

Interest in mysticism in the English-speaking world is at a higher pitch than at any time since the renaissance of mystical studies at the turn of this century. Now, as then, there is enormous confusion, conflicting claims, and a vast literature, with the consequent need of balanced understanding and clarification. The present work provides neither. Fr Greeley's sociological fact-finders at the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago have tallied a good deal of 'scientifically selected' data, and we shall no doubt learn some fascinating things from them about Americans and their religious experience. But *Ecstasy* is not a sociological monograph, the author modestly informs us, nor is it based except loosely on NORC research (p. 90). It is, rather, supposed to be 'a pragmatic, sceptical, hard-nosed analysis of both the mystical experience and the mystical revival' (p. 14). In fact, the book is composed of digests and refutations of current literature on the subject, long quotations from secondary sources, personal anecdotes and a good deal of religious talk divorced from any thorough scientific, philosophical or theological study or grasp of either mystical experience or its current 'revival'.

There is some merit in Greeley's account: his insistence, for example, that mysticism should be taken seriously by scientists and theologians, that ecstasy is more common than previously thought by sociologists, that mystics are not lunatics, that alternative forms of knowledge are not invalid, that mystical experience is akin to art, and that ecstasy is an ambiguous religious phenomenon. All of these points were proposed by William James, Evelyn Underhill and others 75 years ago, but this should not deter our welcoming them from Greeley. Nevertheless, he contributes sufficient misunderstanding and misinformation in addition to render the book of questionable value to either the amateur or the scholar interested in the Western mystical tradition.

His basic difficulties lie, first, in too facile an identification of ecstasy with mystical experience as a whole together with a somewhat hysterical prejudice against all forms of what he labels 'deviant' religious belief and behaviour, including occultism, pentecostalism, oriental religions and practices such as Zen and yoga, psychic phenomena and,

despite an initial hesitation, drug experiences—all of which he summarily banishes from serious consideration as 'valid' mystical experiences. Second, he erroneously identifies ecstasy with mysticism as an essentially cognitive phenomenon, which allows him ultimately to reject mysticism in favour of 'loving service to the community', resuscitating unwittingly the wrong-headed dichotomy between quietism or gnosticism and activism.

Although he acknowledges his rationalistic bias, untiringly denying any mystical side of his own personality or aspiration toward one, he modestly allows for correction: 'The mystic has the right to sit in judgment on the scientist' (p. 7). He adds, further, 'The readers of this book who have had encounters with the transcendent will find my description of it inadequate' (p. 15). He is right on both counts. And it is indeed the mystics themselves who provide the chief evidence against his arbitrary assumptions 'that ecstasy is a cognitive phenomenon' (p. 4) or that 'mysticism is knowledge; it is an act of knowing by which a person breaks through to what he thinks is the basic structure of the universe' (p. 82). For the very examples Greeley cites in favour of his theses plainly speak in terms other than those of knowledge, except insofar as they actually deny the cognitive element. For instance, in his first citation we read, 'I never before so clearly felt the Spirit of God in me and around me. . . . The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of Something I knew not what' (p. 8). Mystical language is one of feeling, not thought. It is unfortunate, moreover, that Fr Greeley completely ignores the meaning of the whole vast theme of mystical 'unknowing', which has its origins in Christian theology as early as the Third Century, for it undoubtedly represents the authentic tradition as much as any other single element in Eastern or Western Church teaching.

His facts are often as wrong as are his theories. And how far adrift he is when treating mysticism is revealed as much by the kind of errors he commits as by their number. Thus, he makes the late Dom David Knowles, one of England's great Roman Catholic historians, into an Anglican. Turning to the Fourteenth Century English mystics, he converts Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole, into 'an active pastor' (p.

34). He further makes Rolle into a 'friend' of Dame Julian of Norwich, who, besides being all of seven years old when Rolle died, was also a recluse. And as for finding Rolle to be the best specimen of English mysticism and his experiences 'paradigmatic of most mystical encounters' (p. 31), scholars such as Knowles generally consider Rolle's experiences and writings to be inferior to those of Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich and the author of *The Cloud*, several of whom opposed what they perceived as Rolle's mistaken emphasis on physical phenomena such as ecstatic warmth. Finally, for Greeley to assert blithely that 'British' mysticism was 'a tradition forgotten after the Reformation' (p. 27) is merely preposterous. For one thing, there never was a 'British' tradition, any more than there was a German tradition or a Flemish tradition or even a Spanish tradition. Secondly, the heyday of mysticism ended in England a century *before* the Reformation, as it did in other European nations with the exception of Spain. Thirdly, there were, nevertheless, plenty of English mystics during and after the Reformation, including Fr Baker and Gertrude More, George Fox, William Law, the Vaughans, Traherne, Crashaw, George Herbert, Blake, the Wesleys, Hopkins, Von Hügel, Underhill, Caryl House-

lander and probably C. S. Lewis—to name but a few.

Such errors and omissions are not exactly grave, but demonstrate clearly that, except for excerpts from popular anthologies, Greeley knows little of the field or sources he so avidly analyses. His total disregard for 75 years of truly critical work by scholars such as Von Hügel, Underhill, Inge, Poulain, Aristero, Graef, Denifle, Gardeil, Garrigou-LaGrange, Maréchal, Pepler, Maritain and even Bertrand Russell, not to mention Thomas Merton, Aelred Graham and William Johnston, adequately explains how he can not only arrogantly dismiss current interest in mysticism (other than his own) as faddism and yet be so patently wrong regarding both fact and interpretation. As for mystical enthusiasm itself, I am inclined to think it will survive its damnation by Fr Greeley, for, as W. K. Fleming remarked (in a different context) in 1913: 'All is not Mysticism that professes the name. But the true variety—what in Germany would be called 'der Mystik', as apart from 'Mysticismus'—is well able to take care of itself and of its secret, even though its reputation may be injured by people who go by hearsay, or who mistake for it its degradations of emotionalism or fanaticism' (*Mysticism in Christianity*, p. 2).

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A NEW PENTECOST?, by Léon Joseph Cardinal Suenens. *Darton, Longman & Todd*, London, 1975. 38 pp. £2.50.

CARDINAL SUENENS, by Elizabeth Hamilton. *Hodder & Stoughton*, London, 1975. 254 pp. £4.95.

A New Pentecost? is a humble, personal book, in which Cardinal Suenens gives an account of the hope that is in him, a hope founded on God's promises and the living reality of the Holy Spirit. Although the Cardinal is evidently very specially enthusiastic about the 'Charismatic Renewal', the book is not simply another 'charismatic' publication: the author, in a warm, if not always profound, way, shows how the Church must always be the Church of Pentecost, and how in many ways the second Vatican council called us back to this; the liturgical movement and ecumenism are seen as major aspects of this, as is Focolare and Marriage Encounter.

As Elizabeth Hamilton's 'portrait' also brings out, Cardinal Suenens is a

man with contagious enthusiasm, with a profound, yet simple faith in God and love for the Church and for all kinds of people all over the world. It would be caddish and impertinent not to be appreciative of him. *A New Pentecost?* is a book which should inspire people, and help to clarify much that needs clarifying, and restore hope at a time when many people are too confused or fanatical to find it easy to hope. Similarly, the 'portrait', impressionistic as it is, and slightly, though not unpleasantly, precious, and fiercely partisan, introduces us to a kind of churchman that is all too rare, dedicated yet humane, orthodox yet unafraid, able to deal with crowds and individuals.

But still, however cheered one is to encounter such a man in such a posi-