and methods of reason. Nor can it be entirely comprehended according to the same manner. Mysticism refers to an ineffable and individual experience in which the experiencer is identified or is in a state in which he believes himself to be identified to a certain extent with the Divine. That the Divine exists is not a major issue within mystical philosophy. It is assumed that creatures are capable of experiencing qualities of entities other than themselves. Such experience is by definition limited in accordance with the limitations of the experiencing agent. Now there must be an ultimate quality or entity, a reality, in the light of which all relative and limited experience gains its meaning. Without the movement of such ultimate reality within the realm of limited and definable experience the latter has no reference outside of itself. In this context the Ultimate Reality is the Divine. It is the end of the mystic quest. It is inexplicable simply because explanation rests on the coordination of limited and definable terms to which the Divine as such has no qualitative reference.

Before further discussion of mysticism is attempted a basic distinction must be drawn: that is between mysticism as an experience of the mystic and mysticism as the attempt on the part of another to understand that experience. The former is the ineffable experience itself as realized by the

experiencer; the latter is the interpretation and systematization given to that experience. This attempt to understand the mystical experience of another is broadly known as the philosophy of mysticism. The philosophy of mysticism is a growing field of inquiry which has as its foundation the body of mystical reports which have been formulated throughout the centuries. Any discussion of the philosophy of mysticism cannot attempt to be founded in mystical experiences themselves. Rather its data are the statements of the mystics, and its end is a clear systematization and interpretation of these mystic reports.

It must be understood at the outset of this investigation that this chapter does not presume to formulate the philosophy of mysticism in all its various aspects and implications. However, it is hoped that these considerations on the nature of mysticism, at least as it is exemplified in St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna and in part in the two religious traditions from which they emerged, may contribute to the philosophy of mysticism. In this sense this investigation is a study of the philosophy of mysticism. In more concise terminology there is attempted in the final chapter of this thesis the formulation of a philosophy of mysticism.

The entire field of the philosophy of mysticism and also this study within the philosophy of mysticism has a single but two-fold dedication. It is considered that the attempt to interpret and to systematize the mystic experience has contributory value to the entire field of philosophic thought. Basic even to this is the dedication to the belief that if the reports of the mystics be taken seriously, and if these reports be considered in any sense to be true as an indication of the nature of reality then increased philosophic understanding of the nature of these experiences can be of great influence

on human moral behavior and spiritual understanding.

## 1. Epistemic Structure

### i. Theory of Organic Participation

It has been suggested above that the philosophic basis of mysticism is to be contained within experience. In its broadest scope experience refers to the response of any conscious creature to the whole complex of qualities and things or to any particular part of this broad complex. Now the framework for such experience, and the structure for this consideration of mysticism is outlined in two entities and defined and developed in their mutual relation and eventual possible identification. These two entities and their relationship determine the scope and extent of the mystical epistemology in this study of the philosophy of mysticism; they are the experiencer (any conscious aspect of creation) and the Divine (that which is at least the totality of consciousness). One fundamental difference appears to separate these two terms: the experiencer, on the one hand, is subject to the limitations which accord with its nature as creature; the Divine, by definition, knows no possible limitation.

This difference gives rise to an epistemology which will stand as the theory of knowledge in this study of the philosophy of mysticism. It can be designated as the theory of organic participation. Below it will be noted that this theory of knowledge will be particularly relevant in the context of mysticism as it is exemplified in St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna.

This theory of knowledge is not unlike philosophic considerations of knowledge as they have appeared in certain forms throughout the history of philosophy. In its traditional historic form epistemology has been based on various conceptions of the reality of the subject-object relationship. In

this context major questions have been concerned with the nature of the subject and the nature of the object. Basic to the entire field are the fundamentally important questions of the problem of the relation between subject and object and the problem of the framework in which this relationship is to be considered.

In regard to the theory of organic participation in this study of the philosophy of mysticism the subject is the experiencer and the object is the Divine. At the outset this epistemic relation is based on the evident gap between subject and object. The subject, the experiencer or the seeker after the Divine, is not aware of the full effects that the Divine could possibly demonstrate in his experience; the object on the other hand is at least full actualization or awareness of all meaning and reality.

This framework for the theory of organic participation can be briefly but succinctly illustrated by reference to the condition of the seeker at the beginnings of the ways of approach according to both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna. St. John graphically described the beginning of the way as one in which the experiencer was conscious only of the absence of God, in that case the fully desired object of his experience.<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna likewise is precise in his characterization of the beginnings of the way.<sup>2</sup> According to him this condition of experience is characterized by ignorance or the separation of the object of knowledge, Reality, from the subject, the experiencer.

From these beginnings St. John and Ramakrishna both discussed the progression from lower to higher forms of knowledge, from separation between the

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1. Saint John of the Cross, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 31.

2. Rolland, Op. Cit., p. 190.

seeker and that which was sought to union in one case and absorption in the other. In both the aspirants after true knowledge sought to participate to a higher degree in the nature or essence of the end of the way - that is, he attempted to attain to a higher degree of closeness with that which was sought. The process and the stages according to which this was accomplished in both cases exemplifies and outlines the theory of organic participation.

This theory is to be considered as a development of the mystical theory of knowledge in this study of the philosophy of mysticism. The development takes the form of progressively more intense organic participation of the subject in the reality of the object, the end of which is a theoretically conceivable enlightenment - that is, the realization of the absolute identity of the two entities in the epistemic relation. This theory of knowledge is outlined in a dualistic relationship of the two epistemic terms. However, as the end of organic participation of subject in object is manifest in an absolute identity of the two terms, the theory is committed to a complete epistemic monism. Knower and known, where once considered separate and mutually intact, now are completely united. Knowledge no longer is at issue. The theory of organic participation is consummated in the full and final mystic experience. It is on this plane of experience that the nature of reality is realized in enlightenment. From this there can follow only a mystical report, which in whatever form presented, embodies metaphysical conclusions derived from the completion of the knowledge process or organic participation.

The reality of an absolute identity of subject and object in this theory of organic participation is one of the main points of argument between the Christian, St. John of the Cross, and the Hindu, Ramakrishna. Extensive

qualification in the light of each of the chapters on these two religious figures will appear below in the particular sections of the discussion of the way in which this point is relevant - that is, in the stages of union and absorption.

This section has been an abstract of the major contention of this thesis - that mysticism, at least as it is represented in the Christian, St. John of the Cross and in the Hindu, Ramakrishna, is in the main to be understood as a matter of knowledge. In this knowledge situation the knower and the known seek to realize their unity, of a certain limited character, or their absolute identification in consciousness. Consciousness in this sense is the theoretical or spiritual basis for the mystic experience; as such it is the basis for the framework in which the theory of organic participation is to be considered. Likewise does consciousness provide the foundation for the development and fulfillment of the way, no matter in what manner the end of this way is realized.

## 2. The Way of Approach

The way of approach in this study of the philosophy of mysticism has been analyzed as an epistemic framework into which are fit various stages in the organic participation of the subject in the object. That a way of approach is necessary in mysticism is a point which needs no lengthy argument. At the starting point in both St. John and Ramakrishna the existence of God or reality was evident. Also evident was the lack of God's presence in the experience of the seeker on the one hand and ignorance of the nature of Reality on the other. In both there was no feeling or idea that God or Reality could not be brought into the experience of him who would attain to

a higher degree of closeness to God or a more adequate knowledge of Reality. Out of this experiential situation comes an implied need for a specified organic progression within experience in which the subject, the experiencer, can realize a certain designated level of identification with the object, the Divine. Such an organic progression is found in the way of approach.

As the consideration of the way of approach proceeds a pronounced rhythm and alternation of knowledge of the Divine will become manifest. Many are the ways of expressing this alternation. None perhaps bear so effectively on mystical epistemology as does the distinction between the positive and negative divine. It is an aspect of this thesis that both of these conceptions of the Divine are requisite for the attainment of the end of the way of approach. Both these aspects of the Divine will be considered in more detail below. But here at the outset, their fundamental distinction can be noted. The positive divine affirms the activity and dynamism of the Ultimate Reality, in effect its creative aspect. In this sense the Divine is Being. In opposition to this the negative divine indicates an inactive unchangeable essence. As in the Vedanta, "not this, not this" is its method. Here the most accurate characterization of the Divine is non-being.<sup>1</sup> Each of these characterizations when taken as the totality is the ruination of the other. Both, when considered in their mutual complementation, constitute a basic indication of the Divine which is an indispensable aspect of the way of approach.

#### i. Conversion

In this study of the philosophy of mysticism the beginning of the way

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1. W. T. Stace, Time and Eternity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 50.

of approach is known as conversion. Conversion in this sense is a conscious experiential condition known throughout a great deal of world religious and mystical literature. In accordance with the theory of organic participation as stated above, conversion is an experiential state marking a stage of knowledge. It is the point of experience from which the seeker begins his journey along the way of approach. This point of conversion in both St. John and Ramakrishna has been noted and illustrated in the preceding section.

Conversion in general is marked by discovery<sup>1</sup> - that is the claim by the mystic that a conscious "sense of reality"<sup>2</sup> is part of his experience. In the thinking and experience of the mystic there is a knowledge of reality on a higher level than that knowledge of the phenomenal world received through the senses or through inferences from sense data. By the attainment of this consciousness of reality the experiencer is thereby converted to the "reality of the unseen."<sup>3</sup>

Every conscious experiencer converted in this sense is a mystic. Because this "sense of reality" known in conversion becomes part of the convert's experience he has at least made certain progress along the way of approach. This progress is manifest in knowledge which is the distinguishing characteristic of all mystics. Knowledge is attained by progress along the way. This is the criterion by which all mystics, no matter how far they have proceeded along the way, may be characterized.

As noted above, conversion, at least in this study of the philosophy of

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1. Paul Elmer More, The Catholic Faith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), p. 208.
  2. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), p. 58.
  3. Ibid., p. 53.

mysticism, is the first stage of the mystic way of approach. Two distinct aspects of this first stage are discernible. First, there comes a conviction that there is an unseen spiritual realm which gives significance to the phenomenal world. The discovery of this order is the basis of all religions, as conscious beings seek rest and meaning in a realm which constitutes their spiritual goal and their moral guide. Such is St. Paul's reference when he says, "We look not at the things which are seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."<sup>1</sup>

The second aspect of conversion is found "in the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order."<sup>2</sup> This tendency dominates the whole consciousness. It is of basic importance in ethical systems which identify the Good and then declare that the good life for man lies in the extent to which he dedicates and patterns his life after this good. Also this tendency is the root of the mystic quest, because it initiates a process, the mystic way, which finds its ideal culmination in the union in which the mystic consciousness is absorbed into the Divine.

So described, conversion is the first stage in the mystical way of knowing. The knowledge gained is intuitive; it is opposed in nature of knowledge of an analytical type. The converted man finds himself immersed to a certain extent in the unseen spiritual realm. He finds his life becoming dedicated and patterned after the requirements which the spiritual life de-

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1. More, Op. Cit., p. 211.

2. Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1952), p. xiv.

mands. He is caught by the love of the Absolute; his aim and purpose become the spiritual and experiential union, no matter how the condition of union may be described, with this Absolute.

## ii. Purgation

Purgation is the next stage along the mystic path. It consists essentially of two definite actions: the cleansing of the self that is to advance towards mystic union, and the elimination of all illusion, evil, and imperfection which stand between the mystic and complete goodness.<sup>1</sup>

Purgation involves suffering. Now suffering in this sense has a two-fold consequence. In the first place suffering is an inevitable condition of the subject in the mystical epistemology. The subject is the experiencer who seeks identification with the Divine, and yet who suffers because of the limitations of his nature which manifest his separation from the object of his quest - the Divine. In this sense suffering is metaphysical. Yet in a second sense which is an aspect of the first, suffering may be construed as psychological. Within the mystic way of approach, as it is exemplified by religious mystics, it becomes the basis of a formula for religious experience - that the more intense the personal denial the greater the understanding and illumination which inevitably follows such denial. To deny oneself is to bear suffering; to suffer as a result of personal denial, at least as suffering is manifested in St. John of the Cross, is to be spiritually illuminated.

It is interesting to note at this point the place of suffering in the pattern of the way according to both St. John and Ramakrishna. In the sense

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1. Ibid., p. 204.

in which suffering is designated as metaphysical it is in harmony with this aspect of the purgative life according to Ramakrishna. In the condition of experience known as Dvaita or Dualism ignorance is manifest and suffering is real. The seeker after true knowledge of Reality suffers because his nature is limited by his ignorance. Because there is a separation in his experience between all aspects of reality - that is, because reality is framed entirely in the fluctuation of multiplicity and relationship - the seeker is separated from the object of his quest - that is, true knowledge of the identification of all aspects of reality into an absolutely unqualified monism.

On the other hand suffering in another sense is designated as psychological. In other words it becomes the pattern of progress along the way of approach that the more one suffers by dying to his own nature as creature the more he simulates that which by definition is beyond creaturehood, namely God or reality. This represents an apt description of suffering according to St. John of the Cross. The way is the way of agony. Suffering is manifest and real along the way from its very beginning through the active and passive nights of the sense and spirit. It is only in the experience of union, according to St. John, that this suffering is relieved - that is, until the seeker gains rest and fulfillment in the object of his quest or God, suffering is a basic aspect of his experience.

The result of purgation is illumination. Yet before the mystic gains this illumined vision he must be cleansed. In most cases this purging of the self has taken form in the act of mortification. Mortification can be divided into constituent parts. These are chastity, obedience, and poverty.<sup>1</sup>

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1. James, Op. Cit., p. 304.

These represent illuminative aspects along the mystic way which are most relevant in the context of mysticism according to the Roman Catholic Church, out of which tradition came the mystical thought of St. John of the Cross. However, it may be validly stated that these important aspects of the illuminative life are not out of harmony with the mystic way of approach according to other traditions including that which produced Ramakrishna.

In the thought of Ramakrishna chastity, obedience, and poverty are significant aspects of the illuminative condition of the mystic experience. To be chaste is to be pure of soul. Speaking generally, the mystic in this sense cleanses his soul of all desires but that for God. Ramakrishna uses the symbol of "woman" to signify the condition of maya in the spirit of man. Maya breeds desires and impurity of soul. The means of cleansing and the way to chastity is one of mental discipline or Yoga. Woman is no longer to be viewed in the context of sensuality. Woman now becomes an indispensable aspect of Reality as formulated by the Tantra. "All women are the embodiments of Sakti. It is the Primal Power (the creative aspect of Reality) that has become women and appears to us in the form of women."<sup>1</sup>

This discipline of mind required for the attainment of chastity is in reality obedience. Obedience is mortification of the will. The result of this usually is perfected in a sense of "holy indifference" to life in the phenomenal world. Ramakrishna never advocated such strict austerities of body and mind as those required by St. John of the Cross. Yet an aspirant after Perfect Knowledge could never attain his end, according to Ramakrishna, unless he engaged in strict measures of discipline. "The mind must withdraw

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1. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 336.

totally from all objects of form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Only thus does it become pure."<sup>1</sup>

The end of obedience is poverty which is a complete material and spiritual detachment from this life and especially from all its material luxuries.<sup>2</sup> The spiritual condition of poverty is known in the thought of Ramakrishna. The emphasis, however, is not focused on loss of man's self in spiritual poverty as stated by St. John, but in gain of Bhakti. "Bhakti, love of God, is the essence of all spiritual discipline."<sup>3</sup> The way of agony differs from the way of realization. But at least on the illuminative stage in the way of approach the differences in emphasis cannot cloud the oneness of end - that is the attainment to a high degree of the presence of God in the mind of the mystic.

This is purgation. In it the mystic makes another advance in the mystical way of knowing. Mortification is concrete and practical. Through the active practice of chastity, obedience, and poverty the mystic is introduced into the illuminative wisdom of the spiritual life. As a process of practical education mortification directs the mystic towards a kind of spiritual vitality and efficiency. This is the demand of spiritual denial. This is the prerequisite of spiritual illumination.

### iii. Illumination

Through conversion the mystic has become reborn into the spiritual life; through purgation he has cleansed himself. The result of this organic process

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1. Ibid., p. 350.

2. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 218.

3. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p.123.

at least as it becomes a working aspect of the way of approach according to the theory of organic participation is illumination. Illumination is enlightenment. It is a new intensity of spiritual awareness in which the mystic has become adjusted to new standards of understanding, conduct, and thought.<sup>1</sup>

In illumination there is the first real establishment of the mystic life.<sup>2</sup> Through an active and concretely realistic educational process, as discussed above in the sections on conversion and purgation, the mystic has prepared himself to receive enlightenment. With this new awareness his active life and expression now find harmony with his intensely new intuitive insight. Often the mystic thinks he has achieved his spiritual quest at this stage. But, as mystical literature shows, more intense agony, denial, and total surrender to God must precede the mystic rest in the Absolute.

The illumined consciousness is manifested in two forms. First, there is a direct "sense of the Presence of God."<sup>3</sup> This awareness of God's presence is not an analogy or metaphor. It is the claim of the mystic of a direct confrontation of God and man in experience. It can only be differentiated from the union of the mystic and the Absolute in the sense that the individuality of the mystic "remains separate and intact."<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, the illumined consciousness is manifested in an enlightened view of the phenomenal world. This is usually a sacramental vision of the universe. Most commonly it takes form in "the discovery of the Perfect One

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 234.

2. Ibid., p. 238.

3. Ibid., p. 241.

4. Ibid., p. 246.

self-revealed in the Mary."<sup>1</sup> The mystic is inspired by the fullness of life and spiritual opportunity. He is inspired by the need to reach out to all that is in the world with the message of his inspiration. In all the world the mystic finds the spirit of God as the mysterious One pervading all existing things.

Within the field of literature there can be found abundant illustrations of this enlightened view of the phenomenal world. Such is the meaning of "Flower in the Crannied Wall" by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you there, root in all, in my hand;  
Little flower - but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly the poet is here inspired by the manifestation of God's presence in the world. For Tennyson as well as for mystics in whom this kind of sacramental vision is real the all-pervading Absolute is the meaning and explanation of all things, lives, and minds.

For both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna this sacramental vision of the universe and of its creatures was a real part of their mystic experiences. St. John was compelled by some force to spend most of his life actively searching out those to whom he could impart teachings on the mystical approach to God. For him the Perfect One (God) was self-revealed in all God's creatures. In their natures was the capacity to achieve the condition of union with God.

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1. Ibid., p. 254.

2. Alfred Lord Tennyson, Complete Poems (Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 233.

St. John did not dwell at length on this illuminative stage in the mystical approach to God. God's presence in the phenomenal world was known in "spiritual betrothal", yet this condition was itself secondary in importance to the dark night which was to follow. For Ramakrishna this was also the case. Visishtadvaita or Qualified Non-Dualism is only an illuminative stage in the progress of the mystic to Pure Knowledge or Advaita. Yet in the illuminative state God-consciousness was manifest. In a certain sense the poet Tennyson might very well have been writing in the context of Ramakrishna when he wrote the lines quoted above. The flower is one of the many aspects of creaturehood which exist as partial manifestations of the Perfect One. God-consciousness is evident as in this expressed love of nature. And a hint of the end is clear. Complete understanding of any one aspect of creation would in reality be Perfect Knowledge of both creator and created. All would be One as in Advaita.

#### (1) Recollection

In the mystical way of knowing there is a series of stages between illumination and the dark night which are among the most important aspects in all of mysticism. The first of these is recollection. Recollection is a state of experience into which the mystic enters with a single purpose.<sup>1</sup> In the state of illumination the mystic has tasted the first treats of the mystic life. Now there enters into his heart that longing for the Absolute which carries him further towards complete union. It is in such a way that the mystic enters the state of recollection.

Introversion is the beginning of recollection.<sup>2</sup> This is a voluntary

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 314.

2. Ibid., p. 313.

and purposeful undertaking. It is an act of concentration in which the self is focused on one point.<sup>1</sup> This point is the meeting in experience of the seeker and that which is sought, at least as this is manifested to a certain degree of reality on the level of illumination. For each mystic out of each particular tradition this point, the object of the process of recollection, is of a particular nature and degree of intensity. For St. John of the Christian tradition the point of recollection on the illuminative level, described as spiritual betrothal, is to be considered in the framework of darkness - that is, the reality of the active and passive nights of the sense and spirit. For Ramakrishna the point of recollection is in an intermediary stage of knowledge in which the aspirant focuses himself on the way of approach to true knowledge, however that way may be described according to various religious and philosophical influences on the Hindu religious figure.

One characteristic of the mystic still present in the state of recollection is the separateness of the personality from the Ultimate Reality. The object of recollection is distinct from the self.<sup>2</sup> The intellect has not fully given way to the intuitive powers of mystical perception. Indifference is not complete as the mystic still feels attachments to life in the phenomenal world.

Recollection brings quiet. This is a preparatory stage to pure contemplation. Quiet is mainly a matter of the mind and the will. Analytic thought is transcended in the calm of mystical perceptions; voluntary action is ceased as the individuality of the mystic begins to lose its separateness

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1. Ibid., p. 49.

2. Ibid., p. 315.

into the oneness of the Ultimate Reality.

## (2) Contemplation

As a result of recollection the mystic is elevated into a new and intense plane of mystical knowledge. The consciousness has been more completely developed, and the vitality and efficiency of the mystic life is in more complete harmony with the intuitive inspiration of the mystic experience. In the highest forms of contemplation the personal faculties of the mystic are more closely bound in union. In such a sense, thought, love, and will are fused in a harmonious mystical perception.<sup>1</sup>

As the mystic advances in his elevation to new states of knowledge he conceives of reality from the point of view of one of two opposite theories. Contemplation varies in character depending on whether the mystic adheres to the theory of transcendence or that of immanence.

In the contemplation of transcendence the mystic is lost in his own unworthiness in the face of the ineffable magnitude of the Absolute.<sup>2</sup> Those who practice the contemplation of transcendence describe the Godhead mainly in negative terms. Thus there is the origin of such descriptions of God as "The Great Nothing."<sup>3</sup> The Absolute is incomprehensible; therefore, the only description is no description at all. This conception is not confined to any one system of religious thought. It is found in Christianity in some of the mystical utterings of Meister Eckhart. In Buddhism Nirvana cannot be described except in such terms as "bliss unspeakable."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 239.

2. Ibid., p. 337.

3. Stace, Op. Cit., p. 28.

4. Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 35.

There is also the contemplation of the immanence. Contemplation of this type begins in a kind of supreme friendship between the mystic initiate and the Absolute.<sup>1</sup> In the final analysis this contemplation is perfected in the loosing of the bonds of ignorance and illusion so that the self realizes its oneness with all that is supremely real. Both this theory and that stated in the above paragraph will receive more direct analysis below. At that point the theories will represent significant aspects of the mystical reports of both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna.

One of the most important elements in the experience of contemplation is surrender. Surrender involves the most intense types of self-denial. This form of contemplation has been called the "Orison of Union."<sup>2</sup> The Orison is a kind of ecstatic prayer; in this prayer the mystic is intensely aware of his closeness with the Absolute. There is a suspension of normal consciousness as the mystic is caught in an inspired trance. Various results often occur from such an experience as this. Generally they are characterized by an enhanced life, new vitality, and a supreme spiritual sensitivity.

### (3) Ecstasy

This state of mystical knowledge is the final decisive aspect of spiritual illumination which precedes the spiritual depths of the dark night. The entire personality is influenced and powerfully affected by the ecstatic trance.<sup>3</sup>

Physically the mystic is subdued almost as if in an unconscious state.

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 243.

2. Ibid., p. 256.

3. Ibid., p. 358.

In many areas of the orient this state is discovered through the disciplines of yoga. It is to be noted that the physical condition is not directly important, except as it becomes the slightest hindrance in the way of spiritual inspiration.

In this exalted state of mystical knowledge the mystic is existing in a form of "complete mono-ideism."<sup>1</sup> This experiential condition is manifest in the process of recollection carried forth to its logical conclusion. It is a psychological state in which one idea dominates the entire consciousness. Such is an exalted form of contemplation in which the whole being of the mystic is directed only towards that Oneness which is the reality of the Absolute.

This final state of enhanced contemplation brings as its result an exalted act of spiritual perception. At its highest point this spiritual enlightenment gives to the mystic the conviction that he at least knows the Reality which is the supreme spiritual nature of the great unity.<sup>2</sup> Here is the crucial point, for if the mystic has actually succeeded in gaining perfection, indifference, and unity then union with the Absolute is his experience. Yet if the mystic still honors his separateness he is doomed to suffer the dark night.

#### iv. The Dark Night of the Soul

This aspect of the way of approach as it is manifested in the Christian mystical tradition is almost wholly inspired by the writings of St. John of the Cross. In Chapter II the "dark night" according to St. John was dis-

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1. Ibid., p. 271.

2. Ibid., p. 363.

cussed at length. But an interesting question is here raised. Is this experience peculiar to the Christian tradition from which St. John emerged? Conversely stated the question would read as follows: in any other tradition as it is exemplified by any other mystic how is the experience of the dark night relevant? First the dark night of the soul will be analyzed generally. Following this the above question will be asked, particularly in the context of Ramakrishna.

Generally speaking the dark night of the soul is a period of intense blankness and stagnation of knowledge which follows the ecstatic visions of illumination and which precedes the bliss of the unitive life. It is difficult to place this mystic state in the pattern of the various stages of mystical knowledge, because in this state the mystic knows nothing positive. Gone is the illuminative vision of the Absolute. In its place the would-be mystic knows only the inadequacy of this former illuminative state and the blankness of despair and wretchedness. The Absolute is absent; the self is weak and imperfect.<sup>1</sup>

The dark night is the forerunner of the unitive life. It is the sorting house of the mystics; many never transcend this state of spiritual agony of the soul.<sup>2</sup> But for those who do there is a blissful settlement of their spiritual struggles.<sup>3</sup> Usually it is realized later that the spiritual torture of the dark night is the result of the self trying to gain the total union with the Godhead. The self must realize that it does nothing positive itself. If it is to attain to union it must be silent and actionless. That

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1. Ibid., p. 287.

2. Ibid., p. 383.

3. Ibid., p. 409.

which brings it into unity with the Absolute is the mutual force of spiritual love which exists between the mystic and the Godhead. Thus the self must totally deny itself in the force of this unifying love.

Is the experience of the dark night of the soul relevant in the way of approach according to Ramakrishna? At the outset it is to be asserted that the dark night as such does not occupy a focal point in the thought of Ramakrishna as it does in the thought of St. John of the Cross. But this is not to say that the seeker along the way of approach according to Ramakrishna does not experience intense blankness and stagnation of spirit as described in the above general characterization of the dark night.

Perhaps this can be exemplified most clearly by reference to experience which according to the Vedanta, is brought about by the method of jnana or discrimination. In the fulfillment of this method in the experience of the seeker there is no positive knowledge or illuminative experiential content. In this sense the mystic knows only the inadequacy of former states of knowledge. Blankness and despair, frames of mind known in the dark night, are likely to follow. Often this feeling which accompanies such a stark lack of knowledge is expressed in terms of yoga. Yoga designates the union of the Atman with the Brahman and the method of discipline according to which this union is realized.<sup>1</sup> This discipline as noted above has reference to both the Tantra and Vedanta philosophies. It is that aspect of experience according to which the dark night is manifest.

According to the general characterization of the dark night its place and function within the way of approach are made more clear. The desolations

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1. Swami Nikhilananda, The Bhagavad Gita, trans Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), p. 382.

of the dark night are in reality the doing away of separateness and annihilation of the self. As a state of knowledge, the dark night is preparatory to the total state of unitive oneness in which the knower and the known are one.

The process of transition between the dark night and the state of union is usually a slow one. It is manifested in the gradual rebirth of spiritual consciousness, until in the state of union the self has completely realized its unity with the Absolute. As an illustration of this fact St. John of the Cross has articulated the image of ten stairs. These represent ten spiritual stages between the dark night and union in which the soul gradually knows its unity with the Godhead. The most subtle and important stage in this image is the meaning of the tenth stair. Ascending to the final stair the soul, says St. John, passes out of the body to be assimilated into God in a beatific vision. By passing out of the body the soul goes forth from all things in the phenomenal world. Its only knowledge is of the essence of God; its only state of existence is an exalted and enhanced mystical unity with the Godhead.<sup>1</sup>

#### v. Union

Along the way of approach the constant goal has been higher knowledge of the Divine. Such knowledge has demanded open and transforming participation of the knower in the known, to the end that the former might realize its identification with the latter in the unity of consciousness.

Now the very goal which is sought and known from the first stage of the way has been blackened and obliterated. Doubts and limitations constitute a "cloud of unknowing." From within the blackened confinements of the

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1. More, Op. Cit., p. 271.

ego which tries vainly to burst from its own self-contained nature, there comes a response which defies explanation yet which stands as a basic requirement for those who would attain to the final goal. This response is acceptance marked by the peculiar relaxation of the strivings of the self.<sup>1</sup> Its significance is manifest in the loss of separateness between the conscious experiencer and his object - the Divine. At least as a matter of active strivings out of the conscious ego the knower and the known are one. Such a phenomenon has peculiar significance to mystical experiences especially as they are noted in various higher religions. This is an expressed unity manifest in religious literature. One of the most precise examples of this can be found in Christianity, where Jesus, the Christ, states, "I and my Father are one."<sup>2</sup>

Such expressions indicate union, or the end of the mystic quest. The result of this achievement is a transformation of the personality, a substitution of the Divine for the strivings of the conscious ego. Many are the ways of expressing this epistemic phenomenon in the lives of conscious beings. If it be asked how one might test such an exalted state of knowledge there would be a three-fold reply. First, there is a marked pre-occupation in the interests of the Divine as over and against the conscious self, no matter whether this be expressed in terms of self-realization or selflessness, and regardless of whatever mode the Divine is apprehended by the self. Secondly, there is a conscious knowledge of the sharing of motivation and authority with the Divine. This results in a sense of freedom, invulnerable serenity, and usually inspires to consciousness untiring creativity.

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 416.

2. The Gospel According to St. John, 10:30.

Thirdly, such knowledge is manifest in outward communication of spirituality and instruction to other conscious selves.<sup>1</sup>

But immediately an important qualification may be drawn. What is the nature of the union which is being described? Does the unitive life as indicated above mean the absolute identification of any conscious self with the Divine? Is such union to be compared with that postulated in the One of Plotinus or in the identification of the Brahman-Atman of the Vedanta?

Among many religious mystics answers to the above questions have been articulated. Christian mystics notably answer in the negative. In this sense consider a statement by Ruysbroek:

But when I say that we are one with God, the statement must be understood of love and not of essence or nature; for the essence of God is uncreated whereas ours is created. Between God and the creature the difference essentially is immeasurable.

It is at this point that certain qualifications need to be made concerning the end of the way of approach in the theory of organic participation. In a former section the end of the way was characterized by a theoretically conceivable enlightenment, in which the experiencer realizes his identity with the Divine, which is at least total experience. But in this discussion of union, as it is specifically considered in the context of the Christian tradition, it is noted that the end, union, is not to be characterized in the above manner. This suggests either one of two possibilities. Either the former characterization is inadequate, or union as it is characterized in Christian terms as notably expressed by Ruysbroek is not the final end of

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 416.

2. More, Op. Cit., p. 251.

the way of approach.

Further explication can be presented in this debate in the terms of St. John of the Cross. In Chapter IV considerable analysis of the nature of union according to the Spanish saint was undertaken. At that point a distinction was drawn which will be helpful here. Union was characterized as a union of wills in love and not specifically as an essential union or identity between the seeker after God and that which is sought. Since St. John characterized the mystic consciousness as possessing three basic aspects, namely understanding, memory, and will, it is fair to conclude that a union of wills is not in the final analysis an essential union. Under such conditions absolute identity is not possible.

It will also be useful at this point to recall a distinction drawn even prior to the discussion of the way of approach. This distinction, between the positive and negative divine, will serve to further clarify the present position. For in the above statement by Ruysbroek and in the qualifications made about union by St. John of the Cross more emphasis is given to the positive than the negative divine. God is characterized by positive attributes which are not in harmony with the nature of God's creatures. This accounts for the "immeasurable difference" between God and his creatures, as stated by Ruysbroek, and for certain aspects of the mystic report as formulated out of implications implicit in St. John's discussion of the way of approach. Among these is the fact that God exists in a transcendent relation to all that is less than God.

As a direct result of these positive characterizations of God known in union, there is the reality of love, in the context of which union is manifest. The love of God, according to St. John, has been a positive force of attraction

which has made the mystic's progress along the way of approach a reality. Now that there has been a union of wills in love there is a love identical to that of the divine which springs forth in the enlightened mystics into positive creativity and instruction into the nature of the way and its end. This activity in love affirms one of the basic aspects of the characterization of God according to the positive divine - that is, His dynamic or creative aspect.

It would be interesting to here note what Ramakrishna would say about this aspect of the mystical way of approach to Reality. Union in love known along the *via positiva* is a positive aspect of his thought. This is the meaning of Bhakti as the central term in Vaishnavism which so profoundly influenced the Hindu saint. Repeatedly "the Master" told his devotees that yearning or love of God is the one essential thing in the attainment of the end of the way of approach to Reality.<sup>1</sup> As such it is a positive force of attraction which has made the aspirant's progress along the way of approach real.

But to admit this is in no sense parallel to the admission that union of wills in love is the final end of the way of approach. Besides union of wills in love which indicates the positive way, there is also discrimination which according to the Vedanta indicates the *via negativa*. A disciple asks: "How can one realize God?" The Master answers: "By directing your love to Him and constantly reasoning that God is real and and the world illusory."<sup>2</sup>

#### vi. Absorption

Presuppositions which validate only the positive divine are not neces-

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1. Nikhilananda, Op. Cit., p. 497.

2. Ibid., p. 220.

sarily the entire story of mysticism as exponents of Christianity would have us believe. In the organic theory of participation along the way of approach there remains a final stage, which from the outset stood as the theoretically conceivable outcome. This stage, absorption, is one in which the knower realizes complete identity in the known in the unity of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> The result is a supra-essential metaphysical unity, a reabsorption of the individual conscious ego into that which must at least be total consciousness - the Divine.

The method of realization is along the "via negativa" - that is, in an inquiry which can only result in absolute denial. In defiance and utter silence of analytical reasoning the method proceeds with negative statements concerning the Divine: "It is not this," "It is not this."<sup>2</sup> At this stage in consciousness, marked by an unspeakable and ineffable experience, there is no trace of any duality. "All ordinary states of knowledge imply a duality of knower and that which is known;"<sup>3</sup> Yet in this state of enlightenment ordinary knowledge has been transcended into the realization of a Supreme Identity in which subject and object have become absolutely identical.

This state of experience was discussed in Chapter III in the context of the way of approach according to Ramakrishna. Absorption of the seeker into that which is sought was designated as the final end and meaning of the mystic way. In contrast to the discussion of the Christian characterization

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1. Raynor C. Johnson, The Imprisoned Splendour (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 301.
  2. S. N. Dasgupta, Hindu Mysticism (Chicago, London: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1927), p. 53.
  3. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

of the end, as expressed by Ruysbroek and St. John, this represents an essential union in which all aspects of the conscious self are annihilated in the experience of being totally absorbed into the nature of Ultimate Reality.

Thus absorption, which was from the beginning of the discussion of the way a theoretically conceivable end, represents the contribution of Hindu mysticism, at least as it is exemplified in Ramakrishna, to the entire field of the philosophy of mysticism. It also pinpoints a basic argument between the mystical traditions of both Christianity and Hinduism as they are represented in the two designated religious thinkers. In this theory of organic participation manifest along the way of approach, union of wills in love is not and cannot be the final end of the mystic experience. Stated in more precise terms Christian mystical union with God, at least as this is represented in St. John of the Cross, is not essential union. No Christian mystic adhering to this concept of union can ever achieve the full and final mystic experience. It has been demonstrated that at least in regard to mysticism according to Ramakrishna the further stage of absorption manifest at the end of the way of approach is real.

So stated, absorption is the supreme identity of the seeker with the sought. Mysticism, conceived at the outset in terms of an epistemic relation in which the knower is initiated in an intense movement or organic participation into the known, has reached its end in this state of absorption in which that which was theoretically possible in the hour of conversion is actual in the experience of total consciousness.

For a conscious being to attain to such a state all his faculties must be brought to bear and guided along the way of approach.

And when through control of desires, meditation, and the like, one comes face to face with this highest reality of Brahman, he is lost in it like rivers in the sea; nothing remains of him which he can feel as a separate individual, but he becomes one with Brahman. This is known by the seer through his heart, when his senses have ceased to move and when his thought and intellect have come to a dead halt.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Report

#### i. The Inevitability of a Mystic Report

Within consciousness an entire transformation has taken place. The experiencer along the way of approach has undergone a series of progressively intensifying alterations to that point where in a Supreme Identity has been realized with the framework and meaning of all experience, total consciousness, the Divine.

Now such an experience when known must be reported. Because the entire conscious being of the experiencer has been qualitatively transformed, that being can do none other than to live in his transformation. And any expression or outward example of life or thought must be a manifestation of its effects and its promise.

When turning to these mystic reports an initial characteristic on the part of many mystics is easily discernible. The report need not be a metaphysical statement of any particular emphasis or structure. Indeed it has become clear in the analysis of the way of approach, as it is exemplified in both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna, that the total mystical experience must transcend any analytically constituted systematic statement. The cosmological structure of reality need not be manifest in the total experience

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1. Ibid., p. 57.

and/or report of the mystic. Knowledge here is not a point at issue. The gap between the subject and object in the mystical epistemology in this study of the philosophy of mysticism has been annihilated. In this sense the identity of the knower and the known in the unity of consciousness is manifest. The Supreme Identity has been realized in the consummation of the total mystic experience. The effects of this experience constitute its report, and in effect the metaphysical conclusions derived from the attainment of Knowledge along the way.

Now there are various senses in which the mystic report may be considered, and these considerations may be in turn taken to represent criteria by which the validity of the mystic experience may be tested. Basic to all conscious reports on the part of the mystic is the very example of his life after his experience has produced its effects. Various magical or psychical doctrines postulate far-reaching powers on the part of the individual mind, but it is peculiar to such experiences that the individual returns to normal consciousness after the magic or psychic spell is at its end. In distinction to this, the valid mystical experience results in an exalted knowledge and enhanced moral and spiritual perception.<sup>1</sup> The test which determines this difference is the psychological test.

Secondly, the mystic report is manifest in the effect of the mystic on others, both through teachings in his contemporary period and through his writings or reputation as they are preserved in history. To be sure such influence of the mystic on others need not be manifest in any systematic construction, yet some direct personal influence from mystic as teacher to disciple or follower appears necessary. As examples of this both Jesus,

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 157.

the Christ, and Buddha declined to formulate metaphysical statements, yet they both chose a small band of followers to inspire with their experience and thought. In this sense the criterion of judgment determining the validity of the mystic report is the historical test. In other words history asks the question of the validity of the mystical experience. Below will be formulated the doctrine of withdrawal and return. Suffice it here to state that after the full force of the experience has been felt in the life of the mystic he must return into society. The question then stands, how does his experience effect the lives of those around him, and how, if any, does this influence alter the course of history? This is the substance of the historical test.

Subordinate to the above are the institutional developments which have grown out of the influence of the mystic on the follower. This aspect of the mystic report, tested by both historical and institutional facts and movements, appears to be in constant fluctuation with the fourth aspect of the mystic report, or the interpretation and systematization which others attach to the mystic and his experience. The body of interpretation has come to be known as the philosophy of mysticism; its criterion is the critical test.

As stated above this thesis as a whole attempts to make some contribution to the field of the philosophy of mysticism. As such it represents certain ideas which are applied in a critical manner to the subject matter at hand. When the mystical experience, as it is manifested in St. John of the Cross or Ramakrishna, or in any other mystic, is so analyzed and interpreted it is in effect undergoing the critical test.

#### ii. The Doctrine of Withdrawal and Return

As documentary evidence of the fact of the inevitability of a report by

the mystic after the attainment of his experience there appears the doctrine of withdrawal and return. Indeed, this experiential phenomenon is well-known and often quoted under the title given above as well as under certain parallel classifications.<sup>1</sup> Yet whatever its label it stands as a significant aspect of mysticism, being a kind of bridge from the way of approach to the report (of whatever kind chosen by the experiencer) as given by the mystic.

In essence this doctrine can be simply stated in its two natural parts. Prior, both logically and chronologically, is the withdrawal, which allows the experiencer opportunity to realize powers latent within himself which might have remained dormant within normal social obligations. In this sense the withdrawal can be focused into the image of a Mohammed in the desert wherein a "transfiguration in solitude" occurs.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately the qualification of direction and purpose becomes manifest. Because this experience carries the experiencer outside of himself it seems natural, and in the case of the report inevitable, that this experience in some way be communicated to others. Thus in essence is already stated the doctrine of the return - or the manifestation and report of this experience on the part of the experiencer to the social world.

No more appropriate example of this two-fold doctrine can be cited than that of the allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic. In this case men of ordinary knowledge stand with their backs to the opening of the cave looking at the reflections of the light as a shadow against the wall. The prisoner,

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1. William Ernest Hocking, The Meaning of God in Human Experience (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912). Professor Hocking analyzes this same experiential phenomenon under the title of the Law of Alternation,
  2. Arnold J. Toynbee, A Study of History (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1946), Somervell Abridgement, p. 217.

suddenly released, faces the naked light and is enlightened into the nature of the good; then he returns into the darkness of the cave seemingly to instruct others on the nature of the way to that reality.<sup>1</sup>

With great clarity this example of the doctrine of withdrawal and return manifests the paradoxical framework in which the mystic report is contained. On the one hand, when the experiencer has been enlightened into the nature of reality "the best thing for him to do is to remain outside the cave and live there happy ever after."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand something, whether this be called selflessness or self-realization, compels the mystic to return seemingly with the intent to communicate his exalted state of knowledge.

Thus stated is the doctrine of withdrawal and return. The entire phenomenon is an indication of the complexity and comprehensiveness of the full content and meaning of the mystic experience and of the necessity of a mystic report.

### iii. The Report as Determined by the Way

According to this thesis the most important aspect of mysticism at least as it is exemplified in St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna is the way of approach. In the main the way is a matter of knowledge in which the experiencer (the subject in the knowledge situation) progresses along the way in an effort to gain true knowledge in a final and experientially possible identification with the Divine (the object). It is not to be deduced from this that mysticism is entirely epistemic in character. The end and final

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1. The Republic of Plato, trans. Francis MacDonalld Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 227.

2. Ibid., p. 227.

meaning of the mystical experience is found in a realization of the Supreme Identity which exists in Reality between subject and object. The resulting knowledge has transcended that which under ordinary circumstances must be defined according to the duality of the two epistemic terms. In other words metaphysical knowledge is manifest in the Supreme Identity. There has been an experience of the Ultimate Reality, and the metaphysical statement resulting from such an experience is given in terms of the report which as demonstrated above must follow from the experience. This report is to be contained within the paradoxical framework of the doctrine of withdrawal and return.

One final aspect of this thesis remains to be stated. It follows as a natural result of what has preceded, and serves to introduce that which is to follow this outline of the nature of mysticism. If mysticism be contained within the theory of organic participation, and if the mystical report is an inevitable outcome of the experience which culminates in enlightenment, the end and final meaning of the way of approach within this theory, then it follows that the report is to be determined by the nature of the experience along the way.

Now within the body of mystical reports which have been formulated throughout the ages, interpretative and systematic efforts have focused attention on two characterizations of the way which have accordingly resulted in the construction of two theories of reality. Stated in their essential form these two theories outline two alternative characterizations for the mystic report as well as serving to summarize them as they have been exemplified in the reports of both St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna.

(1) The Way of Agony - The Theory of Emanations

For the mystic who progresses along the way of approach towards essential

union with the Divine there must be certain characterizations of the way which when considered in the fullness of experience constitute a theory of the nature of the Divine. So it is with one progressing along the way of agony. The Absolute is utter transcendence, wrapped in a cloud of unknowing, and completely changeless in character. It is in darkness and separation which predominate over any opposing mode of knowledge along the way that the mystic conceives of the Divine as utterly transcendent. God in this case is "Infinite Being," the existence of which excludes the possibility of the existence of any other being by the very fact of its infinite nature. In this sense God and Reality are synonymous. As there cannot be more than one God, neither can there be more than one Reality. Also the way of agony is so designated because the seeker after the end of the way must silence all that is not God. Thus again God and Reality are One; both represent the one supreme spiritual principle of meaning. God as Reality manifests an active or creative aspect according to which an outflowing of Spirit to all that is less than God is real. These outflowings of God's spirit are conceived as emanations from God into the created realms of spirit and sense. Conversely there is an inflowing of this force of God into the seeker after God. This manifests itself in knowledge, according to which the seeker progresses along the way of approach to the experience of union. This experience is known in the "utter transmutation of the self into the Divine."<sup>1</sup>

The above is an abstract of the way of agony which when fulfilled in the experience of union and reported implies the theory of emanations. Both are stated in the context of St. John of the Cross.

## (2) The Way of Realization - The Supreme Identity

From a point of view of major opposition to the way of agony as it

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1. Underhill, Op. Cit., p. 415.

leads into the theory of emanations, accordingly as these are formulated in the context of St. John of the Cross, is the way of realization which leads into the Supreme Identity. This second characterization of the way and the end of the way is in reality a brief abstract of the position taken by Ramakrishna. Not only does it point up certain differences between the Hindu religious figure and St. John of the Cross, but it also emphasizes certain other differences in the traditions from which they emerged. Basic among these is the relation between the subject and object in the mystical knowledge situation as it has been characterized in the theory of organic participation. According to St. John of the Cross the seeker after the experience of union with God is not and never can be essentially one with the object of his quest.

But according to the way of realization as it is formulated by Ramakrishna the seeker after true knowledge is in essence at one with the Ultimate Reality - the object of his search. The separation of seeker and sought is merely a matter of ignorance. The way to a realization of this Supreme Identity is according to various stages of knowledge, the highest of which is an absolute unqualified monism in which all aspects of Reality are One.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

1. Although the life of St. John of the Cross was decidedly active in character, the activity had practically no relevance to contemporary movements of a political or social nature. Activity was, according to St. John, included in contemplation; both were to be directed towards the experience of God and the instruction to others in the same.
2. The way of approach designated as the way of agony is so called because of the separation between the mystic consciousness and God in the awakening to the way.
3. Because the beginning of the way is characterized by the absence of God, because God is conceived as far away, a transcendence theory is implicit at this point in the thought of St. John.
4. The darkness of the dark night is a matter of knowledge. So characterized it is spiritual ignorance.
5. Union, conceived as the end of the way of approach according to St. John, is a union of wills in love, and not an essential union. A dualism in knowledge remains as both the soul and God remain essentially separate and intact.
6. In St. John the nature of the mystic report is determined by the character of the way to the mystic experience of union.
7. It is implied in the language of St. John that God, as "Infinite Being", is synonymous with Reality.
8. According to St. John the inflowing of the spirit of God into the soul of the seeker after union with God is in reality the outpourings of a transcendent God. These are called emanations. They flow into the realms of spirit and sense respectively.
9. Knowledge according to St. John is conceived in terms of transformation, in which the subject, the seeker, is transformed in the face of the object, God. Knowledge is manifest in the yearning of the whole of creation for God.
10. Ramakrishna's thought and experience remain almost entirely within the framework of native Indian thought and experience.

11. Although Ramakrishna was profoundly influenced by several religio-philosophic schools he did not at any point in his life adhere to any one exclusively. His individual thought was rather a particular combination of many positions formulated according to his own thinking and experience.
12. For Ramakrishna thought and experience are basically identical.
13. The way according to Ramakrishna is in the form of three complementary systems of thought which represent a progression in knowledge from the level of ignorance to True Knowledge.
14. In Perfect Knowledge rational judgments in which subject and object are distinct have been transcended.
15. The end of the way of approach to Reality is the realization of the Supreme Identity, according to which Reality is unqualifiedly One.
16. Mysticism is the ineffable and individual experience of the mystic. It is differentiated from the philosophy of mysticism which attempts to interpret and systematize that experience.
17. In the main mysticism is a matter of knowledge. The knowledge situation is manifest in the relationship between the subject, the experiencer, and the object, the Divine. The development in this theory of organic participation is considered in terms of the participation of the subject in the nature of the object. The theoretically conceivable end is the union of the two epistemic entities into a metaphysical Supreme Identity.
18. The way of approach is characterized by a rhythm and alternation of knowledge and illumination.
19. Although the dark night of the soul as such is not part of the mystic approach to reality according to Ramakrishna similar states of mind are relevant in the Hindu saint's discussion.
20. A major point of contrast between the thought of St. John of the Cross and Ramakrishna is the nature of the end of the way. According to St. John it is union of wills in love; according to Ramakrishna it is absorption of the seeker into the Ultimate Reality.
21. After the full mystic experience a mystic report follows inevitably. This report need not be of any designated character. It must face certain tests. Among these are the psychological, the historical, and the critical tests.
22. In the report it is evident that the entire mystic experience is to be contained within the framework of withdrawal and return.
23. The character of the report is determined by the nature of the way.

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## CHAPTER VII

### ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the nature of mysticism as it is represented in the sixteenth century Spanish Christian mystic, St. John of the Cross, and the nineteenth century Hindu mystic, Ramakrishna. In the problematic development of the thesis St. John was considered first. The order of consideration was an investigation into the nature of the way of approach to the full mystic experience, followed by a discussion of the theory of reality derived from the examination of the way. The consideration of Ramakrishna followed that of St. John. Finally mysticism as such was analyzed and illustrated according to the two above named mystics. The method in the final two chapters was the same.

The way according to St. John is the way of agony. God is separate from the soul of man. Yet God is discovered, and the way to God is manifest. This way is conceived in terms of the active and passive nights of the sense and spirit. The seeker purges his soul and spirit of sensual attraction. He gains pleasure in nothing save God. In the passive night of the spirit, he waits in detachment for the "inflowing of the spirit of God into the soul." This is known in union which is the goal of the way. It is characterized as a union of wills in love.

St. John's report of the experience of union is his theory of reality. Accordingly God and Reality are synonymous. God is "Infinite Being." As transcendent God is incomprehensible to any aspect of creation. God flows

out to creation, to the realms of spirit and sense respectively. These outpourings are conceived as emanations. The yearning of the souls of creatures for union with God is knowledge, which is manifest in the transformation of the soul along the way of approach.

Various schools of Hindu thought profoundly influenced Ramakrishna. Among these were the Tantra, Vaishnavism, Vedanta, and the influence of the builders of unity in nineteenth century Hindu India. Out of this final influence came the Ramakrishna mission according to which Reality is to be realized in its Unity, in all its aspects and manifestations as unqualifiedly One.

The way to this realization is found in the complementary relationship of three systems of thought. These represent a progression of knowledge. The first, Dvaita, represents the level of ignorance. Ultimate Reality is categorically separated from things, lives and minds which are entirely contained in the fluctuating context of multiplicity and relationship. On an intermediary level of knowledge, that designated by Visishtadvaita, things, lives, and minds are accidental manifestations of Reality. In Advaita true knowledge is realized. At this point the Supreme Identity of all aspects of Reality is attained.

Mysticism is a matter of knowledge. The knowledge situation, which is based on conscious experience, is described by the theory of organic participation according to which the subject (the experiencer) participates in the nature of the object (the Divine) along certain stages. The theoretically conceivable end of this participation is the absorption of the subject in the nature of the object. The two epistemic terms are united into a metaphysical Supreme Identity.

The subject begins its participation in conversion. It is continued in purgation, illumination, and the dark night of the soul. The next stage, union of wills in love, is the end of the way according to St. John. Absorption is the end of the way according to Ramakrishna.

After the full experience a mystic report inevitably follows. This report is tested according to psychological, historical, and critical methods. The entire mystic way is contained in the paradoxical framework of withdrawal and return. The character of the report of the mystic experience is determined by the nature of the way.