



Christian Mysticism by William Ralph Inge

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CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM. By William Ralph Inge, M. A., Fellow and Tutor of Hertford College, Oxford. (Bampton Lectures, 1899.) London: Methuen & Co., 1899. Pp. xvi., 372. 12s. 6d. net.

“As a type of religion,” says Mr. Inge, “mysticism seems to rest on the following propositions, or articles of faith: First, the soul (as well as the body) can see and perceive. . . . The second proposition is that, since we can only know what is clear to ourselves, man in order to know God must be a partaker of the Divine nature.” Thirdly, “Without holiness no man may see the Lord. . . . Sensuality and selfishness are absolute disqualifications for knowing ‘the things of the Spirit of God.’” Further, “there is one more fundamental doctrine . . . our guide on the upward path, the true hierophant of the mysteries of God, is love” (pp. 6-8).

We are not told whether a system which rejected the third principle would be improperly called mystic, or whether it would only not be mysticism “as a type of religion.” Nor does Mr. Inge say anything of a principle which is sometimes held to be of the essence of mysticism—the *immediacy* of the consciousness of reality. (This characteristic of mysticism is admirably brought out by Dr. Royce in “The World and the Individual.”)

To attempt to summarize a book which is crowded with interesting accounts of the most fascinating speculations, would be useless. It can be recommended as combining a wide range of information with real sympathy for the subject. Where so much is given it seems unreasonable to ask for more. And yet I cannot refrain from regretting that the author did not find room for a comparison and contrast of Christian Mysticism with non-Christian systems. To say nothing of the Orientals, there is Spinoza. And it would have been interesting to know what Mr. Inge thinks of the mystical elements in Hegel’s system. The existence of some such elements can scarcely be denied when we consider that the Absolute Idea transcends the categories of cognition and volition.

Mr. Inge does not confine himself to exposition, but criticises freely. The basis of much of this criticism, as is only natural in lectures on the Bampton foundation, is frankly dogmatic. Thus we read, “Even if, with the school of Antioch and most of the later commentators, we transfer the words *ὁ γέγονεν* to the preceding sentence, the doctrine that Christ is the life as well as the light of the world can be proved from St. John” (p. 47).

One or two remarks on philosophical points invite notice. The author seems to ignore an important distinction when he says: "True Pantheism must mean the identification of God with the totality of existence, the doctrine that the universe is the complete and only expression of the nature and life of God, who on this theory is only immanent and not transcendent. On this view, everything in the world belongs to the Being of God who is manifested equally in everything. Whatever is real is perfect: reality and perfection are the same thing" (p. 117). It is no doubt true that many pantheists would hold that God is manifested equally in everything. But many others would reject this view. It is quite possible to hold that the universe is the complete and only expression of the nature of God, and yet to believe that nature is unequally manifested in different things. God is the only reality, but then the reality of finite things may be a matter of degree, and therefore God may be more or less in them. I conceive that this is Mr. Bradley's position (except for the use of the word God), and I believe that Hegel's is the same, though the point is no doubt obscure.

Occasionally Mr. Inge disposes rather too parenthetically of difficulties which merit more elaborate treatment if they are to be touched at all. Thus he says that "an irrational universe" is "the one thing which a rational man cannot believe in" (p. 9). Did Hume believe the universe to be rational, or was he not a rational man? Perhaps he ought, in consistency, to have believed in the rationality of the universe. But he certainly did not. And if he was not a rational man, where should we find one—unless we should claim the privilege of defining rationality as equivalent to idealistic, in which case Mr. Inge's epigram might be blamed as tautological.

And again, "the basis of the belief in future judgment is that deep conviction of the rationality of the world-order, or, in religious language, of the wisdom and justice of God, which we cannot and will not surrender. It is authenticated by an instinctive assurance which is strongest in the strongest minds" (p. 54). And yet it was entirely wanting in Spinoza, in Hume, in Clifford. Were their minds so weak? Appeals to authority in philosophy are never justified, for the authorities are always divided.

But all these are very small points in a most valuable book.

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