

Catholic Mysticism and Spirituality

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Christian Mysticism involves methods of thought, prayer, reflection, and self-discipline that can lead to a closer union with God. Practices range from structured spiritual reading and contemplation, to ecstasies, visions, and supernatural experiences. And Catholic Mystics include Doctors of the Church and authors of spiritual classics, as well as visionaries and spiritualists known best for their ecstasies and levitation.

Catholic spirituality is a personal experience rather than a doctrinal or theological field so it encompasses a broad range of practices. It is difficult, however, to separate contemplative aspects of spirituality from mystical experiences since many of the most revered authors of spiritual writings experienced ecstasies or visions themselves. Nevertheless, we have divided mystical experiences into several categories including spiritual writings, miracles and visions, Christian mystics, and schools of spirituality.

Mystical Saints

There are many types of Christian mystics. Some are known for their writing, others for their spirituality, and others for their miraculous gifts. This is a list of some of the best known Christian mystics from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The Wikipedia page for Christian Mysticism covers much of the material below.

MIDDLE AGES

- **Hildegard of Bingen** (b. 1098) — Multi-talented German Abbess known as "Sibyl of the Rhine", She was a composer, author, visionary, and philosopher, as well as a mystic. She experienced visions throughout her life and interpreted them in her spiritual writings.
- **Christina Mirabilis** (b. 1150) — Holy woman known for her visions, ecstasies, and mortification. She is most famous for coming back to life and levitating during her own funeral.
- **Francis Assisi** (b. 1181) — Italian founder of the Franciscan order. Known for his spirituality, talking to animals, ecstasies, visions, levitation, stigmata, prophesy, and other miraculous gifts.
- **Clare of Assisi** (b. 1194) — Abbess and early follower of Francis of Assisi. She founded an Order of cloister nuns and practices asceticism and mystical prayer. Said to have been able to see and hear mass from within her cell.
- **Gertrude the Great** (b. 1256) — German Abbess and mystics who experienced visions and wrote spiritual works for her nuns. She spent much time in prayer and was especially devoted the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
- **John van Ruysbroeck** (b. 1293) — Flemish mystic whose spiritual writings and ascetic example were influential among other great mystics of his age, including Gerard Groot and Thomas a Kempis. His writings influenced in the 'Devotio Moderna' movement.
- **Catherine of Sienna** (b. 1347) — Lay Dominican, known for her mystical experiences including an invisible stigmata. Her [Dialogue of Divine Providence](#) is recognized as a spiritual classic.
- **Thomas A Kempis** (b. 1380) — Dutch Canon associated with Groot's 'Brethren of the Common Life' and prominent member of the 'Devotio Moderna' spiritual movement of the medieval period. Best known as author of [The Imitation of Christ](#), one of the most popular devotional books of all time.
- **Rita of Cascia** (b. 1381) — Italian widow who suffered in an abusive marriage and later, as a nun, from wounds from Christ's crown of thorns on her forehead. Patron saint of impossible causes and suffers of spouse abuse.
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COUNTER REFORMATION

- **Teresa of Avila** (b. 1515) — A Carmelite nun, prominent Spanish mystic, religious reformer, author of important spiritual works and theologian of the contemplative life and mental prayer. She is also known also for her raptures, ecstasies, levitation.
- **John of the Cross** (b. 1542) — Carmelite friar known for his deep spiritual writings and poetry. He was an associate of Teresa of Avila, and is best known for Dark Night of the Soul, considered the greatest work of mystical Spanish literature.
- **Martin de Porres** (b. 1579) — Peruvian Dominican brother known for his miraculous gifts of levitation, bilocation,
- **Joseph of Cupertino** (b. 1603) — Franciscan friar known for his ecstasies and miraculous gifts of levitation and bilocation
- **Paul of the Cross** (b. 1694) — Italian mystic and founder of the Passionist order. Possessed spiritual gifts of miraculous healing and communication with animals.
- **Gerard Majella** (b. 1725) — Italian Redemptorist brother. Patron saint of expectant mothers and unborn babies. Known for his miraculous gifts of healing, multiplication of loaves, levitation, and reading of souls.

MODERN ERA

- **Anne Catherine Emmerich** (b. 1774) — German Augustinian canoness who experience, ecstasies, and stigmata. She is alleged to have had visions related to the life and passion of Jesus Christ.
- **Catherine Laboure** (b. 1806) — Vincentian Daughter of Charity whose visions of Mary led to the devotion to the Miraculous Medal.
- **Solanus Casey** (b. 1870) — America Capuchin priest known for his attention to the sick and poor, and for the gift of healing.
- **Gemma Galgani** (b. 1878) — Italian mystic associated with the Passionist order. Experienced visions, ecstasies, levitation, and the stigmata.
- **Padre Pio** (b. b 1887) — Capuchin friar, best known for a visible stigmata and for his mystical knowledge of souls as a confessor. He is credited with many other spiritual gifts and miracles including visions, ecstasies, levitation, and miraculous healing.
- **Faustine Kowalska** (b. 1905) — Polish nun and mystic whose visions of Christ's mercy and suffering resulted in the image of devotions to the Divine Mercy.
- **Thomas Merton** (b. 1915) — American Trappist monk and author of a great number of modern spiritual works including Seven Story Mountain, a spiritual autobiography.

Spiritual Classics

- **Dark Night of the Soul** by **John of the Cross** — Carmelite, 16th Century
- **Ascent of Mount Carmel** by **John of the Cross** — Carmelite, 16th Century
- **Interior Castle** by **Teresa of Avila** — Carmelite, 16th Century
- **Way of Perfection** by **Teresa of Avila** — Carmelite, 16th Century
- **Story of a Soul** by **Therese of Lisieux** — Carmelite, 20th Century
- **Divine Intimacy** by **Gabriel of St. Mary Magdelene** — Carmelite, 20th Century

- **Spiritual Exercises** by **Ignatius of Loyola** — Jesuit, 16th Century
- **Dialog** by **Catherine of Siena** — Dominican, 13th Century
- **Imitation of Christ** by **Thomas A Kempis** —Devotio Moderna, Brethren of the Common Life, 15th century
- **Uniformity with God's Will** by **Alponus Ligouri** — Redemptorist, 18th century
- **Rule of St. Benedict** by **Benedict of Nursia** — Benedictine, 6th century
- **Seven Story Mountain** by **Thomas Merton** — Trappist, 20th century

- **Revelations of Divine Love** by **Julian of Norwich** — English Anchorite, 14th century
- **Introduction to the Devout Life** by **Francis de Sales** — Bishop of Geneva, 17th century
- **Confessions** by **Augustine of Hippo** — Bishop of Hippo, 5th century
- **Pensees** by **Blaise Pascal** — French Mathematician, 17th century

LECTIO DIVINO

Lectio Divino is a term meaning "Divine Reading". It is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God. It has four steps: read; meditate; pray; contemplate. Lectio Divina is not theological analysis of scriptures, a way of viewing them with Christ as the key to their meaning. [adapted from Wikipedia definition]

DEVOTIO MODERNA

Devotio Moderna is a term meaning "Modern Devotion". It was a fourteenth century movement for religious reform, calling for an emphasis on personal piety including humility, obedience, and simplicity of life. The movement was promoted by Gerard Groote, founder of the 'Brethren for the Common Life'. It is known today through its influence on Thomas à Kempis, the author of The Imitation of Christ. [adapted from Wikipedia definition]

Miracles of the Saints

The website <http://www.miraclesofthesaints.com> covers much of the material included below.

A spiritual gift is an extraordinary power given by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Mission of the Church, or for the good of others. Spiritual gifts, or charisms, go beyond those graces given for personal sanctification, such as wisdom and piety

Spiritual Gifts can be natural, or supernatural. Natural gifts include such vocations as teaching, serving, and generosity. Supernatural gifts, on the other hand, are given to individuals to demonstrate the favor of God for the good of the whole Church.

Not all of the saints and servants of the Church who are considered to be mystics demonstrated miraculous powers when they were living. But most saints who are known to have been granted miraculous powers are considered to be mystics. Supernatural gifts associated with Christian mysticism include all of the following:

Supernatural gifts

- **Levitation** — Ability to fly or levitate. Biblical account of levitation includes Jesus walking on water. **Joseph of Cupertino** is said to have the gift of levitation, but also **Martin de Porres**, **Teresa of Avila**, **Gerard Majella**, and **Christina Mirabilis**.
- **Bilocation** — Ability to be in two places at one time. Saints said to have bilocated include **Padre Pio**, **John Bosco**, **Anthony of Padua**, and **Francis Xavier**.
- **Ecstasies/Raptures** — Altered state of consciousness attributed to religious fervor. **Teresa of Avila** experienced ecstasies, as well as **Gemma Galgani**, **Catherine of Genoa** and **Catherine of Siena**.
- **Speaking in Tongues** — The most famous incident of speaking in tongues was at Pentecost when the apostles were understood by men of many nations. Later saints who spoke in tongues included **Dominic**, **Paul of the Cross**, and **Anthony of Padua**.

- **Healing** — There are many miraculous healings in the Bible. Most are performed by Jesus Christ, but he also granted the gift of healing to some of his apostles. Other Saints known for miraculous healings include **Mina, Solanus Casey**, and **Padre Pio**.
- **Stigmata** — Appearance of wounds of Christ on hands and feet or head. **Francis of Assisi, Padre Pio**, and **Gemma Gaglini** are well known Stigmatists. **Rita of Cascia** also experienced the wounds of Christ's crown of thorns on her head.
- **Mystical Knowledge** — Mystical Knowledge is the gift of reading hearts or minds. It is an especially valuable gift among confessors such as **John Vianney** and **Padre Pio**.
- **Prophecy** — Many of the best known prophets are from Biblical times, but more recent saints who had the gift of prophecy include: **Colette, Anthony Mary Claret, John Bosco, Francis of Paola, Francis of Rome**, and others.

Christian Visionaries

Miraculous visions are not unusual among Christian mystics, but they range in significance from private dreams to public apparitions. In some cases, visions have inspired saints to do important things for which they became famous (*i.e.* St. Benedict, Joan of Arc's). In other cases a supernatural vision was the experience responsible for a saint's conversion (*i.e.* St. Paul, St. Ignatius).

There are far too many saints who have experienced visions to list all of them. The following list consists only of saints whose visions have resulted in the adoption of some feast day, devotion or sacramental.

- **Miraculous Medal** (1830) — Medal imprinted with Marian symbols based on visions of **Catherine Laboure**, a Vincentian nun based in Paris
- **Divine Mercy Image** (1934) — Painting of Merciful Jesus based on the visions of **Faustina Kowalska**, a Polish nun. Divine Mercy Sunday was established in 2000 by John Paul II.
- **Sacred Heart of Jesus** (1675) — Modern devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is based on visions by **Margaret Mary Alacoque** a French visitation nun with a Jesuit confessor.
- **Immaculate Heart of Mary** (1648) — **John Eudes** promoted devotion to both the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart, and wrote the masses for their celebration.
- **Immaculate Conception** (1858) — Devotion to Mary as the Immaculate Conception became much more popular after the visions of **Bernadette Soubriou** at Lourdes.
- **Corpus Christi** (1264) — Devotion to the Eucharist and the institution of the feast day was based on the visions and devotion of **Juliana of Liege**, a Norbertine Canoness from Belgium. Hymns and sequences for the Corpus Christi mass were written by Thomas Aquinas.
- **Brown Scapular** (1251) — The adoption of the Brown Scapular as the habit of the Carmelites and the blessings associated with it were based on the visions of **Simon Stock**, a 13th century Carmelite Monk.

There are a number of other Christian visionaries who are well known, but who are not associated with a specific feast or devotional object. **Anne Catherine Emmerich** was a German Augustine nun who had visions of Jesus and Mary that provided details of the Early life and Passion of Christ. **Mary of St. Peter**, a French Carmelite, promoted devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus as a result of her visions. **Gemma Galgani** had visions of Jesus' passion and reported experiencing a Stigmata.

French School of Spirituality

The "French School of Spirituality" was an important movement in the Church in the centuries following the Protestant Reformation. Its influence was nearly as great as that of the Jesuits, especially on popular piety and formation of clergy. Many counter reformation saints and religious orders can be traced back to this group of mystics. Some of the following information is adapted from the Wikipedia article on the https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_school_of_spirituality.

The French School of Spirituality was the principal devotional influence within the worldwide Catholic Church from the mid-17th century through the mid-20th century. It focused on the devotional life of the Catholic faithful. It was similar in some respects to Carmelite spirituality but was more accessible and easier to teach. The movement had many important figures over the centuries, beginning with its founder, Cardinal Pierre de Berulle (1575–1629). Many of the saints most famously associated with the movement were founders of religious orders that focused on formation of the Catholic clergy, care for the poor, and promotion of popular devotions.

- **Pierre de Berulle** (b. 1575) — French Catholic priest, cardinal and statesman, one of the most important mystics of the 17th century in France and He was personal chaplain to Henry IV of France, and also to Henrietta Marie, the Catholic wife of Charles I. He mentored St. Vincent de Paul, and many other saints associated with the French School, and founded the **Oratory of Jesus** in order to "restore the state of the priesthood".
- **Bl. Madame Acarie (Marie of the Incarnation)** (b. 1566) — Wealthy and well-connected French socialite known for her piety and good works. She greatly influenced her cousin Pierre de Berulle and founded the **Discalced Carmelite** order in France.
- **Francis de Sales** (b. 1576) — Frances de Sales is known as the author of Introduction to the Devout Life and as the counter-reformation Bishop of Geneva. But during his formation he spent many years in Paris and while there associated with Madame Acarie and Beruelle. He was a major influence on several of their followers including Vincent de Paul and Jean-Jacques Olier.
- **Vincent de Paul** (b. 1581) — French priest from humble origins who was influenced by Pierre de Berulle and became one of his chief disciples. He was placed as a tutor into the wealthy Gondi family. From then on he became one of the leading reformers of Paris, dedicated to service of the poor and the training of priests. He founded a number of religious orders for both men and women, including the **Lazarists** (Congregation of the Mission), and the **Daughters of Charity**. He is the patron saint of Charities.
- **Charles de Condren** (b. 1588) — Succeeded Bérulle as superior of the **Oratory of Jesus** in France and became the spiritual director of many leading French Catholics, especially Jean Eudes and Jean-Jacques Olier.
- **John Eudes** (b. 1601) — Missionary priest who founded the **Congregation of Jesus and Mary** (Eudists) and other religious orders. He also founded seminaries and is best known for promoting devotions to the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** and the **Immaculate Heart of Mary**.
- **Jean-Jacques Olier (b. 1608)** — Disciple of de Berulle and Vincent de Paul, who was appointed a priest at St. Sulpice, the second largest Church in Paris. He dedicated himself to the spiritual formation of priests and founded a seminary as well as schools for orphaned boys and girls. He was an adviser of the Queen regent, Anne of Austria, and was able to raise much money for his good works. The religious order he is credited with founding, the **Sulpicians**, is dedicated to parish work and the education of priests.
- **Louis de Montfort (b. 1673)** — French priest who studied at St. Sulpice and became a disciple of Jean-Jacques Olier. Renowned for his devotion to Mary and the Angels and wrote several classics of Mariology including True Devotion to Mary and Secret of the Rosary. As a traveling preacher he promoted devotion to Mary throughout France. He also founded the the religious orders **Company of Mary** and **Daughters of Wisdom**.
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Religious Orders of the French School

Most Religious Orders associated with the French School of Spirituality are dedicated to missionary work, formation of priests, or service to the poor. Most were very influential, especially in Europe from the time of the counter-reformation to the French Revolution. Religious orders founded by saints associated with the French School of Spirituality include:

- **Oratory of Jesus** (1611) — **Pierre de Berulle, Charles de Condren** — Ran parish missions and were Confessors of influential people.
- **Society of Priests of St. Sulpice [Sulpicians]** (1641) — **Jean-Jacques Olier** — Order of experienced priests dedicated to priestly formation and parish missions. Influential in New France and America.
- **Order of Our Lady of Charity** (1641) — **Jean Eudes** — Religious order of women dedicated to reform of fallen women.
- **Congregation of Jesus and Mary [Eudists]** (1643) — **Jean Eudes** — Educations of priests and missionary work.
- **Company of Mary** (1705) — **Louis de Montfort** — Missionary Priests and Brothers.
- **Daughters of Wisdom** (1707) — **Louis de Montfort, Blessed Marie Louise Trichet** — Active order of sisters dedicated to teaching and care of the sick.
- **Congregation of the Mission [Lazarists]** (1625) — **Vincent de Paul** — Missionary Priests and Brothers.
- **Daughters of Charity [Grey Sisters]** (1633) — **Vincent de Paul** — Active order of sisters dedicated to serving poor.
- **Order of the Visitation [Visitation Sisters]** (1610) — **Frances de Sales, Jane Frances de Chantal** — Women's religious order open to older women and the infirm.