

# Modern Women Mystics: Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil

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## Mysticism and the Paranormal

If the life of the twelfth century Flemish mystic Christina Mirabilis is anything to go by, intimacy with God should carry a health warning! After the death of her parents Christina's elder sisters arranged that she should have the menial job of looking after the family's herds. 'Immediately', we are told in her *Life*, 'Christ did not fail to the lower and more humble office and He gave her the grace of an inward sweetness and very often visited her with heavenly secrets'. As a result of the 'exertions of her inner contemplations' Christina died. That was not, however, the end of the story, indeed it was the beginning of Christina's extraordinary vocation; to suffer for souls through voluntarily imposed penances. During the requiem mass the following day 'the body stirred in the coffin and immediately was raised up like a bird and ascended to the rafters of the church'. When finally forced to descend Christina explained that she had been granted a vision of heaven and hell, before Christ commanded her soul to return to her body.

After this return from the grave Christina, her *Life* continues, 'ran from the presence of men with wondrous horror and fled into the deserts and into the trees and perched on the peaks of turrets or steeples and on other lofty places'. She went on to develop mortifications which included standing in ice-cold rivers and throwing herself into hot bread ovens, not to mention suffering the cruelty of her alarmed family and other villagers who bound her in chains and put a heavy yoke on her shoulders.<sup>1</sup>

Christina Mirabilis sounds, to modern ears, very medieval and bizarre, and we may justifiably wonder whether such experiences are genuine signs of a mystical experience or merely the fruits of a disturbed psyche. I have started with this story, however, because it raises important questions concerning the relationship between the mystical and the paranormal. Christina's biographer, Thomas of

Cantimpré, was clearly fascinated by the superhuman feats performed by the mystic and we learn little of her inner relationship with God. Indeed, the more deranged and exotic her behaviour the greater, it seems, Christina's reputation for holiness. There is a tendency for biographers, from the middle ages to the present, to place more emphasis on paranormal aspects of a mystic's life than the mystic perhaps would have done if writing themselves. Not only Christina suffered in this way. Teresa of Avila's ecstasies, fixed in stone by Bernini, and her supposed levitation, fascinated her admirers and chroniclers. More recently stigmatics (people who display the imprint of nail marks and a side wound in imitation of the marks of Jesus' crucifixion), such as Padre Pio, Terese Neumann or Theresa Higginson, have received equally lurid attention. Such phenomena are, however, religiously neutral, and not signs of sanctity. In fact, as Ian Wilson has demonstrated<sup>2</sup> they are normally associated with psychological trauma and are by no means limited to the religiously minded.

To begin to ask the question, 'what is mysticism?' and 'how can we recognise it?' we must look further than evidence of extraordinary experiences, even where these are present. We have a precedent for this, and some clues to help us, in Paul's advice to the Corinthians (I Cor. 13–14) where he tells them to prefer the gift of prophesy to that of speaking in tongues. The one who speaks in tongues may be speaking with God but it is a personal gift, whereas the prophet benefits the community as a whole and builds up the body of Christ. 'Thank God, I am more gifted in tongues than any of you', says Paul, 'but in the congregation I would rather speak five intelligible words, for the benefit of others as well as myself, than thousands of words in the language of ecstasy' (I Cor. 14: 18–19). One of the signs, then, of a mature relationship with God is the desire to turn outside one's self. Mystical or ecstatic experiences are not ends in themselves and only have value if they bear fruit in a virtuous and loving life.

### **A Life with God, a Life for Others**

Mystical writers often speak of 'consolations', assurances of God's presence which give joy to the soul. These consolations may be separated by long periods of aridity and despair when the soul feels cut off from God and lost in its own sinful state. The greatest mystics warn us that a loving certainty of God's presence is the beginning and not the end of the spiritual life. Such moments can give encouragement but should not be sought nor give rise to a sense of spiritual superiority. The beguine writer, Hadewijch of Brabant, a near contemporary of Christina Mirabilis, understood this well and counselled a young beguine:

This is how everyone today loves themselves: they want to live with God in consolation, in wealth and in splendour, and to share in the delight of his glory. We all wish to be God with God. But, God knows, there are few enough of us who want to live as men and women with his humanity or to bear his cross with him, and to be crucified with him in order to pay for the sins of the whole world.<sup>3</sup>

Teresa of Avila also stressed that it is virtue and not paramystical experiences or the enjoyment of consolation, however fascinating and welcome these might be, which are of value in the Christian life. As Rowan Williams expressed it, describing Teresa's sense of the omnipresence of God and emotional consolation which accompanied it:

But this does not mean that the soul is beyond vulnerability. Teresa knows that after her early advances in prayer and her occasional experiences of absorption, she continued to lead a life of self-pleasing . . . 'Union' does not mean perfection; virtues and discernment have still to be worked out, and there is a continuing need for direction and discussion.<sup>4</sup>

It was the notion of friendship with God, and not what we might call the paramystical side of Teresa's spiritual life, which provided the mainspring of her theology. In an enclosed convent, no less than in an active vocation, there are no shortages of opportunity for loving one's neighbour. Teresa's foundations of Discalced Carmelites were to be based on spiritual friendship and not on individualistic piety. The two main pillars of religious life were friendship with God and an attention to one another, without favouritism or privilege. It was in the daily rub of community life that the soul was to be cleansed of egoistic attachments and to learn virtue.

The dangers of a spiritualised life which is inward-looking, focussed on developing an inner harmony, or seeking 'consolations' at the expense of concern for others, are not confined to Christianity. In his book on Buddhism and social action Ken Jones<sup>5</sup>, describes what he called the 'quietist fallacy' which has been a problem for Buddhists as much as for Christians. Zen Master Rinzai describes the state of those who wish to cultivate inner truth and serenity before seeking to engage with the problems around them, as 'the darkest abyss of tranquility, purity and serenity — this is indeed what one has to shudder at'.<sup>6</sup> An involvement with others and a recognition that inner growth, external observances and compassion go hand in hand, is characteristic of many mystics both past and present. The bodhisatva ideal, to use Buddhist terminology, that is the development of compassion as an integral part

of the spiritual life, is particularly evident in the two more recent mystics, Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil, whose lives and writings I now wish to explore.

### **Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil: Freedom and Authority**

Neither Etty Hillesum nor Simone Weil seem likely candidates for the mystical life. They are both to some extent outsiders. Like Teresa of Avila, they come from non-practising Jewish backgrounds, but unlike Teresa neither woman became a nun nor even embraced Christianity. Their marginality to formal religion and to the societies in which they lived, was utilised by both women as a spiritual resource, enabling them to live more closely with those whom they wished to serve.

Freedom from ecclesiastical authority can be an advantage in the mystical life. The Church hierarchy has always had trouble with charismatic figures who claim direct access to God. They can either be assimilated, like St. Francis, and thereby more easily controlled, or eliminated, like the French-speaking beguine, Marguerite Porete, who was executed for heresy in 1310. Teresa of Avila's Spain in the sixteenth century used the weapon of the Inquisition in order to maintain a stultifying uniformity on the new Catholic kingdom. As a mystic, a woman, and as someone from converso or Jewish stock, Teresa was triply vulnerable. In her writings she is at pains to demonstrate her loyalty to the Church and to refute charges of quietism or spiritual opportunism. More recently we have seen the efforts of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to silence Emmanuel Milingo, former Archbishop of Lusaka in Zambia, whose charismatic gifts of healing and exorcism sat ill with a Latin model of church, and repeated attempts to exert central authority over the liberation theologians and base churches of South and Central America. Milingo appeared too close to his African roots and the liberation theologians excessively influenced by Marxist Socialism for the Church authorities to countenance.<sup>7</sup>

Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil were also in touch with and reacting to secular trends. Etty was profoundly influenced by Julius Spier, a pupil of Carl Jung and founder of psychochirology (the therapeutic study and classification of palm prints). Simone Weil was a born idealist but no ideologue. She skirted the margins of French communism without ever being a paid-up member of the Communist Party, and fought passionately for socialist ideals, even to the extent of joining the anti-Franco forces during the Spanish Civil War. For Etty the meeting with Spier and a psychoanalytic discipline was a turning point in her emotional and spiritual life. As she received help in putting her own house in order the desire to give of herself to others and to open up

to God was nurtured and grew. She underwent a gradual conversion from a good but essentially self-centred life to a life that was profoundly other-centred. Simone Weil's activism also changed in quality and meaning as her inner life developed. Her desire to identify with those who are least in society without gaining any special privilege, even that of baptism, kept Simone outside the Church, but close to God. Although in some ways extraordinary, both by virtue of their human talents and because of the quality of their inner life, Etty and Simone were also very normal; not pious nor particularly religious, or even, in conventional terms, particularly moral. They can therefore serve to remind us that the mystical vocation is open to everyone and that perfection is not a prerequisite to entering the presence of God.

### **Etty Hillesum**

Ester Hillesum was born in January 1914 in the Netherlands to a Dutch father and Russian mother. Etty and her two brothers were intelligent and gifted. Mischa was a virtuosic pianist, Jaap, a promising research scientist. Etty, like her father, had a gift for languages. After graduating in law she turned to the study of Slavonic languages and psychiatry. When she started the diary, through which we know her, in March 1941, she was living in Amsterdam as housekeeper to (and as lover of) an elderly widower, 'Papa Han' together with his son, their German cook and two lodgers. Etty was also teaching privately and pursuing her linguistic studies. She had recently met Julius Spier, a Jewish refugee from Germany, who was teaching a new therapeutic technique based on palm reading.

By 1941 Amsterdam was already a hostile place for Jews. They were being thrown out of their jobs, forbidden to shop in normal stores, humiliated in public and forced into work camps. By April 1942 the yellow Star of David had been introduced and mass deportations to transit camps, and then the concentration camps beyond, had begun. Unlike some of her compatriots, Etty had no delusions about what was happening. In July 1942 she wrote:

Very well then, this new certainty that what they are after is our total destruction. I accept it. I know it now and I shall not burden others with my fears. I shall not be bitter if others fail to grasp what is happening to us Jews. I work and continue to live with the same conviction and I find life meaningful — yes, meaningful although I hardly dare say so in company these days.<sup>8</sup>

It is against this background of fear and unfolding tragedy that Etty works through her personal relationships and comes into an increasingly

intimate union with God. In August 1942 she volunteered to go with the first big round up of Amsterdam Jews to the transit camp at Westerbork, having no wish to escape the fate of her people and believing that she could be 'the thinking heart of these barracks . . . The thinking heart of a whole concentration camp.' One of the last entries in her diary, in October 1942, reads: 'I have broken my body like bread and shared it out among men. And why not, they were hungry and had gone without for so long.' In September 1943 Etty, together with her parents and her brother Mischa, were placed on a 'transport' to Poland. She threw a postcard out of the window which was found and posted by farmers, which read, 'We have left the camp singing'. According to Red Cross reports Etty, together with Mischa and her parents, died in Auschwitz on 30th November 1943.

It is to Etty the mystic which I will now turn, sketching, all too briefly, some of the journey which she made from a young woman tormented by doubts, depression and a sense of purposelessness, to the luminous woman who wrote (on the death of Spier, her friend and lover, in September 1942):

'I now realise, God, how much You have given me. so much that was beautiful and so much that was hard to bear. Yet when ever I showed myself ready to bear it, the hard was transformed directly into the beautiful. And the beautiful was sometimes much harder to bear, so overpowering did it seem . . . With the passing of people, I feel a growing need to speak to You alone. I love people so terribly, because in every human being I love something of You.'<sup>10</sup>

One of the first entries in Etty's diary, for 12th March, 1941, gives us a picture of someone who has started to pray and to experience God's presence and consolations, but who is still struggling with many attachments, fears, lack of direction and indolence. Etty can see the way ahead but realises that she still has some way to go: 'Compassion', she wrote,

can be creative, but it can also be greedy. Objectivity is better than swooning in great emotions. For example, clinging to one's own parents: one has to see them as people with a destiny of their own. The desire to prolong ecstatic moments is misplaced. It's understandable, of course: you long for an hour's moving spiritual or 'soulful' experience, even if it is followed by the inevitable jolt as you come down to earth again. Such jolts used to annoy me, I would be overcome with fatigue, and pine for more of those exalted moments. Call it by its proper name: ambition . . . In near-ecstatic moments I think myself capable of God knows what, only to sink

back again into the deepest pit of uncertainty. That happens because I fail to work each day at what I believe is my real talent: writing . . . Everything will have to become more straightforward, until in the end and I shall, perhaps, finish up as an adult, capable of helping other souls who are in trouble, and of creating some sort of clarity through my work for others, for that's what it's really all about.<sup>11</sup>

In an entry for 21st March, 1941, we see Etty grappling with an understanding of the present moment. She realises that the key to detachment, peace and creativity lies in living each moment fully, as the place in which God is present to us.

This vague fear is something else I must conquer in myself. Life is difficult, it is true, a struggle from minute to minute (don't overdo it now, Etty!), but the struggle itself is thrilling. In the past I would live chaotically in the future, because I refused to live in the here and now. I wanted to be handed everything on a plate, like a badly spoiled child. Sometimes I had the certain if rather undefined feeling that I would 'make it' one day, that I had the capacity to do something 'extraordinary', and at other times the wild fear that I would 'go to the dogs' after all. I now realise why, I simply refused to do what needed to be done, what lay right under my nose. I refused to climb into the future one step at a time. And now, now that every minute is so full, so chock-full of life and experience and struggle and victory and defeat, and more struggle and sometimes peace, now I no longer think of the future, that is, I no longer care whether or not I shall make it, because I now have the inner certainty that everything will be taken care of. Before, I always lived in anticipation, I had the feeling that nothing I did was the 'real' thing, that it was all a preparation for something else, something 'greater', more 'genuine'. But that feeling has dropped away from me completely. I live here-and-now, this minute, this day, to the full, and life is worth living. And if I knew that I was going to die tomorrow, then I would say: it's a great shame, but it's been good while it lasted.<sup>12</sup>

Similar intuitions and sentiments are frequently expressed by those setting out on a spiritual journey. Chiara Lubich, an Italian writer and founder of the Focolare Movement, for example, wrote succinctly:

And I now realise more and more that "heaven and earth will pass away . . ." (Mark 13: 31), but God's plan for us does not pass. The only thing that fully satisfies us is to see that we are at every moment where God, from all eternity, meant us to be.<sup>13</sup>

By June of 1941 Etty, faced with despair at the suffering around her, and feeling totally overwhelmed, is learning to accept suffering, rather

than run away from it or deny it or, as she was sometimes tempted to do, to give up life altogether.

I said that I confronted the 'suffering of mankind' (I still shudder when it comes to big words), but that was not really what it was. Rather I feel like a small battlefield, in which the problems, or some of the problems, of our time are being fought out. All one can hope to do is to keep oneself humbly available, to allow oneself to be a battlefield. After all, the problems must be accommodated, have somewhere to struggle and come to rest and we, poor little humans, must put our inner space at their service and not run away. In that respect, I am probably very hospitable; mine is often an exceedingly bloody battlefield and dreadful fatigue and splitting headaches are the toll I have to pay.<sup>14</sup>

Here, in a way, we see a reflection of Christina Mirabilis, and the other great spiritual figures who have opened themselves to human suffering, to God, and to the world, believing that their availability will somehow benefit others.

Four days later, on 18th June, 1941, Etty records the important realisation that we cannot live our lives depending, or leaning on other people. Men were important to Etty, as friends, as sexual partners, as teachers, and in her hope of a future marriage and family life. Here, however, she writes:

Life itself must be our fountainhead, never something or someone else. Many people, especially women, draw their strength from others, instead of directly from life. A man is their source, instead of life. That attitude is as distorted and unnatural as it possibly can be.<sup>15</sup>

Reflecting later on the difficulties women have in reconciling their various needs with the roles assigned to them by society, and internalised by women, Etty wrote:

Perhaps it is true, the essential emancipation of women still has to come. We are not yet full human beings; we are the 'weaker sex'. We are still tied down and enmeshed in centuries-old traditions. We still have to be born as human beings, that is the great task that lies before us . . . There is nothing else for it, I shall have to solve my own problems. I always get the feeling that when I solve them for myself I shall have also solved them for a thousand other women, for that reason I must get to grips with myself.<sup>16</sup>

As the weeks passed Etty became increasingly conscious of the indwelling presence of God: 'There is really a deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stones and



grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again.<sup>17</sup> In October of 1941 Etty records an experience which proved a turning point in her life. The roots of attachment and of the old self were being dug up and planted more firmly in God alone:

Something has happened to me and I don't know if it's just a passing mood or something crucial. It is as if I had been pulled back abruptly to my roots, and had become a little more self-reliant and independent. Last night, cycling through cold, dark Lairesse Straat — if only I could repeat everything I babbled out then! Something like this: 'God, take me by Your hand, I shall evade none of the tempests life has in store for me. I shall try to face it all as best I can. But now and then grant me a short respite. I shall never again assume, in my innocence, that any peace that comes my way will be eternal. I shall accept all the inevitable tumult and struggle. I delight in warmth and security, but I shall not revel if I have to suffer cold, should you so decree. I shall follow you wherever your hand lead me and shall try not to be afraid. I shall try to spread some of my warmth, of my genuine love for others, wherever I go. But we shouldn't boast of our love for others. We cannot be sure that it really exists. I don't want to be anything special, I only want to try to be true to that in me which seeks to fulfil its promise. I sometimes imagine that I long for the seclusion of a nunnery. But I know that I must seek you amongst the people, out in the world . . .'<sup>18</sup>

By April 1942 Etty was aware that a great change had been wrought in her. She couldn't feel hatred for the Gestapo or indignation at the plight of her people, recognising that all are caught up in and participate in a system of hatred, a system which can only be fought day by day and moment by moment by countering it with love. She had become mature enough, in her own words, to take her destiny upon herself.

I don't have to mess about with my thoughts any more or tinker with my life, for an organic process is at work. Something in me is growing every time I look inside, something fresh has appeared and all I have to do is to accept it, to take it upon myself, to bear it forward and to let it flourish.<sup>19</sup>

The fruits of this process were manifested in an inner freedom. Etty was increasingly able to face and absorb the horrors around her without being destroyed by them. The following passage, from June 1942, describes an insight, which is also basic to Buddhist teaching, that it is not the external phenomenon but one's reaction to it, which is the source of suffering.

This morning I cycled along the Station Quay enjoying the broad sweep of sky at the edge of the city and breathing in the fresh, unrationed air. And everywhere signs barring Jews from the paths and the open country. But above the one narrow path still left to us stretches the sky, intact. They can't do anything to us, they really can't. They can harass us, they can rob us of our material goods, of our freedom of movement, but we ourselves forfeit our greatest assets by our misguided compliance. By our feelings of being persecuted, humiliated and oppressed. by our own hatred. By our swagger, which hides our fear. We may of course be sad and depressed by what has been done to us; that is only human and understandable. However: our greatest injury is one we inflict upon ourselves. I find life beautiful and I feel free. The sky within me is as wide as the one stretching above my head. I believe in God and I believe in man and I say so without embarrassment . . . True peace will come only when every individual finds peace within themselves; when we have all vanquished and transformed hatred for our fellow human beings of whatever race — even into love one day, although perhaps that is asking too much. It is, however, the only solution.<sup>20</sup>

In her last few weeks of relative freedom in Amsterdam we see Etty's life turned increasingly out towards others, not only to those in her immediate circle, but to everyone she met, whether friend or enemy.

This much I know: you have to forget your own worries for the sake of others, for the sake of those whom you love. All the strength and love and faith in God which one possesses, and which have grown so miraculously in me of late, must be there for everyone who chances to cross one's path and who needs it . . . You must learn to forego all personal desires and to surrender completely. And surrender does not mean giving up the ghost, fading away with grief, but offering what little assistance I can wherever it has pleased God to place me.<sup>21</sup>

This was not passivity or apathy, or even escapism, but a surrender of herself to God which allowed Etty to live more and more out of that deep inner well of God's presence. Etty was accused of indifference and passivity for refusing to go into hiding. Some of her friends argued that she had a duty to try to stay out of the clutches of the Nazis. Etty, however, could see no point in seeking to save her own life while thousands of others were still disappearing. And anyway, she argued, she didn't feel that she was in anybody's clutches but safe in God's arms. Whether she stayed in her room or was sent away meant less to Etty than 'the immeasurable expanse of my faith in God and my inner

receptiveness.’<sup>22</sup>

Although she was familiar with the Christian New Testament, Etty was probably unaware of the works of Teresa of Avila, and of the many similarities between her own spiritual journey and that of the sixteenth century mystic. Both emphasised friendship with God and looked within for the source of life and strength. Rather than cultivating images they allowed God to lead them out and to work on them as God willed. As part of her Sunday morning prayer, shortly before leaving for Westerbork transit camp, Etty wrote what will probably be one of her most enduring memorials, and we can see how within the space of less than 18 months she had been prepared for the task ahead of her:

The jasmine behind my house has been completely ruined by the rains and storms of the last few days, its white blossoms are floating about in muddy black pools on the low garage roof. But somewhere inside me the jasmine continues to blossom undisturbed, just as profusely and delicately as it ever did. And it spreads its scent round the house in which you dwell, O God. You can see, I look after you, I bring you not only my tears and my forebodings on this stormy, grey Sunday morning, I even bring you my scented jasmine. And I shall bring you all the flowers I shall meet on my way, and truly there are many of those. I shall try to make you at home always. Even if I should be locked up in a narrow cell and a cloud should drift past my small barred window, then I shall bring you that cloud, O God, while there is still the strength in me to do so. I cannot promise you anything for tomorrow, but my intentions are good, you can see.<sup>23</sup>

### **Simone Weil**

Simone Weil was born in Paris in 1909 and, like Etty, was clever and gifted, although of a very different personality type. After graduating in philosophy from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1931, Simone Weil taught in secondary schools while pursuing an active career as a trade union organiser. In her desire to learn from within what it was like to be ground down by the oppressive conditions of factory work she took a year's leave in 1934 and was employed in a Renault Works on the factory floor. The project was not entirely a success as Simone was better at directing her will than looking after her body, and her health gave way under the strain. Her desire to share the lot of others similarly outstripped her physical capacities when, in 1936, she spent a brief period with the Socialist forces in Spain, but had to be invalided home. Further efforts to be an ordinary worker found her in the south of France as a farm labourer. In 1942 she escaped from France with the intention

of collaborating with the Free French in London. Simone Weil's desire was to be sent back behind German lines in occupied France but failing to achieve that goal, she confined herself to the miserly food rations allowed the occupied French. Once more her health gave way and she died in a sanatorium at Ashford in Kent on 29th August, 1943.

Like Etty, Simone Weil came from an agnostic background but had a profoundly mystical disposition. Her preoccupation with God and the dynamics of the inner life were fed by her relationship with a Dominican priest in Marseille, Fr. Perrin, who she first met in 1941. It was as part of a conversation with Perrin over the succeeding two years of her life that Simone wrote much of the specifically religious material in her vast and varied output.

I wish here only to give some brief glimpses of Simone Weil's writings. She is far more analytical than Etty, but behind her desire to understand and order experience we sense a profound awareness of God's inner activity in her life.

Affliction makes God appear to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. during this absence there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God's absence become final. The soul has to go on loving in the emptiness, or at least to go on wanting to love, though it may only be with an infinitesimal part of itself. Then, one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job. But if the soul stops loving it falls, even in this life, into something which is almost equivalent to hell.<sup>24</sup>

It is through love, as Simone discovered, that we pass from death to life. Love for her fellow human beings was the mainspring of Simone Weil's existence and the chief reason she gave for refusing baptism. Speaking of the materialism of the world and its need for love she explained in a letter to Fr. Perrin:

I have the essential need, and I think I can say the vocation, to move among men of every class and complexion, mixing with them and sharing their life and outlook, so far that is to say as conscience allows, merging into the crowd and disappearing among them, so that they show themselves as they are, putting off all disguises with me. It is because I long to know them, so as to love them just as they are. For if I do not love them as they are, it will not be they whom I love, and my love will be unreal.<sup>25</sup>

Simone Weil emphasises the need to train the will, to act as if we possessed virtues which we don't in fact have. Discipline is seen as an essential means of developing the necessary attention which enables us to reach an awareness of God. But ultimately it is not we who seek God, but God who reaches out to us or, as she so epigrammatically expressed it: 'We cannot take a step towards the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us.'

Here we have a good summary of the mystical life. True compassion and virtue are fruits, signs of God's activity in the soul, and not the result of willed activity. Nor are consolations or an awareness of divine presence a goal for the spiritually minded. No, a mystical life is one in which God draws near to the human person who, in turn, has only to respond. It is God who then begins to work on that life and to perfect it. 'God crosses the universe and comes to us'.

- 1 Quoted in Petroff, E.A. (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, (Oxford, 1986) pp. 184-89.
- 2 Ian Wilson, *The Bleeding Mind: An Investigation into the Mysterious Phenomenon of Stigmata* (London, 1988).
- 3 Letters 6, in Bowie, F. (ed.), *Beguine Spirituality*, (London, 1989), p. 104. Translation by Oliver Davies.
- 4 Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (London, 1991) p.67.
- 5 Ken Jones, *The Social Face of Buddhism* (London, 1989), Chapter 20.
- 6 Jones, *ibid.* p. 203.
- 7 Emmanuel Milingo, *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the struggle for Spiritual Survival*, (London, 1984).
- 8 3 July 1942, p.172. The references from Etty Hillesum's diary are from *Etty: A Diary 1941-43*, (London, 1985). Published in Dutch in 1981 as *Het verstoorde leven, Dagboek van Etty Hillesum, 1941-43*. English translation by Arnold J. Pomerans.
- 9 13 October 1942, p.251.
- 10 15 September 1942, p.217.
- 11 12 March 1941, p.24.
- 12 21 March 1941, p.33.
- 13 Chiara Lubich, *Meditazioni* (Rome, 1959) p.13.
- 14 14 June 1941, p.45.
- 15 18 June 1941, p.46.
- 16 4 August 1941, pp.48-9.
- 17 26 August 1941, pp.58-9.
- 18 ? November 1941, p.78.
- 19 30 April 1942, p.148.
- 20 22 June 1942, pp.162-3.
- 21 7 July 1942, pp.186-7.
- 22 11 July 1942, p.195.
- 23 12 July 1942, p.198.
- 24 Simone Weil, *Waiting on God* (London, 1951), p.66.
- 25 Weil, *ibid.* p.5.