

A MYSTICAL READING OF PAUL¹

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Abstract

The methodological diversity in biblical hermeneutics that has taken place during the last few decades has effected a shift of such magnitude, that scholars are still catching their breath. New methods of interpreting scripture continue to come to the fore. There is a major move from a mechanistic to a holistic paradigm, from within which scripture emerges as life-giving and transformative. Constructive or ecological postmodernism contributes to the revalorization of the aesthetic, the mythological and the mystical. A mystical reading of Paul, with particular reference to his understanding of the term in Christ elucidates the value of this new, yet ancient heuristic tool.

Key Words: *Pauline Mysticism, 'In-Christ', Biblical Spirituality*

Introduction

It has become commonplace to speak of the heterodox methodological explosion that has occurred in biblical studies in the last few decades. Whether the plethora of methods is viewed with suspicion or delight, there is no turning back; they offer new paradigms of interpreting the text and accessing the ancient wisdom often buried deep below the surface structure. The epistemological framework from within which these new paradigms have emerged is that of *postmodernism*, a term often fraught with misunderstanding. Therefore the *aim* of this paper is as follows: firstly, to engage in a brief analysis of postmodernism with particular reference to the current methodological diversity in scriptural hermeneutics and the role of biblical spirituality; secondly, to examine the nature of mysticism, and the relationship between mysticism and scripture; and thirdly, to extrapolate certain salient features of a mystical reading of Paul.

Postmodernism and Methodological Diversity in Biblical Hermeneutics

Although in certain quarters it is considered that the debate concerning the phenomenon of postmodernism has had its day, this is to deny the incredible sea-change or gestalt shift that has occurred as a result of this philosophical movement, particularly in the light of the impact that it has had on scriptural hermeneutics. Postmodernism can be seen as an epistemological transformation, which is manifest, inter alia, in political, social, artistic, economic and religious spheres of life. Modernity, with its rationalist ideologies, mechanistic views of science, reductionist empirical theories and the attenuation, or even atrophy of religious and spiritual sensitivities has led to a truncated vision of humanity. Dissatisfied

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with such a scenario, *constructive* or *revisionary* postmodernism³ offers a more inclusive, open-ended approach, which is characterized by a revalorization of spiritual and ecological values, and a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic and religious insights. It supports ecology, peace movements and feminism, and attempts to transcend patriarchy, mechanization and consumerism, without denying the progress made in the modern era (Griffin 1990:x-xii). In fact, constructive postmodernism seeks to carry the premises of modernity through to their logical conclusions, whilst critiquing and re-evaluating them.

With respect to *biblical hermeneutics*, and of particular importance for the present study, which concentrates on the New Testament, there has been a shift of such magnitude that scholars are still trying to catch up with the variety of approaches that have emerged within the past decades. It is readily acknowledged that the hegemony of the historical-critical method is no longer tenable; it is an approach which sees the New Testament merely as an artifact of history, with minimal, if any, attempt to understand the experience of those who produced the text (Thurston 2005:55).⁴ As such, scholars ignored the very *raison d'être* of these writings of the early Christian communities. Thurston (2005:55; cf 2000:2) describes this as the '...human experience of God mediated by the person of Jesus of Nazareth... The New Testament ... records spiritual experience. This presumes that "spiritual experience" is real'. Historical criticism denied the importance of the latter, and concentrated on the sense intended by the author, to the detriment of allegorical and other 'more-than-literal' approaches (Schneiders 2005a:293; cf 2005b:65). In contrast to the rationalistic and arid approach in which the text is approached from the vantage point of logic and empirical evaluation, postmodern thought has contributed to the rediscovery of the text as dynamic medium rather than static object. A major shift from a mechanistic to a holistic paradigm is evident enabling the text to come to life as transformative and life-changing. Biblical spirituality is thus a 'clarification of the existential meaning' of what is offered in the text (Waaijman 2002:871; cf Waaijman 1992). There is a 'reciprocal relation' that exists between the reader and the text, and the 'personal awakening' that is effected as a result of the revelation of the text (Waaijman 2002:766-767)). Drawing on the insights of Levinas and Ricoeur, Waaijman (2002:771) states: 'By understanding, the text is reactualised and this actualization constitutes an essential aspect of the text... The scriptural meaning imprints itself in the life and contact of the reader...' Thus, appropriation of the essential meaning of the text in one's life witnesses to the power and efficacy of the encounter with scripture.

Schneiders (2005b:65-66) correctly points out that one of the reasons for a renewal of interest in Scripture and spirituality is the fact that there has been an increasing demand for a 'spiritually relevant interpretation'. In addition, the '...collapse of the enlightenment ideal of "objectivity" and the turn to the subject made biblical criticism much more sensitive to the spirituality dimensions of the text and the reader'. There is what could well be called a 'sea change' in contemporary biblical studies, one that has had, and continues to have, immense significance for the academic study of biblical spirituality:

³ Postmodernism can be viewed as constructive/revisionary or deconstructive/eliminative. The latter attempts to overcome the prevailing world-view through an anti-worldview, deconstructing or eliminating such concepts as God, self, purpose, meaning, etc. (Griffin 1990:x).

⁴ Of course, this is not to deny its validity; in spite of its many shortcomings, the historical-critical method has certainly been, and continues to be of vital importance in understanding the provenance of the text (cf Kourie 1985).

Today, biblical scholars are rediscovering the genius if not the actual methods of spiritual exegesis. It belongs to the area of hermeneutics rather than exegesis, that is, to interpretation which is based on critical exegesis but not arrested at the analytical level. As late twentieth-century biblical scholars moved beyond exclusively historical critical approaches they focused first on the biblical writers as authors with theological and other agendas pursued by various rhetorical strategies. This led to a focus on the text itself as literature. And this led inevitably to a focus on the reader whose interaction with the text gives rise to meaning. Readers do not simply work on texts but the text works on the reader, for good or ill. The pragmatics of reading came into focus and this is the sphere of spiritual interpretation (Schneiders 2005a:294).

The seminal contribution of Schneiders in explicating and developing biblical spirituality, especially in the academy has been ably described by Donahue (2006:73-97). Of particular importance is the fact that Schneiders' work offers a reading of the bible that 'is both responsible to contemporary canons of interpretation and productive of a true biblical spirituality' (Donahue 2006:82). Schneiders offers three distinct meanings of the term 'biblical spirituality': firstly 'spiritualities that come to expression in the Bible', secondly, 'a pattern of Christian life deeply imbued with the spirituality(ies) of the Bible' and thirdly, 'a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text' (Schneiders 1999:135-136; cf Donahue 2006:82). Working, therefore, between two poles, namely, a 'reading of the biblical text that is faithful to its historical and literary context' and 'a realization that this is a sacred text, which leads to human transformation' avoids a 'distanced historicism ... (and) an ungrounded piety' (Donahue 2006:83). Thus, in the words of Thurston (2005:68):

The pertinence of the New Testament texts for contemporary spirituality ... is not in static norms set down for future generations to follow, but in the witness they give to a cosmic dynamic... The Prime Mover of the universe ... is actively in love with us, seeking us out, extending to us the divine embrace. As both the New Testament and Christian history attest, some Christians dance into it, some run, some stumble, some fall headlong. The journey there is as individuated as one's DNA. But then, as now, the basic movement of *Christian* spirituality is toward those extended, and wounded, arms. And it will ever be thus.

The importance of developing and strengthening biblical spirituality in the academy cannot be over-estimated.⁵ Fortunately, this is being addressed in departments of Christian Spirituality at university level. It still remains to be seen how willing departments of Old and New Testament Studies in established faculties of theology and religion will be to engage in this more enlightened approach to biblical interpretation.⁶

By way of summary, postmodernist trends include the re-introduction of mythology, which counteracts the flattening of thought so characteristic of a rationalist era. There is a deeper awareness of the power of symbolism, and psychological insights, particularly from a Jungian perspective, are receiving greater attention (Sanford 1993). Within the constraints of the present paper, one method, viz., a *mystical* interpretation has been chosen for brief analysis; in order to more fully understand this relatively new (yet ancient!) method, a short excursus into the meaning of mysticism is in order.

⁵ Recent literature witnesses to this important development, inter alia, Neyrey (2007) and Greenman, Larsen & Spencer (2007).

⁶ In this connection, the *University of the Free State*, Bloemfontein, introduced a new Masters degree in Biblical Spirituality, January, 2008.

Understanding Mysticism

Mysticism has been described as ‘...a relational process between God and man (sic), a process which has its own language and logic and withdraws itself from the objectivizing gaze of reason. The intimacy of mystical love purifies the intellect, the will, and the memory, until they are completely attuned to God’ (Waaijman 2002:357). Furthermore, ‘...the core of mysticism is the radical surrender of self to the loving embrace of the Other who is at the foundation of all life, the One to whom we owe our very existence’ (Perrin 2005:443). McGinn (2008:47) speaks of mystical consciousness as ‘meta-consciousness’⁷ – a consciousness *beyond* – which is ‘...the co-presence of God in our inner acts, not as an object to be understood or grasped, but as the transforming Other’. This is further elaborated: ‘He (She) is active in the human agent as the source, or co-author, of our acts of experiencing ... knowing and loving’ (McGinn 2008:47).

A recent work on mysticism expresses it thus:

Like a lofty mountain ... I understand (mysticism) ... as the yearning of the human spirit for utmost transcendence and utmost integration; as awe before the ultimate mystery of the source of things; as the experience and the expression of communion, or union, or non-difference with, of commitment to, that source (Kruger 2006:9).

Mysticism is not an isolated experience, but rather one that impacts on life, affecting not only the individual concerned, but society itself (Kourie 1992:86). As McGinn (2005:19) points out, the only validation one has with respect to the mystics’ claims is ‘through the impact their inner transformation has upon their lives and the lives of those they influenced’. Mystics can be seen as paradigms of human authenticity; in many cases they are pioneers shedding light on what is hidden and pointing to a passionate encounter with Reality. They witness to the active infusion of Infinite Spirit into finite spirit, or perhaps more accurately, an awakening to the inner actualization of the same. Mysticism may occur as a result of following a spiritual path, but this is not necessarily the case, as it cannot be boxed in or categorized in any definitive manner. Mysticism has often been linked with abnormal phenomena, pathological states, esoteric religious cults, etc., which obfuscates its real meaning and significance. In English, there is only one word for mysticism, which accounts for its equivocal interpretation, whereas German, for example, is able to distinguish true from false mysticism by its use of ‘die Mystik’ for the former, and the dyslogistic ‘der Mystizismus’ for the latter. Mysticism is not necessarily linked with religion; there are many instances of a mystical experience taking place outside the confines of institutionalized religion. Mysticism, in many spiritual traditions, finds its acme in *silence* (Kruger 2006:9). Before proceeding to a mystical reading of Paul, a few comments with respect to mysticism and scripture will help illustrate the deep relationship that exists between them.

Mysticism and Scripture

In line with the preceding discussion on the importance of biblical spirituality, we are reminded of the seminal contribution of Origen (c 185-254 CE) and his teaching on the multiple meanings of scripture. It is outside the scope of the present article to discuss this in depth, suffice it to offer the following observations. Origen is clearly a scriptural exegete of the highest order in antiquity; in addition he combines ‘the roles of exegete, theologian, and mystic with great creativity and intellectual power’ (McGinn & Ferris McGinn 2003:23).

⁷ McGinn refers here to the terminology of Merton (1968:74). In addition, he draws on the work of Lonergan (1972; 1957) for this concept.

Origen expanded and elaborated the well-known two-fold sense of scripture (historical and spiritual or allegorical) into a three-fold model, viz., *historical, moral and spiritual*, in accordance with the anthropological understanding of body, soul and spirit of his time (cf Schneiders 1985:11-12). Origen's scriptural hermeneutic led the way forward for a mystical interpretation of scripture, and the ascent to the Divine: 'The scribe of the gospel is one who knows how, after studying the narrative of events, to ascend to the spiritual realities without stumbling' and then 'gallop through the vast spaces of mystic and spiritual understanding' (Commentaries on Matthew 10:14 and Romans 7:11, in McGinn & Ferris McGinn 2003:25). By way of summary, for Origen and other early scriptural exegetes, all of scripture was seen to be the word of God, written for the purpose of salvation; Christ is the ultimate meaning of the scriptures for individuals and the church. The text has a plurality of possible meanings. Later medieval exegesis expanded Origen's three-fold model to the well-known four-fold exposition: literal (historical), allegorical (theological), tropological (moral) and anagogical (eschatological).⁸

It is certainly a fact that with respect to the radical nature of scriptural interpretation by mystics of all traditions there is a 'stretching' of the texts, by means of allegory and symbolism. Such hermeneutical devices need not necessarily militate against the conservative nature of mystical experience, as they can well serve to '...maintain the authority of the canonical sources under inspiration, rather than to destroy or transcend them' (Katz 1983:30; cf Katz 2000:7-68). Thus, there is not necessarily a displacement of scripture, but rather a 're-interpretation' which serves to expound the very truths contained in the texts. Therefore, Katz (1983:30) concludes, '...the mystical hermeneutic reinforces, even exaggerates, the significance of canonical texts to a degree unheard of in the non-mystical hermeneutical tradition. Extension of the texts, rather than rejection, characterizes the mystics' hermeneutic'. A further point of clarification is the fact that mystics generally show minimal interest, if any, in the historicity of their respective scriptures, or their philological and scientific status. Scriptures are more often used in an *illuminatory* sense, namely to explain and confirm the nature of the mystical experience. The transformative power of the scriptures is central in mystical interpretation, effecting dynamic change and transmutation of character and daily life and thus witnessing to the life-giving power of the texts.

Interestingly enough, therefore, whilst it is true to say that mystics are often in the vanguard of those who provide a radical hermeneutic, nevertheless, the fact that they appeal to their own particular scripture as canonical reflects *adherence* to that particular tradition. In addition, in the exegesis of their experience, mystics claim to have had immediate experience of what their specific scriptural tradition teaches and by so doing they confirm the authority of the inherited tradition of scriptural hermeneutics, rather than offering 'heretical assertions that threaten the pillars of the regnant orthodoxy' (Katz 1983:20). This is not to deny the prophetic role that mystics have within their particular traditions. Indeed, mystics are often pioneers and trail-blazers who venture into unknown territory and challenge the status quo of institutional religion.

A Mystical Reading of Paul

Modern Christological investigation neglected mystical and cognate experiences as hermeneutical keys by means of which the deep wisdom of Paul's thought may be ex-

⁸ Cf The well-known distich of Augustine of Dacia (d.1282): *Littera gesta docet, quid credis allegoria/Quid agis moralis, quo tendis anagogia* (The literal sense teaches historical events/Allegory what you believe/the moral sense what you should do, and the anagogic sense/that toward which you are striving (Cousins 2000:123).

plored. With respect to general Christological thought, the anthropological thrust so evident for many decades has resulted in the *humanity* of Jesus being the primary focus. New Testament minimalist christologies argue that concepts such as pre-existence and divine sonship are seen to be the result of a long and complicated quasi-evolutionary process, involving embellishments in the tradition due to the influence of other cultures and religions (Davis 1988:45-46). Radical historical-criticism, in its efforts to unearth the sources, forms and redactional elements of the text, brought the historicity of the gospel events into question. Liberation hermeneutics, concentrating on social contextualization, interpreted the mission and function of Jesus in a more politicized manner, with the result that liberation, instead of reconciliation, becomes the dominant principle (Tavard 1981:561). Thus Christological assertions are translated into the terms of a 'critical and liberating praxis' (Thompson 1980:8). Such Christologies emphasise the presence of Christ in society, instead of *Christus presens* within the self, as a spiritual dynamic of the inner life. Whist the afore-going methods have certainly been very fruitful, nevertheless few scholars turn to the Christology of the mysticis '...as a valid and valuable source for the exploration of Christ as the centre of a permanently contemporary experience' (Tavard 1981:561).

With particular reference to Pauline Christology, the situation has been further exacerbated by the fact that for decades much of Pauline theology has concentrated on 'justification by faith' to the detriment of mystical interpretation. Allied with this is a prejudice against mysticism, which considers it to be a Greek influenced, heretical branch of Christianity. Paradigmatic of such views is a certain strand of Protestantism associated with, inter alia, Ritschl, Troeltsch, von Harnack and the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and Brunner.⁹ One of the charges levelled against mysticism in Paul is that it is antithetical to personal Christianity as revealed in the historical actuality of Jesus, since it minimizes the historical, concentrating on immanence, instead of the transcendent wholly other God, who addresses humanity in its utter sinfulness. Johnson (1988:11,14) considers mysticism to be '...both anti-Scriptural and a contradiction of the evangelical view that the Bible is the one and only ultimate criterion of truth about God and our relation to Him' and is furthermore a 'non-Christian philosophy'. Such criticisms are, however, untenable, since mysticism in no way abrogates faith and is not in opposition to a personal Christianity.¹⁰ In fact, by way of an anticipatory conclusion, one could speak of a mysticism of the 'historical event' in which the meaning of the historical events of Christianity are transmuted into a meta-historical realm, without denying the validity of their historical importance. Such mimetic re-enactment transforms the historical founding events of religion into deep mystical experience. Therefore the major premise of this article is that Paul the *mystic*, not Paul the moralist, or organizer of the early Christian communities, is the revealer of God's secret wisdom. He it is who reveals Christ as a 'radically new facet of the divine personality, thereby making known the possibility of an essentially dynamic union with the risen Jesus' (Stanley 1977:11). This mystical union is powerfully expressed in Paul's expression *in-Christ*, which can be seen as the major leit-motif of Pauline thought.

⁹ Cf Kourie (1992) for a summary of this position.

¹⁰ See Penna (1996:235 ff) with respect to more recent debate; cf Roesag (2004:55) who cautions against viewing Paul as a mystic. The latter position, however, I would maintain, is based on an incorrect reading of both mysticism in general and Paul in particular.

In-Christ

In-Christ, or some cognate expression occurs 164 times in Paul's writings and it is my contention that this succinct phrase elucidates the core of Paul's mystical thought. This is clearly demarcated in Paul's well-known articulation of union with the risen and glorified Lord: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20). It can be seen as a crucial hermeneutical principle, by means of which the other major tenets of Paul's teaching, such as reconciliation, salvation, eschatology, ecclesiology, etc., can be understood. The prominence given to this expression is itself an indication of the importance that Paul attributes to this concept. Clearly, Paul uses the expression with a certain flexibility, for example, in certain cases 'in-Christ' simply denotes 'Christian' (Rom 16:3; 16:9-10; 1Cor 4:10; Gal 1:22). In addition, ecclesiological, eschatological, and corporate interpretations have been assigned to the phrase.¹¹

The mystical interpretation of the concept 'in-Christ' was propagated at the turn of the century by Deissmann (1892; 1926). Deissmann considered this term to be the kernel of Paul's thought, and postulates that the Christophany on the way to Damascus was a decisive event which replaced Paul's mysticism of performance with a mysticism of grace. This momentous meeting with the risen Lord was a turning point of the greatest magnitude in the life of the then Saul of Tarsus. For Deissmann (1892:82) Paul is a *communio* mystic; his mysticism is not one of undifferentiated absorption into Christ, but one of living in the reality of spiritual Christ. This is, as it were, the 'element' in which the believer now lives. Wikenhauser (1960:64) emphasizes the personal as opposed to a spatial understanding of 'in-Christ': it denotes a way of life that is informed by the power and influence of the spiritual and personal Lord, who is a concrete definitive person, not a formless Spirit which pervades all things.

Another seminal contribution to earlier studies comes from Schweitzer (1931) whose fundamental tenet is that 'in-Christ' colours and transfigures all aspects of Paul's doctrine. For Schweitzer, women and men 'in-Christ' have died and risen again, although as yet in a secret but nonetheless real manner; while the outward appearance is still that of the transient world, the reality is already of the eternal and transcendent world (1931:110, 99). Schweitzer is perhaps best known for his thesis that the 'in-Christ' motif takes precedence over 'righteousness by faith' in Paul: the latter is '...a subsidiary crater which has formed within the main crater, the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ' (1931:225). Schweitzer's interpretation of the 'in-Christ' phrase is strongly eschatological. The resurrection of Christ has initiated the 'last age' and Paul sees the predestined solidarity of the elect with the Messiah drawing them already into the resurrection of Christ, by virtue of their being 'in-Christ'. Whilst 'the outward appearance is still of the transient world ... the reality is already that of the eternal world' (1931:110). Therefore, for Paul, to live is Christ and the Christo-centric nature of his mysticism is summed up in the phrase 'in-Christ'. This understanding brings a new awareness of life, the constituent element of which is freedom from the old life of law and sin and a new sense of belonging to an utterly different locale of existence (Col 3:3); the believer is a member of a new race of redeemed women and men, whose life is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23); faith (Eph 1:12); wisdom and strength (1 Cor 4:10); and truthfulness (Rom 9:1). Above all, it is 'in-Christ' that perfect and total praise can be offered to the Father (Kourie 2004:39). Clearly, Paul's entire mission to the Gentiles and his summons to apostleship was founded on this crucial mystical dynamic (Stanley 1977; 1986). For Paul, the mystical initiative comes from God; it is both an act of

¹¹ These views have been summarized in Kourie (1987).

grace and is effected in the historical actuality of Christ: 'Human mysticism, as attraction, knowledge and experience of God, is always preceded ... by a divine mysticism, as attraction, knowledge, and experience of the human by God...' (Penna 1996:249). This relates to an 'undeniable semantic of participation' without implying a basic 'connaturality or synergeia between the human and the divine' (Penna 1996:245). Living 'in-Christ' is implemented by the power of the Spirit. Life is no longer lived in the 'flesh' – but in the sphere of the Spirit, who guides, directs and comforts (Rom 8:26) and produces fruit in the believers ((Gal 5:22-23). Moltmann (1997:68, 69) speaks of the Spirit as the 'source of energy and the divine field of force' a vitalizing energy which is a 'flowing, an outpouring and a shining ... an inexhaustible wellspring of strength'.

Quotidian Mysticism

Of crucial relevance is the fact that Paul's mystical being 'in-Christ' is a practical reality; it encompasses the daily vicissitudes of life. Therefore, Christ-mysticism for Paul is not characterized by lofty peaks of spiritual excitement and ecstasy, visions and revelations, although these are not totally absent. However, in accord with the major mystical wisdom traditions, these are not seen to comprise the essence of mysticism. Paul's mysticism is typified by self-giving love, by the cross: it is union with Christ in his suffering, death and resurrection (Dunn 1977:195). For a follower of Christ, suffering is unavoidable, since the Christian belief runs counter to the aspirations and ideals of the world. However, in Christ, spiritual fruitfulness is possible even amidst immense suffering. Paul's experience of suffering, especially in Corinth, led to the understanding that human weakness is not an obstacle for God; on the contrary, it provides the ambience for divine activity (2 Cor 11:23-33). This leads to his doctrine of power in weakness (2 Cor 4:7-11). Paul's own afflictions are presented as a didactic model in several instances: he carries death in his body so that the life of Jesus can be manifested (2 Cor 4:10); he suffers to bring comfort to the Corinthians in order that they in turn might suffer and share in Christ's suffering (2 Cor 1:5); he commends the Philippians for suffering as an example to their opponents (Phil 1:29-30) and the Thessalonians for following his example in suffering. Such suffering is not in vain, but leads to transformation and new life.

Mystical Transformation

Paul's mysticism cannot be divorced from his emphasis on the ethical and transformative dimension. Believers are now free and their freedom is 'in the Spirit' (Rom 8:1-2); yet this freedom does not mean license. Whilst free, the community is now at the service of one another (1 Cor 10:23-24); love is the aim (Gal 5:13-14; 1 Cor 14:1). The moral imperative of the new life is directly opposed to ego-inflation, but rather emphasizes *conformity to Christ*. Such mystical transformation is analogous to the Buddhist concept of 'no-self' – *anatta*. The wise one, the *muni*, in Buddhist thought is 'ego-less'; he practises 'due nothingness', acting by not acting at all, not even knowing his non-action, because there is no longer a self (Weber & Vahlkampf 1993:128). This leads to inner tranquility and humility, living in the world in gentleness and quietude. Spiritually poor, the one who is divested of self possesses the entire wealth of divinity. As a result, the adherent is at the service of others: '...the task of psychological and moral development is to move steadily toward a greater understanding of who one is, in relationship to self and others, identified as a movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence' (Billy & Orsuto 1996:103). Such transformation effects societal change: love for others is the hallmark of the Christian life (Wiseman 2006:28-30; cf Bowe 2003:158).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the following points can be made: firstly, a new lucidity and power accrue from the realization that Paul's mystical understanding of life 'in-Christ' touches every aspect of life. 'In-Christ' there is one reality (Gal 3:28); one body (Rom 12:5) and new life; it affects the Christian both individually and collectively. Secondly, living 'in-Christ' is a source of power and strength, especially in the face of suffering and death. Thirdly, a mystical reading of scripture attempts to rediscover the inner dynamic of the text which effects transformation; this has repercussions not only within the depths of the individual but also in society, as the history of spirituality and mysticism shows. Mystical interpretation allows us to experience the 'excess of meaning' in the text which goes beyond the subjective intentions of the author. Such a reading helps 'break the spell' of our presuppositions, correcting and revising our own views, and provoking a new self-understanding. It allows the text to come alive in the present. This does not imply a denial of the historical and sociological situation of the text's provenance, but goes further than mere history. A mystical hermeneutic therefore concentrates more on the synchronic aspect of the text, rather than historical, linear, or mechanistic considerations. The myths of the bible are seen to represent a living dialectic of our inner history, providing meaning for life – the symbols of scripture are constantly being transformed and revitalized. Unfortunately, since the inner world has been neglected for so long in the academy, the symbolic, transformative and mystical aspects of scripture have sadly minimized. Modernity, with its Newtonian-type mindset contributed to an atrophy of the spiritual faculties, and texts which were meant to resonate at many levels of meaning were reduced to the literal sense. Fortunately, scripture interpretation is gradually freeing itself from the fetters of determinism. The limits of rationalism are more and more apparent and the functional consciousness that has dominated Western culture for the last three hundred years is seriously being questioned. For many decades, scholars and writers felt the need to protect themselves from criticism and even ridicule and hence succumbed to the disjointed and arid scholarship endemic in universities. For far too long biblical scholars have been merely 'curators' whose subject matter is locked up into an all too distant historical realm. As such, the text is not seen as religious, sacred and life-giving, but purely as an object to be analysed, dissected and deconstructed. This era is gradually fading. Just as the European Enlightenment itself is losing its grip on the collective consciousness of women and men of the third millennium, so too there is a revitalization of the aesthetic, and above all a greater spiritual sensitivity which enriches our understanding of the ancient texts of scripture. Therefore, a mystical hermeneutic, instead of being viewed with skepticism, can be seen as a powerful key for understanding scripture. By returning to its mystical roots, and rediscovering its mystical heritage, Christianity will once again be empowered to effect change at all levels of society and contribute to an evolution of consciousness so badly needed in the third millennium.

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