

# ST. THERESA OF AVILA

## *A Mystical Vision*

I spent some days, though only a few, with that vision continually in my mind, and it did me so much good that I remained in prayer unceasingly and contrived that everything I did should be such as not to displease Him Who, as I clearly perceived, was a witness of it. And, although I was given so much advice that I sometimes became afraid, my fear was short-lived, for the Lord reassured me. One day, when I was at prayer, the Lord was pleased to

reveal to me nothing but His hands, the beauty of which was so great as to be indescribable. This made me very fearful, as does every new experience that I have when the Lord is beginning to grant me some supernatural favour. A few days later I also saw that Divine face, which seemed to leave me completely absorbed. I could not understand why the Lord revealed Himself gradually like this since He was later to grant me the favour of seeing Him wholly, until at length I realized that His Majesty was leading me according to my natural weakness. May He be blessed for ever, for so much glory all at once would have been more than so base and wicked a person could bear: knowing this, the compassionate Lord prepared me for it by degrees.

Your Reverence may suppose that it would have needed no great effort to behold those hands and that beautiful face. But there is such beauty about glorified bodies that the glory which illumines them throws all who look upon such supernatural loveliness into confusion. I was so much afraid, then, that I was plunged into turmoil and confusion, though later I began to feel such certainty and security that my fear was soon lost.

One year, on Saint Paul's Day, when I was at Mass, I saw a complete representation of this most sacred Humanity, just as in a picture of His resurrection body, in very great beauty and majesty; this I described in detail to Your Reverence in writing, at your very insistent request. It distressed me terribly to have to do so, for it is impossible to write such a description without a disruption of one's very being, but I did the best I could and so there is no reason for me to repeat the attempt here. I will only say that, if there were nothing else in Heaven to delight the eyes but the extreme beauty of the glorified bodies there, that alone would be the greatest bliss. A most especial bliss, then, will it be to us when we see the Humanity of Jesus Christ; for, if it is so even on earth, where His Majesty reveals Himself according to what our wretchedness can bear, what will it be where the fruition of that joy is complete? Although this vision is imaginary, I never saw it, or any other vision, with the eyes of the body, but only with the eyes of the soul.

Chapter 28, "A Vision of God." From *The Life of the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus*, in *The Complete Works of St. Theresa*, trans. and ed. by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., published in three volumes by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York. Reprinted by permission of Sheed & Ward, Inc., and Sheed & Ward

Those who know better than I say that the type of vision already described<sup>1</sup> is nearer perfection than this, while this in its turn is much more so than those which are seen with the eyes of the body. The last-named type, they say, is the lowest and the most open to delusions from the devil. At that time I was not aware of this, and wished that, as this favour was being granted me, it could have been of such a kind as was visible to the eyes of the body, and then my confessor would not tell me I was imagining it. And no sooner had the vision faded—the very moment, indeed, after it had gone—than I began to think the same thing myself—that I had imagined it—and was worried at having spoken about it to my confessor and wondered if I had been deceiving him. Here was another cause for distress, so I went to him and consulted him about it. He asked me if I had told him what the vision really looked like to

me or if I had meant to deceive him. I said I had told him the truth, for I felt sure I had not been lying or had had any such intention; I would not think one thing and say another for the whole world. This he well knew, and so he managed to calm me. It worried me so much to have to go to him about these things that I cannot imagine how the devil could ever have suggested to me that I must be inventing them and thus be torturing myself. But the Lord made such haste to grant me this favour and to make its reality plain that my doubt about its being fancy left me immediately and since then it has become quite clear to me how silly I was. For, if I were to spend years and years imagining how to invent anything so beautiful, I could not do it, and I do not even know how I should try, for, even in its whiteness and radiance alone, it exceeds all that we can imagine.

It is not a radiance which dazzles, but a soft whiteness and an infused radiance which, without wearying the eyes, causes them the greatest delight; nor are they wearied by the brightness which they see in seeing this Divine beauty. So different from any earthly light is the brightness and light now revealed to the eyes that, by comparison with it, the brightness of our sun seems quite dim and we should never want to open our eyes again for the purpose of seeing it. It is as if we were to look at a very clear stream, in a bed of crystal, reflecting the sun's rays, and then to see a very muddy stream, in an earthy bed and overshadowed by clouds. Not that the sun, or any other such light, enters into the vision: on the contrary, it is like a natural light and all other kinds of light seem artificial. It is a light which never gives place to night, and, being always light, is disturbed by nothing. It is of such a kind, indeed, that no one, however powerful his intellect, could, in the whole course of his life, imagine it as it is. And so quickly does God reveal it to us that, even if we needed to open our eyes in order to see it, there would not be time for us to do so. But it is all the same whether they are open or closed: if the Lord is pleased for us to see it, we shall do so even against our will. There is nothing powerful enough to divert our attention from it, and we can neither resist it nor attain to it by any diligence or care of our own. This I have conclusively proved by experience, as I shall relate.

# MAN'S ETERNAL QUEST

P. YOGANANDA 1982

## The Wine of Spiritual Ecstasy Is Incomparable

Once you have tasted the wine of spiritual ecstasy, you will find that no other experience can compare with it. Ever strive to establish the divine consciousness in your children by teaching them to meditate, that they be not tempted to play with the fire of delusive counterfeit joys. Sacred bliss is never-ending, but the pleasures that come from alcohol and drugs are short-lasting and ultimately bring misery.

Every night in sleep you have a taste of peace and joy. While you are in deep slumber, God makes you live in the tranquil superconsciousness, in which all the fears and worries of this existence are forgotten. By meditation you can experience that holy state of mind when you are awake, and be constantly immersed in healing peace.

When the divine joy comes, immediately my breath is still and I am lifted into the Spirit. I feel the bliss of a thousand sleeps rolled into one, and yet I don't lose my ordinary awareness. This is universally the experience of those who go deep in the superconscious state. When the profound ecstasy of God falls over you, the body becomes absolutely still, the breath ceases to flow, and the thoughts are quiet—banished, every one, by the magic command of the soul. Then you drink of God's bliss and experience an intoxication of joy that not a thousand draughts of wine could give you.

As the ordinary person drowns on the borderline of sleep, he feels a little happiness, but he quickly loses that awareness and is fast asleep. Sleep is not total unconsciousness, for when you awaken, you always know whether you slept well or not.

There are various kinds of sleep—some light and some deep. But more intoxicating than even the most blissful slumber are those spiritual experiences one may have consciously with God. Beyond the mysteries of the sleep-land lie all these divine joys. I can remain in any state I wish to. Often I stay between the sleep-land and the awareness of the world—in the superconscious state.

# The Religious Experience

SMART, 1984

Another way of understanding why magic and religion shade into one another in primal religion is that *mana* itself, as an unseen force, carries implications that closely relate to the intuition of the holy. Rudolf Otto, the German historian and philosopher of religion, in his *Idea Of The Holy* (published in 1917 in Germany), pointed to the importance in religion of what we called the "numinous" experience—the feeling of awe, dread, mystery, and fascination men experience when confronted with what is holy, uncanny, or supernatural. Otto considered the numinous, a word he derived from the Latin *numen* meaning "spirit"—the *numina* dwelt in sacred groves and other places with a sacred significance—to be the fundamental element in religious experience. The numinous experience he describes in various aspects; it may

at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant. . . . It may burst into sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements. . . . It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents, and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.<sup>2</sup>

The numinous is, then, an experience of unseen presences that can range from the uncanny to the sublime and holy. The unseen forces surrounding primal people can be personal or impersonal. Some scholars have tried to make an impersonal dynamism the basis of primal religion—dynamism is the belief in impersonal, supernatural power that can exist in anything. Others have considered animism to be central—animism is belief in particular, more personalized, spirits that inhere in natural objects, such as trees or hearth fires. However one need not insist upon either one view to the exclusion of the other. *Mana* may operate in a fluid, dynamic way, or it may be a personal property of human or supernatural beings. Indeed, just as religious feeling normally involves a spectrum from magical fears and hopes to lofty adoration and self-surrender, so the primal world-picture includes a whole range of forces, from impersonal dynamic energies to the gods, and sometimes to a supreme God.