

Scripture and Mystical Transformation

Celia Kourie

Department of Christian Spirituality, UNISA, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Contemporary scriptural studies are characterized by a major paradigm shift from a mechanistic to a holistic paradigm, enabling the text to come to life as transformative and life-changing, and thus contributing to the rediscovery of the text as dynamic medium rather than static object. In particular, a mystical hermeneutic of scripture is one in which a direct experience of God, or Ultimate Reality, or the One is the end result. Such an understanding of scripture allows the many layers of meaning to come to the fore, and witnesses to the life-giving power of the text. It provides a door or window, as it were, between different dimensions of consciousness. Myths enable the mystical reality to be expressed in poetic form. They spring from the depths of the psyche where the ultimate Mystery of existence is encountered; they are the product of the creative imagination and attempt in some measure to portray primordial truth. Mythological imagery witnesses to the deep-rooted desire expressed in all religious traditions to restore the undivided consciousness and unity of being, which is the central facet of mysticism. Utilising a mystical and kenotic reading of the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5, based on the Peshitta, we see that the 'happy ones' are utterly dependent on God. Deeply humble, they have nothing of their own; everything is gift, and therefore there is no room for pride. The death of the subjectively experienced and anxiety-generated 'self' effects a greater Self. There is so to speak, a shifting of mental gears in which the truth of the

indwelling Christ is realised as a source of power, peace and joy. Transegoic consciousness is the result of this mystical transformation, in which psycho-spiritual maturation results in selfless service of the other.

Introduction

A major teaching of all religious traditions is that the purpose of human existence is a process of psychological and spiritual growth. The journey may take diverse forms, but its goal is union with the divine Source or Ultimate Reality. This mystical transformation leads us beyond limited and one-dimensional forms of consciousness, resulting in an enhanced attentiveness to reality and a new theocentric perception, the psychotherapeutic value of which can be seen in an increased zest for life and selfless service of others. Psycho-spiritual development and mysticism are consonant, in some respects, with modern depth psychology, as both have as their aim the unifying and integration of consciousness. Such an approach is also redolent of process thought, often identified with Alfred North Whitehead, and the evolutionary theories of Teilhard de Chardin. In addition, the transpersonal psychology of inter alia, Assagioli (1993;1994) and the integral philosophy of Wilber (1999) contribute to studies dealing with the evolution of consciousness, and put paid to the misconception that meaning can be found purely in scientific empiricism and from a life lived from the thin, precarious strata of superficial existence.

A major component of mystical transformation is the reading, study and assimilation of *scripture*. The myths and words of scripture enter into the depths of our being, and free the mind from its reactive patterns and emotional fog in order to re-awaken the capacity for the transcendent and bring clarity and calm to all levels of the person. The aim of this article is firstly, to look at the mystical nature of scripture in the Christian tradition and its relation to myth, and secondly, to offer a short mystical reading of the Beatitudes.

Mystical Reading of Scripture

In order for scripture to be transformative, it has to be read through a *mystical* lens. This is not to deny the validity of the many other diverse methods of biblical interpretation, each of which has

its place. However, as witnessed by recent developments, the spiritual and mystical reading of scripture is once again coming to the fore. The postmodern era has propelled New Testament hermeneutics into a greater cosmic and mystical ambience in which, inter alia: the insights of other religious scriptures play a prominent role; mythological and mystical approaches are gaining ground; and insights from Jungian and other psychology systems are implemented (Kourie 1995).

Such openness results in a greater understanding of the existential meaning of scripture. The 'reciprocal relation' that exists between the reader and the text, and the 'personal awakening' that is effected as a result of the revelation of scripture are now more fully recognised (Waaijman 2002:766-767).

Drawing on the insights of Levinas and Ricoeur, Waaijman (2002:771) states: 'By understanding, the text is reactualised and this actualization constitutes an essential aspect of the text The scriptural meaning imprints itself in the life and contact of the reader' Thus, appropriation of the essential meaning of the text in one's life witnesses to the power and efficacy of the encounter with scripture. It 'defines our lived faith experience' drawing upon the 'biblical treasure-house of stories, images, prophetic challenges, and prayers and on the ultimate example of the life and death of Jesus for its understanding of God and for its convictions about the meaning of human existence' (Bowe 2003:19). In such a reading, the actuality of the mystical encounter can be experienced, since the core of mysticism is 'radical surrender of self to the loving embrace of the Other, who is at the foundation of all life, the One to whom we owe our very existence' (Perrin 2005:443). Christ, as the 'transforming Other' is the one who articulates this union through the Spirit (McGinn 2008:47).

A mystical hermeneutic of scripture is one in which a direct experience of God, or Ultimate Reality, or the One is the end result. It witnesses to the life-giving power of the texts. The text breaks the spell of our previously-held presuppositions, correcting and revising established views, and thus provoking a new self-understanding, effecting transmutation of character and daily life. A mystical hermeneutic concentrates more on the *synchronic* aspect of the text, rather than the *diachronic*. This does not imply a denial

of the historical and sociological situation of the text's provenance, but goes much further than mere history, since the *illuminatory* sense of scripture is paramount. It can be classified as an *immanent hermeneutic*. The text is now more readily acknowledged as a mediation of meaning which takes place as event in the reader and provides as it were a 'door' between different dimensions of consciousness. Such study of scripture takes the reader '...beyond the clarity of understanding to the darkness of God, the mystery that is not a problem to be solved but the living flame of love ignited by the encounter with that love in Christ through the words of the Bible' (Jantzen 1995:82). The life-giving and transformative power of the text has repercussions not only within the depths of the individual but also in society as the history of spirituality and mysticism shows. Gadamer speaks of the '*excess of meaning*' in a text beyond the subjective intentions of the author. The text needs to come alive in the present. A mystical reading effects precisely this change. Since the mystical experience operates at the level of symbol, *myths* are used to refer to the mystical reality which transcends the limitations of language.

Myth and Mysticism

All genuine religion has as its foundation profound mystical experience; in Christianity, Jesus is the mystic and mystagogue par excellence. Unfortunately, in many cases the mystical reality has degenerated into moralism, ritualism, legalism and intellectualism. Thus the prime purpose of myth is to recapture the pristine reality that has been overlaid by the encrustation of dogma and represent it symbolically. Myth therefore is a *poetic expression of a mystical experience* and has a deictic function. Not only does the mythic symbolism effect wisdom, insight and knowledge, but it also has a *participatory* role. It has the power to draw us into the mystical experience, and lead us to the experiential awareness of the transcendent referent of which religious doctrines are a cultural and theological embodiment. The transforming power of myth takes place in the depths of the psyche. Bede Griffiths (1982:30) puts it succinctly: 'Myth in its origin is the symbolic expression of the One Reality experienced in a living unity in an undivided consciousness'. In the primal psyche, this was experienced as a 'cosmo-theandric' unity in which God, humanity

and the world was conceived as a total unity. Just as the human body has a museum of organs with a long history of evolutionary development, so too the mind is a product of history. The mind originates from the archaic psyche. This explains its collective images and mythological motifs or archetypes which lie below the level of rational consciousness. Rational mind, with its abstractions and logical constructions, is like the tip of the iceberg, while underneath are deep layers of consciousness, linking our human nature with the universe around us and with the transcendent principles governing the universe (1982:49). Myth and mysticism are therefore ineluctably related. The encounter with Ultimate Reality, from which all religion derives its vitality, transcends the capacity of the mind to know in the ordinary sense of knowing. Myths spring from the depths where the ultimate Mystery of existence is encountered; they are as it were, the product of the creative imagination and attempt in some measure to portray primordial truth. Furthermore, myth expresses the desire '... to be at one with a cosmic beginning in a "continual present", an eternal now' (Coupe 1997:60).

With respect to scripture, a mythological understanding takes into consideration the fact that while biblical stories are related to history, nevertheless they also reveal the workings of the psyche. Myths are a dialectic of our inner history, not just physical events occurring at a particular time. They help portray the psychological phenomena which occur in human consciousness. The language of the text is thus *tensive*: the elements of the text are seen as multivalent and ambiguous symbols, and the words of scripture exercise more than a purely cognitive function. Myths of scripture are not to be seen as propaganda or theology, encapsulating eternal truths in neat, tight propositions. Myths are not meant to offer facts or theories, and should therefore not be dissected or analysed to find absolute truth. Rather they are a finger pointing to what is essentially unknowable. They may be clothed in a particular garment relating to the age in which they are expounded, yet the inner meaning transcends any historical era. The mythological interpretation of scripture redresses the balance in favour of comparative, symbolic and psychological meaning as opposed to particularistic, literalistic and merely historical, and facilitates meta-rational knowledge. Mythological imagery

witnesses to the deep-rooted desire expressed in all religious traditions to restore the undivided consciousness and unity of being which is the central facet of mysticism. Two of the major obstacles which prevent constructive understanding of myth are fundamentalist literalism and positivistic aridity, the former turning myth into 'solid history' and the latter evaporating them into the 'mists of primeval ignorance' (Stevenson 1972:536). The importance of mythic thinking cannot be ignored: myths help deal with the perennial questions of the origin of the cosmos; the meaning of life and death; salvation, etc. (Smart 1997:133). Furthermore, myth '... purifies thought... bypasses thought, so that the unthought may emerge and the intermediary disappear. Myth is the salutary fasting thinking; it liberates us from the burden of having to think out and think through everything and thus it opens up the realm of freedom; not the mere liberty of choice, but the freedom of being' (Pannikar 1979:4-5). Myths actually help effect 'freedom' from discursive thought. For Pannikar (1979:344) myths illustrate the silent dimension of language, '... *mythos* is the second dimension of speech itself, the silence between the words, the matrix that bears the words'. It is precisely this dimension of silence between the words which allow the myth to be interpreted in many ways and makes it truly inexhaustible, in contrast to purely rationalistic statements which are exhausted once they are articulated (Prabhu 1996:171). Myths arise from and address the Palaeolithic levels of the human psyche - levels which need to surface once again if humanity is to regain its sense of meaning and purpose. The one-dimensional approach of critical reason does not satisfy the deep-felt need of the human person, and therefore it is questionable whether human consciousness which is devoid of a mythical dimension is really an authentic consciousness (Mostert 1986:39).

Mystical Reading of the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1-9 RSV)

The aim of this section is to extrapolate a few of the major threads running through the narrative dealing with the beatitudes. By means of a cumulative approach certain transformative symbols will be distilled which will facilitate a new reading, one which will hopefully resonate at the deeper levels of the human psyche. Mention will be made of structural or historical features where they help illuminate a mystical reading of the text.

‘Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain’ (Matt 5:1)

Matthew 5:1 speaks of Jesus’ *ascent to the mountain*. This in itself is worthy of note. Firstly, this sentence immediately places us on Semitic literary soil. In the Hebrew bible a whole series of mountains are mentioned, for example: Zion, Herman, Tabor, Carmel, etc. However, whenever a Jew hears of *the mountain*, with no further qualification, there is no doubt that the mountain alluded to is mount Sinai where the law was promulgated. Secondly, there is here a clear parallel between Jesus and Moses: a strong literary feature in the gospels. Thirdly, and of particular importance for a mystical or psycho-spiritual reading of the Beatitudes, is the notion of *ascent*. This denotes an incipient progression into a higher level of *consciousness* - and is in accord with the essence of the message of Jesus both here and throughout the gospel, namely an invitation to take a quantum leap - leaving old thought patterns behind to enter into the ‘kingdom/queendom’ of heaven. It is well known that in religious literature mountains are constantly used to indicate the ‘axis mundi’ - where heaven and earth join.

‘Blessed are ...’

Each of the Beatitudes is introduced by the phrase ‘blessed are.’ The problems associated with the expression concern the fact that such a translation does not do justice to the magnitude of the term. What exactly does ‘blessed’ or ‘happy’ (NAB) mean? Martin Buber states concerning the term ‘blessed’:

The psalmist cries: ‘O how fortunate the man ...’ This is not a wish or a promise ... this is a joyful cry and an enthusiastic declaration: how fortunate indeed is this man! In the cry, timeless by its nature, the division of now and later, of earthly and future life is virtually absorbed The psalmist obviously wishes to say, ‘Pay attention, for there is a secret good fortune, hidden by the hands of life itself, which counterbalances and outbalances all misfortune. You do not see it, but it is the true, indeed the only good fortune.’ (quoted in Lapidé 1986:31)

Four factors relating to the term ‘blessed’ are noteworthy at this stage. Firstly, the beatitudes are formulated in the indicative mode

of fact, rather than the imperative mode of the moral sermon; they are '...not a strategy or exhortation to blessedness but an indicative with the force of a promise. So sure is the reality of the kingdom which has been inaugurated by Jesus that his followers already have what the kingdom promises' (Lischer 1997:296). Secondly, Matthew's use of the word *makarios* points beyond purely human happiness to a divine realm of joy. Thirdly, the happiness that is effected in the poor, the mourning, the merciful is expressed by way of the '*passivum divinum*': it is God who is the author of their blessedness, their happiness: '...the blessings are divine because they come as a gift, and because they are made accessible to us through a relation in which we stand to the sustaining ground of life itself' (Vaught 1986:14). Fourthly, and of vital importance with respect to the mystical interpretation of the beatitudes, is the fact that this happiness or blessedness is a deep interior condition which is not dependent on exterior circumstances, but can even exist in the midst of discord: 'The fundamental task of human existence is to reach the place where ... when calamities come, we not only face them by girding ourselves up to do so, but also confront them in the light of our absolute assurance that we stand at the centre of God's perfect peace' (1986: 14-15).

An alternative reading of certain of the beatitudes from the text of Matthew, chapter 5, is now offered, utilising the *Peshitta* version of the gospel. This is a Syriac Aramaic manuscript, regarded by some eastern scholars as the most authoritative version of the gospels. *Peshitta* means 'simple', 'true', 'sincere', 'straight'. The *Peshitta* is seen, in certain sectors, particularly in the East, to be closer to the thought forms of Jesus than any Greek version. For the purpose of this article it has immense significance. Aramaic does not draw sharp lines between an inner quality and outer action; it also presents a fluid and holistic view of the cosmos. Furthermore, Aramaic organises and defines its words on a poetic root and pattern system, with the consequence that each word may have several layers of meaning (Douglas-Klotz 1990:3). This, the language of Jesus, is held in high esteem in the eastern church. What follows is the translation of Douglas-Klotz (1990) without commentary on the individual beatitudes. A cumulative commentary will follow on from this section.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3) (Tubwayhun l'meskenae b'ruk d'dilhounhie malkutha d'ashmaya)

*Happy and aligned with the One are those who find their home in the breathing;
to them belong the inner kingdom and queendom of heaven.
Blessed are those who are refined in breath;
they shall find their ruling principles and ideals guided by God's light.
Healed are those who devote themselves to the link of spirit;
the design of the universe is rendered through their form.*

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4) (Tubwayhun lawile d'hinnon netbayun)

*Blessed are those in emotional turmoil; they shall be united inside by love.
Healthy are those weak and over extended for their purpose;
they shall feel their inner flow of strength return
Tuned to the Source are those feeling deeply confused by life; they shall be returned from their wandering.*

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt 5:5) (Tubwayhun l'makikhe d'hinnon nertun arha).

*Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive physical vigor and strength from the universe.
Integrated, resisting corruption are those who have dissolved heavy morality within; they shall be open to receive the splendour of earth's fruits.*

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matt 5:7) (Tubwayhun lamrahmane dalayhun nehwn rahme)

*Aligned with the One are the compassionate; upon them shall be compassion
Tuned to the Source are those who shine from the deepest place in their bodies.
Upon them shall be the rays of universal love.
Blessedly ripe are those who radiate from a new self within;
they shall be shown a waking vision:
the womb of the One surrounding them with compassion.*

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt 5:8) (Tubwayhun layleyn dadkeyn b'lebhon d'hinnon nehzun l'alaha)

*Blessed are the consistent in heart; they shall contemplate the One.
Aligned with the One are those who lives radiate from a core of love;
they shall see God everywhere.*

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called sons of God (Matt 5:9) (Tubwayhun lahwvday shalma dawnaw (hie) d'alaha nitqarun).

*Healthy are those who strike the note that unites;
they shall be remembered as rays of the One Unity.
Aligned with the One are those who prepare the ground for all
tranquil gatherings;
they shall become fountains of Livingness.*

Kenotic Mysticism of the Beatitudes

The foregoing translation elucidates certain themes that suggest that the mysticism of the beatitudes is perhaps best described as *kenotic*. Kenosis effects happiness and blessedness. The 'blessed' ones, the happy ones, they are the poor in spirit, who do not put themselves forward; they wait in the silence of God for the time of appropriate action (Matt 5:3). Douglas-Klotz (1990:48-66) elucidates this mystical transformation as follows: The blessed are animated and linked to life by an inner energy - *rukḥ* - the spirit/breath/soul. Those who mourn (v 4) - *lawile* - are those who long deeply for something to occur and they are comforted, are sustained by inner continuity, returned from their wandering - *netbayun*. They are the gentle (v5) - *L'makikhe* - receiving the source of their strength from the depths within; the centre which radiates life, which generates power and releases repressed desires and anxieties. The merciful (v7) - *lamrahmane* - exhibit pity, love, compassion.; they are pure in heart (v9) - *dadkeyn b'lebhon* - showing consistent love, and exhibiting a 'fixed electrifying purpose.' *Nehzun* - 'contemplate' / 'see' - has connotations of insight like a flash of lightning; and *alaha* - 'God' / 'the One' - 'points to the force and passionate movement of the cosmos through the soul of every living thing . This cosmic force can be identified everywhere as 'here' / 'this' (1990:63). This interpretation is reminiscent of the 'Is' of Parmenides. The peacemakers (v9) - *Lahwvday* - are committed to peace, constantly labouring and bringing forth fruit despite the difficulties that may occur; planting peace - *shlama* - becoming channels for peace, for wholeness, integrity. They are

those who inherit the kingdom of heaven (v 3) - *malkutha* - not in the sense of a remote, metaphysical reality, but rather the 'queendom/kingdom' that extends throughout the universe, from the personal through to the cosmic. It is a ruling principle that guides our lives towards unity. This 'realm of the heavens' is the absolute and manifest dominion of God (Lapide 1986:28). From a mystical perspective, this queendom/kingdom is not only an eschatological actuality, but is already anticipated in a mysterious yet real way here and now. In traditional Christian terminology, the beatific vision, which constitutes the quintessence of eternal beatitude is anticipated by grace. Therefore it is the same situation, but a different modality, that exists both before and after death. This divine milieu is the most real, the most endurable of existences and permeates earthly existence. As a poet and teacher of native mysticism Douglas-Klotz (1990:7;1995) offers a mystical translation of the beatitudes that does not aim to '...mystify, but to return us to a better relationship with the cosmos, which is the heritage of all native traditions'.

A mystical and kenotic reading of the beatitudes elucidates the fact that the 'happy ones' are totally and utterly dependent on God - they have nothing of their own. A deep humility enables them to see that everything is a gift, and therefore pride has no place in them. As a result they are anxiety-free, since anxiety is a reflection of the ego's fear and self-reliance. The death of the subjectively experienced and anxiety-generated 'self' effects a greater Self. There is so to speak, a shifting of mental gears in which the truth of the indwelling Christ is realised as a source of power, peace and joy (cf Gal 2:20). This results in a release of new energies. The senses are developed and refined and are freed from the conflicting welter of ego-attitudes. In Eckhartian terminology, we enter the '...barren Godhead' or the 'desert of the Godhead' which is the *void* in which there is absence of movement, where silence and darkness pervade. The void is only entered when we depart from the crowds - the agents of the soul and their activities: memory, understanding and will in all their diverse manifestations. This effects a state in which the mind and heart are emptied of thoughts, images, fears, worries, plans, etc. Such an inner purification results in the transformation of our entire person, and insight into our essence. This powerful transformative

insight and the consequent living from the deep centre of 'no-self' leads to a life characterized by virtue, freedom and compassion.

A similar description is found in the Buddhist *Sutta-Nippata* where the *muni* (wise one) is not caught by the desire of binding a net of 'reality' but stands within the immanence of divine flux. His volition has come to an end - the *muni* practices perfect humility, he performs 'due nothingness'; he acts by not acting at all, not even knowing his non-action, because there is not a self any more. Thus he finds peace in the dhamma (Weber & Vahlkampff 1993:128). The *muni* embodies spiritual tranquillity and inwardness. Humility is the key-concept of *muni*-hood. The wise one is freed from mental existence. As in the beatitudes, there is a call to be unwise, small, without reputation in the world, without haughtiness, but warm-hearted, and longing for divine wisdom. The *muni* practises perfect nothingness and mystical unknowing. Knowing that erudition and sophistication can lead to arrogance, selfishness and illusion, both the *happy one* and the *muni* live in the world without belonging to it, in gentleness and quietude. As spiritually poor, the whole wealth of divinity is theirs. They have no doubts, or falsehood, but have cut the fetters binding them to humanity's ego-centric existence. These 'fortunate ones' can be recognised by simplicity and silence.

Kenosis leads to *silence* - since language surrenders in the presence of the Unknowable. There is a sense in which language itself is freed and becomes silence. Silence and solitude are essential in order to effect unification and integration in the depths of the person. The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu proclaimed the greatest revelation to be stillness. Silence effects stabilization of consciousness and elimination of discursive thought - this is aptly described in the Buddhist Mahayana text, the *Diamond Sutra*, when it urges: 'Develop a mind which clings to nought' (Goldstein 1987:68). Such absence of all multiplicity and freedom from specificity is epitomised in the idea of *sunyata* the pure void disclosed in the mystical consciousness. This is described in the sutra, *The Awakening of Faith*: 'Mind-essence does not belong to any individualized conception of phenomena or non-phenomena It has no particularizing consciousness, it does not belong to any kind of describable nature In its aspect of Enlightenment, Mind-essence is free from all manner of individuation and

discriminative thinking' (quoted in Stace 1960:108). In this 'absolute emptiness' or 'nothingness' there is no time, space, or becoming. The idea of *sunyata* as 'emptiness' or 'nothingness' may give the impression of nihilism; however, this is far from the case. A more correct translation would be 'unbounded openness' - which refers to an opening of the mind which sheds dualistic thinking. *Sunyata* is boundless, limitless and formless and cannot be grasped by the conceptual intellect, nor is it observable as object - it can only be understood through 'existential and non-objective awakening' (Abe 1997:141). Such awakening effects a total 'letting go' - in Eckhartian terms, *Abgeschiedenheit*, namely dispossession from all exteriority and all distinctions. Such Eckhartian thought finds resonance in the poet Johannes Scheffler (1624-1677), who is usually better known as Angelus Silesius. This can be seen in his poetry, expressed in the following:

*The rose is without why
it blossoms
because it blossoms
To itself it pays no heed
asks not if it is seen.* (quoted in Ueda 1989: 4)

For Eckhart, God is 'without why'; likewise when women and men 'break through' to the Godhead, they too are 'without why', living because they live. 'God as life itself, "without why", flows into the non-attached nothingness of man (sic!) and brings him to live life "without asking why"' (Ueda 1989:7). Such existence effects supreme freedom. Mystical reading, therefore, helps effect a formless state of consciousness, a sea of silence, from which eventually flow increased energy and creativity, which will in turn benefit the world. Therefore, the inner realm is one in which external confusion and distraction give way to a silence which is a force for psychological integration and personal wholeness. In this state the patterns of oppositional consciousness present in desire, fear, prejudice, etc., are discarded. Although it may seem to be a passive quality of existence, it is the fountain-head of a fundamental dynamism which is the only true driving force for apostolic endeavour.

The Christianity of the Sermon on the Mount expresses a mystical richness - 'fresh from the mint' - unfettered by dogmatic baggage.

Jesus as mystic and mystagogue par excellence turns attitudes around. Happiness is not as the world sees it, rather it belongs to the poor, the lowly, the despised, the humiliated, the 'emptied ones'. Those who believe the message of Jesus in the beatitudes are energized, galvanized, enabled to witness to the saving action of the Divine in their own lives. Jesus comes as an archetypal wisdom teacher revealing true happiness - his message is a transformative tool by which his hearers can be radically changed (Blount 1997:276). The basic message of the beatitudes is nonsense for those deluded by the ego, but once the Light has shone, all that once seemed desirable falls away - power, possessions, wealth, etc. Meekness, mourning, mercy, purity of heart, peace-making - these are all signs that 'the cord of desire is snapping and the light is dawning ...'(Williams 1978:50). The beatitudes do not speak in terms of common sense, rather they elucidate the basic teaching of 'non-ego'. The 'ordinary mind' has to go; ordinary thoughts have to be vanquished. In this way the landscape normally hidden in the depths of the psyche can surface.

Such a mystical transformation of consciousness leads to *non-egocentricity*. This does not mean the total destruction or annihilation of the ego, but rather its transformation. Washburn (1995:5-8), in his treatment of the unification of the psychological and spiritual perspectives in transpersonal psychology, divides human development into three main stages: *pre-egoic*; *egoic*; and *transegoic*. The pre-egoic stage is that of early childhood; the egoic encompasses late childhood, adolescence and early adulthood; and the transegoic usually begins at mid-life or later. These stages are not hard and fast. In fact, the transegoic stage may begin much earlier in life, or it may never come to fruition, since the consolidation and perpetuation of ego-identity may unfortunately encompass the totality of life. The transegoic stage is characterised by integration, and is often preceded by an existential questioning of accepted values which leads to spiritual awakening. This in turn leads to spiritual transformation and transegoic integration. The transegoic psyche manifests the following characteristics: transcendence of dualisms; empowerment of ego by the Ground; spiritual presence; awakened imaginal, intuitive and contemplative capabilities; rediscovered openness and

spontaneity, and an outreaching closeness to and love of others (Washburn 1995:7).

Conclusion

In conclusion, a mystical interpretation of scripture allows the reader to be 'described' or 'narrated' by the words of the text, instead of merely approaching them as an objective outsider. Scripture has a psycho-spiritual effect which resonates at the deepest levels of our being, resulting in transformation and enlightenment. Mystical reading witnesses to the 'semantic potential' of scripture. The 'existential' significance of the text takes precedence over grammatical and historical concerns. Therefore, the emphasis is on the illuminatory function of scripture rather than its philological or scientific status. As such, scripture can be a vector which leads us to ever higher levels of consciousness and energy, liberating the human spirit to reach its potential for human integration which is in turn our divinisation. The myths of scripture are a map leading us to the treasure of our deepest psychological potential. Operating on a level that transcends the rational, the mystical realisation enables an outer engagement with reality, whilst at the same time, resting in the inner centre of peace. As a result, life becomes centred, and we learn to live in the eternal present, grounded in holy space. This is beautifully rendered in the Aramaic alternate reading of 'Hallowed be thy name' (Matthew 6:9):

*Clear holy space around your Name:
let it be the center on which our life turns.
Focus your light within us – make it useful:
as the rays of a beacon show the way.* (Douglas-Klotz 1990:55)

References

- Abe, M 1997. *Zen and Comparative Studies*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Assagioli, R 1993. *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. London: Aquarian/Thorsons.
- Assagioli, R 1994. *The Act of Will: A Guide to Self-actualisation through Psychosynthesis*. London: Aquarian/Thorsons.

- Blount, B 1997. Righteousness from the inside: the transformative spirituality of the sermon on the mount, in Fowl, SE (ed), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bowe, B 2003. *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality. Touching a Finger to the Flame*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Coupe, L 1997. *Myth*. London: Routledge.
- Douglas-Klotz N 1990. *Prayers of the Cosmos. Meditations on the Aramaic words of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Douglas-Klotz, N 1995. *Desert Wisdom. The Middle Eastern tradition - from the Goddess to the Sufis*. London: Thorsons.
- Goldstein, J 1987. Paths of Awareness (Theravada), in Walker, S (ed), *Speaking of Silence*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Griffiths, B 1982. *The Marriage of East and West*. London: Collins.
- Jantzen G 1995. *Power, Gender and Christian mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kourie CET 1995. *New Testament Scholarship on the threshold of the Third millennium*. Religion and Theology 2 (2) 171-178.
- Lapide, P 1986. *The Sermon on the Mount*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Lischer, R 1997. The Sermon on the Mount as radical pastoral care, in Fowl S E (ed), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Mostert, JP 1986. How are we doing without myths? *Religion in Southern Africa* 7 2 39-49.
- McGinn, B 2008. Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal. *Spiritus* 8 (1) 44-63.
- Pannikar, R 1979. *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Perrin, D 2005. Mysticism, in Holder, A (ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Prabhu, J 1996. *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Pannikar*. New York: Orbis books.
- Smart, N 1997. *Dimensions of the Sacred*. London: Fontana Press.
- Stace, W 1960. *The Teaching of the Mystics*. New York: New American Library.
- Stevenson, D 1972. Communicating Biblical Myths and Legends. *Religious Life* 41 (4) 536-542.
- Ueda, S 1989. The Zen Buddhist experience of the truly beautiful. *Eastern Buddhist* 22 1-36.
- Vaught, C 1986. *The Sermon on the Mount*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Waaïjman, K 2002. *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Washburn, M 1995. *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*. New York: State University of New York Press
- Weber J & Vahlkampff J 1993. *The Depth of humility. Commentaries on the Gnostic and Buddhist concept of humility*. Delhi: Eastern Book Corporation.
- Wilber, K 1999. *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber. Vol One: The Spectrum of Consciousness, No Boundary, Selected Essays*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Williams, J 1978. *Yeshua Buddha. An Interpretation of New Testament theology as a meaningful myth*. London: The Theosophical Publishing House.