

body and sexuality and to present them as representative of the whole of Christianity during that period. . . . But this is something that needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed.” By retrieving the full dimensions of a Catholic theology of the body, K masterfully upends these unsubstantiated claims. Thomas Aquinas, in fact, held that “it is also possible to sin by having less play in one’s life than is reasonable” (110).

K. aptly provides the corrective: “If one starts with *what people were doing* . . . , a different picture emerges” (67, emphasis original). One may not denigrate the human body if one complies with the actual lived tradition.

After laying out a solid Catholic anthropology of the body, K. explores some of the successes and challenges of contemporary sport. He relates how Catholic women’s colleges pioneered in the development of women’s intercollegiate athletics. The story of young women at Immaculata College in Philadelphia is heartwarming and telling. Supported by the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters, the college racked up repeated national championships, and their coach was widely credited with revolutionizing women’s sports and breaking early barriers (134).

The devotion and faith of the storied Vince Lombardi, who got his start at Fordham University, and went on to coach several championship professional football teams at Green Bay, is another powerful model of integration of the Catholic faith, spirituality, play, and sport that K. advocates.

K. also suggests that professional sports has become so driven by the Calvinist work ethic that it has lost its playfulness and endangered its soul, and it certainly damages young bodies. He lays out positive avenues for its reform.

K.’s text provides an attractive resource for courses in Catholic tradition and Catholic spirituality. It should have wide readership among all people of faith who are concerned about what drives and motivates young people today—both on and off the field of play.

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THE VARIETIES OF VERNACULAR MYSTICISM 1350–1550. By Bernard McGinn. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* 5. New York: Crossroad, 2012. Pp. xiv + 721. \$70.

I have now had the honor, pleasure, and difficult task of reviewing four volumes of the most commanding, synoptic, single-authored, history of the Western mystical tradition in any language. McGinn’s masterful fifth volume of a projected seven-volume work focuses on the writings in the Golden Age of Dutch, Italian, and English mysticism. In contrast to earlier times when the major mystics were often also prominent ecclesiastical figures, those of “the long 15th century” were mostly marginal figures: hermits,

poets, anchoresses, and little known male and female religious—underscoring both the relatively minor impact of mysticism on the institutional church in that century and the growing division between deep spirituality and academic theology.

This period of what McG. calls the “new mysticism” witnessed an explosive panoply of intersecting traditions, influences, and experiments caused by the dialogue between Latin and the vernacular, the “conversation” between men and women, and a new attitude toward cloister and the world. This new mysticism found expression in texts that frequently contain candid accounts of deep mystical friendships between a God-enlightened female and her clerical director, of “embodied” (a merging of corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual visions) descriptions of both visionary and non-visionary experiences, of prolonged and sometimes violent ecstasies, and of excessive ascetical practices, of a passionate—and often highly erotic—love of God and Christ. Dizzying new forms of both kataphatic and apophatic language speak about the madness of love, mystical dereliction, annihilation, and the mutual yearning of both the soul and God in a union of often-indistinct identity. The sheer volume of manuscripts and printed books from this period underscores the wealth of vernacular mystical theologies that were not simply translations of traditional Latin texts but were in turn sometimes translated into Latin to reach a wider audience. Let me present what I find particularly striking.

Jan van Ruusbroec’s trinitarian mysticism centers on the systole of the three Persons contracting as the one God, whose diastole, in turn, flows out as the three Persons. The human person’s spirit contracts into super-essential, undifferentiated union with God to enjoy his or her eidetic precreational existence in God but also expands to experience differentiated union with the triune God. The true contemplative’s “common life” must mirror both the enjoying and the active-giving dynamic of the inner trinitarian life. Salient is Ruusbroec’s claim that the false rest of the pseudo-mystics is not sinful in itself but becomes demonic if enjoyed only for the self without yearning for God and virtuous living. The sections on the ambivalence of Jan van Leeuwen and Godeverd von Wevele about Eckhart and the Groenendaal defense of Ruusbroec against the formidable Jean Gerson are especially noteworthy.

McG. sees the *devotio moderna* and its most famous text, *The Imitation of Christ*, as concerned mainly with apostolic renewal—but not with directly fostering mystical contact with God. Intriguing is Gerlach Peters’s emphasis on seeing and being seen by God through a self-naughting adherence to Christ’s divinity and humanity. McG. describes Alijt Bake’s radical Passion-and-Christ mysticism as second only to that of Francis of Assisi. Striking is her benign “null state” of lack of solace that followed horrific periods of mystical dereliction and her desire actually to become Christ in

his humanity and divinity. Maria van Hout's teaching on physical exercises in conjunction with those of meditation is worth emphasizing. In my view, the Arnheim mystical sermons, which urge full identification with the risen Christ by also bearing his five glorious wounds, are unique in the Christian mystical tradition. McG. describes Dante as a theological poet and a poet theologian-mystic ("Dante mysticus" 179), who claimed to have had a face-to-face vision of God, and whose masterpiece is a deconstruction of ordinary language to communicate to his readers the love that moves the sun and the other stars. The renaissance figures, Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, are described as philosopher-mystics who were convinced that the wisdom of the *prisca theologia* and Jewish Kabbalah found its fulfillment in Jesus. For Ficino and Pico, philosophy seeks the truth, theology finds it, but only religion possesses it. A captivating figure, in my view, is Gheraert Appelmans who held that the annihilation of the Spirit's "something" into the Father's Nothingness is true adoration. McG.'s section on the mystagogical *Evangelical Pearl* is exceptional—even for him. This work focuses on the need to go back into the nothing in which we were before we were created, by means of a liturgically empowered inward gaze at Christ's divinity and an outward gaze at his humanity.

McG. presents Birgitta of Sweden—who spent much time in Italy—not only as a channel of heavenly calls for church reform during a time of crisis, but also as a prophetess-mystic because of her special intimacy with God and the painstaking detail she gave to Christ's passion. For McG., Catherine of Siena is an apostle of the "Word's embloodiment," for whom blood is love made concrete. Her "holy anorexia" and "abject eating" are of historical interest.

Distinctive of this period in Italy was the belief that holy women grace and protect cities. Caterina Vigri fascinates me, a Jesuit, because of her view that radical obedience as annihilation—tempered, however, with discretion—is the means of attaining the divine presence. Significant in her mysticism is the role of music and singing, an undeservedly neglected area of mystical studies. Camilla Battista da Varano's spiritual autobiography was written to give vent to her "most unhappy happiness" and her desire that every day be Good Friday. Catherine of Genoa stands out as "the Apostle of Pure Love" (327) who described mystical purgation as an earthly purgatory and hell as the soul trapped in the tortures of a self unwilling to submit to God's transforming love.

McG. views Richard Rolle as a highly sensate, somatic, affective mystic who is almost excessive in writing about his own experiences and his claim to mystical authority. McG. contends that what Rolle writes is song and melody that invites the reader to experience the psychosomatic effects of heavenly warmth, sweetness, and song. Rolle, however, does not distinguish the spiritual from the bodily senses but appeals to a single sensorium

as the integral source of mystical sensation. I appreciate McG.'s judgment that Rolle is an important model of mystical contact with God, and not the superficial, extreme, failed mystic, as asserted by some scholars.

McG. depicts Walter Hilton as the paradigm of traditional Western Augustinian mysticism, especially in its ability to adapt to a changed world in which an educated laity was becoming a major audience for mystical literature. More widely read for centuries than either Julian of Norwich or the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Hilton understood the mystical journey as the process by which the individual comes to experience what the church teaches publicly and contemplation as nothing other than the sight of Jesus, our true peace.

McG. judges the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* to be the most subtle, incisive, and original mystical theologian in the English language and his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's entire *Mystical Theology* as unprecedented. McG. views the author's double apophaticism, focused on God's naked being and the naked self, as solidly rooted in Scripture, the church, and Christ—a welcome correction of those commentators who reduce the author's works to a way to achieve Buddhist emptiness. I agree with McG. that the *Cloud's* graced naked intent produces presence—neither absence nor vacuum—in an obscure supercognitive loving knowledge that negates all ordinary human feelings, knowing, and loving. His advice on pseudomysticism is significant.

In McG.'s view, Julian of Norwich's *Showings* may well be the most popular mystical text in history. He maintains that she is neither a monastic nor a Scholastic theologian, but a distinctive vernacular mystical theologian whose opus provides a universal, synthetic, integrated, and holistic point of view that invites readers to help their fellow Christians learn to love God more deeply.

McG. depicts Margery Kempe, author of the first English autobiographical work, as a living picture of love in action and proof that a married woman cannot be excluded from the ranks of supreme lovers. For this woman, to weep is to pray. Impressive is her almost total recall many years afterward of conversations with God.

Interestingly, McG. maintains that the Reformation did not introduce a definite break in the history of mysticism. Thus, his proposed volume 6 in the History of Western Mysticism series will focus on the mysticism in divided Christianity, which comprises both a "monastic layer" and the new vernacular mysticisms of both Spain and France. Volume 7 will center on crises and renewal in mysticism (especially the Quietist controversy, the Enlightenment, papal condemnations, and 20th-century renewal). His volumes will be the standard for a long time to come.