

# Is Christian Mysticism Truly Mystical..?

by Shaun Prario



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I'd like to take a look at the excerpt below as so many Christian Mystics write on contemplative prayer in this similar manner of one attempting to personally experience the pain and suffering Jesus went through during the Passion of the Christ. — *S.P.*

**Excerpt from:** *Reading Scripture Through a Mystical Lens* by author Celia Kourie.

Chapter 3.4 *Conformity to Christ* (PG. 145-46)



Mysticism & Contemplation Prayer = Suffering alike the Christ — *S.P.*

*"Thus the "breakthrough" of the divine and archetypal life into history facilitates living life at a higher level than merely of the senses. Interiorisation forms a major principle by which Elisabeth interprets the historical events of Christianity and transmutes their meaning into a meta-historical realm. This is what could be called a mysticism of the "historical event", by means of which such mimetic or contemporizing re-enactment transforms the historical founding events of Christianity into deep mystical experience. Cousins (1983:166) describes this as follows,*

*In this type of consciousness, one recalls a significant event in the past, enters into its drama and draws from it a spiritual energy, eventually moving beyond the event towards union with God.*

*For Elisabeth, the powerful Pauline expression "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" determined her life as a Christian and as a Carmelite; this formula is a synthesis of her entire doctrine, and transformation in Christ forms the bedrock of Elisabeth's scriptural*

*mysticism. This is effected in everyday living: a quotidian mysticism. It does not presuppose extraordinary states of consciousness, although there may well be “mystical touches” at times, when the window of eternity is opened, and the fresh breeze of the Spirit allows a glimpse into Reality. However, as Dunn (1977:195) speaking of Christmysticism states, ...*

*union with Christ for Paul is not characterised by lofty peaks of spiritual excitement and ecstasy, experiences of visions, revelations ... or high inspiration but more typically by self-giving love, by the cross - union with Christ is nothing if it is not union with Christ in his death.*

27 *The burden of the argument to date centres on the fact that Christ is not merely paradigmatic for Elisabeth, but also the one who effects transformation. As mentioned above, both these facets of her Christological mysticism are evident in Elisabeth’s understanding of suffering. True to the spirit of Carmel, Elisabeth saw suffering as the patrimony of her order, the salvific efficacy of which was seen to radiate beyond the confines of the cloister to help effect the redemption of mankind. Allusions to suffering are not merely fragmentary or incidental in the writings of Elisabeth but pervade her mystical doctrine. The concept of radical renunciation is a strong leitmotif, based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus which forms a dominant conceptual dynamic for her own incredible suffering. With the progressive deterioration of her health, Elisabeth’s identification with the suffering Christ intensified. Owing to her scriptural understanding of the meaning of the cross, she bore her excruciating pain with deep patience and love. The secret of her strength is to be found in the fact that, in line with many mystics of her time and ours, Elisabeth realized that the road of the cross is at the same time the way of beatitude. However, bearing her pain with fortitude does not mean that Elisabeth was lulled into a kind of platonic detachment; Christian faith does not sweep its adherents up and out of the struggle and misery of life into some non-involved spiritual or intellectual relationship with God.*

*In stark contrast, the gospel shows God as sweeping out of eternity in order to be totally and passionately involved in the brokenness of life (Thomsen 1988:252). Following Paul, Elisabeth is aware that human weakness is not an obstacle, on the contrary, it provides the ambience for divine activity.”*

**My Response** (Next Page)...

This small amount of thought above displayed by author Celia Kourie certainly doesn't cover a complete Christian Mystical lifestyle. Nonetheless, this idea of suffering like Christ appears quite often in the works of the medieval Christian mystics and modern writings as well. As seen above a wrote, "*Mysticism & Contemplation Prayer = Suffering alike the Christ*". Whether one compares their non-related suffering in life or sits quietly in contemplative prayer going through the passion in the minds and words of prayer as an attempt to appease Jesus and feel His sufferings – this sometimes get overdone in my mind and reminds me of Buddhism; as the Buddha taught much suffering on earth in the physical body will bring enlightenment in the spiritual realm. Thus, I must disagree on this logic. Yes, the Early Christian martyrs such as Ignatius of Antioch or eve Polycarp, etc., desired suffering in the arena to compare that level of suffering to that of the Passion of Christ. Furthermore, we can imagine how horrendous of sufferings and torture Jesus went through as He valiantly carried His cross to Cavalry and likewise was nail to it in brutal fashion. On the contrary, I don't believe we should consider other sufferings in life to appease Jesus or at least not purposely sabotage our life, wherefore these sufferings occur on a grander scale!

A good number of Christian mysticism writing to me is far from a spiritual/mystical way of life and with an empty arsenal of informative ideas, this Buddhist style of suffering reappear time and time again, and I simply desire to warn others approaching this path to keep a clear mind focused on reaching union with God in other ways combined with our merciful thoughts towards the torture Jesus suffered at the hands of the Jews and their Roman authorities as He fulfilled the scriptures for the sins of the world. Amen. Glory be to our Heavenly Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

 **Shaun Prario**

