

Jesus teaches with authority/power and the synagogue goers are *astounded/astonished/amazed*; Jesus acts with authority/power expelling an evil spirit and they are *awestruck*. Their astonishment is expressed in a question: *What is this?* They are not accustomed to what they have witnessed.

Eighty-six year old Bernard McGinn, is professor emeritus at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and author of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* which runs to seven volumes and over 4,000 pages. His concluding volume, just published, is titled *Modern Mystics*.

McGinn, as a foremost authority on Christian mysticism, is frequently asked to recount his own "mystical" experiences. "I resist," he says, "in part due to a natural reticence to talk about private matters." Natural reticence is not the full explanation. To identify the mystical with ecstasies, raptures, and special revelations is a serious mistake.

This is Paul's argument with the Corinthians, "*special knowledge*" inflates (the ego, gives one a "big head"). *If anyone thinks that he or she has achieved some piece of this "knowledge," they have not yet come to know as they ought to know.*

Let's be honest, most of us would love to be blinded by the light as was Paul. We want certainty. We forget how painful and frightening this experience was for Paul. His special revelation radically revolutionized his life and set him on a course that led to his death.

The people of Israel, awestruck by the immediate presence of God, long for some distance: *Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, and this great fire let me not see again, that I may not die.* They plead for an intermediary, a less immediate presence, a prophet who will speak for God, keeping God at a safe distance.

Let the prophets have the more immediate experiences and report back. Isaiah's vision of God (visions are the bread and butter of mystics), his hearing of angels singing *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord*, his experience of the pillars of the Temple swaying, evokes his confession *Woe is me, for I am a man of impure lips.*

God is never known objectively, at a safe distance; God is always known existentially. A more immediate experience of the presence of God always entails a more immediate experience of ourselves.

Who wants that? Not those who heard God's voice and saw the fire of God's presence, who thought they would die if God came any closer. Not the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath with/in an unclean spirit when confronted by the man filled with the holy Spirit.

*What do we have to do with you, Jesus the Nazarene?* Literally the text reads “What to us and to you?” It is a Hebrew idiom with two shades of meaning: “What cause of enmity is there between us?” and “What do we have in common?” The answer in both cases is humanity, its salvation or its destruction. Chaos and the destruction of humanity is the work of evil; creation and the flourishing of humanity is the work of the holy.

From the beginning of the story, from his baptism, Jesus is challenged by the forces of evil: *Have you come to destroy us?* The evil spirit knows Jesus aims to free human beings from its power to harm. *I know who you are—the holy one of God?*

Until Jesus shows up, the man with an unclean spirit blended in with the others, looked like everyone else, dressed like everyone else, was one of the crowd. When the holy becomes more immediately present, as it was in the person of Jesus, the unclean is revealed. The desires for personal satisfaction, for material gain, for political advantage that endanger the common good are exposed and expelled.

Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, *Shut up and come out of him!* Yes, in an unsanitized translation Jesus tells the man to *Shut up*, or more colloquially, *Shut your trap*. This rebuke of the unclean spirit is an allusion to the primordial battle in which God rebuked the demonic power of chaos, ordering creation for the flourishing of human life.

Mark invites its readers to acknowledge a hidden, insidious world of evil that can break out even within positive institutions like the church. In the presence of the holy, the veils of custom, selfishness, and obtuseness that prevent us from beholding the profound actuality of love—love of God and love of neighbor—are torn away.

A full human life is not achieved in being blinded by the light. Meaning is not discovered in knowing profound mysteries. Human life flourishes when we can no longer look into the eyes of the neighbor without meeting the gaze of Christ.

To be awestruck by the light of Christ in the eyes of the weak is a spiritual and mystical experience open to all who desire it. To love as Christ loves, to forego one’s rights and privileges for the salvation of the other, is to know the mysterious power of love, is to be known by God.