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Natural Mysticism—Gateway or Detour?

Aquinas, Maritain, and the Core/Contextualist Debate

I. Introduction

Spiritual progress is marked by a mystical knowledge in which dogmas shine like stars in the midday sun and is a result of persevering in grace through the dim awareness of faith.[1] Through the byways of sensible realities and the fragilities of human existence, theological speculation helps us penetrate the knowledge of simple faith, bathing our early certitudes in a "second clarity."[2] Maritain echoed Garrigou-Lagrange's focus on the close association of metaphysics, theology, and mysticism, and his zeal for climbing the "luminous summits which must illuminate all the rest."[3] For

1. Charles Cardinal Journet, *What is Dogma?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 121, speaks of mystical knowledge thus: "[C]onceptual knowledge of revealed truths is not in any way *laid aside*, or in any way got rid of, it is merely for the moment covered over, *transcended.* All the dogmas thus subsist in the faith of the contemplative, but like the stars in the midday sunlight.... The passing light which throws them into the shade strengthens them to a wonderful degree." Emphasis in original.

2. The notion of "first" and "second" clarities is developed by Baron Friedrich Von Hügel and Andrew Louth. In von Hügel's words, only in the saint is thought about God transformed into a religious act, and the "dim apprehension" of nascent faith becomes the "clear perception" of true knowledge of God. See Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Wichita, Kansas: Eighth Day Books, 2007), 135.

3. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross,* translated by Mary Timothea Doyle (St. Louis, Missouri: Herder, 1949), 50–51.

Maritain, realist metaphysics is shot through with a mystical aspiration for union with the first principle of being.[4] In their syntheses of the fundamental doctrines of Aquinas with the fruits of mystical theology, Garrigou and Maritain echo the integral approach of the commentatorial tradition and together constitute what has rightly been called the "Thomistic-mystical movement."[5]

The binary structures that permeate mystical theology (eternity/time; transcendent/immanent; etc.) also appear in the contrast of interpretation and religious experience, in the "core/contextualist" debate among late twentieth-century scholars of mysticism. Whether there is an initial core of mystical experience that is subsequently interpreted by reference to texts and traditions, or whether an experiential and conceptual matrix precedes and informs mystical experience, is also relevant to Garrigou's and Maritain's considerations of mystical experience "outside the Church."[6] Terms such as natural or pre-mysticism, implicit faith, pan-supernaturalism and pseudo-supernaturalism, emerge in the attempt to reconcile the authentic

4. "The natural desire to see the Cause of being derives from the natural desire of knowing being.... [E]very great metaphysic is indeed pierced by a mystical aspiration." Jacques Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," in *Ransoming the Time*, translated by Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 260–61. The article was based on a talk Maritain gave to the Fourth Congress of Religious Psychology in 1938. For a good summary, see Henry Bars, "Maritain's Contributions to an Understanding of Mystical Experience," in *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Achievement*, edited by Joseph Evans (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 119–120. Compare this with what Evelyn Underhill says in "What is Mysticism?" in *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1946), 107: "[A] mystic is not a person who practices unusual forms of prayer, but a person whose life is ruled by this thirst," echoing St. Augustine's saying that "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." This thirst seeks nourishment from God's hand, not by snatching at spiritual satisfactions "like greedy greyhounds" (Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. 46) in the pursuit of rarified, abstract mental states, but through the course of daily circumstance and struggle. Progress in the Christian spiritual life is won, in part, by wrestling with the paradox of eternity entering into and transforming time.

5. Aidan Nichols indicates that this trend at unification anticipates readings of Aquinas such as are found in Jean-Pierre Torrell. See Aidan Nichols, *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Naples, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2008), 117.

6. Garrigou-Lagrange, "The Grace of Christ and the Mystics Outside the Church," in *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, translated by Bouchard (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1998), 355–84. Maritain deals with the topic of natural mysticism and mystical experience outside the Church in several works, such as: "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," 255–89; "Mystical Experience and Philosophy," in *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, fourth edition, translated by Gerard Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 247–90; *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel*, translated by Joseph Evans (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 93–134, for instance.

ecclesial experience of God in Catholicism with the universal call to grace and divine omnipotence.

For Aquinas and Garrigou, authentic supernatural mystical experience is possible outside the visible Church, but only as accompanied by an "implicit faith" which grounds the experience on a minimal set of explicitly held truths about God concerning His existence and providence.[7] Given this demand, what are the chances that a core cross-religious mystical experience exists, let alone one prior to interpretation? The question of "natural" mystical experience outside Christianity is, nonetheless, of importance for inter-faith dialogue, spiritual pedagogy, and cross-disciplinary topics such as the role of the subconscious. For Maritain, natural mystical experience involves both a turning of intelligence from its metaphysical outward course towards a lived nescience and self-denial, and a metaphysical and ascetic discipline which accesses the immensity of God through a return on the self's own act of existence. I will argue that Garrigou maintains a closer affinity to Aquinas on the parameters of the spiritual life, and that he does so by consistently and sharply subordinating mystical experience to the life of theological virtue, understood as a process of conformity, through charity, to Christ.

There are several factors at work in discerning the positions of Aquinas, Maritain, and Garrigou with respect to the contemporary core/contextualist debate. First, there is the seventeenth-century rupture of ascetic and mystical theology which ironically laid the groundwork for the nineteenth-century cultural shift to a personal, experiential approach to religion.[8] Second, Aquinas's sacramental, ecclesial approach is invariably absent in treatments of

7. "However, we can inquire whether the Gospel is to be considered as promulgated in places where it has not yet been preached or where it has been completely forgotten. In any event, true mysticism presupposes at least an implicit faith in the Redeemer." Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, 362 n. 13. He develops the notion of implicit faith in this chapter, resting his view on Aquinas's use of Hebrews 11.6 ("But without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is: and is a rewarded to them that seek him" [Douay-Rheims]), where belief in God's existence and providence conditions true faith. Implicit faith in the Redeemer is virtually contained in explicit faith in these two *credibilia*. Aquinas develops the notion of implicit faith in his outline of the categories of unbelief, in ST II-II, q. 2, aa. 7–8 and ST II-II, q. 10, for instance.

8. On the contribution of William James to the modern "episodic" notion of mysticism as a set of discrete paranormal phenomena, see John Peter Kenny, *The Mysticism of St. Augustine* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 147: "[I]n the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ... mystical experience became an unusual but highly prized phenomenon, conferring upon its subject the sensation of transcendence and the feeling of certainty."

core mysticism, since his spirituality is resistant to the psychological analysis favored by them. In addition to the distinction of explicit and implicit faith and the various types of union with the divine (differentiated vs. undifferentiated), there are other intersecting questions, such as the role of apophatic or "dark" metaphysical contemplation and the treatment of paradoxes in scriptural texts.

Amidst this web of issues lie three tasks. First, I will note the terms and assumptions of the core/contextualist debate. Second, I will examine Maritain's and Garrigou's ideas of natural or pre-mysticism and implicit faith in light of relevant texts of Aquinas as these Thomists become our imaginary interlocutors in the debate. Third, I will ask whether Aquinas's use of paradox in his texts on natural contemplation and in his Christology as developed in two biblical commentaries provides any evidence for elements of the core view in his thought.

II. The Core/Contextualist Debate

Two opposed approaches to religion have helped set the terminology and parameters of the twentieth-century debate about the nature and possibility of union with the divine. These are the secular philosophy and religious studies camp, which flourished at the turn of the twentieth century and set the terms of the core/contextualist debate, and the French Catholic camp, consisting of a medley of scholastic and transcendental Thomists, *nouvelle théologie* adherents, and interreligious scholars. The secular camp combines a post-Enlightenment divorce of thought and being with the notion that the study of mysticism is at root an endeavor to assess epistemic and psychological claims about religious experience. The French Catholic camp develops various views on religious experience in relation to a Thomist, ecclesial, sacramental spirituality.[9]

9. An overview of modern mysticism scholarship approaches can be found in: Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 265–343. Closer than many of these to Garrigou's account is the German Benedictine Anselm Stolz, who retrieves a Scriptural and Patristic basis for a Eucharistic mysticism. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 281. On Garrigou-Lagrange, see ibid., 279–80. McGinn also treats Maritain, but does not analyze his views on natural mysticism in any detail; see ibid., 305–310. Both the secular and French religious camps boast adherents of both the core and contextualist views on mysticism, which points to the pervasive desire for both universality and historical context.

1. The "Core" View

First is the core or "essentialist" position, an interesting term hinting at a kind of "abstraction with precision" from lived religious traditions. Here, mystical experience or consciousness is pre-linguistic and has a cross-religious set of key characteristics. Divisions and distinctions among objects, and later, religious dogmas, are said to emerge through the filters of language, tradition, and cult. Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi mystics are said to experience the same absolute, expressed variably in terms of God, Brahman, Atman, or Allah, or Emptiness.[10] A core of mystical experience is said to precede interpretation and tradition, such that three elements in mysticism are cemented and seen as invulnerable to skeptical critique or dismantling. These elements are a comprehensive phenomenology of mysticism, a nonsectarian "spirituality," and a robust ecumenism.

The core view on the inner unity or fundamental sameness of all mystical experience was popularized by Stace and Smart, and by William James, who extracted four "marks" of mystical experience—ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (some core adherents add Evelyn Underhill's phenomenology of mysticism to the list).[11] Core adherents are fond of lists and charts wherein typologies and traits are compared and distilled into universal categories of experience.[12] Cross-religious access to a core of pure consciousness, accessed by a non-conceptual unity with the universality of being, is sometimes claimed,[13] suggesting a confusion of mystical and metaphysical contemplation, and of absolute and universal being.

10. On this view, see Larry Short, "Mysticism, Mediation, and the Non-Linguistic," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no.4 (1995): 659. Short defends the view that there is, in fact, no dichotomy of the core and contextualist positions, and that both are true, since there can be a nonlinguistic basis of mediated experiences.

11. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1902), 380–82. For a list of authors on either side of the core/contextualist debate, see, for example Edward Howells, "Mysticism and the Mystical: The Current Debate," supplement, *The Way Supplement* 102 (2001): 15–27. In 1960, Stace made an unsuccessful attempt to overcome the problems of the experience/interpretation dichotomy by distinguishing introvertive and extrovertive species of mystical experience, which still share seven common characteristics. See: Walter Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1960).

12. Jose Nieto, for example, gives an appendix with various charts on the essentials of "universal mysticism." See his *Religious Experience and Mysticism: Otherness as Experience of Transcendence* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1997).

13. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, edited by Robert K. Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology and Philosophy*, edited by Robert K. Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

The core thesis is flawed in many ways. First, it errs in its circularity,[14] in that mystical experience of objective, transcendent being is purportedly based on a subjective state of content-less pure consciousness, which claims universality while failing to escape the privacy of an inner psychological state. Second, it errs in its ahistorical artificiality and withdrawing of texts from their religious contexts in order to attain a level of "pure experience." The monistic tendency among core adherents often assumes a hiatus between religion and spirituality in the critique of the divisive effects of theistic revelation.[15] Third, it errs in claiming that traditional religious claims about divine union are extraneous and secondary to the real nature of mysticism.[16] Fourth, the core view fails to recognize the ways in which language and belief systems influence and shape experience, such that a defense of the thorny claim of 'pure experience' is again sidestepped. "Pure experience", a rebellious stepchild of the Cartesian and Kantian self/world divide, is a notion that situates the core/contextual debate in a nest of modern approaches to religion. George Lindbeck's "post-liberal" theology represents an objection to the kind of direct, universal intuition of the divine which the core view assumes.

Robert Bellah situates the core theory within George Lindbeck's pantheon of religious typologies as outlined in the latter's *The Nature of Doctrine*.[17] Lindbeck's own "cultural-linguistic" approach makes doctrines "commonly authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action" and interprets inner religious experiences as formed by and derived from outer influences such as language and community. Opposed to this view are two views: the traditional "cognitive" or "propositional" approach, which sees religious doctrines as truth claims about objective realities, and the "experientialist-expressivist" approach, which views religious doctrines as expres-

14. On this critique, see Bernard McGinn, "*Quo Vadis*? Reflections on the Current Study of Mysticism," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (1998): 15.

15. The familiar narrative of the Church incorporating alien mystical strands for the stated purpose of determining which strands are orthodox or heretical, but with the actual motive of suppressing it under institutional, hierarchical control, is stated explicitly, or implied, by many core adherents. See, for example, Jose Nieto, *Religious Experience and* Mysticism, 165. Core's monism is not only antireligious and a confusion of mystical and metaphysical contemplation; it is a Platonic rejection of individuality. Personhood, Nieto thinks, belongs to the realm of matter, and so pure mystical consciousness must be monistic to be properly metaphysical.

16. See McGinn, "*Quo Vadis?*" 15, for some of these critiques.

17. See Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2011), 11, where he discusses George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

sions of non-discursive inner states,[18] a view Lindbeck associates with the liberal theologies of Schleiermacher and Tillich.

The "experientialist-expressivist" version of the core theory assumes internally common states or intuitions of the divine among mystics, which language and culture then diversify into outer formulae (creeds), rituals, and doctrines. Lindbeck rejects this model of religious typology, viewing it as a denial of what religious traditions have understood as radically distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbor, and cosmos. Finally, the core view errs by introducing pantheistic monism, which is entailed by the suggestion that a universal intuitive grasp of the unity of being that excludes the God/creature distinction.[19]

There is a knot of assumptions at work in the core view, starting with the assertion that authentic and "pure" mystical experience transcends creed as well as the Western God/creature distinction. Bellah notes the problems with the notion that the "unitive event" is a kind of "ground zero" with respect to interpretation. A core experience requires conceptual representation if it is to be communicable.[20] The reality/interpretation duality (as well as the particularities of symbol and tradition) is said to be transcended by a nugget of pure experience. This fundamental event is said to then issue in paradox and apophatic language (*sunyata*/emptiness, void, silence, incomprehensible *lux inaccessa,* etc.), which highlights the inadequacies of the rational discourse in interpretation. The core view also assumes that non-religious mystics (including those who have "transcended" or ignored their religious heritage) embody the vocation of mystic more properly than do religious ones; and third, that religion is a step along the way to a fuller, more metaphysically developed, spirituality.

The pitting of spirituality against religion and the confusions about the types of contemplation and of concepts such as personhood[21] are symptomatic of pseudo-scientific approaches to mysticism. In addition to distinguishing the levels of contemplation with clarity and precision, Aquinas *rejected* monism on the grounds that God is not the "formal being" of all

18. Core theorists often view religious experience as "existing generically in the human psyche," with particular religions as "surface manifestations" of a "panhuman" experiential potentiality, and other such vagaries. See Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution,* 11.

19. On some of these errors, see McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism,* 315–16, where he focuses on the problems with Walter Stace's views in *Mysticism and Philosophy.*

20. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution,* 12.

21. See note 15 above.

things. Rather, God is separate and transcendent, yet omnipresent causally through His essence, presence, and power.[22] Thus, the intellectual basis of a core mystical experience is mistaken, inasmuch as the undifferentiated unity of absorption it entails is, in fact, impossible. Maritain himself viewed the divine immensity supposedly experienced by the Hindu mystics' contact with the substantial *esse* of the soul as distinct from the mystical depths of God accessed by Christian supernatural charity.[23]

2. *The "Contextualist" View*

In 1983, the core view came under attack by Steven Katz, whose contextualist or "constructivist" view complemented the historical research of Bernard McGinn. Katz's work of retrieval is a curio cabinet of religious phenomena (autobiographical, doctrinal, and literary narratives), produced to prove the dependence of mystical experience on particular cultures, traditions, and belief systems. Bridal mysticism, as well as Jewish Kabbalistic literature, for instance, presupposes a personal, differentiated union of love, based on *The Song of Songs*. As removed from Scripture as Zoharic Kabbalah may seem, with its doctrine of the divine *Sefiroth* reunited through human action, it is nonetheless true that biblical education is thought to provide the context of divine encounter, and biblical texts anchor and enrich Rabbinic literature. As Katz puts it, "what the rabbinic mystic 'saw' was not independent of what he had studied in order to 'see.'"[24] Interpretation not only follows, but precedes and permeates, mystical experience, and these accounts draw on cosmologies telling us about origins and ourselves and of ascending paths towards perfection.[25]

Metaphysical frames-of-reference are neither accidental conditions nor biased reprises of content-less, ineffable "experiences." If dogmas are like the stars that shine in the midday sun of mystical experience, then ontic sche-

22. See SCG I, chap. 26, "Is God the formal being of things?" Steven A. Long details the metaphysical path of Aquinas's rejection of Parmenidean monism, from his adoption of Aristotelian notion of potency and the hierarchy of being, to the implications of an infinite act which is not self-limiting, in his recent book *Analogia Entis: On the Metaphysics of Analogy, Being, and the Act of Faith* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 13–38.

23. See Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," 279–80 n. 18.

24. *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, edited by Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 9. McGinn denies the relativism and truth-denying character of the contextualism, but does agree that there are no "mysticisms" but only mystics adhering to various traditions and beliefs.

25. See ibid., 33.

mas are the like the light-transmitting atmosphere itself, which make them possible. So, a Buddhist undifferentiated absorptive state, which makes no room for individual souls, is *not* a Western relational union of charity; grace as exercised by an omnipotent benevolent divine will is *not* necessitarian *karma;* Buddhist release from *samsara* (cycle of rebirth) is *not* the perfection of Christian resurrection, and so on, *contra* the "one summit" view of spirituality.

Despite its nuances, the contextualist view is also flawed. Katz not only affirms mystical contexts, but also denies any direct contact with ultimate reality, and denies the truth value of any proposition about mystical experience. Katz thus accepts the dichotomy that *either* mystical experience is unmediated and direct (the core view), *or* it is generated and limited by context and tradition, precluding access to objective truth—in short, a religious relativism.

To bracket out religious texts, doctrines, and even sacraments as either mere triggers, or as secondary reflections on primary ineffable and certain "experience" also reduces mysticism to a transitory alteration of consciousness, instead of the complete appetitive and personal transformation called for by Maritain in his distinction of mystical from mere philosophical contemplation. The post-Enlightenment "contents-of-consciousness" ersatz[26] mysticism also ignores the influence of language on experience, yet the power of language effects personal transformation in the mystic, especially considering the incommensurability between the finite and infinite subjects.[27] The paradox of presence and absence is a verbal strategy in the *via negativa,* for example.

Bernard McGinn hits on the Achilles heel of the core view in noting that the fundamental error involved "lies in thinking that there is a real division between the experiential and the theological in ... the mystical tradition. The mystics themselves never thought that this was the case."[28] James's contribution to the erroneous split in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) set the tone for a three-pronged approach to mysticism as:

26. As Howells puts it: "In the modern period, this Christian framework broke down under the influence of the new science, and was replaced by an ersatz 'scientific' field of 'mysticism' focusing on extraordinary phenomena, now divorced from the system of thought which gave it meaning." Howells, "Mysticism and the Mystical: The Current Debate," 22.

27. Cf. McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism,* xviii.

28. Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65, no. 2 (1996): 214.

i. experiential and autobiographical; ii. focused on the paranormal and extraordinary; and: iii. involving an exchange of the properly theological for an empirical, inductive, psychological approach—a fundamental failure of methodology, according to Garrigou, which further separated ascetical and mystical theology.[29] Anglicans such as Dean Inge and Evelyn Underhill rightly rejected this artificial division, as well as the pseudo-spirituality of the paranormal promoted since the seventeenth century, but it was Garrigou who reintegrated the elements of the spiritual life by positing a continuity of natural, acquired, and infused levels of contemplation, to make mysticism a normal, if rare, culmination of the universal call to holiness.[30]

III. Garrigou, Aquinas, and Maritain on Implicit Faith and the "Mysticism of Self"

1. Garrigou and Aquinas

Despite the universal call to holiness and the possibility of grace being dispensed outside the visible Church, however, Garrigou does not accept the core thesis. Why not? First, his limitation of authentic mysticism to the supernatural life of grace precludes Pelagian-style generated states of consciousness as an index of spiritual progress. Second, his goal of reunifying ascetical and mystical theology (in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation,*

29. On Garrigou-Lagrange's rejection of modern approaches to mysticism, both within and outside the Church, see the excellent review by Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2008).

30. Garrigou's articles in *La vie spirituelle* were taken up in his 1923 book *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation selon S. Thomas d'Aquin et S. Jean de la Croix* (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*), where the universal call to contemplation and holiness as the normal outcome of the development of the life of grace, is asserted. In the same stroke, the artificial division of the ascetic and mystical, and the confusion of contemplation with paranormal phenomena was dispelled. Inspired by Aquinas, for whom mysticism is not a discrete set of experiences, but a *life* whose principle and end is charity, Garrigou detailed the stages of spiritual growth in which the giving and uniting of ourselves to God is made possible. Mystical union for the *viator* shares in the secret wisdom of God, the loving knowledge proceeding from the gift of wisdom. For the theologian, the Gifts open an inward vision of the mysteries of faith in a joining of the practical (end-directedness) and theoretical loving contemplation. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life,* translated by Mary Timothea Doyle, 2 vols. (Herder: St. Louis, 1946). On the various components of the mystical life in terms of the definition of contemplation in Aquinas, see ST II-II, q. 24, a. 9. On the degrees of charity, where Aquinas distinguishes between the charity of the *incipientes, proficientes,* and *perfecti,* see ST II-II, q. 24, a. 9. Cf. David Knowles, "Contemplation in Saint Thomas Aquinas, Part 2," *Clergy Review* 8 (July, 1934): 85–103.

for example[31]) involved a hinging together, in a broad continuum, of active discipline—acquired and infused—and passive contemplation, both animated by charity. In his view, mystical contemplation is a rare but normal flowering of the ordinary life of grace, involving the supernatural initiative of God, the passivity of the Gifts of the Spirit, the presence of charity, and the goal of differentiated, personal union with Christ. Third, natural or pre-mysticism involves the potential confusion of levels of contemplation, and is open to error. How so?

Garrigou develops a view midway between naturalism (the modern core version of Pelagianism) and pseudo-supernaturalism (the Jansenist view that makes grace and infused faith the condition for all good works, and denies the dispensation of grace to pagans).[32] Naturalism denies the necessity of sacraments and Christ for salvation, and leads to false mysticisms which confuse the realms of nature and grace, God and self. It is open to inspirations from lower spirits in the inevitable confusion of "darkness from above" (God) and "darkness from below" (the self). Supernaturalism denies divine omnipotence and the role of implicit faith in those advancing towards salvation.

Little allowance is made for natural mysticism as an ascetically prepared meditation on the self. Neoplatonism stands alone as a natural mysticism that can exist in souls in a state of grace, over and against Buddhism, Hinduism, and theosophy. *De jure*, major mystical graces can occur outside the visible Church, in some Protestants and Muslims, but *de facto*, even minor mystical graces occur only very rarely outside the visible Church, and occur within the Church, only as compensation for defects in environment.[33] This 1951 position parallels the early edition of Maritain's *The Degrees of Knowledge* (1926), which, unlike his treatment of mysticism in *Ransoming*

31. See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and* Contemplation, 23, 27, 29. He also emphases the distinction of the "traditional thesis" (the unity of mystical and ascetical theology), the "modern" thesis (their rupture after the seventeenth century) and his "return to the traditional thesis" in his other works. Cf. Robert Eiten, "Recent Theological Opinion on Infused Contemplation," *Theological Studies* 2, no. 1 (1941): 95–98.

32. See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, 355–84.

33. See ibid., 379. In note 50 on page 379, Garrigou quotes Lemonnyer: "The minor mystical graces are properly supplementary graces. When God grants them, He takes into consideration need rather than merit. He holds them in reserve as help mercifully granted to weakness rather than as direct means of accelerating progress in perfection. If there are born-candidates for the minor mystical graces, they are those unknown Catholics, members of the one spiritual Church.... They lack so many things." See Antoine Lemonnyer, "L'Existence des phénomènes mystiques, est-elle concevable en dehors de l'Eglise?" *La vie spirituelle* (May 1, 1932): 73ff.

the Time (1938), downplays the possibility of natural or pre-mysticism by reducing it to asceticism and natural contemplation.

The quest for a universal core mystical experience resembles a search for prayer shorn of doctrine. For Garrigou, an inductive, empirical approach to religious phenomena (found in the core view) removes mysticism from its theological moorings, reducing it to an experientialist caricature while destroying the unity of the spiritual life. Any experience of God outside the boundaries of the visible Church must also involve divinely instituted graces, and must rest on explicit faith in God's existence and providence. Aquinas's view on the implicit faith of non-Christians, and the content and direction of the first act of freedom, is relevant here. Three cases warrant analysis: i. the uncatechised savage; ii. the child's first act of freedom; and: iii. the pagan mystic.

In *De veritate* q. 14, a. 11, Aquinas raises the question of the salvation of a savage brought up among wolves, or, as Garrigou would add, the case of one who has forgotten or rejected a caricature of the faith.[34] Such a person is not automatically damned, Aquinas argues, for providence fittingly provides all with what is necessary for salvation. This early view is replaced in later texts by a more Augustinian pessimism, as some have noted.[35] In *De veritate*, the savage can possess "implicit" faith by following natural reason, by seeking good and shunning evil, God providing either internal inspiration or external guidance to make this faith explicit, as the case of Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10) illustrates. Explicit faith in the two truths of Hebrews 11.6 (God's existence and providence) implicitly contains truths necessary for salvation.

Every truth of faith cannot reasonably be believed with clarity in every age by every person, Aquinas reasons. The case of the pagan of good will resembles that of ordinary folk between the fall and the age of grace—both can possess the two necessary *credibilia*. After the coming of Christ, however, the evangelized must *also* have explicit faith in the Trinity, the Redeemer, and the general articles of faith.

34. Interestingly, Garrigou aligns two scenarios—one, where the Gospel has not been preached, and the other, where it has been "completely forgotten." Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, 362 n. 13.

35. F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 53–55. Sullivan believes that Aquinas's silence in later texts on the inevitability of a preacher or inspiration being provided to make implicit faith explicit (and so salvific), led him to adopt an Augustinian view on the possibility of salvation for pagans.

Does Aquinas's early optimism about the uncatechised man of good will (who possesses implicit faith) bear any relation to the situation of the pagan who practices a natural or pre-mysticism? Such a pagan must also possess implicit faith for the comparison to be apt.

The second case Aquinas considers is that of an unbaptized child, who chooses between himself and God, or goodness in itself as a "due end" in his first act of freedom. Does this second case bear any relation to the mystical experience of an unbeliever? At ST I-II, q. 89, a.6, Aquinas takes up the issue of grace and the types of sin in a discussion of the child's first act of freedom in relation to his final end:[36]

> Now the first thing that occurs to man to think about then, is to deliberate about himself. And if he then direct himself to the due end, he will, by means of grace, receive the remission of original sin; whereas if he does not ... as far as he is capable of discretion at that particular age, he will sin mortally, for through not doing that which is his power to do.[37]

A person of the age of reason, upon directing himself by deliberation to his due end, can avoid mortal sin and receive grace,[38] but will never have original and venial sin together without mortal sin, should he turn from God. Rather, he will either have grace together with later venial sin (if he turns to God immediately prior to reaching the age of reason, "insofar as he is capable of discretion"), or, he will have mortal and venial sin (if he fails to turn to God immediately). There is no hiatus period once reason dawns, where sinners simply have original sin with venial sin in the absence of any choice either for or against God.

So, an unbaptized child can have implicit faith by turning to God through his natural reason. Could this also be true for a pagan who has reached the age of reason, who decides about his end without the benefit of the sacraments? Can he also receive grace and the remission of original sin before explicit membership in the Church? If so, this might be used as evidence for the veracity of his mystical experiences.

If the pagan possesses implicit faith, however, it would *not* be because he has yet to turn to God through his natural reason, as in the case of the

36. See ST I-II, q. 89, a. 6: "Whether venial sin can be in anyone with original sin alone?"

37. ST I-II, q. 89, a. 6 in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas,* edited and translated by Anton C. Pegis (Random House: New York, 1945). All quotations from the *Summa theologiae* are from this translation.

38. See ST I-II, q. 89, a. 6, ad 3.

child prior to reaching the age of reason. The pagan mystic will *already have made the original choice* with respect to his end at the point of reaching the age of reason. So, the pagan is already either in a state of implicit faith, and is open to further grace, or he is in a state of mortal plus venial sin. His continuance in a state of grace would depend on his response to God's providential invitation to explicit faith, or he would fall into mortal sin and be guilty of the sin of rebellious unbelief. At ST II-II, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3, Aquinas argues that the pagan centurion Cornelius had implicit faith: the truth of the Gospel was not yet made manifest to him, but Peter was sent to give him fuller instruction, to make that faith explicit. Aquinas's texts concerning implicit faith cannot be used to bolster the case for an authentic natural mysticism, unless the pagan is like the savage who is already *on the way* to faith. The case of the individual's first moral act is not analogous to that of the pagan or unbeliever's every act, despite some scholars' views to the contrary.[39]

This conclusion is confirmed by a glance at the three categories of unbelief listed at ST II-II, q. 2, aa. 7–8.[40] There are those who i. deliberately reject faith, ii. those who lack faith without explicitly rejecting it, and iii. those with implicit faith before the time of Christ. Those who have involuntary or sinless disbelief, in the second category, will nonetheless be damned if they fail to repent, according to Aquinas, for they have received the punishment of sin, even if they have committed no sin.[41] "Without faith," he states, "they are unable to be forgiven: but they are not damned on account of the sin of unbelief."[42] There is no middle ground or state of "pure nature" in which the human will could be suspended between a state of grace and mortal sin, and there is no indifference or neutrality with respect to our

39. Both Thomas F. O'Meara (*Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* [Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997], 239) and Joseph A. DiNoia (*The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992], 97) collapse these cases, as is noted by Thomas M. Osborne, Jr. in "Unbelief and Sin in Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic Tradition," *Nova et Vetera* [English edition] 8, no. 3 (2010): 625. Osborne notes that unbelievers' morally good acts, which are indifferent to merit by lacking charity, are not salvific according to Aquinas.

40. On this text, and its various interpretations, see Osborne, "Unbelief and Sin in Thomas Aquinas," 614–16.

41. See ST II-II, q. 34, a. 3 ad 2. Sinless unbelief stands outside the economy of salvation because the unbeliever, while not guilty of sinning against faith, still reaps under the effects of original sin. In contrast with his optimism in the *De Veritate* text, Augustinian pessimism about the role of original sin increased in Aquinas, by the time of the *Summa*.

42. ST II-II, q. 10, a. 1, as cited in Osborne, "Unbelief and Sin in Thomas Aquinas," 615.

ultimate end. To make this error involves confusing moral goodness and merit, and overlooking the superadded charity by which we are ordered to God and eternal life.[43]

Neutral or negative unbelief must be overcome by faith and charity for salvation to occur. So it seems that mystical experiences must occur either in a state of grace, on the way to salvation, or in a state of mortal sin, on the way to damnation. Unbelievers *can* perform good acts without grace, if their unbelief is non-voluntary, and non-hostile to Christianity, but they lack the developed faith, and thus charity, of authentic mystical union. Natural mysticism in one who has implicit faith is thus not a neutral, independent, trans-religious state, as core adherents would have it, but a vestibule to the feast of charity.

From the *De veritate* and *Summa* texts, we see that explicit faith regarding God's existence and providence is necessary for salvation, but not to attain an initial state of grace. It seems possible for a child or a pagan of good will to attain and maintain sanctifying grace by following natural reason. Their implicit faith involves a state of readiness for the Gospel, or even a neutral sort of unbelief, if it falls short of a positive, or rebellious, unbelief. How does this state of affairs relate to the status of mystics outside the Church? Is there a parallel between the implicit faith of a pagan and his natural mystical experience?

According to Garrigou, those who have natural or pre-mystical experiences are in the same category as the unbaptized savage, those with implicit faith who preceded Christ, and as those who have "forgotten" Him through no fault of their own.[44] But implicit faith requires a conviction that God, in His mercy, has provided some undefined means of salvation.[45] Charity, and thus faith, are required for salvation and for supernatural union with God. And the pagan mystics' state of grace would depend on their response to a divine offer of explicit faith. Their natural love of God is no more efficacious for salvation than the angels' natural desire, which does not raise them to union with God. Because men did not remain in the state of pure nature, their natural drives are fallen and cannot result

43. ST I-II, q. 21, a. 1; q. 18, a. 5; q. 23, a. 3; *In III Sent.*, d. 18, a. 2. By condign merit, the moral agent is made a sharer of God's nature, by charity; see ST I-II, q. 114, a. 3.

44. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, 363.

45. Ibid., quoting Father Eliseus of the Nativity. On the text of Hebrews 11.6 on explicit faith, see ibid., 375.

in divine union.[46] Pagans' deliberations about the end, and by extension, their mystical experiences, are *not* in the same situation as a child's initial reception or rejection of grace;[47] they await, it would seem, formation by Christian inspiration, which God would infallibly provide, as long as they put no obstacle in the way.[48]

Unlike the situation of the child, pagan mystics dwell in a spiritual hiatus between the explicit *natural* desire for reunion with the cause of their being and *supernatural* faith. The only place for non-Christian natural mysticism in this schema is the case of mystics with implicit faith, moving *towards* the Faith, mystics in whom the grace of Christ is working through the invisible Church. Such a situation excludes the core view inasmuch as non-theists cannot possess implicit faith.

To sum up, contrary to "anonymous Christian" interpretations of grace, Aquinas thinks that even neutral unbelief incurs damnation, and implicit faith requires explicit faith in the two Pauline *credibilia*. For Garrigou, natural mysticism can co-exist with Christian mysticism in the Christian Neoplatonist,[49] or in the pagan mystic, only through the grace of Christ working in the invisible Church. However, original sin, combined with the danger of confusing mystical and natural forms of contemplation, and the angelic sin which pulls the intellect towards union with evil spirits,[50] makes pre-mysticism the exception to, rather than a condition of, spiritual progress. While Garrigou examines mysticism from the side of the rule rather than from the side of the exception, Maritain, inspired by French scholars of Hinduism and Islam,[51] also embraces the exception as a spiritual guide in his interpretation of natural mysticism. However, he moderates his enthusiasm for the invisible workings of grace outside the visible Church

46. Ibid., 373. The text of Aquinas is ST I, q. 62, a. 2.

47. See Osborne, "Unbelief and Sin in Thomas Aquinas," 625. He notes that both O'Meara and DiNoia make a false parallel between the case of an individual's first moral act and an unbeliever's every act.

48. See DV q. 14, a. 11.

49. Osborne "Unbelief and Sin in Thomas Aquinas," 380.

50. On this point, see Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, 374, where he cites Maritain, who cites Aquinas, on the temptation of the Arabic philosophers; see SCG III, chaps 41–45.

51. See Louis Gardet, *Expériences mystiques en terre non chretiennes* (Alsatia, 1953); *Mystique musulmane—Aspects et tendances, éxperiences et techniques* (Paris: Vrin, 1961). Cf. Olivier Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Geuther, 1937). Cf. Maritain, "Appendix V: On a Work of Father Gardiel," in *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated by Gerald B. Phelan, 4th edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 445–50.

with his last word on the subject, in *On the Church of Christ* (1973), in a view closer to that of his Dominican mentor.

2. *Maritain on Natural Mysticism*

Every great metaphysic is pierced by a mystical aspiration which a purely conceptual exercise cannot satisfy.[52] Metaphysics tends towards mysticism in what Maritain calls our "hyper-finality," or rational mode, of reunification with the Cause of our being. Mysticism, he says, is "an experimental knowledge of the deep things of God," or, with Dionysius, a "suffering of divine things."[53] Maritain's differences with Garrigou in "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void" over the validity and nature of natural mysticism stem from three sources: i. his contact with French religion scholars (particularly those of Hinduism and Islam);[54] ii. his pioneering work on the "spiritual supra-conscious" (an inversion of Freud), in which he exchanges the implicit/explicit faith distinction for the terminology of connaturality and levels of consciousness; and, iii. his efforts to explain the thirst for the absolute which he finds in modern atheism across various religious families.

Abandoning his earlier agreement with his mentor on the inauthentic nature of natural mysticism in *The Degrees of Knowledge,* in "Natural Mystical Experience" Maritain describes a natural, pre-conscious mysticism as a preparation and even tutor for Christian spirituality. In *On the Church of Christ,* he reaffirms the virtual and invisible presence of the Church in her entirety in those with implicit faith, such as the savage, or one "born in the forests."[55]

In *On the Church of Christ,*[56] Maritain distinguishes the person and elements of the Church, noting that while personality presupposes a nature that is "whole in its proper order," where there is nothing lacking that is essential (Roman Catholicism), "elements" properly so-called (ve*stigia*) of supernatural faith can exist in Christian groups formally separated from

52. Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," 261.

53. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge,* 247. Cf. Henry Bars, "Maritain's Contributions to an Understanding of Mystical Experience," 111–27.

54. Olivier Lacombe's work on the *Vedantas,* and Gardiel's work on the soul's self-knowledge are discussed by Maritain in "Natural Mysticism and the Void." Cf. note 51 above.

55. Maritain, *On the Church of Christ,* 31. Cf. DV q. 14, a. 11. The topics of natural mysticism and the child's first act of freedom are closely related for Maritain, as we shall see.

56. Maritain, *On the Church of Christ,* 93–134.

Rome (dissident Christian communions). The "elements" *improperly* so-called also exist in all monotheisms (Judaism and Islam), whereas mere "pre-elements" of the Church may exist in non-supernatural, non-salvific, spiritual families (Eastern religions). There is thus a descending participation in truth, ending in "traces" of the supernatural, in the natural preparations and recognition of a "call" present even among atheists. Hinduism and Buddhism are merely natural forms of deliverance, and Buddhism crushes idolatry in a metaphysical suicide that withdraws the delivered one from both suffering, the human condition, and even from existence itself. Judaism "truncates" the means of salvation by denying the New Covenant, and Islam denies intimacy with God.[57]

The contribution that natural mysticism might make to inter-religious dialogue, which is discussed in "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," is muted in *On the Church of Christ*, Maritain's late masterwork on ecclesiology.[58] In this sense, *On the Church of Christ* (1973) retrieves the early perspective of *The Degrees of Knowledge* (1926), in which Maritain echoes Garrigou: there is no authentic mysticism outside the visible Church, although the intervention of grace in rare individuals could result in mystical graces. Natural mysticism lacks grace and charity, and thus does not qualify as *pati divina*. Plotinus' mysticism is a combination of asceticism and natural contemplation, and the *Upanishads* is an anticipation of mysticism. The dangers of confusion of absolutes and of contact with spirits, also illumine the dubious status of natural mysticism. The shift away from Garrigou's synthesis came with a 1931 Appendix to *The Degrees of Knowledge*, where Maritain describes an intuitive, experimental, and indirect knowledge of the soul's existence through its own acts—the nucleus of his own view of natural mysticism defended in his 1938 "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void."

57. In *Peasant of the Garonne*, however, he had expressed approval of Massignon's desire to canonize al-Hallaj. Maritain, *Peasant of the Garonne* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 320. The original was published in 1968.

58. Maritain lists four factors which prevent the natural mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism from being a sign of the invisible presence of the Church. First, the vocabulary of grace and salvation is a verbal facsimile of Christianity, and nothing more—nonhistorical revelation claimed by Hindus, for example, results in an apophatic world-denying experience. Second, the Pelagian tenor of Eastern asceticism differs from the ascent of faith required for Christian mysticism—this spiritual technology is an ecstasy of natural spirituality which is confused with an obscure metaphysical imagination. Third, the "grace" issuing from the Hindu pantheon is benevolence, favor, or protection, he states, but is not the divine gift which elevates the soul to the interior life of God; and fourth, the Hindu Absolute, Brahman, is mingled with cosmic energy so as to deny the pure transcendence of the first principle. See Maritain, *On the Church of Christ*, 122.

In "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," mystical experience is treated as one of four types of knowledge by connaturality, also known as knowledge by way of inclination.[59] The fourth type is mystical knowledge, which is neither a knowledge for action or for creation, nor pure speculative knowledge. It can be affective, as in supernatural contemplation and the union of love—here, the gift of wisdom, under God's action, frees the human mind from the mode of concepts and analogy as the means of knowing, and suppresses, by way of love, the distance between subject and object.[60] Or, mystical knowledge can be intellectual, by which he means a natural but non-conceptual contemplation that attains three things at once: i. the "ultimate goal of the act of knowing in its perfect immanence"; ii. the "absolute" as the very *esse* of the soul, known obliquely as the source of its acts; and, iii. a brushing contact with divine immensity, or the presence of *Ipsum Esse* as the source of all existence.[61]

In an ebullience of spiritual energy, Maritain describes the "mysticism of the self" as a retorsion of our minds' drive to know universal being which yet reflects our desire to be united practically and entirely with the *cause* of our being. The mind "voids" itself of all concepts, images, and distinctions in a "lived *via negationis*"[62] and an "act of abolition of all act."[63] The term of this experience of negation is not the essence, but the existence, of the soul.

When united with the body, the soul cannot know its own essence directly, but it nevertheless experiences the act of existence at the root of its own powers. Through the medium of the void (the act of abolition of all acts or operations), the soul is said to have contact with divine immensity: "existence in its metaphysical amplitude, and the sources of existence ... is something emanating from ... an influx wherefrom it obtains its all."[64] The effort to gain this contact is one against the grain of nature, "an art," he says, "of entering while living into death ... which is not evangelic death, intended to give place to the life of Another, but a metaphysical death, intended

59. Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," 255–90. The first type is knowledge for *right action*, by way of practical inclination, in moral judgment (Aquinas used this type as an analogy to explain the "suffering of divine things"). The second type is *intellectual connaturality*, which is a natural contemplation by the wise man of divine things. Third, there is *poetic connatural knowledge*, which tends not to silent contemplation but to the creative word. The fourth type is *mystical connaturality* (affective or intellectual).

60. See Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," 264.

61. See ibid., 263–65.

62. Ibid., 275.

63. Ibid., 276.

64. Ibid., 279.

to winnow spiritual activities away from the body."[65] Natural mysticism thus involves a perilous denial of the human condition and an indifference to the demands of charity,[66] and requires cautious awareness of the dark ends of spiritual manipulation. Yet it also parallels Maritain's later development of the theme of subjectivity and nonintellectual pathways to God found in his 1945 essay on the first act of freedom.[67]

Maritain develops four basic claims in his natural mysticism of the self. First, through nescience, the soul can attain an intellectual experience of its own *esse* through the medium of the void (this medium takes the place of love, as found in supernatural mysticism). Second, through contact with this *esse* (the first absolute), the soul is said to contact divine immensity (the second absolute), not through a judgment of existence, or of metaphysical *separatio*, but through an experiential "touching" that culminates in an intellectual apophasis. Hindu mysticism is seen as propadeutic to Christian mysticism, even though it ends in Buddhism's metaphysical suicide of sorts, and involves a potential confusion of absolutes (atman/Brahman; self/God). While Maritain does not detail the nature of natural mysticism's relationship to Christian mysticism in "Natural Mysticism and the Void," it is clear that its priority is temporal and sometimes in the order of discovery; it is also clear that natural mysticism is not in any way ontologically prior to Christian mysticism in the order of perfection.[68]

65. Ibid., 278.

66. And yet even Georges Cardinal Cottier, O.P., theologian of the Pontifical Household under Pope John Paul II, said that natural mysticism of the self even if fraught with dangers, "does not in principle raise any objection." Georges Cardinal Cottier, "Metaphysics and Mysticism," *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 1, no. 2 (2003): 281.

67. The 1945 essay appeared in English as "The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom" in Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 66–85.

68. And even here, we can point to instances of cross-religious mystical experiences that are indicative of confusion, error, and psychic darkness, more than of a straight path towards the fullness of truth. One thinks immediately of the Christian/Hindu hybrid Bede Griffiths, explaining his experiences of "nondual wholeness, an experience of *advaita* or oneness"—which he calls, in line with Sankara, an "awareness of being which is nothing but being's reflection on itself"—in other words, the self's identification with the divine Self in a state of nonduality: "In meditation (*beyond the conscious mind—viz.)* I become aware of the ground of my being in matter, in life, in human consciousness. I can experience my solidarity with the universe.... I can get beyond all these outer forms of things in time and space and discover the Ground from which they all spring. I can know the Father, the Origin, the Source, beyond being and not being, the One." Bede Griffiths as quoted in Judson P. Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 129–30; emphasis in original. Bede Griffiths is a fine example of the dangers of natural mysticism and is proof of the fact that natural mysticism can furnish its own term of awareness and need not ever lead towards the affective union of Christian mysticism.

How one is to transcend a flawed monism to enter a Christian differentiated union is unclear. Only a union *secundum intentionem*, not *secundum esse*, prevents the soul's being dissolved into the divine, and the levels of consciousness at play in Maritain's account do not give way to deification in the Plotinian sense, as the union of love always involves a duality.[69] This is the mystery of the spiritual marriage between the created will and Uncreated Love, a marriage in which, Maritain says, God "becomes her [namely, the soul] more than she herself, and is the principle and agent of all her operations."[70] Stratford Caldecott has argued for a Christian non-dualism in contrast to a Hindu "monistic" non-dualism, by stressing the nonreciprocal relation of dependence of creatures on their cause, which means their nothingness outside God.[71]

As we have seen, Maritain, unlike Garrigou, exchanged Aquinas's language of implicit vs. explicit knowledge for the more inclusive language of connaturality and a spiritual "supra-conscious." Placing his views on natural mysticism alongside his interpretation of the first act of freedom reveals his optimism regarding the capacity of the will to influence the intellect in our moral and spiritual lives.[72] Maritain links his essay on the first act of freedom to ST I-II, q. 89, a. 6, where Aquinas considers the possibility of the coexistence of original and venial sin.[73]

The problem with Maritain's account, Lawrence Dewan shows,[74] is his relegation of cognition to the sidelines in the dawn of our moral life, and its replacement with appetite as assigning our ultimate end. As Dewan notes, the rectitude of appetite which influences the intellect concerns the practi-

69. See Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (p. 368, for example) on the distinction between types of union. Cf. Curtis Hancock, "Maritain on Mystical Contemplation," in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, edited by Deal Hudson and Matthew Mancini (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 265.

70. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 369. Cf. Hancock, "Maritain on Mystical Contemplation," 265 on Maritain's avoidance of monism.

71. See Stratford Caldecott, "'Face to Face': The Difference between Hindu and Christian Non-Dualism," *Communio* 34, no. 4 (2007): 616–39. Cf. Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), which draws lines of similarity between the Hindu Sankara and Aquinas, on the basis of nonreciprocal dependence. Caldecott claims his view is similar to Grant's. See Caldecott, "'Face to Face,'" 627 n. 21.

72. See Maritain, "The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom," in *The Range of Reason*, 66–85.

73. See Maritain, "The Immanent Dialectic," 85 n.

74. See Lawrence Dewan, "Natural Law and the First Act of Freedom: Maritain Revisited," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 221–41.

cal judgment of means, not of final ends (since we cannot *but* will our final natural end). The practical syllogism involved in the first act of freedom involves an acknowledgement or declaration of an ultimate end. It is this conscious, albeit imperfect, cognition which is our gateway into the moral universe, reasons Dewan.[75] In contrast, for Maritain, just as natural mysticism stresses the power of the non-conceptual, so the first act of freedom is said to be directed God-wards by a pre-conceptual appetite for the good as the ultimate end of our existence, such that,

> God is thus naturally known, without any conscious judgment, in and by the impulse of the will ... [in a] purely practical, non-conceptual and non-conscious knowledge of God, which can co-exist with a theoretical ignorance of God.[76]

Both pre-conceptual cognition and appetite are seen as capable of directing the soul to God, where conceptual knowledge is posterior and accidental.[77] The priority given to the impulse of the will unwittingly leans Maritain towards the core view's emphasis on the pre-conceptual experiential matrix. His view of the "void" as the term of an act of abolition of all acts in natural mysticism also reveals the light work he assigns to discursive reason in the spiritual life.[78]

Two facts mitigate against a clear trajectory from natural mysticism to the culmination of holiness, namely, the centrality of love in Christian spirituality and the nonappetitive nature of much of natural mysticism. Further, there is the question of the soul's use of signs in mystical ascent. "Philosophical inquiry," de Lubac reminds us,

> rises analytically from effect to cause, in virtue of a rational necessity. The mystical impulse rises from effect, perceived as a sign, to that same cause, by a movement

75. "In the very moment of entering into the moral universe, one must be declaring an ultimate end." And even the "moral debutant", he shows "must have a natural knowledge of God, though a confused knowledge." Ibid., 236. Cf. "Thomas's primary doctrine concerning inclination is that it presupposes cognition." Natural inclinations form the basis of the natural law (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2). The child not only has the chosen object before its mind, but the process of deliberation itself is an object of reflection.

76. Maritain, "The Immanent Dialectic," 70.

77. Cf.: "The extent to which we are asked to set aside conceptual knowledge of God here is remarkable. If it is not 'in the way,' an impediment, it is certainly not appropriate as a help or as furthering the process of which Maritain wishes to speak." Dewan, "Natural Law and the First Act of Freedom," 230.

78. The experience of the self could be argued to negate (or compete with) the influx of love that is the remote call to mystical union, and to holiness, in the Platonic attempt to separate the spirit from its material conditions.

which cannot be wholly justified by pure reason ... [and] the mystic, in the end, will reject all signs ... in order to rest in the contemplation of God alone. [79]

In Christian mysticism, the effect of charity in the soul serves as a starting point or sign; in the natural mysticism of the self, the soul's contingent existence is the sign by which divine immensity is imperfectly experienced.[80] In natural mysticism, contrary to Christian mysticism (which involves the act of faith and the theological virtues), there is a gradual short-circuiting of intellectual ascent, culminating in Buddhist emptiness/*sunyata*. In its final stages, natural mysticism refines the soul by destroying it, through removing the condition of its true progress—the purifying force of love.

III. Aquinas on Christ and Paradox in Biblical Commentaries

Paradox, the holding together in tension of intelligible opposites, is often linked to the core position, as a sign that mystical experience eludes the net of syllogistic reasoning. Whether ultimate reality is expressed as the nameless Tao, as *Advaita* (non-dualist) by Vedanta philosophers such as Sankara, as Zen's impersonal "suchness," as the hidden essence of Allah, or as the ultimate reality of which we know more what it is *not* than what it *is*,[81] (Maimonides and Aquinas), the trans-discursive quality of paradox serves the core approach's suppression of particularity and the discursive approach to theology. Since the truths of faith are in no wise known or comprehended in this life,[82] no demonstrative proofs of reason are possible.[83] Paradox often plays a role in the exhortative and pastoral character of Christian theology in meditations on the fittingness of the mysteries of faith.[84]

In Aquinas, there are metaphysical paradoxes involved in the "dark

79. Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1960), 146–47.

80. Maritain's notion of divine immensity here recalls his "sixth way" of attaining God through a realization of the contingent existence of the self.

81. See Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 14. Cf. Denis Janz, "Syllogism or Paradox: Aquinas and Luther on Theological Method," *Theological Studies* 59, no. 1 (1998): 16.

82. See Aquinas, *In de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1c.

83. See Aquinas, *In de Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 4c and ad 7.

84. Chenu pointed to the many theological syllogisms that are "purely expository in character" (providing arguments of fittingness, not logically necessary proofs). See Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, translated by Albert Landry and Dominic Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 80. Torrell agrees that demonstrative syllogisms are rare in Aquinas's

knowledge" of God, where the higher mode of divine perfections is found to exist preeminently.[85] God is said to be good and not-good, wise and not-wise, and so on. Often, these paradoxes are dissolved through appeal to analogy, which explains the apparent equivocity through causal perfection or *pros hen* (causal one-to-many) predication; the affirmation of supereminence to some degree, removes the negation.[86]

While metaphysical paradoxes can be unraveled by showing their internal coherence, paradox resists dissolution in its native home of scriptural exegesis. And it is here that Aquinas's use of paradox is particularly inhospitable to the core interpretation.[87] True, he does dissolve many biblical paradoxes through introducing levels of meaning that illumine the trajectory of spiritual development. For example, that "the first are last, and the last first" points to the difference between pride and humility,[88] as does the

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theology. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: His Person and His Work*, translated by Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 266. Torrell also emphasizes the pastoral role of Aquinas's arguments.

85. See, for example, ST I, q. 13, a. 2.

86. "It cannot be said that whatever is predicated of God and creatures is an equivocal predication; for, unless there were at least some real agreement [*convenientia*] between creatures and God, His essence would not be the likeness of creatures, and so He could not know them by knowing His essence. Similarly, we would not be able to attain any knowledge of God from creatures, nor from among the names devised for creatures could we apply one to Him more than another." DV q. 2, a. 11, in *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. 1, translated and edited by Robert M. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 112. On Aquinas's avoidance of the irrationalities implied by pure equivocity, see Gregory Rocca, "The 'Dark Knowledge of God' and Our Worship of the Divine Mystery," *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 3, no. 1 (2005): 818–19. Joseph Owens argued that Aquinas imposed a metaphysical interpretation on Dionysius' mystical "darkness of ignorance," such that the metaphysician holds three propositions in logical tension: first, that the primary efficient cause is subsistent existence; second, that it contains all perfections in the highest degree; and third, that we cannot conceive of its nature or any of its perfections, nor intuit its existence, yet knowledge *si est* of this cause contains the riches and starting point of metaphysics. See "Aquinas: 'Darkness of Ignorance' in the Most Refined Notion of God," in *Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers*, edited by Robert W. Shahan and Francis J. Kovach (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 69–86.

87. Chenu notes that reason operates with "great mobility" in Aquinas's theology. See, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 177. Theology's need for a variety of uses of language and reason is also due to the pastoral exigencies of the trade, and partly to the nature of theological truths, which refer to contingent realities dependent solely on the will of God, not to any predictable natural causes. Theology, says Torrell, is an "organization of contingent data received from revelation upon which the theologian labors to find the arrangement of God's design." Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas: His Person and His* Work, 266. Cf. Janz, "Syllogism or Paradox," 14.

88. Aquinas, *Super 19 Mattheum*, lectio 2, in *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 5th ed., edited by Raphaelis Cai (Rome: Marietti, 1951).

saying "these things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to the little ones" (Matthew 11.25).[89] The loss of one's soul being "gain" is taken to refer to the willingness to expose oneself to physical danger for Christ's sake,[90] for example. But in St. Paul's paradox of the Cross, Aquinas saw the brilliant star of Christian doctrine against his own midday sun. Here, Aquinas did not find a content-less "core" or bedrock of spiritual experience, but rather the persistent demands of a Christocentric soteriology.

Chenu notes the fact that many theological syllogisms are "purely expository" and exhortative in character," drawing out the intelligibility of faith—the wide sense of proof/*probare* not as logical demonstration, but as "fittingness"/*convenire* based on an accepted proposition—for instance, the Incarnation.[91] The mysteries of the faith also require non-discursive uses of language to reveal scriptural truths to the initiated, and to communicate truths that are not only beyond reason but also contrary to the senses.[92]

The intractability of mystery in which theological reason moves permeates Aquinas's commentaries on the paradox of the Cross, a favorite meditation in his mystical theology. Once he has established the counterintuitive "fittingness" of the Incarnation, Aquinas defends the counterintuitive "fittingness" of the Passion itself. The various texts contain many paradoxes: the essential hiddenness by which all things are re-established in Christ; the mystery of God's self-sacrifice; the folly of the Cross, which juxtaposes the strength of God in weakness with the power of the empty wisdom of words which would empty the Cross of Christ of its power, and so on.[93]

Here, I note two texts which show the distance between the core interpretation and Aquinas's scriptural meditations on God.[94] First, there is Aquinas's *Commentary on Ephesians* 3.18–20, on the dimensions of Christian charity. Second, there is his *Commentary on Philippians* 2.5–8, where

89. Aquinas, *Super 11 Mattheum*, lectio 3.

90. Aquinas, *Super 10 Mattheum*, lectio 3.

91. On this, see Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 180; Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas: His Person and His Work*, 266. Cf. Janz, "Syllogism or Paradox," 14.

92. See Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 1. Cf. Chenu, who said that reason operates with "great mobility" in Aquinas's theology, pointing to the pastoral exigencies of the trade, and to the nature of theological truths as referring to contingent realities dependent solely on the will of God, not to any predictable natural causes. In theology, reason functions "within the mystery." Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 180 n.

93. Many of these texts of Aquinas are noted in Janz, "Syllogism or Paradox," 20.

94. Although there is no autobiographical mystical account in either of these texts (as we find with Augustine, for example), the interpenetration of doctrine, exegesis, and devotion is at work, and to this extent, we can call them "mystical meditations."

we see him discussing St. Paul's notion of the *kenosis* of Christ. Paul's text introduces a famous theme often used to argue the core view, through a parallel of Christ's self-emptying to Buddhist *sunyata*.[95]

1. *Commentary on Ephesians 3.18–20*

Aquinas applies an Augustinian definition of wisdom as knowledge of divine realities,[96] to contrast human flawed human knowledge (*scientia*) with transcendent divine wisdom, the origin of charity. The text of the *Commentary on Ephesians* 3.18–20 is a meditation on that charity and power of Christ which works in the elect through the Church:

> 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever.[97]

Aquinas ponders the wisdom given to us through faith and charity, and the transforming power of this wisdom, through the power of the Cross.[98] The four dimensions are applied to three objects in the text: to God's nature, to Christ's love expressed through the Incarnation and Redemption, and to the four parts of the Cross.

Regarding God's nature, God's depth is His incomprehensible wisdom, His breadth is His power over all creation, His length is His eternal duration, and His height, the nobility of His nature. Christ's charity manifests what God the Father has accomplished through reconciling the world to Himself. "Depth" here signifies the origin of charity in the Spirit; "breadth"

95. Masao Abe, for instance, makes this leap. See Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic *Sunyata*," in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, edited by John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), 3–65.

96. See Aquinas, *In Eph.*, c. 5, lectio 6, no. 305. Cf. Mark Edwards, "Aquinas on Ephesians and Colossians," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: Continuum, 2005), 155.

97. Ephesians 3.18–20, New Revised Standard Version. All Bible references are from this translation.

98. *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians* cap. 3, lectio 5, in *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Biblical Commentaries Series, vol. 39, translated by Fabian Larcher and Matthew Lamb, edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

signifies the extension of charity even to our enemies; the "length" of charity is its eternal duration; its "height" is its heavenly motivation. Christ's obedience unto death was motivated by charity, and the Cross also exhibits these dimensions. He states that the breadth of the cross-beam signifies charity stretched out to our enemies; the length of the trunk of the cross against which Christ leans, signifies the enduring, sustaining nature of charity; the top part of the cross on which Christ's head has a height, which signifies our hope of eternity; and the base of the cross driven into the earth signifies the depth of divine love, which sustains us yet is not visible insofar as the mystery of predestination eludes our comprehension.

This meditation flows from Aquinas's own devotions to the Crucifix, in which charity stimulates knowledge, and knowledge influences one's life and conduct. God's elevation of man to the status of sharer in the divine nature, he says, is accomplished in the Incarnation of His Son. Here, mysticism is less a transient Platonic detachment from material particulars than it is conformity to Christ, the spiritual exemplar, in a charity which is "lasting, extensive, sublime and deep." Christ is the door to mystical union, in which the soul "finds pasture" (cf. John 10.9) in the contemplation of His divinity and humanity.[99]

2. *Commentary on* Philippians 2.5–9

The famous *kenosis* text is Paul's hymn to Christ, who emptied himself for the sake of the world:

> 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. 9 Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

Here, we see the double paradox of a self-emptying God who, through His humility, is exalted. The Japanese religion scholar Masao Abe gives a Buddhist reading of Paul's hymn to Christ,[100] interpreting it as a total renunciation of Christ's divinity, by which God establishes solidarity with man, who can then respond in loving witness.

99. Aquinas, *Comm. in Eph.*, cap. 3 lect. 5, no. 179.
100. See Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic *Sunyata*," 3–65.

Abe uses the text to show the ways in which Buddhist forms of emptiness or *sunyata* could be used to tease out the basis of Paul's Christology and provide evidence for an interfaith interpretation of mystical experience. Using the paradoxical language of "emptiness" in the school of Nagarjuna and his predecessors, Abe argues that Christ embodies Buddhist *sunyata,* reaching enlightenment and reclaiming His sonship by "not clinging" to His own divinity.[101] By means of this paradoxical exaltation through humiliation, Christ is said to become an icon of the living God instead of a distant unattainable idol. As a parallel to the paradoxical Buddhist "emptiness of emptiness," Jesus is said to *be* the Son of God precisely because is he *not* the Son of God. Upon analysis, Abe's paradoxical transcendence and immanence through *kenosis* or self-emptying, as an application of Nagarjuna's "emptiness" is less an affirmation of the core view of mystical experience than it is a powerful negation of the Christian God through Arianism.[102]

The text from Philippians is not evidence of the core view, since Buddhism and Christianity have opposed ontic schema, and thus possess different goals and strategies of negation or self-emptying. While both Buddhist *sunyata* and Aquinas's *via negativa,* for example, engage the self in exercises of detachment, Buddhists are not directed towards a transcendent realm, but merely towards the relief of suffering through the denial of *all* forms of existence. Christian asceticism and Aquinas's way of denial, on the other hand, inhabit what has been described as a "fulfilment theology,"[103] a term which expresses Aquinas's final affirmation of deepening levels of desire, and the reality of their term in a fruitful but non-comprehensive, personal contact with divine excess of being.

If we go on to compare the experience of divine incomprehensibility in earthly mystical union in Aquinas with the Eastern concept of *nirvana* in Buddhist *sunyata,* we find no core experience to speak of. Aquinas's self-subsistent, transcendent Creator is a personal plenitude acting through grace to elevate human faculties, while Buddhist emptiness or *sunyata* is

101. Cf. James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004), 72–95.

102. The Council of Chalcedon (451 ad) clarified belief about Christ by proclaiming him fully divine and fully human. The view that Jesus was human but not fully divine (Arianism) is heterodox. This is detailed in Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians,* 93–94.

103. Fredericks refers to "fulfillment" theologies as ones which acknowledge the goal of theology as the term of human desire. Ibid., 97.

a strategy of negation by which false attachments, even the pull towards emptiness itself, are discarded. Catholic mystical ascent is not a metaphysical contemplation of immanence, or a supreme deliverance by final renunciation, in the way that Buddhist spirituality envisions. Rather, it is a lifting of the mind and heart through a purgative way to the *excessus* of divine being by which vision and ontological desire are ultimately transformed.

In his commentary on Paul's hymn to the Philippians,[104] Aquinas labors to balance the humility of Christ in self-emptying with the truth of his divine nature, expressed as Christ's majesty. Christ's equality with the Father is expressed by Paul's saying he was "in the form of God." The proper names of Jesus as the Son, Word, and Image of God denote the perfection of form, and underscore His equality with the Father. Jesus is the Son as "one begotten," and the end or perfection of begetting is the form. Jesus is the Word in the sense that a perfect word leads to the knowledge of a thing's nature; in having the "entire nature" of the Father, Jesus is the perfect "word" leading to knowledge of God. Finally, Jesus is the perfect Image of the Father, since a perfect image has the form of its original.

The emptying of Christ does not refer, *contra* Rabanus the heretic (who made it a function of Christ's divine nature), to Christ's forfeiting His divinity for his humanity, but to his assuming a human nature, itself only capable of fullness. Christ's true self-emptying is known first, in the Incarnation itself, and second, in the Passion. Christ took the form of a servant by assuming weak human nature. By becoming man, God was born into our species, and so assumed all non-sinful defects and properties of our human nature. In "being found in human form," Christ's divinity is not changed by way of addition, as a fool is changed by gaining wisdom. Just the reverse is the case, says Aquinas. By becoming man, our human nature itself is changed for the better "because it was full of grace and truth" (cf. John 1.14).

Christ's *kenosis* is also apparent in His Passion. The fittingness of Christ's suffering and death stems from the sapiential plan of the reversal of Adam's sin through the obedient sacrifice of Christ. Sacrifice is perfect in the offering of one's own self, and by slaying one's own will in obedience

104. Aquinas, *In Philipp.*, cap. 2, lect. 2–3, in *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Biblical Commentaries, vol. 40, translated by Fabian Larcher, edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

to another, Aquinas says, perfect charity is made known. Even as the human will tends towards life and honor, so in his perfect subjection to the Father's will, Christ fled neither death nor ignominy (death on a cross). He was thus exalted by God[105] not by earning his divinity (Arianism, and Masao Abe), nor by gaining a kind of pre-eminence over creatures (Photius). Rather, Christ's Lordship is a reward for humility given eternally in a grace of union, not of adoption, by which Christ is both God and man.

In his commentaries on the Ephesians and Philippians texts, Aquinas develops a spirituality of conformity to Christ, the moral and mystical exemplar. He is not engaging in a series of techniques by which an introvertive monist comes to experience inner harmony and the falling away of all distinctions. Aquinas's differentiated union is at once personal, incarnational, ecclesial, doctrinally rich, and demanding of an ethical response of love to the divine personality of Christ. The Christocentric mutual indwelling of God and the soul developed here and elsewhere in Aquinas is far from the core view, which suppresses intellectual, moral, and transformative considerations. The key loci of paradox in Aquinas, namely, the Incarnation and Passion, cannot be used to support the core view.

IV. Conclusion

The core/contextualist debate reveals a set of motives, arguments, and problems which displace the integral unity of ascetical and mystical theology in Thomist circles. Through an examination of various texts and Thomist interpretations of the levels of contemplation, faith, freedom, and paradox, I identified points of intersection between Aquinas's mystical theology as developed by Garrigou, Maritain's natural mysticism, and modern theories of religious experience. In contrast to the core/contextualist template which juxtaposes experience and tradition stands the robust synthesis developed by Aquinas and the Thomist-mystical movement.

The core view, which assumes a cross-religious experiential ground for mysticism, was argued to be impossible for Aquinas and Garrigou. Even natural mysticism cannot provide the necessary content, for the core view lacks the key component of implicit faith, and religious experience is neither neutral nor static.

105. Aquinas develops the theme of "exaltation" in *In Philipp.*, cap. 2, lect. 3.

Motivated by interfaith concerns and the link between contemplation and levels of consciousness, Maritain developed his mysticism of the self, echoing some aims of the core view. Here, practitioners of natural mysticism served as porters at the door of the supernatural life, in an interiority provided by the invisible power of God. But the sparks of the invisible Church seemed more sparsely scattered, if not less dimmed, in Maritain's narrative of God's activity in non-Christian spiritual families, in his final work, *On the Church of Christ.*

Finally, Aquinas's texts on implicit faith, and those employing metaphysical and theological paradox (particularly the *kenosis* and Cross of Christ) distinguish his approach from the core view for several reasons. First, implicit faith is impossible for nontheistic religions, for it propels the soul towards an affective indwelling of God in the soul. Second, metaphysical paradoxes are usually dissolved into affirmations about being, and involve natural, not mystical, contemplation. Third, his mystical meditations are Christocentric and resistant to the diluted abstractions required by the core view. Thus, while natural mysticism and paradox may serve as fruitful ground for comparisons with unbelievers, they cannot serve as signposts for a universal core of mystical experience.