



Mixology and Theology

Michael Coffey

Week Ten: Smokey Old Fashioned and Mysticism

Mixology: Smokey Old Fashioned

We previously learned the history of the Old Fashioned cocktail: The Old Fashioned cocktail originated in the 1880's. It was based on earlier cocktails made with spirits, bitters, and sugar. As it came back into fashion and was updated with whiskey, it was known as an Old Fashioned cocktail.

The use of smoke for flavoring cocktails began around 2007 in New York City with the invention of the Waylon, a mixture of smoked Coca-Cola and bourbon.

Smokey Old Fashioned

2 oz	bourbon	1 tsp	simple syrup
2 dashes	Angostura bitters	1/2 tsp	Luxardo cherry syrup (optional)

Luxardo cherry and orange peel to garnish

Wood chips for smoking (whatever you would use for grilling smoke)

Place a small pile of wood chips in a cast iron skillet or other heat-proof container. Light the chips with a kitchen torch or lighter until they are burning and smoking. Cover with an old fashioned glass. Let sit.

Mix the bourbon, simple syrup, cherry syrup, and bitters in a tall glass with ice. Stir for 30 seconds.

Turn over the old fashioned glass. Add one large ice cube or a few smaller ones. Strain drink into

Smokey Old Fashioned Mocktail

6 oz	Coca-Cola	1 tsp	Luxardo cherry syrup
4 dashes	Angostura bitters		Luxardo cherry and orange peel to garnish

Wood chips for smoking (whatever you would use for grilling smoke)

Place a small pile of wood chips in a cast iron skillet or other heat-proof container. Light the chips with a kitchen torch or lighter until they are burning and smoking. Cover with an old fashioned glass. Let sit.

After the glass has sat a few minutes with smoke in it, add ice to the glass and then add the Coca-Cola, cherry syrup, and bitters to it. Stir. Garnish.

Theology: Mysticism

Introduction

Mysticism is the theology and spiritual practices that emphasize direct experience of the divine. It emphasizes the goal of unity or union with God. It is not unique to Christianity, but has a unique Christian expression. In Judaism, mysticism has taken several forms over centuries. The best known of these today is Kabbalah, which includes mystical practices and highly symbolic use of texts to reveal God's mysterious presence. Islam also has numerous mystical traditions including Sufism, a set of beliefs and practices focusing on inward purification that leads to direct experience of God. Hinduism also has a mystical tradition.

Mysticism often emphasizes prayer and contemplation as higher or alternative forms of experiencing God, beyond intellectual forms of knowing God. It is the emphasis on direct experience, rather than knowledge about God or believing in doctrines or theological statements, that distinguishes mystical traditions from other Christian theology and tradition.

The different strains of Christian mysticism can roughly be divided into Neoplatonic understandings of God, and more Christ-centered experiences of God.

Spiritual Practices

Since the early centuries of the church, mystical teachers have spoken of a three-fold path:

- **Purification:** Emphasis on prayer, physical positioning of the body in prayer, and physical disciplines, like fasting. The goal is mastering of the body's desires and the accompanying awareness of how the mind drives us, and our own limitations.
- **Illumination:** The Spirit reveals truths to the mind, including what we know from Scripture and tradition, but also what is not known through external things. The goal is seeing God in all things.
- **Unification:** Experience of the self united with God. Some would see this as a true mystical experience.

Central to mysticism is the idea of prayer as contemplation, which is the practice of emptying the mind and one's whole self to listen and know God in the now, and the loss of the self. Thoughts are put away one by one until a person is truly present to the moment.

Some mystics throughout history speak of their visions, their ecstatic experiences, and their physical transformations, such as stigmata.

History

Christian mysticism emerges early on and is influenced by earlier forms of Jewish mysticism, by some parts of the New Testament, and by the development of Neo-Platonism in the work of the third-century philosopher Plotinus, who emphasized the unity of all things in one divine being.

In the New Testament, the Gospel of John has particular resonance with mystical thought, with its emphasis on encountering God directly in the incarnate Word in Jesus, and Jesus' statements about being one with God in him. The New Testament also speaks frequently of life in the Spirit as a unique experience

of God. Paul's encounter with the risen Christ, who confronts him as a persecutor of the church years after the resurrection, is a unique mystical story.

In the early church the desert fathers and desert mothers form some of the earliest traditions of prayer and mystical experience. They emphasized monasticism and felt a vocation to a life of prayer.

In the early church, mysticism was called "theoria" which is the Greek word for contemplation. Important early church theologians like Origen (184-253) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) explored what *theoria* means for Christian faith. Origen emphasized knowing God through creation. Gregory of Nyssa taught *theoria* as the experience of the highest or absolute truth, realized by complete union with God. It is entering the 'Cloud of Unknowing', which is beyond rational understanding, and can be embraced only in love of God (Agape or Awe). This emphasis on *theoria* and *theosis* becomes central to Eastern Orthodox traditions of spirituality and liturgy.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5th to early 6th century) had a strong impact on Christian thought and practice, both east and west. *Theoria* is the main theme of Dionysius' work called "The Mystical Theology". In chapter 1, Dionysius says that God dwells in divine darkness i.e. God is unknowable through sense and reason. Therefore, a person must leave behind the activity of sense and reason and enter into spiritual union with God. Through spiritual union with God (*theosis*), the mystic is granted *theoria* and through this vision is ultimately given knowledge of God. In this tradition, *theoria* is the lifting up of the individual out of time, space and created being, while the Triune God reaches down, or descends, to the person. While *theoria* is possible through prayer, it is attained in a perfect way through the Eucharist.

Christian mysticism flourished in the middle ages. The rise of the Franciscan and Dominican orders led to competing theologies of mysticism. A number of individual mystics were highly influential.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a German Benedictine abbess, and a prolific composer of liturgical songs. She had visions of divine light since childhood. She wrote about her experiences in many volumes

From my early childhood, before my bones, nerves and veins were fully strengthened, I have always seen this vision in my soul, even to the present time when I am more than seventy years old. In this vision my soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven and into the changing sky and spreads itself out among different peoples, although they are far away from me in distant lands and places. And because I see them this way in my soul, I observe them in accord with the shifting of clouds and other created things. I do not hear them with my outward ears, nor do I perceive them by the thoughts of my own heart or by any combination of my five senses, but in my soul alone, while my outward eyes are open. So I have never fallen prey to ecstasy in the visions, but I see them wide awake, day and night. And I am constantly fettered by sickness, and often in the grip of pain so intense that it threatens to kill me, but God has sustained me until now. The light which I see thus is not spatial, but it is far, far brighter than a cloud which carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it "the reflection of the living Light." And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings, sermons, virtues, and certain human actions take form for me and gleam.[

Meister Eckhart (1260—1328) was a German theologian and mystic. He was a Dominican and Neoplatonic in his theology and mysticism. Eckhart emphasized the deep connection between God and human soul. From his own works we get this sense of his mystical theology: When I preach, I usually speak of detachment and say that a man should be empty of self and all things; and secondly, that he should be reconstructed in the simple good that God is; and thirdly, that he should consider the great aristocracy which God has set up in the soul, such that by means of it man may wonderfully attain to God; and fourthly, of

the purity of the divine nature. He was often considered a heretic for his teaching of the strong identification between God and the human soul, but he rejected this as a misunderstanding.

Julian of Norwich (1343—1416 or after) was an English anchorite, a type of ascetic hermit. Julian is known for her series of visions, which she tells of in her writings, which she called “showings.” Her profound experiences of God were rooted in a deep sense of love that permeates all, a love which she spoke of as motherly as well as fatherly. She wrote that God sees us as perfect and waits for the day when human souls mature so that evil and sin will no longer hinder us. "God is nearer to us than our own soul," she wrote. This theme is repeated throughout her work: "Jesus answered with these words, saying: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' ... This was said so tenderly, without blame of any kind toward me or anybody else".

The Reformation saw a decline in interest in mysticism, especially among the reformers. They de-emphasized individual experience for the external Word of God, given in Scripture and sacraments, which was seen as more dependable than the internal self. Luther’s notion of faith rooted in baptism in Christ comes from a similar position.

The Counter-Reformation, however, led to a renewal of mysticism among Roman Catholics. The Spanish mystics, influenced by the teachings of Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. John of the Cross wrote about the “dark night of the soul” as a part of the path of knowing God fully. Teresa wrote of four devotions: heart, peace, union, ecstasy, which were her understanding of the progression of mystical experience. One of her poems expresses this:

*Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing make you afraid.
All things are passing. God alone never changes.
Patience gains all things. If you have God you will want for nothing.
God alone suffices.*

As Lutheranism and Calvinism developed into more doctrinal traditions, renewal movements began to rise up, such as Pietism, which emphasized more the personal experience of the believer, instead of theological orthodoxy. German Lutheran theologian Johan Arndt was influenced by some earlier mystical traditions and shaped the rise of Pietism. The emergence of the more Spirit-oriented Protestant traditions tend to lean toward mystical understandings of knowing God, including George Fox and Quakerism and Emanuel Swedenborg.

Modern day leaders and teachers influenced by mysticism include Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Richard Foster, and Richard Rohr. In the realm of spirituality that is not specifically Christian, Eckhart Tolle is a hugely popular writer in the mystical tradition, especially his book *The Power of Now*. Deepak Chopra is another popular spiritual teacher in the mystical tradition, and much of the New Age movement is a Neoplatonic spirituality.

There is great renewed interest in many church traditions in recovering ancient spiritual practices, such as contemplative prayer, liturgy that creates an other-world experience, and connecting more with nature. One reason for the renewed interest in traditions of mysticism might be to escape the effect of modernism, which is the endless pre-occupation with the self as a separate entity. Many experience this spirituality of modernism as ultimately unsatisfying, and losing one’s self in union with God may be appealing.