

## AN UNFOUNDED PREJUDICE ABOUT MYSTICISM

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In modern times, the word "mysticism" has developed a somewhat negative connotation. However, "mysticism" need not be relegated to the world of bizarre groups who weave fear by cloaking everything in a shroud of confusion, chaos, or conspiracy. In its most honorable sense, "mysticism" doesn't exploit the 'unknown', but rather deals with those intangible qualities of life that are often felt -- perhaps never seen by the eyes, but nevertheless touching our minds & hearts with profound effects --- which enhance our life, health, spirituality, and overall well-being.

The well-known religious writer and commentator, Rev. Richard P. McBrien has often been interviewed on television news shows and has written numerous books. Rev. McBrien says that mysticism, in a stricter sense, is "the graced transformation of consciousness that follows upon a direct or immediate experience of the presence of God, leading to deeper union with God."

Rev. McBrien goes on to say that there are basically two ways of interpreting mysticism. First is : "imageless, stillness, and wordlessness" (the via negativa or apophatic way). Second is the way of imaging God by the use of human imagination in words (the via affirmative or kataphatic way). The end result always focuses on God's power as channeled through various avenues. Mysticism was "first employed to designate the deepest meaning of Sacred Scripture, a meaning accessible only by Faith."

Masonic Rosicrucians know this. Our study is academic in scope, but always grounded by our deep faith in Jesus Christ. Having that said, let us discuss the various positive and honorable aspects of mysticism. In this presentation, I would like to discuss various avenues: Prayer; Human Memory; Oratory; Benevolence; and Intuition. And, I would like to also discuss analogous technological aids such as X-Rays/Radar/Sonar/Ultra-Sound/Lasers.

Probably the avenue that most people wonder about is: PRAYER.

### What about Prayer ?

Most devout Christians acknowledge that prayer is a deep and intimate communication between man and Almighty God. I would describe it as a mystical type of communication since words of prayer might be audibly heard or written on paper; yet the sentiments expressed are mostly invisible and infinite...and the person who prays undoubtedly has infinite hopes & intentions that those prayers will someday be answered. Many people will agree that prayers are often answered in mysterious ways. The 'answers' to those prayers may keep us on our current pathway in life, or they may put us on a different tangent or divert us to a completely different direction. Humans, being mortal beings are subject to weakness, frailty and shortcomings. However, the Divine Mercy of Almighty God with His unlimited power can change our minds when everything else fails.

What about human memory? Human memory is a powerful force. Memories help sustain us during times of grief & despair. Memories can teach by reminding us of moments of failure & adversity. Most significantly, memories build a bridge between our ancient past and our distant future by being a tool used in 'the here & now'. Human memories vary. Some significant memories of many, many years ago may seem crystal clear today and appear "as if they happened yesterday"; when trivial or insignificant memories of what happened to us 20 minutes ago may have been nearly discarded or given a low-priority in our memory banks.

The joys and perils of life impact our level of awareness, sensitivity, and consciousness. In his first Inaugural Address, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of the United States staying together as a Union and his hope that the bonds of affection amongst the States must not break. He said: "The



mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." As Masonic Rosicrucians, we can identify with the Mystic Tie of Brotherhood. Our duties & obligations bind our living Fratres together.

In addition to prayers; a person might contemplate the power of orators.

What about Oratory? Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address used a mixture of oratorical rhetoric by interweaving topics blended as one: Honoring the Dead, but admonishing the Living to continue a mission of honor via Principled Actions. Oratory has been extensively used in the various Masonic Degrees and Orders. Oratory has consoled the widow; calmed jittery nerves of the Apprentice, lifted charitable hearts of friends and Fellows; and elevated keen minds enabling them to Master the skills necessary to continue onward in life.

One of the most popular theologians among clergy of the 20th Century was Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. He was a prolific writer and popular in the early days of radio and television. Archbishop Sheen once jovially commented on one of the 'tools-of-the-trade'....he said, "a fisherman uses only a hook, but a bishop uses a crosier or a hook. That means he is to increase Christ's fold whether they be fish or lambs, both "by hook and by crook". On August 7, 1973, Archbishop Sheen spoke before an enormous audience of Lutheran youth in the Houston, Texas, Astrodome. At age 77, he was away from home three weeks of every month. He still believed in a line he had written in 1939: "Burning the candle at both ends for God's sake may be foolishness to the world, but it is a profitable Christian exercise ---for so much better the light !!!"

Archbishop Sheen believed that one of the forces leading to the restoration of righteousness was the law enforcement agencies of the nation, in particular the F.B.I. He exhibited an admiration for the leadership of then-Director, J. Edgar Hoover, 33°. To celebrate Law Day in May 1969, in Cleveland, Ohio--- Sheen told the Special Agent-in-Charge of the Cleveland office that J. Edgar Hoover was one of the greatest men in the country, and again voiced his admiration for the work of the Bureau. A person who tries to abide by God's Laws are usually more inclined to obey the civil law (in a general sense; assuming the laws are just). Being a law-abiding citizen is much more than a learned behavior. "Behavior" is a continuum covering the vast spectrum of human character: from being a scowflaw to being a Saint.

In matters concerning mysticism, [Archbishop Sheen](#) recalled that he, "[Had an extraordinary mystical experience.](#)" It occurred at 5:30 in the afternoon as he was listening to a conference. Archbishop Sheen reflected later that, "[My mind seemed to be suffused with light,](#)" and he no longer heard the voice of the conference director who was speaking. In retrospect, he could not remember how long the vision lasted, only that, "[There came to me an illumination of soul, a light that suffused my intellect, bringing with it an overwhelming conviction of the certitude of the Faith.... I was momentarily possessed of the absolute and irrefutable character of Faith.](#)"

Archbishop Sheen was knowledgeable in many areas of life, and he was familiar with inventions of the times. He spoke of another tool which may be unseen as it works, but which has tangible results: X-rays. Archbishop Sheen made a comparison, saying, "[Most important of all is faith, for faith is another pair of eyes, a kind of X-ray which penetrates beneath the surface and sees the meaning of it all.](#)" X-Rays as a tool in medicine have helped enhance and even save the lives of millions of people. Lasers include a whole range of devices which use amplified radiation which cascades into even greater amounts of emitted radiation. Similarly, Radar and Sonar are helpful tools which are more than 'blips' on a screen...they detect images of objects both above-ground and below-ground, and which can literally 'see' through water, snow, fog and other obstructions which the human eye could not. Another similar tool is ultra-sound. If anyone doubts the value of these



tools to humanity --- let them ask millions of pregnant women whose babies have been saved by the careful monitoring which ultra-sound permits.

My point is: Advancements like ultra-sound may have a frequency greater than the upper-limit of human hearing...yet its positive effects are quite "visible" to the eyes when observed on a monitor screen. **Using that as an analogy in a mystical realm: we must realize that we sometimes "hear with our eyes."**

What about Benevolence ? Benevolence is a Spirit of Caring & Giving. Archbishop Sheen once told a television audience: "Take a circular map of the world, and run a finger around the 30th Parallel, raising it slightly above China, and it will be discovered that most of the wealth, health, education, scientific advancement is above the 30th Parallel and much of the poverty and ignorance is below it. Is a benevolent nature a mystical behavior? I think so. What else would explain the ordinarily selfish nature of man changing for the better to exhibit selflessness and charity to his fellow human-beings ? It takes a stronger amount of effort to give than to receive. And, sharing of time, talents, love and resources takes increased effort as those factors multiply. **The mystical quality of romantic love between men & women is not like an "on/off switch."** Generally, it takes time to mature and blossom like the proverbial rose. But once it has been established, cultivated, and enhanced ----- a spiritual union occurs: 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

Comraderie and deep friendship and fellowship among like-minded individuals helps nurture Benevolence. When cemented by obligations, vows, and solemn promises -- deep lifelong bonds are created in such fraternal settings. It is no wonder that the Shriners are officially known as **the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine**. Another Masonic organization, "The Grotto" is officially known as **the Mystic Order of Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm**. When I joined The Shrine and later, The Grotto, I felt that invisible, but entirely palpable, sense of special friendships transforming into a unified mission of charity & benevolence. It is a special feeling when a Freemason becomes a Noble of the Mystic Shrine, and / or, a Prophet of the Enchanted Realm. No official claim to regal nobility is implied, nor any claim toward being a prophet in a scriptural sense. However, the fraternal title is one of merit and distinction.... joining the caravan of others marching in unity on a unified mission or crusade of benevolence and good-will. My thoughts seem to parallel another member of The Shrine and The Grotto.... President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the year 1935, he sent an official letter to the Imperial Council of the Mystic Shrine welcoming them to Washington D.C. for their annual session. In his letter (which was hand-carried to the Session by the Attorney-General of the United States, Homer S. Cummings) **Roosevelt said:** *"Fellow Nobles..... Every genuine organization has its own merits ---its own distinct contribution to make. You Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, in your devotion to the maintenance of hospitals for crippled children and to other enterprises of philanthropic endeavor are daily attending to the lofty standards implied in the titular designation of your members. But, you do not thus carry, as mere duty, your share of the social load: you appreciate that the problems of life are too serious always to be taken seriously; and you practice the belief that gaiety of spirit is a healthful reinforcement of the things that make life sane and sound.*

*In this spirit Washington receives you; the preparations made throughout the length and breadth of the city are the visible evidences of the warmth of its feeling for you. The capital of your country invites you to relax in the cordiality of its welcome: that you may be fortified to renew that journey, which, as we all know, will lie through both oasis and desert, but which can never be entirely the one or the other. Fellow Nobles, I bid you welcome to Washington, (signed) Franklin D. Roosevelt.*

What about another unique & intangible quality: Intuition? Almighty God knows what is in our hearts even before we do. However, there are undoubtedly certain situations which many people have experienced which have prompted them to see ahead or take action to avert some danger which would have otherwise imperiled them. Whether called "Intuition" or "Instinct"..... it is an



inner sense that guides our outer sense of direction. It is essentially an "inner Compass." Intuition should not be confused with baseless superstition or Old Wives' Fables. Humans have free agency to make good decisions or bad decisions. People who praise intuition nearly always do it because of a positive outcome. Intuition may come & go to varying degrees. Just as human memory looks behind us...Intuition is having glimpses of what may lie in front of us. Genuine intuition works wonders.

Many critics espouse unfounded prejudice about mysticism. Mostly, they are just trolling for things to criticize. The noted Masonic scholar, Dr. Albert G. Mackey, 33°, in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, said that "mysticism" is a word applied to any "views or tendencies which aspire to more direct communication between God and man by the inward perception of the mind..." His view mirrors that of Rev. McBrien (mentioned above). Mackey said that the Germans have two words 'mystik' and 'mysticismus'; the former of which they use in a favorable sense ---- the latter in an unfavorable sense almost comparable to Atheism. Mackey then quotes a bit of sage advice: "Every man ought to be somewhat mystical, but should guard against coarse mysticism." I wholeheartedly agree. Too many so-called "Rosicrucian societies" claim to evoke mystic elements. However, those pretenders engage in thought, word, and deed that drift away from God's Law. As they do, they become more and more coarse. Those groups rightfully earn the scorn & disdain of people having a genuine belief in Almighty God.

A similar point of view was expressed by the late Dr. Hubert M. Poteat, a professor at Wake Forest College and a Past Imperial Potentate of the Imperial Council of The Mystic Shrine. Poteat wrote: "If there is one thing our harassed world needs more than any other today, it is brotherly love. This can be found nowhere in a finer or truer form than in the Mystic Shrine. This does not mean for a moment that all Shriners are the perfect embodiment of this quality. However, Shriners in general do live by this principle.

Such is the weak and fallible nature of man that he needs all the spiritual strengthening he can get; and the Shrine teaches its initiates as all Masonic bodies do, that God IS and that it is our duty to worship and to obey Him, to esteem Him as the chief good and to fight with all our power against atheism."

Sadly, the blanket of unfounded prejudice often rubs-off against the Masonic Fraternity as a whole, and especially toward Masonic Rosicrucians. We are an honorable society. The unfounded prejudice towards us of the critics themselves is often just as evil as the topics which they attempt to criticize. I believe that if the positive aspects are pointed-out, along with their laudable Christian Virtues...many of these detractors will likely form a higher opinion of the word "mysticism". It could loosely be tied to the word "magical", but even that word might seem blasphemous to some critics ---similar to what Mackey mentioned about the Germans with hair-thin separations with word-definitions. In place of those unfortunate words which incite debate and acrimony ---I prefer to describe mysticism as a conduit which facilitates belief, which when magnified further ---facilitates Faith in God and the goodness of the world HE created. Most importantly, this conduit always acknowledges God's power as supreme, omnipotent, and omnipresent. No attempt is made to diminish, usurp or supplant God's role as Creator of mankind and everything in the Universe.

Misunderstandings have occurred in the past surrounding mysticism. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) did not invent the telescope ((Dutch spectacle makers did)) but he was the first to use the telescope to study the heavens systematically. His discoveries were so disturbing to some Church officials that they refused to even look through the telescope. They believed that the Devil was capable of making anything appear in the telescope. Only after many centuries had passed, did Church officials issue an apology for their distrust. Galileo's endeavors were honorable...and so are our endeavors. The mystical elements of Fraternal union among men has a definite rationale. The mystical union of the Square & Compasses for Ancient Craft Masons; the mystical union of the Cross & Crown of Knight Templary; the mystical union of the Double-headed Eagle of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; and the mystical union of the Rose & Cross for Masonic Rosicrucians



are more than superficial emblems of two objects side-by-side or intertwined. It is a comprehensive and intricate "merger of symbolism" of such emblems which leads to a "magnification of symbolism" ----similar to using a telescope.

Many Christians devoutly wear jewelry in the shape of a Cross to denote their religious faith, despite the Cross being the emblem of torture involved in the crucifixion of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The wearer of such an emblem who has good and honorable intentions has made a transformation-of-interpretation toward the Cross symbolizing Christian Love. Similarly, the Double-headed Eagle is one of the oldest royal crests or symbols in heraldry. It once represented the imperial power of a double-empire. One head would look West toward Rome, while the other head would look East toward Byzantium. The symbol has been used by nations such as Germany and Russia. In a Masonic context, the Double-headed Eagle symbolizes eternal vigilance, dedication to duty, judiciousness, and shared responsibilities. Usually, the Double-headed Eagle in Masonry is surmounted with one imperial crown balanced evenly by both heads. Nearby, is a delta with the mystical numerals "33" therein.

Our in-depth studies as Masons (and a Masonic Rosicrucians) have the deep purpose of broadening our minds. Objects that were once considered out-of-reach of the mortal eye were brought into view by the telescope. As said earlier, God's power and presence of creating the Universe wasn't changed by the telescope; that invention just enables us "to see more." It is a similar parallel with Masonic & Rosicrucian education. This brings me back full-circle to what was said earlier in this paper: [Mysticism is a Graced transformation of consciousness, leading to a deeper union with Almighty God](#). We may not be able to end the unfounded prejudice of others toward mysticism. But, if our knowledge of scripture is heightened; if our Prayers become more reverent; if our Memories trigger good decision-making; if our Oratory becomes clear; if our Benevolence is truly heartfelt; then our Intuition will instinctively tell us that we are walking on the good pathway of life as Almighty God intended. Honorable intentions will then be clear to all.

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Sources / Recommended Readings:

- [This Is The Holy Land - A Pilgrimage in words and pictures](#).

Conducted by Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen,

Photographed by Yousuf Karsh,

Described by H. V. Morton

Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1960 page 9

- [America's Bishop --- The Life & Times of Fulton J. Sheen](#).

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- [Treasure In Clay--The Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen](#).

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- [Parade To Glory](#) --The Story of The Shriners and their Hospitals for Crippled and Burned Children.

by Fred Van Deventer, Pyramid Books, New York, 1965, pages 20, 253-254.

- [Catholicism](#) by Rev. Richard P. McBrien

Harper-Collins

- [First Inaugural Address](#) of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln.

March 4, 1861

- [Gettysburg Address](#) by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln.

November 19, 1863.

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, by Albert G. Mackey, 33°

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Helpful Definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary:

- LASER: Any of several devices that emit highly amplified and coherent radiation of one or more distinct frequencies. One of the most common lasers makes use of atoms in a metastable energy



state that, as they decay to a lower energy level, stimulate others to decay, resulting in a cascade of emitted radiation. Acronym for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation.

- RADAR: A method of detecting distant objects and determining their position, velocity, or other characteristics by analysis of very high frequency radio waves reflected from their surfaces.

- SONAR: A system using transmitted and reflected underwater sound waves to detect and locate submerged objects or measure the distance to the floor of a body of water.

- ULTRA-SOUND: Cyclic sound pressure with a frequency greater than the upper limit of human hearing.

- X-RAYS: Invisible, highly penetrating electromagnetic radiation of much shorter wavelength (higher frequency) than visible light.

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