

**ARA COELI: AN
ESSAY IN MYSTICAL
THEOLOGY**

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Ara coeli: an essay in mystical theology by Arthur Chandler

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ARTHUR CHANDLER

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ARA CÆLI :

AN ESSAY IN MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

BY

ARTHUR CHANDLER

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SEVENTH EDITION

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PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

THERE are a few things which I should like to add in reference to reviews and notices of this book by the Press.

First, I want to apologise for the large number of misprints which appeared in the earlier editions. I am very much ashamed of them, and hope that they have now been corrected.

Secondly, some Roman Catholic papers, for whose friendly appreciation I am very grateful, note the omission of any reference to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. I can only plead that it is very difficult to recall, on reflection, the sum total of one's indebtedness, and I suppose that very often the authors to whom we owe most are least prominently in our minds, just because their ideas have soaked so deeply into us. I should like, then, to repair my neglect, and acknowledge gratefully the help which I have received from the Exercises, especially, I think, in the first two chapters of my book. But I must add, on the other hand, that the complicated scheme of meditation recommended by him is the sort of method against which I venture to argue in Chapter VII.

A further criticism from the same quarter is the

very natural one that, whereas I claim that the Anglican Church is the best sphere for the cultivation of mystical religion, the great bulk of my quotations are from Roman Catholic authors. That is perfectly true. But, in the first place, my words about the Anglican Church express an aspiration for the future, not a statement about the past or present. And, secondly, if I had wished to be controversial (which I particularly desired to avoid) I might have pointed out that, though the majority of my post-Reformation authorities, the only ones touched by this criticism, belonged to the Roman Church, many of them received scant encouragement from the authorities of that Church; in fact, some of them may be said to have been mystics in spite, and not in consequence, of their Romanism. If Molinos escaped being burnt, this fate was only exchanged for perpetual imprisonment; the canonisation of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, who held much the same views, was a tardy compensation for much petty persecution during their lifetime; whilst the treatment of Madame Guyon is a later illustration of the same kind of attitude on the part of the official hierarchy. Over-organisation and suspicion seem to have dictated this attitude; and we may hope that, if the English Church remains free from these faults, and at the same time maintains her loyalty to the Faith and the ministry of grace, she will be allowed to train many of her children in the inner ways of spiritual experience.

Lastly, it has been said by one reviewer that I am guilty of a confusion of thought in making the term mysticism "synonymous with all spiritual-mindedness and vital religion." I hope I have not done so ; but the point is an important one for the understanding of mysticism, and I should like to say a few words on it. If we analyse what we mean by "vital religion" and "mystical religion," we see at once that they have a certain element in common, as distinguished from what may be called conventional religion. Vital religion implies that the man who possesses it accepts his Creed *ex animo*, is in earnest with his prayers and reverent in his use of the means of grace, and makes the life of Christ a real test and standard for his own conduct ; in fact, that he is guided and swayed by the action of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Vital religion is a religion which is "alive" and active, as opposed to one consisting mainly in dead faith and formal observances. But, then, life may be working, and bringing forth spiritual fruit, without being *felt* or *understood* in its comprehensive unity ; and it is here that the path of mystical religion diverges. The mystic, for instance, not only accepts the Creed with intellectual conviction, but feels it by a kind of spiritual intuition, which is at the same time both a principle of love and an appreciation of beauty. Further, mystical *theology* tries to understand this unity and the process of its manifestation. To make this point

clear, perhaps I may quote a few words from page 117 of this essay : "The life of God in the soul first works secretly in the processes of disillusionment and mortification, and in the shaping of higher ideals and aspirations ; then, when this work is in some measure completed, it may become manifest to the spiritual vision. . . . It is because of God's long-continued presence and operations within us, that at last our eyes may be opened to see Him." Thus my earlier chapters are mainly concerned with that inner working of God in the soul, which is the essence of vital religion ; the later ones try to expound the unity and method of that Divine working, and the process by which we can come, in some measure, to feel it and think it as a fact of personal experience.

I do not contend that the mystic (whether theological or otherwise) is necessarily a better Christian than other men of vital religion ; but I do mean that he differs from them in trying to make explicit to himself, through thought or feeling, the nature of that Divine " life " which animates both himself and them. If we may illustrate the spiritual from the physical, we might perhaps compare vital religion to the healthy and vigorous activity of the body in its various departments ; mystical religion to that comprehensive " joy of living " which belongs to certain temperaments ; and mystical theology to a scientific investigation into the nature and origin of the life thus working in the former condition and felt in the latter.

PREFACE

MYSTICISM, as I understand it, is the Religion of Experience. Mystical theology unfolds the processes in which this religion consists, and the laws of its development. It has its place between dogmatic theology, which systematises Christian truths, and moral theology, which expounds Christian duties.

Mysticism, or experiential religion, accepts doctrinal truths and treats them as vital principles—principles, that is, by which men live, and which are verified by the life itself. It takes the raw material of fact, and fashions it into the finished product of character; it is the process by which dogma comes to be stated naturally and appropriately in terms of duty; and mystical theology is the science which explains how this is done.

It tells us that truths are made into vital principles when they are naturalised in us, being accepted unreservedly by the will and the affections as well as by the intellect, and being thereby transmuted into spiritual love and energy. It unfolds the comprehensive discipline by which the will and the affections are schooled and consecrated; it helps us

to understand the coming and going of those gleams of illumination which are at once an encouragement and a reward for hearts that are becoming pure ; it explains the verification of the spiritual life as consisting in the assurance that there, and there only, we have got or are getting what we want, namely, the supreme rest and satisfaction of a soul that is at union with God ; and it tells us how this assurance can be made a secure and abiding certainty, a foretaste and earnest of the Beatific Vision. Mysticism, then, is a process ; mystical theology is the science which explains that process. It is important to remember the distinction, since some confusion has arisen from ignoring it. When we speak of a mystic, we sometimes mean a man whose religion is a matter of real spiritual experience, sometimes a man who investigates the growth and conditions of such experience. The confusion comes to light when the question is asked whether every sincere Christian ought to be a mystic. If mystic is used in the latter sense of the word, the answer is obviously in the negative. A man can be a good Christian without being a theologian at all, *a fortiori* without being a mystical theologian. In the former sense the answer is more doubtful. It is true that a man may hold the doctrines of the faith with intellectual conviction, may frequent the Sacraments with devotion, and be occupied with noble and strenuous endeavours without having any glimpse of the underlying unity of a