AN EXPLORATION OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES THROUGH LIFE HISTORIES

by

THOMAS JOHANNES BIELA
B.A., University of British Columbia, 1990

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
Counselling Psychology

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
DECEMBER, 1993

© Thomas Johannes Biela, 1993
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

(Signature)

Department of Counseling Psychology

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Dec. 23, 1993
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of mystical experiences within the context of life histories. Existing research has primarily employed traditional methods in its concern for codification, regularization, and generalization. Qualitative methodologies have received little attention. The aim of this study was to contribute to existing research by a holistic, contextual understanding of mystical phenomena and to inform counsellors in their efforts to help clients in the meaningful integration of these experiences.

This thesis employed a multiple case study approach within narrative methodology. Three individuals, one woman and two men, all in their fifties and with appropriate mystical experiences were identified through a network of acquaintances and invited to participate. Intensive interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and presented as "straightened" individual stories. Cochran's (1990) discovery of four natural phases toward a unified dramatic composition provided an important framework for analysis. Each story was validated by the respective participant. In addition, a summary analysis or common story was constructed of the individual accounts. Findings indicate that the mystical phenomena were intimate to the very lives as lived, making a holistic research approach indispensable for the investigation of meaning.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Mysticism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Family Resemblance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical Experience as the &quot;Numinous&quot; and the Interaction of the Nonrational with the Rational</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as the Mystic Way Toward the Unitive Life</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as the Inward Way and the Outward Way</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Visions, Voices, and Hyperemotionalism</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Seen by Science</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Pathology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Drug &quot;High&quot;</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Peak Experience</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Mysticism</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Universal Core Experience of Values</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Seen in Cultural Context</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism as Survivalism, Functionalism, Contextualism; the Cultural Source Hypothesis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological Issues and Dilemmas of Before, During, and After Mystical Experiences</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the members of my committee, Drs. Amundson, Cochran, and Whittaker. I extend my thanks to Larry Cochran, my thesis advisor, for his solid guidance and keeping me focused, Elvi Whittaker for her inspiration during my foray into anthropology, and to Norm Amundson whose bold suggestion to apply for a sizable grant literally paid off many a bill.

I am exceedingly grateful to the participants in this study who entrusted me with the gift of their life stories. Their generosity and honesty enriched my life immeasurably.

I extend my gratitude to Norbert Buxbaum of the Bavarian Room Restaurant for letting me occupy a quiet corner for many hours, many days, and many years, allowing me to remain in contact with the world while immersed in my work.

I am grateful to have met Nurit Barkan-Ascher who became a good friend and comrade in arms throughout the experience of the master's program.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to my family. I thank my wife Pam for encouraging me to begin my B.A. at age forty despite the dauntingly slow part-time process whose end seemed ever so far. I have seen our baby daughter Stephanie grow into a young teenager and our son Daniel mature from a ten year old into a university student. I am grateful for their patience, understanding, and enthusiastic support to see me through.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of mystical experiences within the context of life histories in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon's emergence, nature, and potential to influence a person's life.

Background of the Problem

Throughout history and across cultural boundaries experiences of a greater, all inclusive, ultimate reality beyond the reaches of ordinary sense perception have been reported. In their highest form, these experiences have a power and "given-ness" which irresistibly absorb the person's total attention or being. This "totality perception" provides new knowledge in the form of revelation and illumination bound up with feelings of bliss, peace, and joy, by way of participation, not observation. The intuited reality is variously called the Ground of the Soul, the Abyss of Being, the Self, the Absolute, the One, or God, etc. (James, 1972; Underhill, 1955).

Despite numerous and often negative connotations, the term "mystical" appears to be best suited to capture the "mysterium tremendum" (Otto, 1958) which lies veiled beyond the reaches of the senses. Equally important is historic continuity from ancient Greece through the Middle Ages where the mystical referred to the hiddenness and secrecy of sacred rites and the ineffable experience of the presence of God.

Although the terms "mystical" and "religious" experience are often used interchangeably, the mystical realm assumes primacy "... in that personal religious experience has its root and center in mystical consciousness" (James, 1972 p. 299). Indeed, the mystical gave rise to and lent meaning to all great civilizations and religions (Hay, 1987; Harkness, 1973; Hunt, 1984). However, with the advent of modern, materialistic science in the nineteenth century, religion and the mystical were declared illusion at best or pathological at worst. Past civilizations were thought to be founded
on ignorance and superstition (Feuerbach, 1967; Freud, 1907; Marx & Engels, 1957). As Hay (1987) pointed out, Karl Marx's description of religion as the "opiate" of the people and tool of the ruling class to retain power did not lack evidence. Nevertheless, investigation of religious experience around the turn of the century by Starbuck, James, and Underhill supported a short-lived hope that science and religion might be reconcilable. But the rising tide of materialism, including Freud's psychoanalysis and its paradoxical opposite in Watson's (1931) theory of behaviorism which denied inner experience, effectively defined mystical experience away. Research on mysticism came to a halt.

The 1960s brought about a significant change. Advances in the philosophy of science argued that systems of knowledge and their application as science operate within a given socio-cultural context. Modern science is not absolute (Kuhn, 1970). Furthermore, behaviorism was no longer successful in convincing people that they are devoid of consciousness and inner experiences (Hay, 1987). Consequently, phenomenological methods gained increasing acceptance for the investigation of inner experiences. Researcher's bias within the human sciences appeared problematic. But philosophy of science assisted in the recognition that every researcher proceeds from an inescapable social context or overt and tacit assumptions, including a personal life history (Hay, 1987). With objectivity and awareness of bias being limited, methodologies in the human sciences developed in which the observer and the observed create a composite whole. Similar observations were also made in quantum physics (LeShan, 1969). The recent ascent of narrative methodology (Polkinghome, 1988) and its adaptation to research life histories (Cochran, 1990) appears to be particularly suited for the investigation of meaning and values.

With respect to mystical experiences, narrative methodology offers new avenues leading beyond surveys, questionnaires, and quasi-experimental methods with their focus on character variables, mental health, and demographics. Although interviews
were used occasionally in data collection, in-depth phenomenological studies employing
narrative principles, including hermeneutics and life histories, are completely absent.

The approach to the investigation of mystical experiences through life history is
governed by the gap in the existing research and their surging acceptance as legitimate
inner experiences associated with personal growth.

**Defining Mysticism**

Definitions of mysticism span the continuum from pathology to its embrace as
the highest expression of evolution or spiritual development. The trend over the last
two decades has been to wrestle mysticism away from its entrenched identification with
pathology in modern psychology.

Despite great efforts to determine the essentials of mysticism, no claim to
universality remains unchallenged. This fact should not surprise since mystics describe
their experiences in analogies and metaphors not meant to mirror the actual experience
which is said to be ineffable. Consequently, phenomenological description and
interpretation cannot be neatly separated. Also, some analogies capture the experience
better than others depending on the intellectual, linguistic, and imaginative giftedness
of the describer and the cultural context.

In absence of a contemporary, solid, and continuous mystical tradition in the
West, theorists have relied on classical, traditional literature of Western medieval
mystics such as St. Augustin, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Meister
Eckhart, John Ruysbroeck, etc., as well as Eastern traditions in order to construct
systematic categories. Despite shortcomings of relying on medieval mystics, who were
of a different socio-cultural era, the mostly autobiographical accounts provide a concise
starting point from which to venture into modern times. As indicated, some writers
question the translatability of meaning systems in general (Berman, 1981; Kuhn, 1970)
and of mystical systems in particular (Jones, 1983). This relativity issue will be discussed in detail in chapter II.

A further threat to comparing and understanding mysticism is the practice to carefully choose among Eastern mystical traditions in order to support a particular argument (Foster & Hufford, 1985). The same can be said about choosing from Western theories such as psychoanalysis, humanism, evolution, cognitive development, etc., for the purpose of defining mysticism.

Disagreement also abounds with respect to parameters of mystical experiences. James (1972) might be considered a latitudinarian casting his net rather wide (Foster & Hufford, 1985). Stace (1960) admitted only the purest manifestations while Underhill (1955) and Otto (1958) were cautiously open to experiences which point in the 'right' direction.

Since boundaries defining mysticism are fuzzy, it appears appropriate to follow Wittgenstein's (1953) concept of family resemblance rather than attempt to construct well defined categories. The vastly differing viewpoints on this issue require a thorough analysis in order to lay a solid foundation for this study. Therefore, the exploration of family resemblance will be deferred to the review of the literature in chapter II.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Mysticism as Family Resemblance

Otto's (1958) categorization and phenomenology of mystical experiences will serve as a point of departure followed by Underhill's (1955) mystic way in order to lay the foundation for further discussions. These authors are closer to the traditional, nonsecularized view and provide a contrast to scientific explanations and operationalizations. Their highly generalized, typical diagrams of mysticism are neither to be taken literally, nor are they applicable to any one mystical experience or mystic.

Mystical Experience as the "Numinous" and the Interaction of the Nonrational with the Rational

Otto (1958) distinguished between the "numinous" or non-rational "felt element of the holy" of the mystical and the "mysterium tremendum" as its immediate, rational schematization and meaning (p. 13). These two categories are to be understood with the interdependence of "... the warp and the woof of the complete fabric" (p. xvii).

The "numinous" transcends sense perception and rationalization. It is, nevertheless, experienced as intensely objective, suggesting an ontology of something "wholly other". The intensely felt objectivity of the "numinous" produces an immediate and primary subjective feeling response which Otto called "creature-feeling" analogous to cosmic dependence, nothingness, humility, dread, or a sense of impending annihilation before some absolute living Power. This "creature feeling" may have given rise to such concepts as "original sin", "karma", and "predestination".

Otto (1958) made a further distinction between "mysterium" and "tremendum". The "mysterium" finds its creative schematization in the "wholly other", God, the All, the One, the Void as the noetic object of the "numinous". As of the "numinous", nothing definite can be ascertained about the "mysterium". A common practice is to
talk in terms of negations which paradoxically enhance the positive sense about the "mysterium".

The "tremendum" is a conceptualization of both the tremendous, aweful, stupendous, mysterious, powerful nature of the "numinous", as well as the immediate total response inherent in the "creature feeling". The individual is shaken to the bottom of the soul. Otto (1958) subdivided the "tremendum" into "awefulness", "overpoweringness, and "energy or urgency". "Awefulness" is ambiguous and its experience may range from a mild, gentle, loving presence, to a sudden, powerful, vibrant, bewildering, blissful, and ecstatic force, to an unpredictable, wild, willful, demonic tempest imparting a sense of terror. The "tremendum" and the "wholly other" may be typically experienced as a strange harmony of bliss and dread aptly expressed by St. Augustine,

What is that which gleams through me and smites my heart without wounding it. I am both a-shudder and a-glow. A-shudder in so far as I am unlike it, a-glow in so far as I am like it" (Confessions, ii. 9. 1.).

Schematization of "awefulness" seems to take an ethical bent and becomes the wrath of God, Divine justice, righteousness, punishment, etc.

"Overpoweringness" or "majesty" of the "numinous" may be schematized as God's omnipotence and omniscience, evoking humility and worship.

The felt "energy" or "urgency" of the "numinous", akin to a never resting vitality, aliveness, or "frenzy" may crystallize to the idea of a "Living God", the "Source of all Being", as well as willful demonic power. Further elaborations about its nature are expressed as "passion, emotional temper, movement, excitement, activity, impetus, or 'consuming fire' of love" (Otto, 1958, pp. 23, 24).

The "mysterium tremendum" is incomplete without the "fascinans" or fascination with the "numinous". The passive, stupefied, awestruck and trembling creature is, nevertheless, irresistibly attracted to the inexplicable, yet wondrous qualities of the "numinous". The passivity changes to active entrancement seeking
interaction. This relationship may range from attempts to manipulate and capture the "numinous" for human ends through magic, shamanistic practices of conjuring and possession, to total self-giving in union with the object of love. In its highest form, the "numinous" is experienced and interpreted as salvation, rebirth, conversion, grace, or that which warrants ultimate human concern as expressed in a religious or mystic way of life.

The nonrational or intuitive perception, in conjunction with emotional excitement, functions as the source of energy and motivation, whereas the rational guides and criticizes conceptualization and meaning.

Mysticism as The Mystic Way toward the Unitive Life

The mystic way can be conceptualized as emanating from the psychology of the "fascinans" carried further as the remaking of personality in conformity with the perceived reality toward a life of unity with the "numinous". Underhill (1955) deviated from the traditional threeproof mystic way of purgation, illumination, and ecstasy. She suggested the five phases of the awakening of the self, purgation, illumination, the dark night of the soul, and the unitive life.

The awakening of the self. Something must happen, either gradually or suddenly, before the mystic way can be meaningfully embarked upon. An experience of a new, wider, and transcendent reality that relativizes and questions hitherto held fundamental concepts and beliefs must break into awareness. Inherent in the awareness is the recognition that a new way of being in the world may require the remaking of one's character in accordance with the new reality. The old ways must be purged.

Purgation: The purification of the self. Underhill defined purgation as "unselfing" or "self-simplification". This process of "self-simplification" aims at stripping away all that hinders and at cultivating all that helps toward the unitive life. Traditionally, purgation meant detachment from worldly ambitions and mortification of
the senses whose highest expression in Christianity was the cultivation of love and compassion for those who seemed most repulsive.

**Illumination of the self.** According to Underhill (1955), illumination is a state of consciousness qualitatively different from everyday consciousness. The day to day world is now permeated by a "Sense of Presence" of the Absolute, God, etc.. As a rule, this non-sensuous Presence is experienced as subtle, heightened apprehension rather than as states of ecstasy. However, Underhill made allowances for "unstable artistic types" in whom the Presence may well up in ecstatic visions or voices. Throughout this phase the individuality of the self is maintained, falling short of complete union with the All.

It is within this phase that Underhill (1955) placed nature mysticism or the illuminated vision of the world as something to be expected on the way to deeper participation in the consciousness of the Absolute. In anticipation of further discussions on nature versus depth mysticism, suffice it to say that she recognized the mystic way as encompassing both, depending on personality and focus of the mystic.

**The 'dark night of the soul'.** This phase emerges slowly and is recognized as the loss or withdrawal of the sense of Presence. Only faith, hope, sheer endurance, and recollection of previous experiences sustain the mystic through the sense of utter abandonment and desolation. Purgation is now aimed at the last vestiges of self-withholding in order to bring about complete self-surrender, utter humility, or death of self as prerequisite for the unitive life. Psychological correlates for this phase may be mental or psychic fatigue and chaos, a total sense of helplessness, a heightened sense of imperfection, depression, and more.

**The unitive life.** Slowly the desolation recedes. Depending on temperament, historic context, and focus, the mystic may experience the union as either transmutation into an impersonal transcendence of the Absolute or as spiritual marriage in the deepest possible relationship with a personal God. Any awareness of self, the senses, or
intellectual activity is obliterated during the most intense moments of complete absorption. In everyday experience the "Self, though intact, is wholly penetrated - as a sponge by the sea" (Underhill, 1955, p. 417). Absorption in the Absolute also means partaking in its freedom, peace, and the union of acting and being. The self has become a center of creative energy seeking expression.

Wapnick (1969) suggested a sixth stage to Underhill's mystic way in the return to active participation in the world. But Underhill stated clearly that the mystic life is practical and active throughout in various forms. Although temporary withdrawal from society in meditation, purification, and contemplation are considered necessary in preparation for the unitive life.

**Mysticism as Inward Way and Outward Way**

Scholars have divided mysticism into two approaches which are not necessarily separated by the mystics themselves. In the most generalized fashion, the inward way is one of introspection, gradually moving beyond all physical and mental differentiation. Depending on the prevailing tradition, the aim is to intuit the undifferentiated self, soul, or pure consciousness. At the bottom of this consciousness lies identity or union with universal consciousness, God, the Absolute, etc.. This way is also referred to as soul mysticism (Otto, 1932), introvertive mysticism (Underhill, 1955), or depth mysticism (Jones, 1983).

In its briefest form, the outward way is the perception of the union of all things also referred to as the extroverted way (Stace, 1960), the unified vision (Otto, 1932), the illumination of the world (Underhill, 1955), and nature mysticism. Both forms may coincide or occur separately to the point of antagonism (Otto, 1932). However, Underhill (1955), Stace (1960), and to some degree Otto agreed that both ways aim at union which, as a concept, is transcended in its deepest form. Here, beyond any
differentiation is the Absolute Stillness, Desert, Void, Abyss of Being, Nakedness, or Nothingness of the Godhead or Self.

Stace (1960) noted that mystical techniques seem to be exclusively of the introspective kind, because they allow some measure of control. An example is Underhill's mystic way toward the unitive life which is reached through various levels of contemplation. In contrast, outward unitive experiences occur spontaneously and sporadically.

Otto (1932) made three important qualitative distinctions within the outward way. The lowest stage is the perception of the unity of all things. Surface diversity of the world is not obliterated but illuminated in a transcendent unity in which the observer is included. This state is accompanied by feelings of bliss, peace, ecstasy, etc. Individuality remains intact. Otto (1932) placed nature mysticism within this lower stage similar to Underhill's (1955) illuminated vision of the world. Sense perception remains intact but is partially transcended in the service of a deeper intuitive vision (Underhill, 1955). The second stage is the intuition of the One, who is more than the sum total of all diversity, suggesting its own ontology. In the third stage the One becomes the absolute transcendent reality or Godhead uninformed by sensory and intellectual concepts.

Mysticism as Visions, Voices, and Hyperemotionalism

Scholars and the great mystics are unanimous in regarding automatism or spontaneous sensory and quasi-sensory parapsychological or supernatural phenomena with suspicion (Otto 1932; Stace 1960; Underhill 1955). Although visions and auditions are relatively common among mystics, they are in themselves not mystical. The mystic tries to overcome the intrusion of the sensuous, mental, and emotional manifestations, because only the pure self can find union with the Absolute in a deep sense of serenity.
Underhill (1955) took a less abstract approach without trivializing the inherent dangers of pathology. The problem arises when vision and auditions are taken literally instead of being understood as artistic symbolizations of "subconscious activity of the spiritual self" (p. 271). These symbolizations are given form through personal temperament and historico-cultural belief systems. The great mystics were blessed with sharp, discriminating intellects and took great pains to distinguish between hallucinations and interior mental phenomena of various spiritual values. Underhill distinguished between three categories of visions and auditions. First, "intellectual visions" and "immediate inarticulate voices" are qualitatively beyond expectation, imagination, or intellectual speculations. They come closest to the felt "Sense of Presence" of Christ for instance. No sense perception is involved. Second, "imaginary vision and "interior words" occur in the mind and are not sensory hallucinations, though the border to the outside world is less tight. The mystic is aware of their symbolic qualities with their deeper truth and new understanding of latent and overt beliefs. Thus, a Christian may have a mental vision or auditory experience of Christ, the Trinity, or the Blessed Virgin. These visions may in part result from concentrative techniques such as the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius in which the mind focuses on sacred subjects. Both, the intellectual and imaginary visions are passively received in contrast to the third or "active imaginary vision". This vision is more dramatic, dream-like, or mythological in character, allowing participation as in "journeys" through heaven, purgatory, and hell, etc.. The value of visions and auditions does not lie within themselves, but in what is fruitfully gained. This is equally true of highly emotional experiences or ecstasies who, by themselves, have no mystical value and may point to a temporary or chronic loss of inner equilibrium (Otto, 1932; Stace, 1960; Underhill, 1955).
Mysticism as Seen by Science

Introduction. As an act of faith, modern science has committed itself to a materialistic and atheistic paradigm, redefining rationality in keeping with this view (Hufford, 1985). Consequently, spiritual or supernatural concerns and experiences are prejudged as something less than they appear to be. Reduction of mystical experiences range from their outright rejection as irrational, meaningless, and pathological, to their warm embrace as the highest form of human evolution. Though the supernatural has been exiled by definition, the basic mind-body relationship remains far from being solved. Reducing mind to an epiphenomenon of matter is an epistemological bias (Hardy, 1979; Hufford, 1985).

Hardy (1979) argued that materialistic evolution of natural selection does not tell the whole story. Human consciousness, particularly in the form of language and culture, is a selective force in its own right beyond genetic inheritance. Evolution of consciousness includes spiritual development making humans "fitter still" (Hardy, 1979, p. 12). However, consciousness remains unexplained not amenable to investigation. It is a medium in which humans live, shaping itself in accordance with every turn of the mind (Stace, 1960). Hardy exemplified the belief that an expanded view of evolution and science will eventually explain the interaction of mind and body, granting each its own realm.

At the bottom of naturalizing and secularizing spirituality lies the recognition that values and meaning are a necessary, integral, and natural part of human existence. Supernatural explanations are not needed (Hardy 1979; Maslow, 1983). However, the assumption that science transcends values, culture, and existential constraints is being weakened. Following Kuhn (1970), science is practiced within a socio-cultural context of values from which it is inextricable. The world can no longer be seen as an objective, preinterpreted given (Manicas & Secord, 1983).
Many scholars such as Maslow, James, Underhill, Stace, Hunt, only to mention a few, consider mystical, religious, peak, or transcendental experiences to be instrumental in and perhaps the origin of ultimate human concerns, values, and civilization. Science, being subject to values itself, must expand its methods in order to investigate and understand them if civilization is to survive. However, if mystical experiences are accepted as the highest expression of human evolution (Underhill, 1955), supernatural explanations must be given due consideration. Scientific reduction is a Western practice. Eastern cultures have traditionally included religion, psychology, the natural and the supernatural into a comprehensive framework of understanding. The Buddha nature is thought to permeate all creation (Bakalar, 1985; Hufford, 1985).

The long tradition of irrationalizing and pathologizing mystical experiences by all modern, secular and nonsecular institutions has been an effective form of social control. As a result, the reporting and investigation of mystical experiences was suppressed, preventing the development of adequate support systems to incorporate them into a healthy lifestyle (Foster & Hufford, 1985; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Lenz, 1983). The object of science is not to spiritualize its endeavors, but to approach the mystic realm with respectful criticism while avoiding prejudging its ontological value (Foster & Hufford, 1985; Lukoff, 1985). Otherwise the tacit research question becomes, "Why do people who know better insist on claiming such experiences and making such interpretations of them" (Hufford, 1985, p. 179).

Mysticism as Pathology

Mental illness and mystical experiences have had a long history of association. Prophets of the Old Testament, Socrates, St. Ignatius, St. Teresa, Boehme, and many others have, at times, been considered mad. Kroll & Bachrach (1982) discussed the relativity of cultural understanding of mental illness with respect to mystical
experiences, suggesting a reassessment of modern psychopathological categories of "religious symptoms" (p. 719). In their comparison study of 134 medieval visions, Kroll & Bachrach concluded that, given their cultural context, these mystics should not be considered mentally ill. Today, the pathology of mystical experiences can be divided into the two main streams of regression and of psychosis or schizophrenia.

Regression. Beginning with Freud (1907), modern psychology, and particularly psychoanalysis, reduced religion to obsessional neurosis. Mystical experiences became regressive disorganization of the ego to an infantile psychological equilibrium or "oceanic feeling" as defense against overwhelming circumstances (Freud, 1930). Leuba (1929) saw mystical experiences as indicative of a serious neurosis. Prince and Savage (1972) moderated this view to adaptive regression, serving the ego insofar as the mystical union led to positive psychological outcomes such as improved coping, creativity, integration, etc.

Hood (1976) and Hufford (1985) regarded the entire notion of regression as speculative supported only by tradition and authority rather than scientific evidence. Hood (1976) suggested that psychoanalysis has mistaken analogies and metaphors used by mystics to describe the loss of ego or self in mystic union as literal explanations. Since the infant has no ego to surrender, the adult process of losing the ego into undifferentiated consciousness without losing awareness is not a return to infantile consciousness. Indeed, James (1972) noted that "in mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness" (p. 329). Underhill (1955) spoke of transcending the ego rather than regression.

Nevertheless, the regression idea is very much alive and can be pursued indefinitely (Prince & Savage, 1972). For instance, Hunt (1984) saw regression operative in mysticism as cognitive disorganization triggered by a "crisis in meaning" in which consciousness returns to a fetal state. Here, spontaneous cross-modal reorganization between usually masked sensory organization takes place. This
disorganization is experienced as dread in the face of annihilation of the self.
Reorganization is experienced as bliss, rebirth, union, insight, light, relief from fear, etc.. Hunt's theory included reasons why the entire experience is "numinous" in quality, beginning with dread and ending in bliss. He explained St. Teresa's dread before the loving union as symptomatic of human "recombinatory capabilities". This mystical capability is developmentally upward though risky and tragic. The choice is between the death of the self in order to live or a living death refusing to grow. Psychosis and mental illness result from the miscarriage of and defense against these developmental pressures (Hunt, 1984).

Deikman (1966) foreshadowed Hunt's (1984) theory and suggested that a process of "deautomatization" of everyday habitual sensory perception and schematization is implicated in producing mystical states of consciousness. Contemplative meditation may assist in the retreat of organized perception to its more primitive preorganized form. Thus, a state of union is achieved free of conceptual boundaries making no distinction between the self and its object of contemplation. Short of union, deorganization may result in heightened physical perception akin to the illuminated vision of the world.

But regression recedes further. Maven (1969) pushed the origin of mystical union back to the remembrance of the blissful union of egg and sperm at the moment of conception. Grof (1971) allowed consciousness to regress to phylogenetic or evolutionary memories.

Associated with self-surrender is the assumption that mystical experience, like psychosis, is symptomatic of a weak and immature ego. However, research points to the opposite (Greeley, 1975; Hardy, 1979; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Hood, 1976). Individuals with healthy egos are less reluctant to surrender them. Hidas (1981) noted that therapy traditionally focuses on strengthening the weak ego, paying little attention to the importance of surrender of the strong one. The assumption is that a strong ego
must be developed prior to surrender. Consequently, children are thought to be incapable of true mystical experiences for lack of ego. Armstrong (1984) objected to this view, citing research by Hardy (1979) and numerous autobiographical accounts, indicating that mystical experiences are perfectly natural to childhood. Armstrong offered two explanations. First, based on research by Stevenson (1983) and Wilber (1980), he suggested that transpersonal or super-consciousness, spanning several reincarnations, may be accessed by the child. Second, the child may be capable of a natural openness to a deeper self.

**Schizophrenia.** Salzman (1953) and Ostow (1974) observed similarities between schizophrenia and mystical experiences. With reference to introspective techniques, Alexander (1931) declared these experiences a special kind of schizophrenia.

The neglected observation that some psychotics return to normal life with improved mental health (Bateson, 1961; Laing, 1967) led to the association of schizophrenia with the mythical hero's journey and rites of passage marked by separation, initiation, and return (Lukoff & Everest, 1985). Joseph Campbell (1956) noted that the mystic, the psychotic, and the LSD taker are equally plunged into a deep inner ocean. Campbell and pertinent psychiatric literature agree that the mystics, by virtue of native talent and training, find themselves able to swim whereas psychotics and frequently LSD takers drown. Similar to the mystic way, mental odyssey and rite of passage begin with separation or the "awakening of self", continue with the initiation into the inner world of gods, demons, or the self, and end with the successful return marked by psychological well-being and social integration (Lukoff & Everest, 1985). It is not difficult to conceptualize St. Teresa's mystic development as an epic journey through the Interior Castle of her deeper consciousness.

Hufford (Foster & Hufford, 1985) deplored the association of psychosis with mysticism. Hood (1976) accused psychiatry and psychoanalysis of mistaking peripheral phenomena such as vision, auditions, etc., as the essence of mystical
experience while understanding little of the undifferentiated union beyond sensory and conceptual schematization. Nevertheless, therapists sympathetic toward mysticism still face the diagnostic challenge of differentiating between psychosis and mystical experience. Lukoff (1985) distinguished between "simple mystical experience, mystical experience with psychotic features, psychotic disorder with mystical features, and psychotic episodes" (p. 156). Although much work has been done in creating diagnostic categories by Goleman, Smith & Dass (1985), Gottesfeld (1985), Lenz (1983), Lukoff (1985), Wapnick (1969), and others, the general consensus is that proof is in the fruit or the ensuing life. James (1972) and Underhill (1955) expressed a similar sentiment in that the mystic life is an ordered life in every respect.

Mysticism as fruit will be discussed in turn. In essence, the mystic is not attached to the experience whereas the psychotic is fixated (Gottesfeld, 1985). There is no loss of everyday common sense and no conceptual disorganization in mysticism (Lukoff, 1985). The mystical experience leads from less to more freedom, creativity, flexibility, self-losing, service, meaning, inner peace, hope, etc., (James, 1972). Psychosis results in mental estrangement, rigidity, isolation, hopelessness, despair, and sometimes suicide (Lenz, 1983). But as Laing (1967) advocated and Lukoff's and Everest's (1985) case study indicated, short term psychosis, often with mythical and mystical features, may have beneficial outcomes.

Mysticism as Drug "High"

The association of psychedelic drugs with mysticism is very controversial despite its venerable history. Throughout the ages and across all continents "sacred" substances have been instrumental in inducing a form of mystical consciousness usually in connection with religious practices (Clark, 1969; Prince, 1968). Despite arguments that psychedelic drugs may at best produce unauthentic, hallucinatory, pseudo religious experiences (Bucke, 1923; Zaehner, 1972), evidence suggests that some psychedelic
experiences may have mystic merit. James (1972), Huxley (1963), and Leary (1970) were the most prominent supporters of drug use in connection with mysticism. Stace (1960) argued that the test lies, in part, in phenomenological similarities between drug and mystical experiences. Based on Stace's categories for mysticism (ego quality, unifying vision, sense of objectivity or reality, nonspatial, nontemporal, noetic, ineffable, positive affect, sense of the Holy, paradoxicality) similarities have been documented under controlled and supportive conditions (Clark, 1969; Grof, 1971; Pahnke & Richards, 1969). Conversion experiences or personality changes compare favorably with non-drug mystical experiences (Clark, 1969). Psychedelic experiences have generally been compared to lower level nature mysticism. However, some accounts suggest that deeper experiences may occur (Clark, 1969). Again, the proof is in the fruit (James, 1972). But Clark noted that not much is known about the durability of drug induced religious experiences. Given the present day restriction an research with psychedelics little new information will be forthcoming.

Maslow (1983) acknowledged the effect drugs may have, but joined a common argument that a life-long quest would be preferable to a quick fix. This argument is countered by testimony that psychedelic experiences often involve great inner struggle in order to break through to genuine mystic consciousness. It is claimed that drugs are not a trigger as in a cause and effect relationship. Rather, the veils of perception seem to be temporarily removed to reveal what is usually hidden (Bakalar, 1985; Clark, 1969; Prince, 1968). Following Clark (1969), drug mystical experiences are not the end, but the beginning of a long arduous journey. The problem is that apart from drug abuse, many drug users are unprepared for the sudden, overwhelming encounter with the "mysterium tremendum". The novice is suddenly confronted with inner "demons" and undesirable character traits previously not recognized. Great courage and persistence is needed to work through and integrate a "bad trip" (Clark, 1969).
The use of psychedelics may be an attempt by naturalists to bring mysticism within the realm of biology for, "that which can be induced naturally can also be explained naturally" (Foster & Hufford, 1985). From the Freudian perspective, drugs are just another way to access the unconscious and induce regression to infantile states (Bakalar, 1985). The scientific materialist may welcome drugs in order to reduce mystical experiences to brain chemistry. Thus, Francis Crick suggested that psychedelics mimic "theotoxin" or God-poison (Bakalar, 1985). Another argument for a chemical connection is the suggestion that ascetic practices change brain chemistry which in turn triggers mystical experiences. In any case, reducing mystical experiences to brain chemistry has so far eluded all efforts (Bakalar, 1985).

**Mysticism as Peak Experience**

Maslow's (1983) concept of peak experience must be understood within the context of his agenda to expand science to allow the investigation of values and to create a unified vision of human nature and society. This unity is necessary, because "dichotomy pathologizes and pathology dichotomizes" (p 13). Some examples of dichotomies Maslow wanted to integrate were those of the rational versus the nonrational, science vs religion, religion vs religion, the sacred vs the profane, introspection vs extrospection, autonomy vs belonging, good vs evil, the natural vs the supernatural, and the values of religion vs value free science. The source for this unified vision was to be found in human nature itself, that is, in transcending participation of union and ecstasy or in peak experiences.

Stripped of all interpretations or ethnocentric phrasing, the peak experience is thought to be the undifferentiated, universal, core-religious or unitive experience. Achievement of this union lies within natural human capacity rather than in appeals to or interaction with the supernatural. The objective is to increase awareness and occurrence of peak experiences. The more authentic, integrated, or self-actualized a
person becomes, the more often peak experiences should occur and guide the person toward the unitive life.

Maslow (1983) referred to Otto's (1958) "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" stressing the importance of awe and wonder and allowing the wild, willful, orgiastic, fascinating, demonic, and mythological Dionysian elements of the "numinous" their proper place in human nature. Maslow, (1983) following Otto (1958), saw the nonrational qualities in their positive expression as the source of transcendence. Maslow stood in opposition to the Freudian tradition of seeing the unconscious only in negative and pessimistic terms.

Peak experiences also represent Maslow's (1983) way out of the impasse of existential nihilism and chaotic subjectivism through directly perceived universal "Being Values" such as truth, goodness, perfection, justice, etc..

As a rule, peak experiences are classified in contemporary mystic literature as nature mysticism. Maslow (1983) did not separate introspection and extrospection, but saw both openness and reflection as complimentary characteristics of a self-actualized person in whom autonomy, belonging, and serving society are integrated.

Maslow may be criticized in several ways. Unlike Otto (1958), James (1972), and Underhill (1955), he made the noetic optional in peak experiences which can be purely ecstatic. The benefit derived from pure ecstasy is the awareness that it is possible and enjoyable in itself. However, he frowned upon self-seeking indulgence. Unfortunately, Maslow did not clarify the emergence of "Being Values". Following Otto (1958), the schematization of the "numinous" would be the immediate beginning of rationalization. How this process of perceiving universal "Being Values" remains uncontaminated by ethnocentric concepts is not clear. Hufford (Foster & Hufford, 1985) criticized Maslow (1983) for excluding the supernatural a priori despite nearly universal claims for its existence. It appears that Maslow considered Western science to be beyond existential constraints capable of transcending ethnocentric differences.
Hufford also suggested that Maslow advocated a secularized religion, sacrificing differences for ideological reasons. Nevertheless, Maslow (1983) has been instrumental in bringing mystical experiences within the realm of healthy mental development. He stressed that self-actualization is a life long process of hard work and discipline in which peak experiences illuminate the path away from narrow self-centeredness to self-giving, creativity, and an all inclusive cosmic awareness.

Culture and Mysticism

Mysticism as Universal Core Experience of Values

Perhaps the only agreement with regards to the universality of mystical experiences is the notion that something in human nature allows them to occur. The search for a common core experience must center on specific universal knowledge claims and meaning rather than on apparently universal, but vague categories such as ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, passivity (James, 1972), unifying vision, transcending of space-time, surrender of ego, sense of objective reality, peace, sacredness, and paradoxicality (Stace, 1960). Mysticism is about an inner quest for absolute reality and values that allow for a unified position from which to live and act meaningfully (Foster & Hufford, 1985; Jones, 1983; Underhill, 1955). Maslow (1983) accepted and employed this basic tenet of mysticism. In order to build a unitive theory, Maslow needed universal values he believed to be accessible through peak experiences. By necessity, the naturally occurring mystical experience must be universally the same and undifferentiated. Interpretations are governed by cultural context and are overlaid with "ethnocentric phrasing". Maslow seems to have underestimated the complexity of cultural context within which mystical experiences are embedded. A discussion of contextualism appears to be warranted.
Mysticism as Seen in Cultural Context

The objective is not to resolve the problems of contextualism, but to highlight the difficulties surrounding claims for a universal core experience. Extreme contextualism confines knowledge claims to strictly within its cultural context incommensurable with other cultures. Following Berman (1981), the local context in which "men conceived of matter as possessing mind, ... matter did possess mind, 'actually' did so" (p. 92), with the same ontological and epistemological importance as modern scientific materialism claiming the opposite. Since modern science has not transcended existential constraints (Kuhn, 1970), objective cross-cultural investigation is not possible (Foster & Hufford, 1985). In any case, the existence of a universal core experience is just another assumption (Foster & Hufford, 1985), though shared with most scholars. The benefit derived from contextualism is in that it endows culture specific truth claims with ontological and epistemological legitimacy. This is in conflict with both supernatural and positivist claims for objective reality, though they differ on the nature of reality and how it should be investigated (Foster & Hufford, 1985). From the contextualist point of view, empirical investigation across belief systems makes little sense since they are all true. However, contextualism's dilemma is that arguments with respect to cross-cultural truth value become circular and unproductive (Hufford, 1985).

In general, and with particular reference to mysticism, contextualism remains a serious issue. Jones (1983) warned that it is not necessarily meaningful to equate mystical experiences across cultures and that translation to a different realm of meaning does not give access to `correct' understanding. Also, mystical systems are cultures in their own right and interact in complex ways with a heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, socio-cultural environment. Therefore, contextual issues arise within as well as between cultures.
Within cultures. Contextual separation is already operative between the actual mystical experience as holistic perception and the interpretation through everyday knowledge ruled by subject-object differentiation. The ineffability of the mystical experience throws the mystic back on the prevailing cultural context for analogies and symbols without claiming one to one correspondence to everyday language usage. On the other side of the equation, doctrine, tradition, and general cultural beliefs precede and inform the mystical experience (Jones, 1983). Underhill (1955) and Jones (1983) stressed the inescapability from the cultural milieu and its importance for informing the mystic in order to avoid pathological idiosyncrasy. Despite the appearance of circularity, new knowledge does emerge, often in a manner that tests the limits of prevailing doctrines. New knowledge will be further discussed in connection with the fruit of mysticism. Suffice it to say that the mystic's relationship with articles of faith is not ideological, but creative often to the point of heresy (Jones, 1983). For instance, within Christian mysticism, Christ, as the sacrificial lamb of God, becomes the bridegroom of the soul. More controversial are expressions of union bordering on identity with God or His immanence in creation at the expense of transcendence, as in pantheism. Both St. Teresa (Underhill, 1955) and St. Augustine were so troubled by the 'pantheistic' nature of God's overwhelming immanence that they took to deliberately contemplating God's transcendence in accordance with the teachings of the Church (Harkness, 1973). Meister Eckhart came very close to formulating a heretical doctrine of identity of the soul with the Godhead. Both Teresa and Eckhart came under investigation for heresy (Jones, 1983). But heresy, too, depends on the cultural context within which it makes sense (Kueng, 1974).

Between cultures. Mystical systems lay claims for absolute knowledge of reality. They do not consider themselves mutually complimentary as part of a greater whole. Jones (1983) suggested that the analogy of several blind men touching different parts of an elephant does not hold true since mystics consider themselves anything but
blind. A diluted, abstract, universal version of mysticism is equally problematic since mysticism is lived concretely within its context (Jones, 1983). For example, the Theravada Buddhist idea of rebirth in the quest to end suffering is inherently unique to a particular perception of reality. Self-concept, treatment of others, motivation, etc., are in accordance with the total way of being and acting. In this context, mysticism serves in the cultivation of values and means deemed important toward a particular end. Elements of various belief systems may appear similar in isolation, but their meaning will be different given the context from which they emerged. Therefore, Jones warned that the concept of rebirth cannot be grafted onto a Christian belief system of salvation or vice versa. For the purpose of perspective, Christian, medieval mysticism was not a means to salvation, but a way of "loving God and of improving charity" (Jones, 1983, p. 151).

Hufford (Foster & Hufford, 1985) considered neither contextualism nor positivistic materialism as absolute. In view of available accounts, he made a case for the supernatural as a cross-cultural category of thought, including its alleged interaction with the natural world. Another opening for fruitful cross-cultural comparison, considered by Hufford, are rapidly accumulating reports of near death experiences. These phenomena, though varied, consistently claim encounters with the supernatural and exhibit many features of classic mystical experiences. The question is not one of proof, but of respectful consideration of seemingly universally reported phenomena.

The above arguments should suffice to point toward the formidable task of either extracting core values from ethnocentric phrasing or their construction from the apparently noncomplimentary diversity of mystical experiences.

Mysticism as Survivalism, Functionalism, Contextualism, and the Cultural Source Hypothesis

Contextualism was a reaction to functionalism which, in turn, was a reaction to survivalism. The survivalist-positivist maintains that some beliefs have become useless
vestiges of a defunct worldview about to be replaced. The supernatural has suffered this fate within the context of academia because it lacks "a proper orientation to reality" (Hufford, 1985, p. 179).

The functionalist assumes that beliefs have survived, because they fulfill a useful, though often latent function. The supernatural may serve as a denial of death, support social control and sanctions in the name of God or by threat of damnation. Another useful function of mystical experiences might be their powerful effect on self-actualization or perhaps their role in defensive regression.

The contextualist, as explained above, grants legitimacy in addition to function to different belief systems.

The cultural source hypothesis claims that people have mystical experiences and believe in the supernatural because the culture supports and expects them. Hufford (Foster & Hufford, 1985) objected by pointing to sufficient experiential evidence that the reverse is the case. An example of cultural source was given by Durkheim (1915). He postulated that Christian revival meetings generate religious excitement flooding the individual with peace and joy as if originating from a source greater than the self, though the actual source is the community. Later, when alone and in prayer, all that is left is a faint memory. Malinowski (1974) disagreed with Durkheim. Speaking from personal experience and anthropological observations, he stated that the most meaningful religious experiences occur in solitude.

Phenomenological Issues and Dilemmas of Before, During, and After the Mystical Experience

This section will serve as a transition between conceptual and definitional issues of mysticism and the review of pertinent research.

Before

The focus on what precedes the mystical experience may range from an entire life context to antecedents, such as physical and mental stress, meditation, prayer,
absorption in nature, or more immediate triggers like drugs, sex, sensory deprivation, etc.. However, the purity of the mystical experience is influenced by the state of preparedness (Clark, 1969; James, 1972; Underhill, 1955). James cited Starbuck (1899) emphasizing the importance of an awakening to a condition of incompleteness as either a wrongness from which to escape, an ideal to work towards, or both. This awakening is a necessary first step in the preparation toward conversion or mystical experience. Preparedness may follow the deliberate path of a mystic way (Underhill, 1955) or involve a, more or less, conscious quest for meaning, purpose, or self-actualization (Maslow, 1983; Lenz, 1983). For the unawakened and unprepared, a mystical experience may well be negative, resembling a "bad trip", psychotic episode, or a nightmare, depending on the individuals temperament, character, lifestyle, desires, present focus, setting, etc.. Therefore, the greater concern is not with triggers, but with life as lived in meaning, its values, purpose, openness to experience, and preparation implicated in the occurrence, nature, and purity of the mystical experience.

Awakening. In its most general form, awakening is the gradual or sudden awareness of a gap between what is and what ought to be (Cochran, 1990). Disillusionment with present reality, the ways of being, thinking, and acting in the world grow increasingly meaningless (Hidas, 1981; Hunt, 1984; James, 1972). Despair thickens with the realization that a solution lies beyond intellectual and emotional capacities. A dark period of the soul descends, pushing the person beyond despair into apathy and surrender. But it is at this "point zero" where meaninglessness toward past and future has sapped all willful intent that the redemptive process begins (Hidas, 1981; Hunt, 1984) and the new way is incubated (James, 1972). Purging of the old and stilling of all struggles have prepared an inner void open to something larger than the egoistic concerns of surface consciousness (Underhill, 1955). The person has become receptive to the inpouring of the deeper reaches of the self expressed as illumination, conversion, ultimate reality, the Divine, etc..
The foregoing description is prototypical and many variation are possible. But Underhill (1955) pointed out that deep inner upheaval is the rule rather than the exception. James (1972), too, differentiated between the "once born" who live with a natural effortless transcendental awareness and the "twice born" needing a conversion.

The importance of considering an entire life context in the emergence of a life problem, quest, or vocation, has been demonstrated by Cochran (1990). Personal, cultural, and historical circumstances collude in the awakening of a "primitive life drama" during childhood. The early beginnings are largely tacit and their emergence into a life's quest is by no means guaranteed. Discipline, endurance of uncertainty, pain, and luck are needed to develop a meaningful one-pointedness and purity of purpose. The life histories Cochran (1990) consulted indicated that transcendent moments of certainty akin to peak or mystical experiences can be instrumental in the consolidation of certainty, personal identity, and purpose.

Within mysticism, the process of personal growth has been systematized from the assumption that sense perception and intellect can be transcended to allow the uncontaminated inflow of, or union with a greater, superior reality. From the outset, the aim is to purge the rational and the senses from the illusion that they are the primary source of knowledge. Underhill (1955) summarized the methods of the inward way as recollection, quiet, and contemplation.

**Recollection.** Recollection follows awakening and resembles meditation rather than reflecting on memories. It is a gathering of dispersed consciousness and dissipated conceptual and sensory multiplicity into a singular purity and stillness of heart and mind. As an act of sheer determination, recollection is the most difficult and painful part of purgation and the mystic way (Underhill, 1955).

**During**

**Quiet.** The quiet or interior silence is the process of surrender and developing receptivity to a deeper intuition or a will larger than the self. The paradox of the quiet
is that it "... is actively embraced, not passively endured" as a transition from the "... old, unco-ordinated life of activity to its new, unified life of deep action - the 'mystic life'" (Underhill, 1955, pp. 321). The great temptation is to remain in this phase to enjoy the mystic peace, joy, or union for its own sake. Idle quietism leads to "holy indifference" (Underhill, 1955, p. 321) and egoistic self-absorption destroying mental and moral life. It is in contrast to the paradox of passive, yet active "self-giving and self-emptying" (Underhill, 1955, p. 321).

**Contemplation.** Contemplation, unlike meditation, is a family of related states during which the transcendent is beheld and includes ecstasy and rapture. Part of the contemplative state is under the mystic's control in the contribution of focused consciousness and active response to the given-ness of the All, the One, or Ultimate Reality perceived to be streaming in by its own volition. The contemplative state is part personal effort and part gift whose refusal is still possible, though only with great effort and pain. In contrast, ecstasy and rapture are beyond all control and impossible to resist. The distinction between these two states is that ecstasy gradually arises out of more gentle contemplation of the trained mystic. Rapture, also an ecstatic state, is more typical of individuals untrained and experienced as a sudden, forceful, transport, as if lifted up and carried away into another reality, the Divine, etc. Both rapture and ecstasy are accompanied by a, more or less, deep physical trance, including diminishing heartbeat, slowing of breathing, and perhaps a catatonic immobility, by psychological mono-ideism or intensely focussed attention, and by an experience of Ultimate Reality, Union, the Divine, etc. The actual unitive experience is brief, but depending on its intensity, the trance may last for hours (Underhill, 1955).

According to Underhill (1955), contemplation in any of its manifestations is an expression of personal temperament. Ecstatic states have often aroused suspicion of pathology. These states have mystical value only in conjunction with noetic qualities (Underhill, 1955).
A dilemma. For any discussion of what transpires during mystical experiences two issues must be considered. First, pure mystical consciousness is said to transcend any sensory and intellectual contributions. As St. Teresa said, "She does not see it then [during the orison], but she clearly sees it later, after she has returned to herself, not by any vision, but by a certitude ... " (Teresa, 1961, p. 423). This lack of content or the inherent ineffability, does not provide its own interpretation.

Second, the more sensory, emotional, and mental material contributes to the experience, the less pure it is, the more cultural specific and idiosyncratic it becomes, and the more ineffability recedes. The boundary between a mystical experience and mere 'religious type' feeling may become a problem if the net is cast too wide.

After

Fruit of mystical experiences. James (1972) expressed the general consensus of mystics and scholars that mystical experiences are best judged by common sense for their beneficial effects on the individual and society. The ensuing life must be orderly, balanced, and free of excesses. The direction of positive mysticism is from less to more consciousness, joy, peace, self-acceptance, selflessness, compassion, harmony and unity within self and with others, ethical fortitude, vocational commitment, strength in adversity, creativity, awareness of eternal values, belief in an afterlife, appreciation of beauty, humor, and ability to laugh at oneself, etc. (James, 1972). Conversely, there might be a decrease in worldly concerns and ambitions for their own sake, in self-importance, fear of death etc. (James, 1972; Jones, 1983; Pahnke & Richards, 1969; Underhill, 1955).

Excesses might occur by inflating the significance of the mystical experience through asceticism aimed at the mortification of the senses, denial of the world, and obsessive devotion at the exclusion of practical accomplishments (James, 1972; Underhill, 1955).
James (1972) placed the beneficial effects of mysticism on a continuum from subtle and imperceptible to the outsider to increasing empirical evidence of "sainthood" as in the unitive life. James also recognized the problem of backsliding after the excitement and newness wear off. He cited evidence by Starbuck (1899), indicating that conversion experiences are rather resistant to a complete return to the former state. The least that might be learned is, "... that it should even for a short time show ... what the high-water mark of his spiritual capacity is ... " (James, 1972 p. 209).

The fruit of mystical experiences must also be seen in cultural and historical context. Sainthood or holiness within the framework of overcoming suffering in the cycle of rebirth or the presence of the Buddha nature in all creation may emphasize different virtues, action, or passivity than emulating Christ or attaining self-actualization.

**Mystical knowledge.** Bertrand Russell (1921) defined mystical knowledge as, "... in essence little more than a certain intensity and depth in regard to what is believed about the universe" (p. 3). James (1972), Stace (1960), and Underhill (1955) gave more credence to the mystics' expertise and claim that mystical knowledge is primarily a form of immediate holistic perception, emotions being secondary. Medieval mystics differentiated between knowledge arrived at by intellectual discourse and true wisdom as grasped through osmosis of the knower with the known. Thus, mystical knowledge is not based on propositions and logic that something is the case (Jones, 1983).

Mystical knowledge and the mystic way reciprocally justify each other (James, 1972; Underhill, 1955). The same, however, might be said of any knowledge system, including science, its methods, and findings. Nevertheless, it could be argued that science, at least, discovers new things whereas mysticism appears circular. Mysticism produces new knowledge in keeping with its methods (Underhill, 1955). It is experience internalized, "... into a dispositional cognitive framework" (Jones, 1983, p. 146). Mystical knowledge, though rooted in tradition, may take the form of
illuminating and revelation of new patterns, of confirming experientially what was understood only intellectually, of bringing into the center what was merely peripheral (James, 1972; Underhill, 1955).

Research

Problems with Operationalization

Lukoff & Lu (1988) deplored the lack of uniformity and agreement with respect to methods and questions, making comparisons difficult. Notable exceptions are contributions by Greeley, Hardy, Hay, Hood and others associated with them. Nevertheless, the parameters of what is actually being measured are not always clear. Hay (1987) pointed out that the strict standards of Otto (1958) and Stace (1960) would not apply since they are based on extraordinarily gifted religious heroes. Hood (1975) reflected on possible shortcomings of operationalizations in the Hood Mysticism Scale (1975) based on Stace (1960) categories whose universality cannot be assumed. Hood considered his work empirically fruitful.

Mystical Experiences: Frequent or Rare?

Until the 1960s mystical experiences were considered uncommon, if not pathological. Bucke (1923) estimated the rate to be one in several million. James (1972), too, thought them to be relatively rare. Improved survey methods and the rise of phenomenology set the stage for the investigation of inner psychological processes. In addition, the drug culture of the 60s and 70s contributed to a freer expression of feelings (Hay, 1987).

Some of the first surveys (Back & Bourque, 1970; Gallup Poll, 1977-78; Glock & Stark, 1965; Wuthnow, 1976) achieved startling, positive responses between 20% and 50% depending on the nature of the question and the population. Greeley & McCready (1974), Greeley (1987), and Gallup (1985) in the USA, as well as Hay & Morisy (1978) and Hay & Heald (1987) in Britain, showed consistently that at least one
third of the general population answered 'yes' to the question, "Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?" (Greeley, 1974). This question alluded to an experience of ecstasy or rapture. Thomas & Cooper (1978) challenged Greeley's (1975) results in an exploratory study with university undergraduates, asking for detailed information in addition to the above question. The initial results of 34% were almost identical to Greeley's (1975) 33%. However, further analysis indicated that only 2% resembled classic mystical experiences as postulated by Stace (1960) involving awesome emotions, sacredness, perceived knowledge, oneness with God, restructuring of priorities, beyond space and time, and ineffability. Twelve percent were classified as "psychic" or "other worldly", another 12% as "faith and consolation" experiences, and 8% were uncodable.

In contrast to Thomas & Cooper (1978), Hay & Heald (1987) in Britain and Greeley (1987) in the USA detected an upward trend in positive responses reaching 50% and 43% respectively. Hay & Morisy (1985) conducted 300 interviews on a general population sample in Nottingham England which yielded the startling result of 62% positive responses. Hay & Heald (1987) reported that about 40% of those surveyed had never told anyone about the experience compared to Nottingham's 33%. Hay (1987) attributed this increase to improved survey and interviewing methods, a shift away from religious to spiritual terminology, weakening of the taboo to talk about these experiences, and widening of the parameter that includes the mystical. Nevertheless, Hay (1987) believed to be well within the boundaries of the mystical by accepting awareness of another realm including Wach's (1958) categories of given-ness, reality, total involvement, effect on behavior, lack of control, surprise, peaceful and elated mood. Only a small number of religious experiences would fall into Otto's "numinous" category.
Mysticism: Mental Health and Personality

Research points increasingly toward superior mental health of individuals reporting mystical experiences. Greeley (1975) and Hay & Morisy (1978) employed the Bradburn (1969) psychological well-being scale and found that "mystics" scored higher in mental well-being than "non-mystics". Greeley's (1975) sample was more optimistic, less authoritarian, and lower in racism. The more classic the experience was, the higher the positive affect. Wuthnow (1976) found individuals reporting "peak experiences" to be less materialistic, less status seeking, showing more social concern, and to be more self-assured. Hood et al. (1979) employed the Jackson Personality Inventory (1976) and found that university students scoring high on the Hood Mysticism Scale (1975) had a wide "... breadth of interests, [were] creative and innovative, tolerant of others, socially adept, unwilling to accept simple solutions to problems ... [and] critical of tradition" (p. 806). Individuals giving a religious interpretation appeared to be more traditional and more concerned with the welfare of others. Smurthwaite & McDonald (1987) found that "mystic" university undergraduates, contrary to the common notion of mystics' exclusive absorption in their inner world, were more concerned about social problems than non-mystics. A similar sample by Caird (1987) reported no correlation between mystics as measured by the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975) and introversion, neuroticism, or psychoticism as per the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (1975). Spanos & Moretti (1988) detected a correlation between diabolical mysticism and neuroticism, psychosomatic symptoms, hypnotizability, and absorption in a university female sample. Oxman et al. (1988) conducted a content analysis of autobiographical material and found a significant difference in lexical choice and frequency of words in schizophrenic, drug, and mystical accounts.

With respect to ego development, Hood (1970, 1972, 1973) demonstrated that intrinsically oriented individuals had more intense mystical experiences than extrinsic
persons. Further measures indicated that high ego strength and mystical experiences are correlated, giving credence to the possibility of non-pathological surrender of the ego (Hood, 1974, 1976).

**Social Class and Education**

The more education and the higher the social class the greater the likelihood that mystical experiences will be reported (Gallup Poll 1978; Greeley, 1975; Hay, 1979; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Wuthnow, 1976). In Hay & Morisy's (1978) National Opinion Poll in Britain, 56% of individuals with at least some higher education reported mystical experiences. The upper-middle class reached 47%, the middle-class 49%, and the working class 31%. More restricted samples of postgraduate students and nurses yielded 65% (Hay, 1979) and 66% (Lewis, 1987) respectively. For as yet undetermined reasons, blacks, Pentecostals, and members of messianic sects reported more mystical experiences in the USA, but not in Britain (Hay, 1987). However, the Nottingham interviews indicated that earlier differences between social classes were probably inflated (Hay and Morisy, 1985). No significant differences were found in their sample.

Church membership appears not to be a determinant, though some correlation between church attendance and mystical experience exits. Hay, (1987) concluded that the most reliable indicator for the occurrence of mystical experiences is the individual's concern with spirituality. Of interest is also that, 23% of the agnostics, 24% atheists, and 23% who did not know their religious affiliation reported mystical experiences (Hay & Morisy, 1978)).

The hypothesis that religion or ecstatic experiences are the consolation of the socially and mentally marginalized is no longer tenable in view of the evidence available.
Gender Differences

Gender differences with respect to the frequency of mystical experiences are inconclusive and are concomitant with church attendance, women being in the majority in most denominations (Hay, 1987).

Hood & Hall's (1980) university student sample revealed that females used receptive language for both sexual and mystical experiences. In contrast, males used agentive language for sexual but not mystical experiences.

Mallory (1977) found reports of sexual arousal during mystical prayer experiences by Discalced Carmelite nuns as opposed to Carmelite friar who were not particularly aware of physical states during mystical prayer. Attention is drawn to similar gender differences in the choice of analogies of medieval mystics.

Triggers and Antecedents

Laski (1961) has been credited with creating the perception that transcendent ecstasies may have specific triggers (Hay, 1987). After reviewing the empirical research, Spiilka et al. (1985), as well as Hay (1987) concluded that the wide variety of personal, cultural, and social variables do not point to specific triggers or cause and effect relationships. Hay & Morisy (1985) found that 73% of the Nottingham sample could not think of anything that might have caused the experience. With reference to general antecedents, mental distress or feeling ill at ease due to impending death, severe illness, death of someone close, loss of livelihood and similar existential concerns were reported by 50% of the respondents.

Hood's (1977a) sample of a high school seniors indicated that sudden illuminations correlate with situational and mental "limits" rather than chronic stress as implicated in ego regression. Another study by Hood (1977b) showed that high self-actualization, as measured by the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1964), and mystical experiences are significantly correlated in university undergraduates. Highly self-actualized individuals reported sex and drugs as triggers
and low self-actualized individuals reported nature and religious settings as instrumental. However, the POI's value as a measuring instrument is rather questionable (Hood, 1977b).

**Miscellaneous Findings**

Accumulating research indicates that all age groups are well represented. Notably, data on children are conspicuously absent.

The vast majority of mystical experiences or 61% of the Nottingham sample occurred when the individuals were alone. Another 9% had their experiences when alone in a public place. Only 7% occurred in a communal setting (Hay & Morisy, 1985) which considerably weakens the hypothesis that cult activities are the source of these phenomena.

Immediate after-effects of mystical experiences in a survey in Nottingham were reported as being: happy (14%), elated (61%), at peace or restored (41%). Long term effects were reported as confirming or intensifying of belief (24%), more optimistic (22%), insight into life (16%), and encouraged moral behavior (10%). Twenty-four percent found that the mystical experiences had made no difference in their lives (Hay & Morisy, 1985).

Hardy (1979) collected over 4000 autobiographical accounts of mystical experiences over a ten year period and produced detailed phenomenological classifications. Participants answered in writing to pamphlets and newspaper ads. However, a disproportionately number of respondents were elderly females presenting rather "polished" autobiographical accounts (Hay, 1887). Nevertheless, Hardy's work was at the forefront for the investigation of mystical experiences in modern times.

Some attempts have been made to examine mystical experiences under controlled laboratory conditions. Pressinger (1988) induced a "mystical" state of mind electromagnetically by stimulating the temporal lobes of individuals. These areas are reputedly active during epileptic seizures and said to be implicated in mystical
experiences. The assumption was that ecstasies may be learned by repeatedly stimulating appropriate brain structures. However, an earlier study by Sensky (1983) indicated that epileptics did not report mystical experiences with greater frequency than non-epileptics. James (1972) commented that attempts had been made to explain away St. Paul's conversion experience as temporal lobe epilepsy.

Efforts to show that mystical experiences are purely natural phenomena led Siegel (1977) to observe drug intoxicated animals in laboratory and natural settings. Peculiar animal behavior was interpreted as "religious worship" occurring in a state of ecstasy normally not experienced. Lukoff & Lu (1988) remarked that it takes considerable imagination to bridge the gap between observed animal behavior and its interpretation as "inner" mystical experience.

Deikman (1966) conducted meditation experiments in order to test his deautomatization hypothesis. By intense focus on a particular object, the deautomatization process is said to weaken or remove perceptual boundaries and thereby produce an experience of union. The separation of the observer and the observed is perceptually overcome. Ego awareness is suspended. Subjects reported that the object, a vase, became luminous, animated, including a feeling as if merging with it. A similar exercise was suggested by Underhill (1955) for individuals who never had a mystical experience, but would like to know what it might be like. However, Underhill indicated that this feeling of union with an object is not a mystical experience. Thus, many of the transpersonal and out of body experiences, or union with inanimate or animate objects belong, strictly speaking, not to the mystical realm.

Limitations of Existing Research

The strong evidence supporting the prevalence and positive nature of mystical experiences surprised even those who were sympathetic toward mystical phenomena. The fact that purely "numinous" experiences are relatively rare is not surprising since
native talent, deliberate, and inadvertent preparations influence the nature and quality of the experience. Otto (1932), Underhill (1955), and James (1972) accepted a range of experiences insofar as they challenge narrow ego confinement by accessing a wider, previously veiled, all-inclusive reality. People emerge with the conviction that the everyday world is not the whole of reality (Hardy, 1979).

Research on mysticism seems to be declining with little or no new ground being broken. Traditional methods have focused on codification, regularization, and generalization which are achieved only at the cost of meaning and context. Qualitative methodologies have received little attention and no hermeneutic or narrative studies have been conducted. Language was seen as a problem by Maslow (1983) and other proponents of the ethnocentric phrasing hypothesis. The assumption was that language can be cleaned of cultural presuppositions so that the real phenomenon might be exposed. The epistemological role of language had been overlooked.

However, the essence of mysticism is about "ultimate" meaning and must be investigated with suitable methodologies as this study proposes to do.

**Approach to the Present Investigation**

As is apparent from the review of the literature, mystical experiences have not been examined from a holistic perspective of context and meaning, particularly within the framework of life histories. This study will contribute to filling this gap by proceeding from ontological and epistemological premises of the nature of human reality and how it should be investigated.

The ontological premise states that meaning, not matter, is the fundamental reality which is ordered qualitatively according to aesthetic principles (Heidegger, 1962). Intrinsic to the ontology of meaning is the hermeneutic circle within which a particular way of being in the world is made meaningful. However, "meaning is contextually grounded, inherently and irremediably" (Mishler, 1986b, p. 3) and
constructed linguistically (Polkinghorne, 1988). Human experience is rendered meaningful, that is, composed into holistic patterns by linguistic forms of narrative or story whose basic structure is the plot with beginning, middle, and end.

The hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle encompasses existence, experience, the capacity for self-reflection, and language as inseparable from being in the world or Dasein.

Thus, in the portrait of reality given in the human experience, the hermeneutic and linguistic structures are understood to be aspects of reality which gives meaning to reality's self-display (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 136).

Human knowledge does not derive from objective, preinterpreted facts and formal knowledge, but proceeds from "... our everyday participatory understanding of people and events" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 23). Knowledge begins with the paradox that something must already be known, or a "fore-structure", in order to know anything at all (Heidegger, 1962). The "fore-structure" is shaped by largely tacit and taken for granted socio-cultural preconceptions and expectations. Since Being or Dasein is postulated to be inherently projective, the "fore-structure" is projected into the world as a beginning of further understanding and interpretation. This understanding folds back on itself to be projected outward again in hermeneutic circularity (Packer & Addison, 1989). According to Heidegger (1962), the circle of understanding need not viciously verify prejudices, but is open to assimilation and accommodation of new material within an expanding horizon of present understanding.

Language. narrative or story. Following Polkinghorne (1988), the role of language is epistemological and intrinsic to the hermeneutics of rendering human experience meaningful. Language is inherently "being with others" (Ricoeur, 1981), that is, meaning is constructed, negotiated, and shared communally through narrative discourse or story. Narrative is simultaneously process and structure and intimately associated with human experience of time. The awareness and experience of the temporality of life binds time to the hermeneutic circle of meaning within the inevitable
story structure of beginning, middle and end. Human time is not merely a linear series of instances to be recorded as chronicles, but is a holistic awareness of past and future in the present (Cochran, 1989). Citing Ricoeur (1981), Polkinghorne (1988) proposed "that narrative discourse is the linguistic, hermeneutically reasoned expression of the human experience of [and in] time" (p. 134). It is through the plot that the experience of time and events are woven into a meaningful whole according to their importance for the development of the story.

The plot, or logical structure of story, is the movement and dramatic tension between the two opposing poles of beginning and end (Cochran, 1989). The beginning may be an unsatisfactory state of affairs the individual is motivated to change. The end is the desired, or eventually, the actual outcome. The middle is the means employed toward the end in order to close the gap between what is and what ought to be (Cochran, 1989, 1990). The unfolding story is by nature open-ended and may display two story lines. One is the intended line and the other is the actual one that may or may not move toward the desired goal. Therefore, tension occurs between these two story lines if they fail to converge. Since the outcome is not guaranteed, circumstances may lead to a different end than the projected one. The significance of what once hindered or helped the movement toward the end may be reinterpreted in the light of new events and deeper understanding. Consequently, the tension between the actual end and the beginning determines retrospectively what is important and what organizes the story. Events are not fixed facts, but receive their significance from the context within a particular story. (Cochran, 1889, 1990). Emplotment is a creative, hermeneutic search for best fit between the parts and the whole (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Mounting scholarly consensus within the narrative literature argues that human beings live in story (Cochran, 1990; Mishler, 1986b; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schank, 1990). Following Cochran (1990), the only proof that is needed is our own observation that we explain, describe, work, plan, tell jokes, dream, read, watch
movies, etc., in story form. It appears that story is a "primary act of mind" and whatever we do is done in story (Cochran, 1991, p. 20). Bruner (1988) argued that from early childhood on we learn the story form which becomes so habitual that it becomes an organizing principle for experience. The narratives we have "settled on 'being' our lives" become so entrenched that "a life as led is inseparable from life as told" (Bruner, 1988, p. 582). A metaphysical shift is needed to become aware of this fact. Thus, story is the medium in which humans live, more or less, unawares. Personal stories invariably reflect the socio-cultural environment from which they are adopted or adapted.

**Research method.** This study employs life history case study methods in keeping with the premises laid out in the previous section.

According to Yin (1984), case study is a form of empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 23).

However, as explicated above, this study proceeds from the recognition that within the human realm of meaning, context and phenomenon are inseparable. Thus, a more precise definition is that a case study investigates occurrences in their natural setting "to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events" (Yin, 1984, p. 14).

Life histories may be defined as

any retrospective account by the individual of his [or her] life in whole or part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited by another person (Watson & Watson Franke, 1985, p. 2).

**Research interview.** "One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview" (Yin, 1984, p. 82). In order to fulfill the premises for this study, the interview must facilitate a discourse capable of capturing context and meaning as a coherent story. Mishler's (1986b) explication of narrative interviewing methods will be the guide to this end.
Following Mishler (1986a), "narratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize, and express meaning" (p. 106). The all pervasive context of interviews includes the circumstances, social conventions, personal intentions, needs, etc., inherent in the telling as well as the construction of the narrative. Therefore, the researcher will be vigilant to what helps and hinders the elicitation of a coherent story and to what lessens the need "to present oneself in socially valued images" (Paget, 1983, p. 73). "Interview as discourse" entails hermeneutic principles in the joint construction of meaning by the interviewer and the interviewee. The entire process of meaning-making, including the ensuing analysis, is a cooperative endeavor in which power is equally shared between the researcher and the participant to "restore control to the respondents over what they mean by what they say (Mishler, 1986a, p. 122). Within this framework, interviews resemble conversations in which questions and responses are formulated and reformulated "so that together we understand what their stories are about" (Mishler, 1986b, p. 249).
CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore mystical experiences within the context of three life histories. To this end narrative methodology was employed allowing for the contextual emergence of meaning, both in the telling of the stories and their analysis. The following twofold procedure was observed. First, individual stories were constructed from the transcripts of the interviews. Second, these stories served as the basis for a common analysis.

Explication of Presuppositions

It will be taken for granted that the contextual and largely tacit nature of fundamental socio-cultural assumptions are inextricable from conducting research (Kuhn, 1970; Manicas & Secord, 1983). Within the limits of this horizon, the researcher is expected to declare significant circumstances surrounding a particular study in so far as they appear to influence the investigation (Mishler, 1986a; Whittaker, 1986).

Because of the dogmatic manner in which religion was imposed on me during childhood, I developed a strained relationship with Catholicism in particular and organized religion in general. The desire arose to escape the narrow dogmatic confinement, leading to a quest for intellectual freedom. At age eighteen the quest became focused through an experience that falls within the mystical realm of Underhill’s (1955) framework. Within a timeless moment I perceived with unprecedented intensity that all my religious beliefs had collapsed. No longer believing in God to give my life direction, the quest for freedom instantly became a search for meaning. Despite having been raised to regard the mystical with suspicion, the next three decades brought a number of mystical experiences of various intensities and qualities leading to an increasing awareness of an all inclusive greater unity. Only
much later in life did I become acquainted with the mystical literature which helped me considerably toward integrating the experiences.

In sum, the decision to conduct this study of life histories is based on personal experience leading to the conjecture that the mystical is, for the most part, integral to a life as lived rather than a non-contextual, intruding phenomenon.

Selecting Participants

Sampling method. Non-probability, purposeful, opportunistic sampling was employed. Selection was based on the following requirements. Participants must have had a relevant mystical experience broadly falling within the criteria outlined by Underhill (1955) and Otto (1958). A number of years should have passed since the experience in order to gain insight into its influence on the ensuing life. Ideally, the person should be past mid-life for a wider life history perspective. Participants should be conversant in the English language and be able to articulate coherent and reflective accounts of their lives.

Search for participants. Through my network of friends and acquaintances I let the intent to study mystical experiences be known. Invariably, the first task was to define mysticism which was generally confused with parapsychological phenomena such as apparitions of ghosts, E.S.P., out-of-body experiences, etc,. I spoke with three people who had experienced minor mystical phenomena that might be summarized as, "having been hit with a spiritual Force, Presence, or Light", providing solace and reassurance regarding temporary difficulties without leaving a lasting impact other than the surprise that this unusual experience occurred.

I met the first suitable participant, John, (all names are pseudonyms), at a social gathering for counsellors. At the time I was unaware that he had been a Jesuit priest and that he would be my first "mystic". A mutual friend was instrumental in arranging John's participation in this study. Through John, I contacted Sister Chelsea who
graciously agreed to take part. Sister Chelsea lives a good distance from Vancouver and we did not meet until the time of the interview. The same friend was again involved in contacting the third participant, Henk, whom I had also met socially prior to discussing mysticism.

I did not seek out individuals with backgrounds other than stipulated above. By mere happenstance the sample included a Catholic nun, a former Jesuit priest, and a biologist with a Calvinist background. Coincidentally, all participants happen to be in their fifties. A further description of each participant's background was included in the individual stories.

**Life History Interviews**

The interviews proceeded from the premise that people are naturally inclined toward narrative discourse as an organizational scheme to render experience meaningful. "If respondents are allowed to continue in their own way until they indicate that they have completed their answers, they are likely to relate stories" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 163). For this reason, unstructured, yet focused life history interviews were conducted, as suggested by Paget (1983). The focus was on tracing the mystical as it emerged and influenced the participants' lives. The interviews were audio-taped in order to free the researcher to be wholly present in the discourse and to allow accurate information taking.

All interviews began with pleasantries such as the researcher expressing gratitude toward the informant for participating in the study, etc. This preamble was followed by the explication of the nature of the study and the participant's role in it. The discussion included concerns regarding confidentiality, anonymity, the right to both delete sensitive material and to withdraw from the study without prejudice, participation in the evaluation of analysis, etc. The intent was to create trust and rapport to allow the person to speak freely. All participants expressed concern about
not being sure where to begin and not knowing if their stories would be of value to my study. I invited each person to begin by reflecting on his or her childhood and to simply begin with memories that might have some connection with the way their lives developed. I conveyed that we were simply engaging in a conversation with a particular purpose and that any questions I might have were designed to further the formulation and cooperative understanding of the story.

Length and number of interviews varied due to available time frames and personal circumstances. A total of four hours per participant proved to be the norm, including one hour for the discussion of the analysis. The aim of the first interview was to elicit as coherent and complete a story as possible to be followed by a second interview if necessary. Henk's interview proceeded over a single three hour span after we had discussed the issues in great length during the previous three days. There was a one year lag between John's respective one and two hour interviews. The previous year, John had agreed to be interviewed for a class project on the same topic. Sister Chelsea and I had scheduled a two hour interview which was later augmented by a one hour taped telephone conversation. All discussions of the analyses were conducted by phone.

Previous social contact with both John and Henk greatly facilitated mutual rapport during the interviews. My initial concern with respect to interviewing Sister Chelsea immediately upon our first face to face meeting were quickly dispelled by her disarming openness, genuineness, and dignified presence.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis to be presented as a "straightened" stories (Cochran, 1989).

Sample of questions. The questions listed below served as a guide to focus the interview and to further the telling of the life story.

1. What are some of the early childhood memories that seem to have had a lasting influence on your life?
2. How would you describe your upbringing? Your family relationships?
3. How would you describe yourself as a child?
4. What events, people, strengths, circumstances, and shortcomings were particularly influential?
5. What were your fondest daydreams or desires and what happened to them?
6. What captures your imagination now?
7. How are these early experiences related to the mystical experience?
8. How would you sum up your life up to the mystical experience?
9. What was it about the experience that makes it stand out?
10. What mental and physical conditions were prevailing before the mystical experience?
11. What were you aware of during the mystical experience?
12. What were you aware of after the experience?
13. What insights did you derive from the experience?
14. What immediate changes occurred in the way you saw yourself?
15. In what way have these changes lasted or are still continuing?
16. In what ways have you tried to have the experience again?
17. What do you hope to accomplish in the future and what role does the mystical experience play?

Analysis: "Straightening" the Story

The analysis contains two parts. First, individual stories were constructed from the transcribed interviews. These stories were submitted to the thesis advisor for evaluation and consequently made available to the participants for critical review and validation. Second, a common story was composed after the individual stories had been accepted.

Throughout the analysis hermeneutic principles were operative as outlined in the previous chapter. Upon familiarization with the individual transcripts it became apparent that Cochran's (1990) method for the investigation of life histories within the context of vocation was particularly well suited for this study. All participants had a strong awareness of either a vocation or a life quest in which the mystical had become the central focus.

Cochran (1990) conceptualized the story of vocation as a lived pattern of meaning that emerges over four naturally occurring phases toward increasing unity of being and doing. Detailed explanations of the method were woven into the individual stories and supported by verbatim quotations from the transcripts in order to leave a clear "decision trail" of interpretations, descriptions of experiences, and the general
construction of the story. This method of straightening the stories was particularly appropriate, because it allowed each participant to judge method and analysis as a whole.

**Role of researcher.** Following Cochran (1989), the researcher may be envisioned in the ancient role of the bard, who creates meaning not merely by putting pieces together but by "straightening" the story so that it makes sense. He selects what is relevant, dismisses what is irrelevant, infers, explains, and interprets not in order to ascertain truth, but to create wisdom and understanding. Removed from the action, like a spectator, the bard provides a different perspective. Rather than accumulating and weighing facts, he reflects on the happenings. The bard and the actors need each other and, together, they create meaning.

There is no particular point of entry into the hermeneutic realm of meaning. "Understanding generates understanding until general appreciation is reached" (Cochran, 1989). A final understanding is never achieved. For all practical purposes, a saturation point eventually becomes evident (Bertaux, 1981).

**Scientific Rigor**

Packer and Addison (1989) summarized prevailing, problematic issues regarding validity and reliability within the human sciences and narrative research in particular. These authors agreed with Kuhn (1977) that "... not even natural science can provide ... fixed validity. Interpretation-free validation is impossible there too ... and it would stifle science if it were possible" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 188). Traditional science is based on the closed system of formal logic and mathematics and is therefore incommensurable with the inherently open-ended linguistic paradigm. Truth claims within the linguistic realm approach the status of likelihood (Polkinghorne, 1988) which is not far removed from Cook and Campbell's (1979) suggestion to consider validity in traditional science as approximate.
Various efforts have been made to gain understanding of the nature of scientific rigor as it applies to the realm of language and meaning. Evaluation of narrative research cannot escape its own paradigm and remains within the circle of qualitative interpretation and open-endedness.

A true interpretation is one that uncovers an answer to the concern motivating the inquiry. If an answer has been uncovered by an interpretative account we should find it plausible, it should fit other material that we are aware of, other people should find it convincing, and it should have the power to change practice (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 289).

Guba and Lincoln (1982), Yin (1984), Sandelowski (1986), and others, advanced similar suggestions. The following section will address some of the issues as they pertain to this study.

One of the main goals is "confirmability" (objectivity) also expressed as plausibility, intelligibility, likelihood, or coherence. "Confirmability" is achieved when the interpretation attains "creditability" (internal validity), "fittingness" (external validity or generalizability), and "auditability" (replicability or reliability) (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Sandelowski, 1986).

"Creditability" is obtained when participants identify the description as their "own" and others are able to recognize the phenomena. "Creditability" is further enhanced by the researcher's description of his or her involvement in the study.

"Fittingness" refers to the meaningful fit of a study into a larger context. Both "creditability" and "fittingness" must survive scrutiny of the interpretations by the participants and others.

"Auditability" depends on leaving a clear 'decision trail' so that others may follow the entire genesis of the study.

With respect to this study, "creditability was furthered by explicating the researcher's presuppositions, the selection of the participants, the collection of information, and the method of analysis. Also, descriptions, inferences, and interpretations were supported by verbatim quotations from the transcripts indicating
that "interpretation is not a matter of conjecture and guess" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 289). The individual stories were made available to the thesis advisor, the participants, and the thesis committee for evaluation of "fittingness". "Fittingness" is further evident by references to the literature throughout the study and chapter V in particular. "Auditability", that is, leaving a clear `decision trail was the researcher's inherent intent and must by judged by others.

In order to enhance "confirmability", the researcher continuously considered rival explanations in order to obtain the highest level of plausibility possible. Finally, the suggestion that the findings "should have the power to change practice" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 189) will also be discussed in chapter V.

Participants' Critical Review

Sister Chelsea commented that she felt deeply understood and regretted that future contact with the researcher would be limited due to the considerable distance between their respective cities. Corrections were minor and mainly of a demographic nature.

John commented that the story portrayed the essential spirit of his life. Corrections were similar to those requested by Sister Chelsea. John commented on the methodology as it appeared within the story. He was struck by the appropriateness of the psychological development as it might relate to religious vocation in particular.

Henk had discussed the story with his wife. He commented with astonishment how succinctly his life had been captured within a few pages. He was saddened reading about himself and considered the possibility that he may have wasted his life. We discussed some of the implications. Only minor misunderstandings needed to be corrected.

I was also surprised and grateful for the careful thoroughness all participants devoted to validating their stories. Generally, there was some concern and self-
consciousness about the difference between the casual conversational style of the language as it appeared in the quotations and prepared speech or polished, written compositions.
CHAPTER IV

Results and Analysis: Life History Case Studies

Life History One: Sister Chelsea

Sister Chelsea, not her real name, is a member of an international, Roman Catholic, teaching order. Now in her fifties, she entered the community at age twenty. She holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew Scriptures and has occupied a number of responsible positions. Her term as Provincial Superior has just come to an end. She is presently head of the Religious Studies and Philosophy Department at a college in the United States. She also serves as vice president of the local Chamber of Commerce. The college was founded by the order but is presently operated in trust by a secular body of directors.

Sister Chelsea is the oldest of five children. Reflecting on her family, she said, "We had a lot of marks of affection in our family. I've never been really abused, you know, really abused by people I trusted." Unfortunately, this is not the case for many women she meets through her work. Sister Chelsea's parents were Catholic but went to church only on major feast days. Family prayer or saying the rosary emerged mainly during times of crisis. Catholicism, though contextual in young Chelsea's life, was not zealously imposed by parental or other authorities.

As will become evident, Sister Chelsea's experience of God's presence in the world was as natural as growing up. By age six, an intellectual and intuitive unity, or what she called "singleheartedness", was already sufficiently formed and active as a basic orientation capable of expanding and binding more and more of life into a seamless whole.

The Beginning: The Phase of Incompletion or the Awakening and Unification of Yearning

Cochran (1990) and Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) demonstrated how individuals with a vocation or dominant life theme were able to identify, consolidate,
concretize, and externalize primitive dramatic childhood experiences into a coherent
desire, yearning, wanting, etc.. Cochran recognized repetition and rhythm of early,
often tacit, dramatic units as instrumental in composing, strengthening, and unifying
desire out of a multiplicity of fragmented, episodic, and perhaps chaotic experiences
typical of childhood. Why a particular experience becomes salient is not clear.
Following Cochran (1990), innate temperament and socio-cultural milieu conspire in
raising a particular experience to a prototype or metaphor whose boundaries are
sufficiently fuzzy to allow incorporation of more and more of life into a family
resemblance of experiences and reality. Thus, an awakened salient experience is
repeated and dramatically strengthened in ever increasing variety and extension.

The arousal and unification of desire is the recognition of a gap between what is
and what ought to be. The emergence of opposing poles and the attempt to narrow the
gap clearly define the movement of the story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Sister Chelsea's earliest childhood memories are of taking care of her younger
siblings when she was between three or four years old. While her parents were
working in the fields, she was responsible for changing diapers, feeding, herding the
little ones inside out of the sun, etc.. She remembers breaking her baby brother's fall
by throwing herself underneath him. At age four occurred what she called the "key
incident of all my life." A brother was born a "blue baby" and after two weeks seemed
to be dying. Her parents asked Chelsea to run for help to the neighbor, who was a
nurse. The nurse came too late, and the baby died. Chelsea's mother worried over the
destiny of the baby's unbaptized soul which would end up in some terrible place, like
hell or purgatory. Sister Chelsea said,

'I remember standing there, thinking, ... being very philosophical about it,
'That's not my God. I don't think God would do that to a baby. I think that
my parents are wrong.'
The circumstances of her brother's death congealed two powerful influences that came to shape Sister Chelsea's life. First, she awakened to a strong obligation toward assuming responsibility. Second, she became aware of a personal God.

In one way, her brother's death was a personal tragedy that seemed to have summed up earlier experiences of responsibility for her siblings which was "at times too much." But now she had failed to save the baby's life. She said,

I think, I couldn't run fast enough. I felt responsible for his death. It was a very mixed up experience for a four year old at the time.

Throughout her life, Sister Chelsea suffered the burden of being "super responsible" accompanied by the nagging worry that she could have done more. As an adult she began observing others who seemed much less conscientious, caring little about coming to meetings unprepared, not even bothering to read the minutes. Becoming more and more aware of what she called, "My biggest fault", she wondered about its origin. Somehow the traces always led back to her brother's death.

However, the evidence thickens considering her statement.

I grew up too fast. I think, I grew up at age three, I was going on thirty. I've often thought about this in my life, when you talk about grief. I think, one of the griefs I had to work through in my life has been losing my childhood.

Within the same context, she said, "God works with whatever happens."

Though spoken in retrospect, everything in Sister Chelsea's life, whether the burden of worrisome super-responsibility, grief, success, joy, etc., became subordinated and integrated into an ultimate reality greater than the self, paralleling Cochran's (1990) observation of individuals with a vocation. In Sister Chelsea's life that journey began with the awakening to her personal God at age four. What stands out most significantly is that things concerning God, from here on, had to make sense in addition to what her heart might feel. She said,

I remember these things when I was four, six, eight. It was like religion was both a head and a heart thing. It wasn't that I didn't feel compassion for people or things, but a lot of that stuff just didn't make sense. I always thought there had to be an intellectual way of looking at it, you know, a critical way.
At age eight she observed her aunts praying for rain, because it would be good for the laundry hanging on the line. She dismissed this practice as "magic stuff". Though God is capable of performing miracles, He is not

The God you could make do things, because you wanted it to happen. ... I think that if God would let it rain, He would let it rain. We would have to make that adaptation.

Apart from further demonstrating her independent thinking, this incident also highlights her extraordinary sense for reality from childhood on. This ability to avoid escapism and embrace reality within the framework of what is, what ought to be, and what might realistically be accomplished, further typifies vocation (Cochran, 1990).

From her teenage years on, Sister Chelsea made a daily reading of the bible part of her meditation. While in the novitiate this practice was frowned upon because it smacked of Protestantism. But she would not be deterred and said,

"They didn't read the bible the Catholics, no they didn't. I used to sit and pray about the scriptures, meditate on what they meant. It just seemed more right."

Once more, taking responsibility or what she called being "stubborn" and "hardheaded" about religion is evident. But her reference to praying, meditating, and rightness refer obliquely to a, by now, well developed intuition about religious matters. So far, the explication of Sister Chelsea's relationship with God has been seriously incomplete. It was at age six when that which began at age four emerged, in a way, complete.

The family had moved from the Mid West to a city in the Pacific Northwest in the U.S. Her account of that time leads to the conclusion that an accomplished young person burst into the world. As Cochran (1990) pointed out, in retrospect life seems to have unfolded with an inevitability that belies the obstacles, struggles, and uncertainties that prevail much of the time. However, Sister Chelsea's "stubbornness", "hardheadedness", and inner directedness kept her on track. As much as God had to make intellectual sense, she followed her heart with equally singleminded, intuitive
determination. Her actions point toward a basic unity of being and doing which appears to have laid dormant needing an opportunity to unfold.

Following an innate desire, six year old Chelsea began to go to church alone every morning without being prompted. With a chuckle she noted that she was barely tall enough to peek over the pew. From this time forward, daily mass became a matter of course whenever possible. One morning while in church, she became aware of a woman returning from communion. Sister Chelsea said,

I had not received [first] communion yet. She [the woman] was real plain looking, but I just knew there was a presence, something very special, ... different about her than a lot of other people. There was something about it that was kind of integrated and radiant. .... I can still remember the feeling, and I can still remember how she looked. There is something I never did understand, it is that I could sense something in people that were really holy.

But Chelsea did not merely passively observe. This presence attracted her so much that she moved along the pew so that she would be sitting next to the woman upon her return. This moment was a conscious recognition of what she called, "The single grace of my life. I always felt God very present ... from childhood on." But this moment was, above all, experiencing and witnessing holiness, wholeness, and integration of a human being within God. Symbolically, intuitively, and in actuality, young Chelsea recognized what she wanted, where she belonged, and put herself in its presence. Several times during the interview, Sister Chelsea mentioned how important it is for her to live singleheartedly or with a purity of heart and a sense of belonging. She said,

I think singleheartedness has always been there, you know, the real focus. But how I get there, I don't know. .... That doesn't mean that other things aren't related .... That purity of heart gives your life a sense of direction and integration, you know, that God is the All, that God is Everything, and how all those pieces are directed there. .... It's more than service. It's belonging. Single heart, to me, means totally belonging to God, and the doing flows from the belonging.

These words, though spoken many years later, harken back to the early experience of what integration, belonging, and singleheartedness came to mean. How
far six year old Chelsea had worked out the philosophical details is hard to say. But she said,

    I used to think a lot. .... I remember thinking and meditating on some things that didn't make sense. One of them was baptism (laughs). It just didn't seem [plausible] that God would put a purple mark on your soul. I thought indelibly of purple pencil (laughs).

    However, she did not brood in isolation, but took the responsibility to knock on the priest's door to discuss her issues. She said, "He was a very kind Benedictine. So, we used to walk with each other all around the neighborhood, and we talked theology ... ."

    Sister Chelsea's awareness did not merely rest with her own concerns. With an innate naturalness, she translated her intuitive and intellectual growth into compassionate and practical activities in the community. She said,

    I felt drawn to take care of people. I felt drawn to pick up the kids in the neighborhood that were retarded, or couldn't read, or couldn't do anything. But I remember, I was only six years old that I used to do that.

    Though she was younger than many of her peers, Chelsea was the leader. She took the children to the nuns demanding they teach them to read. The nuns retorted, "You teach them!" Chelsea had learned to read at age three and a half. Her extraordinary intelligence is further evident in graduating from high-school two years ahead of time and by being selected for a graduate school scholarship involving candidates from fifty colleges in fifty states. Unfortunately, the scholarship was prematurely terminated and will be referred to in further discussion.

    Sister Chelsea recalled another important moment from that pivotal time at age six while in church one morning. She said,

    I remember thinking, 'I think, I might some day become a 'religious'. ' My sister reminded me of that just last Christmas.

    Her four year old sister had ruined her own doll and Chelsea said,
That's okay., you can have my doll because, probably, when I get big, I'll be a sister, and you'll be a mother, and you'll need to know how to take care of babies, and I will not.

In memory of that moment, her sister presented Sister Chelsea with a doll last Christmas. Also, young Chelsea's emergence of a vocation was not lost on those who knew her well. At age twenty, she told her parents of her decision to become a member of a religious community. Her father remarked that he had known since she was in the first grade.

**The Middle: The Phase of Positioning or Attainment of Personhood**

At age six Sister Chelsea had achieved what proved to be an enduring unification of yearning directly accompanied by meaningful enactment of its spirit. Though very young, she had a sense of personhood. Cochran (1990) defined personhood as the emergence of a regnant stance around which other stances crystallize "into a more or less harmonious position" (p. 39). Personhood is a symbolic, dramatic, and actual position necessary for sustained enactment of the central concern. Toward completion of that phase, the person recognizes him or herself as someone with a particular life's work to do, or a vocation. From a methodological point of view, the person's life goal is clearly defined by the opposing poles of what is and what ought to be. Motivation derives from the infusion with a sense of drama through the awareness that the work to be done matters "as if very existence is at stake" (Cochran, 1990, p. 50). The middle of the story is marked by the development and employment of the means to close the gap between the poles.

Sister Chelsea's life history leaves little doubt that she lived her life from age six to age twenty in preparation for a vocation. Although her life's path seemed to unfold unerringly with respect to her spiritual growth, avenues for concrete enactment were open to potentially many possibilities. In either case, repetition of a central concern and prototypical experience in varied guises proved instrumental in creating
and strengthening the unity of position. The following examples from Sister Chelsea's life history will illustrate her journey.

Repetition of Sister Chelsea's central concern or her relationship with God is clearly identifiable. Particularly striking is the development of her intuitive spirituality. Apart from daily mass, a prayerful attitude began permeating her life wherever she went. From an early age, prayer was not a matter of words, but silence in meditation and contemplation. She described prayer as "being with God", listening and being receptive to His ways of communicating. That communication may be through an intuitive thought, a hunch, dreams, a book, a person, etc.. Equally important was the development of critical faculties in matters of spiritual intuition and will be discussed in turn.

During junior high-school Chelsea worked in berry fields. She said,

I used to pray a lot in the fields, kind of drink it all in. In the morning it was beautiful. .... Yeah, I liked the solitude, prayed a lot, thought, watched the sunset. It was gorgeous.

Manual labor, whether working in the fields, in the cannery, or elsewhere, became an opportunity for prayer. Thus, from a young age on Sister Chelsea practiced what Cochran (1990) called infusion of spirit of the central concern. Infusion alternates with diffusion. Diffusion found its expression in her active compassion for others. What began with taking care of her siblings, gathering neighborhood children, continued throughout her school years either as teacher's helper or someone who assisted others who had difficulties catching on.

Following Cochran (1990), nestled within repeating cycles of infusion and diffusion of the central spirit lies the development of virtues and characteristics necessary for vocation and the unitive life. These characteristics include wholeheartedness, responsibility, courage, agency, industry, mastery, inspiration, finding models, and trying out personal metaphors and ostensive roles for one's life. Infusion and diffusion of spirit are also bound up in the alternating cycle of reflecting
and doing in the roles of spectator and participant (Cochran, 1990). Much of this activity proceeds from a tacit knowledge base. Unity, vocation and its elements are attained indirectly rather than directly. Vocation is part gift and part willed (Cochran, 1990).

The phases of incompleteness and positioning tilt toward the spectator role and construction of a livable reality through observation, exploration, incorporation, and reflection. "Involvement in the world is told and retold to oneself, ... formulated and reformulated" (Cochran, 1990, p. 87.) Within this context Cochran included Piaget's (1968) theory of assimilation and accommodation as well as Kelly's (1955) elaboration and revision. Corresponding and increasing participation make the central concern real and thereby heightens and unifies dramatic inspiration and motivation. Participation and spectatorship reciprocally influence each other in the construction and reconstruction of the symbolic or the meaning of action within the desired spirit.

Sister Chelsea's entire life has been an exercise in spectatorship and participation. Her prayerful life included reflecting and doing as a matter of course.

Cochran (1990) pointed out that virtues and characteristics are specific to the central focus. Thus, the person need not be courageous, agentive, and responsible in all areas of life, but where it matters most.

Sister Chelsea's life history clearly reveals the emergence of appropriate virtues and characteristics. Wholeheartedness is obvious in the importance of singleheartedness. Agency, courage, industry, and taking responsibility are evident with respect to her spiritual growth and in active compassion for others. With great understatement, she said, "I did things." Though her actions flowed from an innate desire, she was also highly aware of her inclination to help others. She said, "I talked it over with father [the priest], the sisters, or somebody." In addition, society reciprocated. Teachers and neighbors recognized her leadership and conscientiousness
by putting her in charge of others. Though one of the youngest, it was she who was scolded if there was trouble.

By age thirteen, reading had become an important means by which Chelsea widened her horizon and satisfied her curiosity about the world. At that time, she read a book a day. Her teacher declared the library off limits, saying that she read too much. Chelsea was angry and thought, "Well, if I can't read them, I'll write them!" She consequently wrote her own novel. Again, with her strong sense of what is and what might be, she created a new reality with a never lacking self-confidence.

Chelsea had also heard of Dr. Tom Dooley who, as a surgeon, had devoted his life to helping others in South-east Asia. In Dr. Dooley, Chelsea found a role model that gave her desire to help others a concrete direction for working singleheartedly from the awareness of God’s presence in the world. As will become evident, the metaphor of a physician, a healer, as someone creating and restoring wholeness has remained a dominant force in her life. Eventually, Sister Chelsea had to readjust her vision of becoming a physician to different circumstances. However, her intentions at the time were focused and serious. She said,

I had operated on every animal in the neighborhood that ever died, ... an autopsy to figure out how they died. I wanted to be a surgeon.

Thus, Chelsea practiced mastery in two important and connected ways. First, she cultivated her relationship with God which flowed into the second way of helping and healing.

A further example shall illustrate the breadth of young Chelsea's awareness of the lack of wholeness and her self-directed agency to heal the rift. During her senior class in high-school, she was disturbed by the lack of interaction between the boys and girls. She said,

I got tired of the whole student body. They had the boys on one side and the girls on the other. So, at noon time I told everybody to dance. I had some people teach other people. We used to have wonderful dances .... The principal
and his wife were very good dancers and that helped. He was a good model for the guys.

In anticipation of further discussion suffice it to say that, for Sister Chelsea, the integrating of male and female aspects in the world extend into spirituality and God.

Chelsea was very active and popular during her high-school years. Though the boys teased her at times for her strong moral values, it was also important for her to be liked by them. She was still in grade-school when she overheard a neighbor referring to her as being homely. Her mother's consolation, to use her head instead, made matters only worse. Sister Chelsea said,

I remember puzzling for many years whatever I was gonna do if I was that homely. How is my life gonna turn out, you know? So, I didn't have any trouble when I got to junior high-school. It turned out okay. (laughs), I guess. But I remember there were a couple of years in there that was real trauma. That hadn't anything to do with my vocation.

After graduating from high-school at age sixteen, Chelsea worked for a department store and a physicians' insurance company. She became engaged a year later. She said,

But during that time [three years], I was engaged, and every time we would set a date it just didn't seem right, you know. It didn't seem the right thing. So, finally, I went to the sisters at this college, as a matter of fact, and said, 'You know, I think I'm supposed to join something' (laughs).

However, this little episode is wedged within a period of decision making that eventually led to the recognition of a vocation. This process included a very rational approach of considering various options. She carefully evaluated marriage, remaining single as a professional, possibly a physician, and the religious life. Whatever option she might choose would be pursued with the singleheartedness she had been seeking since early childhood. She began exploring the religious communities by gathering information, looking for sufficient "largess" that might suit her temperament. Even after selecting a particular community, it was still a very difficult decision. The relationship with her fiance had to be sorted out. She was also very concerned about some aspects of the community she considered joining. The curtainless windows
seemed to symbolize her growing impression of a general lack of hospitality and warmth. Warmth and affection were not only the mark of her family, but belong to the wholeness and goodness inherent in her experience of God. She said, "... it seemed so cold, kind of not hospitable, and that has been my biggest problem in the community too." In addition, she had to abandon her dream of emulating Dr. Dooley. As a teaching order, the community did not provide for the pursuit of medicine. She had to widen the metaphor and said,

I had to work that through more, because I thought, 'Well, in a way this is being a physician, because I'm dealing with a lot of kids who are hurting and a lot of kids who have no real parents that love them. It's like sublimation, I guess you call it.

With her great sense of reality, she said, "I decided that was my call, yeah."

Inherent in this simple statement are the intellectual effort of deciding and the intuitive ability to 'hear a call'. Sister Chelsea reached a decision through her ability to work from an inseparable unity of intuition and intellect. Throughout the interview, Sister Chelsea stressed the development of both intellectual discrimination and awareness of intuition. Intuition is not followed blindly but scrutinized and heeded with a critical mind and much prayer. As will be shown, Sister Chelsea is very aware of self-delusion. In the final analysis, it is the outcome or fruit that determines the value.

The phase of positioning was transcended with Sister Chelsea's decision to enter the community. Personhood had jelled into the recognition of a vocation breaking the cycle of uncertainty, hesitation, doubt, and tentativeness. She was now "... in position and bent on fulfilling ... her promise as a person" (Cochran, 1990, p. 91). The end of positioning is marked by a shift or a more or less subtle culminating experience that separates "striving to be" from the recognition "that one is" (Cochran, 1990, p. 91). Sister Chelsea's account clearly indicates that shift. She was now in position to begin the work of life.
The Middle: The Phase of Positing or the Work of Life

Cochran (1990) defined the phase of positing as the repetition of the central drama in order "... to actualize the spirit or tenor of one's being" (p. 40). The new challenge is to live up to the promise of the culminating shift in personhood. A new way of doing things has yet to be worked out through trial and error. Intensity of commitment and effort wax and wane. Success and setbacks, doubt about one's vocation, periods of hopelessness, etc., remain within the fabric of life. Thus, the way to completion progresses through cycles of repositioning, positing, and incompleteness. However, incompleteness and positioning are now experienced with the difference of no longer being chronically stuck. One knows the way out (Cochran, 1990).

In its basic manifestation, Sister Chelsea's life work began at age six. Perhaps her inscrutable awareness of God and cooperation with that Presence precluded a religious crisis and rebellious teenage years. Nevertheless, as an adult she had to find a suitable translation of singleheartedness in a particular manner. She had chosen a difficult route. It appears that her life's work was accompanied by much personal hardship.

Sister Chelsea faced the challenging task of balancing personal integrity and being a member of a community. In addition, a physical, mental, and spiritual time of the Dark Night was awaiting her. Sister Chelsea began her university education upon entering the novitiate. However, challenges to her commitment lay elsewhere. As time went on, her assessment of the lack of hospitality was confirmed. She said, "The novitiate was a very, very hard time for me. At that time they did a lot of things that were not too humane." For instance, letters from her former boy friend were withheld for a period. Consequently, she was unable to communicate with him and perhaps soften the blow of their breakup. Her integrity was also tested when she and two other novices refused to sign an agreement not to develop close personal relationships which included not touching other sisters, because that would make love less universal. In
addition to the lack of warmth, affection, and caring, she found the community equally inhospitable to new ideas. She said,

"I've always been five years ahead of schedule and gotten a lot of negative feedback initially. People are always much more comfortable with what is than I am.

For Sister Chelsea, however, difficult times were the more reason for prayer and being with God. A rather serious reassessment of her commitment occurred when, after winning a scholarship for graduate school, she was pulled out of the program by her superior in order to take the place of a nun who was in a "snit" refusing to teach her classes. Not only had the superior broken her word, but the university viewed the withdrawal as a serious breach of trust putting the future of the scholarship in doubt. Sister Chelsea wondered whether she should leave the community and continue the program on her own. But she decided to stay and eventually returned to school to obtain a Ph.D..

Not so much a test of her commitment, but a particular way of experiencing God was awaiting her as a high-school teacher. Apart from dealing with senior boys who were regularly getting drunk in order to drown their fears of having to go to Vietnam, Sister Chelsea had to endure what amounted to psychological harassment by a superior who disliked her intensely. She said, "I've never cracked up, but it was the closest that I have ever come to that I might." That difficult time was accompanied by a particular awareness of God. She said,

"I had just a real sense of being enveloped by God. ..... It was a real physical throwing myself in God's arms at night so that I would get some sleep. I just felt I was being held in existence.

The almost physical awareness of God's presence and the wisdom of a supportive principal saved her until a kind provincial superior initiated a transfer to end her plight.

The Dark Night. Sister Chelsea was about to experience six years of physical, mental, and spiritual alienation. The community had recognized her extraordinary
capabilities and appointed her the youngest novice mistress in the history of the order. In addition, she was chosen to be the spiritual director for the novices. This position was traditionally held by a priest since spiritual direction and the sacrament of penance were deemed inseparable. Development of spirituality most closely identifies and unites what is closest to Sister Chelsea’s heart as the way to wholeness and integration. She did away with the customary focus on sin and the quick “checklist” of religious practices as measurement of spirituality. Instead, she devoted great individual attention to each novice often deep into the night. She said, they talked about

Spiritual direction as the art of, you know, helping someone grow and listen, trusting your own movement of the spirit, your intuition. We talked a lot about discernment. So, it was kind of new.

She found much needed support in two priests, a Jesuit and a Sulpician, who became her life-long friends.

But it was also a time of great physical and mental isolation. Sister Chelsea had suddenly risen to a very high position within the hierarchy of the community. She said, “Even my friends wouldn’t come [to visit]. They’d put you in a different category.” Also, Vatican II had rattled some of the old ways of thinking and doing with the consequence that Sister Chelsea was “blamed for everything that was wrong with everyone’s life.” Neither the old sisters, the young novices, nor those in the middle could be pleased.

However, more painful than her isolation from others was the loss of the awareness of God’s presence and guidance. She said,

It was almost the whole time I was director of the novitiate, for approximately six years. I felt, I was in a dark tunnel, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Only, it was curved. I couldn’t see the light at the end. I knew it was there, and I kept praying. I went to a psychologist, because I had this tearing I could not explain, that I could not get rid of. It felt like my whole chest cavity was raw, you know. It was like it was bleeding, but it wasn’t. But the feeling of rawness, that burningness, it was a terrible physical, just very painful experience. It would be like the picture of open heart surgery. I thought it was psychological, my head thing again. I thought you can delude yourself. You can manufacture all kind of symptoms, stigmata, you know. I’m always afraid of fake religion, that’s a real fear of mine, being something that is not in
keeping with the way God made us. I don't know what it was, and I can't explain it. Nobody could. He [the psychologist] couldn't either. I never did resolve that and eventually it disappeared, --- the Dark Night, --- gradually.

Sister Chelsea's account suggests that the Dark Night was a transition from the phase of positing to unparalleled unity of being and doing analogous to Underhill's unitive life and Cochran's (1990) phase of completion. She said,

That period of my life, from 1974 to 1978, was the time I felt most consoled. When I'd wake up in the morning, God was very present. I started praying right away. It was like every thing was right. What I must do was right.

During that time she started a center for spirituality, teaching spiritual intuition and spiritual discrimination according to St. Ignatius. She particularly loved working as a team with her Jesuit friends providing both female and male points of view. However, before discussing the next phase, the Dark Night deserves a final comment.

Whatever conceptualization is hoisted onto the Dark Night is apt to deepen the mystery rather than explain it. The important point is that a shift had taken place. In this context the idea of rite of passage or the hero's journey might be helpful by the markers of separation or symbolic death, initiation, and return (Campbell, 1956; Van Gennep, 1960). Underhill (1955) described the Dark Night of the Soul as the purging of the last vestiges of self-withholding in preparation for total immersion in God "as a sponge in the sea" (p. 414). But from the outset, Sister Chelsea's life was about joyful participation rather than purgation. Although, within the context of vocation, purgation might be interpreted as cultivating virtues, overcoming hindrances, and enduring what cannot be changed. Judging from the life that followed, Sister Chelsea had transcended preparation for enactment of position. She had entered a unitive, timeless way of being and doing.

The End: The Phase of Completion or the Unitive Life

Following Cochran (1990), completion involves a shift in personhood. Personhood is no longer dominated by a regnant gap and the desire to close it as in the previous phases, but by attainment and completion of dramatic unity. Completion ends
and transcends story. The end is not satiation, restful fulfillment, or retirement. Instead of working to fulfill, the person overflows from the fullness of being. Fluctuation, cycles, and fragmentation of previous phases recede. The central enactment as repetition and series of individual acts gives way to timeless activity. With the opposing poles closed, the future is absorbed within the present. Cochran (1990) referred to Underhill's (1955) unitive life for further comparison. The mystic way is equally a way of personal transformation though by seeking increasing union with God, the All, etc. (Underhill, 1955). It is equally a life of greater freedom, deeper participation, and total self-donation to a reality greater than the self. "The new life is not an act, but a state" marked by great vitality (Underhill, 1955, p. 428). Life's adversities are not banned, but are approached with an "... indistinguishable gladness of heart (p. 437).

Sister Chelsea exemplifies both the tenor of Cochran's (1990) completion and Underhill's (1955) unitive life as her personal, creative attainment.

Sister Chelsea leaves no doubt that her world is a seamless whole that issues from God. Therefore, her intellectual and intuitive awareness of God will be the point of departure. She said, "What is happening between God and the Son Jesus and the Christian community is a tremendous theological reality in which I am a participant." This intellectual conceptualization is inseparably integrated with the intuitive awareness that God is intimately personal, caring, and loving. She said,

    God can intercede and miracles can happen. But ... that's not the ordinary way. I think, God is present in the reality of the human condition and that's where the discovery [of His presence] takes place. People that argue, `Where was God when my child died, or where was God then'? I mean, God is right in you when you are going through that terrible suffering.

    The human condition includes freedom, but also limitations, and is open to good, evil, misfortune and "God does not get in the middle of it." Nevertheless, the nature of God as the Trinity is intimately relational. Sister Chelsea sees God as community rather than God merely as Christ. She said,
I don't know what Christian means. ... I think it's more Trinitarian than Christian. Well, the Spirit, the wisdom figures. Sophia means a lot to me, so does the warmth of the Father, so does the Christ figure and His identification with all human beings, you know, our role model. In some way there is the feminine too. I don't know what you call it, the Goddess, the Blessed Mother, or what. It's just more diffused than the word Christian. But it is relational, not abstract like 'cosmic' is. ... Universe is out there. It's relational, you know, relationship as God as community. It's wholeness again.

It seems correct to say that, for Sister Chelsea, God as the Trinity sets the all inclusive standard for personal integrity and participation in a greater wholeness that extends into the world. Thus, individual wholeness and participation in a community or a greater whole are integral to the human condition. The unitive life is rooted in God. Indeed, Sister Chelsea's life has been a testimony to the balance between personal integrity and community. By her own admission, it has been very difficult at times.

The above theological conceptualization is accompanied by Sister Chelsea's intuitive awareness of God's presence. She distinguishes between "horizon awareness", as awareness of someone's existence somewhere, perhaps being in love, and the actual sense of God's presence. Though "horizon awareness" is part of it, God's presence is qualitatively different. She said,

I feel myself just held as if in somebody's arms, just a real embrace. It's hard to explain. Most of my life I've either felt that, either Presence or being embraced, or something.

Upon being asked, Sister Chelsea clarified that this presence is neither imagined, nor willed, nor under her control, but comes as a gift or grace. Upon entering the novitiate the Presence intensified to a feeling as if being "embraced" or "held in giant arms". Not surprising, the Dark Night felt "pretty terrible". Her reaction to the withdrawal of the Presence is indicative of how inseparable the physical, the mental, and the spiritual have become. She said,

I think, I must feel a lot with energies. If the energy flow seems harmonious like, — it happens all the time the way I treat people, a way of doing everything. If there is a flow of energy, if there is a rightness about it, it feels like God is right by my shoulders, something like that. If I'm moving along
with that energy flow it's okay. But if I do things that aren't quite charitable, selfish, or whatever, I know it.

Referring to a particular incident, she said,

I had absolutely no feeling of God's presence, you know. It was lack of integration, and confusion, and resentment, --- lack of wholeness.

God's absence and presence have become a "totality response" as either fragmentation or wholeness. Within the physical realm, Sister Chelsea has learned to heed bodily signals such as headaches or a queasy stomach that something is "not quite right, not quite jelling." With respect to the mental, dreams are very important and "clarifying" in what needs to be done, that changes must be made if the college is to survive, or they remind her that she is trying to be "super woman". Of great importance are frequent premonitions preparing and guiding her. For instance, she knew well ahead of time when a responsible position would come her way either as novice mistress or provincial superior. She said, it might be God's way to prepare her gradually, because of her tendency to be overly conscientious and to worry excessively. She said,

It's as if God said, 'Well, you'll be there in two years, but I'll see you'll be ready for that. Don't worry, it will happen, but I'll be there, and I'll guide you', or whatever.

Often she knows beforehand who is coming to see her and what the problem might be, or how a difficult business decision is going to turn out. Other times it might be a touch or voice. She said,

So many times it's either hearing a voice, sometimes it comes in my dreams. It's almost as if, "Chelsea do this or do this, call so and so." It's almost as if I'm guided by a companion. That's really true.

For instance, she felt touched on her shoulder with the message, 'Go be with Lucy'. She said, "I knew it was God." Lucy was in the infirmary with cancer but not expected to die. Had Sister Chelsea not heeded the intuition, Lucy would have died alone without anyone to comfort her.
The above examples demonstrate how Sister Chelsea experiences God's presence as intimately personal, loving, caring, and working "with whatever happens." The reality of her personal history as someone who worries is not taken away, but integrated. Lucy's life was not spared, but she died in someone's arms. There is no hint of escapism, rather, there is acceptance and cooperation with life as it presents itself. Life has become a single act, a flowing activity (Cochran, 1990), a state of total belonging (Underhill, 1955). Sister Chelsea said,

It doesn't matter whether I'm working with the Chamber of Commerce, or working on a doctorate, or working with retarded children, you know. Work doesn't really matter. And the people, it doesn't matter whether I'm with rich people, or poor people, or people who can't read, or anything else. Still, the heart is in the same place. The doing flows from the belonging, true, but it's [the belonging that is] more important, even if I couldn't do anything, even if I were deaf and blind. At one time I had a lot of ear trouble, and we thought that I was gonna be deaf for ever more. I had surgery, and I thought, 'Well, maybe my vocation will then be a contemplative.' I'd be, so to speak, cut off from the world. But that didn't bother me. That didn't even make me feel afraid, because that meant I'd be closer to God in a different way. (pause) That's what I mean by singleheartedness.

During the interview, Sister Chelsea often paused, reflecting when asked to elaborate on God's presence, her intuitive awareness, spiritual discrimination, or how she maintains personal integration. Sometimes she said, "I take it so much for granted", or she mused aloud, "How do I do that?" Her reference to the harmonious flow of energy includes an ever present, unselfconscious vigilance as if an inner gyroscope keeps her on track. Cochran (1990) cited Csikszentmihalyi (1975) who likened unselfconscious absorption to flow or total self-giving to the situation at hand. However, unselfconscious does not mean automatism or lack of awareness. In Sister Chelsea, various levels of consciousness cooperate harmoniously, including dreams, intuition, and the discriminating intellect. There are times when the rational attempts to minimize intuition by saying, "Oh, this couldn't be." Nevertheless, the rational is the last instance of discrimination for following up on intuition, for making final decisions, for assessing value and veracity. When through her intuitive awareness God seems to
say, "Chelsea, do this or do this', her freedom is never in question. There is neither coercion nor blind obedience to anyone. But there is an unfathomable inner vigilance and certainty for what is good, whole, and of God.

Throughout her entire life, Sister Chelsea's vigilance and focus toward wholeness seems to have protected her from becoming trapped in peripheral issues such as resentment, blame, bitterness, and a host of other distractions. Wholeness also includes knowing what kind of action to take, what to change, what to endure, when to quit. While working on her doctorate she suffered terribly from the prevailing coldness, absence of caring, and lack of spiritual awareness at the seminary she described as a "very gay world." She endured the "harsh" environment by keeping her focus on what mattered most and responded positively by forming a core group of individuals interested in developing their spirituality.

Vigilance is also very much evident with respect to personal integrity. Thomas More is her role model. She said,

Thomas More is a lay person and that's what a nun is, a lay person. Thomas More had a sense of humor. Thomas More knew where he started and where he let off. He was a real person of integrity, and he lost his head over it, the Church. But he stood what he stood for, you know. .... How does one belong to an organization and still maintain one's integrity? And I think that that is always a struggle, because you want to belong but, yet to do some of those things would be a violation of integrity. And so, when I reach that brick wall, then I have to make some decision, and, usually I make that decision on the side of integrity. But, I try to talk to the people in charge and tell them why.

A number of years ago when she attempted to integrate spirituality and philosophy into a credit course, she was inappropriately attacked and defamed. Although she had more than sufficient arguments to pay back in kind, she refused to do so. She knew that the point of no return had arrived. As always, she spent time in prayer and sought consultation with superiors. The requested transfer led to her doctorate.

Embedded in the previous episode is her ever present central enactment for healing, for being a different kind of physician. Even at the present time, she is
troubled that education at the college is merely seen as improving job opportunities, neglecting philosophy and spiritual awareness. Equally, when asked what she would like to do with the rest of her life, she said,

I'm really drawn to spirituality. I feel a lot of our students are so confused. They've been in cultist situations, and I'm wondering, if I'm called to do more spiritual counselling.

But there are also obligations to her community which include earning a wage. She said,

I guess, I kind of live the reality that comes up. But I try and listen and see if there is a different reality to which I am called.

Apart from living reality in the present as a flowing activity, the above quotation implies that her life is open-ended. Listening requires being open to the new and unexpected, to a "different reality" which is, nevertheless, anchored in the search for wholeness. Sister Chelsea referred to the spiritual as the art of listening. Cochran (1990) defined vocation as artistic dramatic composition. In either case, unity overcomes fragmentation as well as rigidity and under its leitmotif embraces diversity, integrity, openness, and expansiveness. Cochran related wholeness to holiness and quality of life unified in meaning. Sister Chelsea exemplifies how a unified life is also a good life. Fragmentation not only compromises the quality of life, but Sister Chelsea experiences it as physical, mental, and spiritual pain. Completion or the unified life are not perfection or the development of every human potential (Cochran, 1990). For Sister Chelsea, perfection is of the 'after life' rather than of this world.

With respect to the mystical, Sister Chelsea is very suspicious of visions in general and does not claim to have had any extraordinary experiences akin to Otto's (1958) "numinous" category. Her life exemplifies Underhill's (1955) description of the intuitive awareness of the Presence and how premonition and automatism such as voices and touch may accompany the mystic way and the unitive life. Sister Chelsea may be counted among the "once born" (James, 1972) who have no need for a dramatic
conversion experience, because their spiritual awareness is simply part of a natural way of being.

Much neglected in the mystical literature is humor. Throughout the interview, Sister Chelsea demonstrated a disarming ability to laugh at herself and readily acknowledged the comical in human interaction with frequent chuckles. When asked for a personal metaphor, she chose the oak tree, because it is alive, sturdy in adverse conditions, provides shelter for other creatures, and "was once a nut that held its ground."
Life History Two: John

John, not his real name, is in his fifties and married. He was a Jesuit priest, holds four masters degrees and is presently head of counselling at an educational institution. He has remained active in the Catholic Church and is a volunteer with a society for the mentally handicapped.

John is the oldest of four. His father, a journeyman welder, was also a professional gambler who would disappear for months without a trace. He would send for his family only to repeat the same scenario. When John was about ten years old, his father left for good, leaving the family penniless and homeless. By that time, John had lived in many states and been to well over ten schools. When the father was around, he acted somewhat like a pal who took his young son to the bar where much of the gambling took place. His father was not a Catholic and is deceased.

John's mother is Catholic. She took the children to church every Sunday regardless in which part of the country they happened to live. Otherwise there was little talk about God or Jesus in the home except for prayer before meals and at bedtime. The home was recognizable as Christian by a crucifix and religious pictures in the bedrooms.

John grew up with the experience that "people who show care and concern did not hug you physically" very much. Neither John's father nor his mother came from affectionately demonstrative families.

Synopsis of John's life. John's early life was marked by a constantly changing environment due to his father's lifestyle. There was never time to develop friendships, to join peer groups, or to call a particular place home. Nevertheless, within that swirling chaos, John found two reliable sources of stability that came to determine his life. He said,

Stability was my mother. I recall, we were going to church every Sunday. And I moved from city to city, you know. I was just a little kid. One thing that was stable was that there was always the Catholic mass. That was familiar,
the only thing that was familiar. The only stable person was my mother, occasionally relatives. But no matter where we moved, there were Catholic churches and Catholic masses. That was there.

The early experiences of the father, the mother, and the Church became intimately intertwined into, what might retrospectively be called, a destiny.

Particularly striking was the role of the Catholic community, who continuously opened new doors inviting him to ever deepening participation while simultaneously offering protection. The mother's stability profoundly influenced his devotion to Mary. With reference to his mother, he said,

I think my devotion to Mary is also a relationship of stability, someone to go to when you are troubled. It's very easy [for me] to go to Mary. And so, over the years that was there.

Equally, the father had a profound impact on John's image of God the Father.

He said,

My father image was of someone who was irresponsible, who was not reliable, someone who is not dependable, someone who is not around. .... God the Father was very much affected by my own father as someone distant, remote, there and not there, reliable and not reliable, ah, never someone who would hug you, ... not huggy, sort of stern figure.

He summed up this description with the question, "Is this love?" In the simplest fashion, this image of God already contained the seeds of discontent. Eventually, a full-fledged crisis emerged that was ultimately resolved in a mystical experience of God's loving presence "settling" and "rooting" John. The relationship with his father, and in extension with God, appeared to have been an important undercurrent that has remained largely unexplored. John said,

I haven't spent much time relating my experience of my father to my attitude toward God the Father or Jesus. I'm basically going stream of consciousness out loud. It's the first time I've been able to verbalize them in any way or even attempted considering doing that. So, there has to be some kind of effect, and I need to think about it more.

However, a further powerful experience of Jesus' presence alludes to an intimate connection. At the time, John was in his just deceased father's apartment sorting out business affairs and making arrangements for the funeral. The dramatic
setting is inescapable. Most telling is the meaning the experience had for John. He summarized its message as "the feeling of Jesus was there when I needed him" which stands in sharp contrast to his father's conduct.

The Beginning: The Phase of Incompletion or Awakening and Unification of Yearning

Following Cochran (1990), repetition of early, often tacit, dramatic units is instrumental in composing a coherent and enduring structure of desire out of a multiplicity of fragmented, episodic, and perhaps chaotic experiences of early childhood. John's chaotic early life offered a number of potential themes that might have gained ascendency. In some way, circumstances and temperament colluded in making the experience of the ever present Sunday mass particularly salient. This positive relationship with the Catholic Church took a dramatic step forward when John was in the fourth grade. His mother enroled the children in a Catholic boarding school after the father had deserted the family. She settled in the same town. The children rejoined the mother one by one as her finances improved over the years. John left boarding school after one year. As the oldest he did not need constant supervision, allowing his mother to continue working.

John described the destruction of the family, not having a home, and the ensuing hardship as a terrible jolt that changed his personality. Although the siblings were in the same school, they were separated by age and gender. A further trauma was being poor. Since his mother had four children, she could not provide them with pocket money to join the other kids on Saturday outings to the movies. John said,

It was painful, because the other kids were off and I was alone again. So, I would be different from the other kids, because a lot of them had money from their parents. I, and maybe a couple of other kids, would play around the boarding school while others went off to the movies and enjoyed themselves.

John dealt with these difficulties by becoming withdrawn, introverted, and reflective. He said, "Before that I was spontaneously involved in mischief like boys my age. As a child I was always extroverted." Significantly, it was not the negative
but the positive that gained strength. The early experience of the Catholic Church was repeated and widened by including school life. The Church was no longer just an impersonal Sunday mass, but began to take on a human face through the caring and loving nuns at the boarding school. He liked the daily rhythm of prayer. Also, for the first time his environment allowed him to become part of a stable peer group and to form lasting friendships.

After leaving the boarding school, John continued going to a Catholic grade-school in the same town. His involvement with the Church deepened significantly when he became an altar boy, changing his role from mere spectatorship to participant. He said,

I really started becoming aware of religion, you know, 'This is what I've been doing!' Instead of being at a distance, I was suddenly involved. It became more meaningful, much more so.

When the time came to go to high-school, the Church was once again present in an unexpected way. The Jesuits, who looked also after the parish, decided to open the boys' high-school after twenty-six years of closure. John was happy to continue his education with them.

Again, it was the people within the Catholic environment who continued to make a difference. John said,

The people were more important to me [than dogma]. .... I was good friends with the nuns. They liked me, and I liked them. I was good friends with the priests, as good as a person could be friends with someone who was much older than he is. I felt comfortable around the church, the priests, the sisters. They were always nice to my family. I found the priests so understanding. I was aware that they were friends of the students. Fortunately we had some of the best Jesuits around. They were good! I would say, they were first with their hearts. I mean, they were loving people.

Being around the church was also fun. John and his friend, who was also an altar boy, had contests of who could say the most payers during service. The priests organized picnics, told ghost stories, etc.. The Church was present wherever John turned. When going to his friend's house to play after dinner, the family was often
engaged in praying the rosary. John was invited to participate. John would rather play
than pray and worked on improving his timing. But he said, "The family was a very
peaceful and loving. So, that had an impact on me." Through this family, John
became aware of the rosary and devotion to Mary which became increasingly important
in his life.

Even during the summer holidays while visiting his mother's relatives, he was
among Catholics. But more importantly, he said,

I felt good around them. They were all nice to me, my uncles. They were hard
working ranchers, farmers, solid German stock. ... So, I really learned a solid
work ethic from them.

John's home life normalized over the years. But the returning siblings meant
greater responsibility for him. In addition to a part-time job, John took care of the
younger children while his mother worked. The added responsibility was, at times,
hard on him. But all the children became very independent. For John, independence
meant control over his environment. As long as he was in control, he would not be
hurt again as in the traumatic breakup of his family that he was unable to prevent. The
need for control came to permeate his prayer, meditation, and contemplation. As will
be shown, the control issue became important within the context of the mystical
experience.

Upon graduating from high-school, John worked for the railroad in a
neighboring state. Without actively seeking it, the Church emerged once again and
took him under its wings. John worked as an assistant station master. His superiors,
two station masters at different locations, were both practicing Catholics. One of the
men was married. The men and family became friends. They went to church together
and joined in recreational activities. Every other week John visited relatives nearby
and Sunday mass was a given. Summing up his early experiences, he said, "I was
always around good people. I ran around with Christians. I was quite fortunate in that
respect." But John was not settled. He said,
I was on my own, and when I'd go home from work, I found myself praying more and more, because I didn't have a family around me. I found myself trying to find meaning in my life. I was restless. I could have lived a very fast lifestyle if I wanted to, because I had a fair amount of money coming in. I was totally independent living on my own. And there was the Church again.

After nearly three years with the railroad, he received a letter from a friend in the Jesuit seminary inviting him to visit. John said,

When I went to that seminary, I think my whole previous experience led up to my life coming together. People [at the seminary] were very nice to me. I was just enthralled by the services. I talked to the novice master as well as the young men who were in the seminary. I was quite moved by the whole experience. It was very powerful, and I had never been to anything like that before. It was very pleasant, and peaceful, and enjoyable. Then I went back to the railroad, and I started thinking, and thinking, and thinking. And then, over a period of four months, I decided to become a priest, a Jesuit.

During formal application and interviews two Jesuits, John had known as a youngster, independently validated his decision. One of them said, "I always thought you should be a priest. I'm surprised you waited this long." John said, "That was an interesting confirmation. It's interesting, they never mentioned it to me when I was growing up."

John's life up to the decision to become a priest was clearly marked by arousal and unification of desire bound by the opposing poles of stability and instability. His early experience of the Church contained the primitive dramatic unit promising to close the gap and fulfilling his desire for stability, shelter, and wholeness. Becoming an altar boy brought a significant shift in awareness foreshadowing his inclination toward meaningful participation that led to the priesthood. Circumstances remained favorable and strengthened the plot for life. John said, "I clung to Catholicism. It was natural."

This statement indicates a progression as well as tension. The early dramatic unit was not merely repeated in many different ways but was significantly transformed from a haven to a way of being. Increasingly the Church offered an entire world as a coherent dramatic unity. The tension originated in the need to cling to safety which threatened
to disintegrate during the crisis of faith. This tension was resolved through the mystical experience by imparting a total sense of acceptance and belonging.

John experienced the Church concretely through its people rather than through abstract theology. Similarly, it was a personal experience of a living God that came to integrate him and fused his personhood in the metaphor of a follower of Christ.

Cochran (1990) described the phase of incompleteness as dominated by spectatorship and rehearsal for life. Although John participated actively as a young Catholic, it is clear that his work was watching and emulating others. He was surrounded by role models. With reference to the priests and uncles he said, "I looked up to them as father figures. I would observe how they behaved."

The decision to become a priest indicated a shift from relative passivity to agency by taking responsibility for making the potential actual. Desire had not only been unified but was brought to a workable and realistic basis for central enactment. Incompleteness was sufficiently transcended for the phase of positioning to emerge.

The Middle: The Phase of Positioning or the Attainment of Personhood

The novitiate and postulate of religious orders are designed to serve as trial periods for religious vocation and fit effortlessly Cochran's (1990) conceptualization of positioning. As will become apparent, John's personal development, entering the seminary, and the phase of positioning made for a dramatic confluence.

"A person enters positioning with a plan, more or less, for bridging the gap between what is and what ought to be. .... One is, yet one is not" (Cochran, 1990, pp. 69, 74). Life is continuous rehearsal away from incompleteness toward a passionately desired conviction from which to live. Inessentials are discarded, essentials accepted and developed. Finally, all that is needed is what Cochran called a culminating experience of certainty that unifies personhood as a regnant stance for sustained enactment of the central concern. Furthermore, the two analogies of protagonist versus antagonist and the rite of passage suggested by Cochran for this phase fit John's life
particularly well. First, the battle between antagonist and protagonist was ushered in by a traumatic crisis in matters of faith literally involving "the nature of the world" (Cochran, 1990, p. 74). Second, this crisis was a preamble to a series of mystical experiences over thirty-five days where ultimate reality of the universe established itself as spiritual. By direct participation in this reality, John underwent a transformation akin to separation, initiation, and integration analogous to a rite of passage. Through this experience he gained sufficient certitude to begin his life's work.

**Antagonist vs protagonist or the crisis of faith.** John found the atmosphere in the seminary much to his liking. The military style discipline and structure provided a measure of stability. His independence was safeguarded by prevailing freedom of thought encouraged by the spiritual directors who continuously questioned ingrained assumptions. However, the challenge to John's faith came from the outside. After about five years, the boot-camp atmosphere gave way to greater personal freedom by attending an open university. The crisis was ushered in during his studies in philosophy, particularly the existentialists. As previously mentioned, John's image of God the Father contained the seeds of discontent. Over the years this image widened. God became the enforcer of rules and regulations, a stern judge who would punish non-compliance severely, possibly with hell. He said, "There was not the hell fire and damnation talk, but I had it in me that if you were not a Catholic you went to hell."

With reference to the crisis he said,

> I was throwing off stuff, taking on new stuff. I had to go through it. .... The more I studied the more I found myself distant. I didn't believe in the divinity of Christ, the Holy Trinity. The Church was just another human organization. For me, God, if He existed, was way out there, remote, and had very little to do with reality in my life. I saw God as judgmental, not loving. I said, 'Well, I don't need to relate to a God like that.' So, that's it. I was agnostic, but I had atheistic tendencies.

John wrestled with a host of other issues including the connection between predestination and God's goodness, the presence of evil, the nature of rules and regulations, etc. He tried to make his faith happen, but to no avail. He stopped going
to church and stopped praying. His friends advised him not to make any major
decisions during that traumatic time, but to just keep going, to lead a normal life as a
good person, and see what happens. Since he had run out of options, little choice was
left but to surrender control. Within this passivity a measure of faith returned almost
imperceptibly. But he said, "I knew to a certain degree there was a God." It was like
a tree in soft dirt. When the wind blows hard, it's gonna fall."

The battle was not only over the existence of God, but equally about God's
interaction with humanity. John had to heal and integrate God's father image through
which he had come to experience the world. At stake was all that had given his life
meaning and stability.

While immersed in this "tremendous struggle", John followed the urge to track
his father down. This search took some effort since no one in the family had any
information about his whereabouts. John said,

I have no idea what it really meant as far as the relationship with God the Father
is concerned, because it was more a "getting to know you" type of thing. I
haven't really made that connection myself. But I think it really important that
that happened.

There was no dramatic reunion or trying to make up for lost time and missed
opportunities. John kept in contact with his father over the years and developed a
meaningful relationship insofar as circumstances allowed. It was satisfying for John to
learn that he was among those his father wanted to be contacted in case of illness or
death.

A few years later John was called to his unconscious father's bedside. With
amusement John noted that he was in a Catholic hospital. An attending nun wondered
about his father's religious affiliation. John did not know, but gave his consent to the
sister's inquiry to have his father baptized a Catholic. He was not expected to live the
night. However, his father recovered fully. He was delighted having inadvertently
become a Catholic and inquired about taking religious instructions. Apparently the
Monsignor he contacted rejected him by calling him an "old reprobate" who wanted to save his soul at the end of a wasted life. John laughed. But the Catholic Church played once again a healing role in John's life. At least symbolically the father had accepted and joined the son's world.

There was another development around the time of the crisis. John's mother declared that she was no longer going to suppress her affectionate nature. She began giving hugs to her adult children.

John commented on the thematic confluence of these occurrences. He reiterated that resuming contact with his father and his mother's sudden show of affection were parallel to the restructuring of his faith rather than instrumental.

However, in retrospect, including the mystical experience, it can be said that love was emerging as the ultimate stability and freedom, transcending previous instability and excessive control.

The Mystical Experience.

About four years later while studying theology, John had found a small private Chapel for regular quiet prayer and contemplation. He had become familiar with the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius as well as the lives of saints and mystics. It seems most fruitful to provide a summary of the mystical experience in John's own voice. The following quotations are a collection from various places in the transcript.

I would go there [the chapel] on a daily basis. I somehow ended up in a form of contemplative, imaginative type of prayer. I would slowly slip into being aware, literally, through my imagination, of Nazareth somewhere around the time Christ began his public life. And through my visualization, I was just sitting there outside His house overlooking the valley, watching people, just being with Him. I could actually hear, and feel, and smell, and everything. I was right into it. It's a very Ignatian prayer. I had been accustomed to this form of prayer off and on. I would dialogue with Jesus. I would talk with Him about what He was about to do going into His public life. I would share my concerns, etc., or I would talk with His mother. Gradually, it started becoming very meaningful to me. I started feeling a sense of peace and a greater sense of wholeness than before. And it started affecting my conscious awareness during the day. I was just becoming more and more slowly aware that something neat was happening, something very peaceful, very subtle. It was settling me, because I wasn't settled. Then I got to the point
where it startled me, wondering what was going on with me. What’s happening to me? I would try to verbalize, and I wouldn’t be able to. I’d try and say something, ‘I’m concerned about this or that’, and I wasn’t able to. I mean, that disturbed me [losing control]. What happened was that I was getting aware that I really was in the presence of God and not just in my imagination anymore. There was a building awareness. I found myself going into prayer and very quickly started getting absorbed into a sense of the presence of God. It was a sense of Jesus. It was a felt sense. It was like in the center of the prayer I was experiencing this Presence. I would try to use my imagination to place myself at Nazareth and that wouldn’t work. I tried to say, ‘Lord I love you’, but I couldn’t even say that despite myself. As soon as I tried for a second, ‘Be still, be quiet’, is what happened. It was almost like I was there, not just at Nazareth, but I was there in the chapel. I would come into the chapel, and I would be aware that somehow I was in the presence of a Being. And it was very, very peaceful. So, after a few days fighting the experience, trying to make things happen, I found I could no longer make it happen. I could no longer make my imagination work. What I’d do, I’d go there and it was almost like I was being held. I would just be still. I would just be there. I would just very, very deeply feel the presence of the Lord, and there was nothing I could do about it. It was almost like the experience took me over rather than me leading the experience. I couldn’t control it. It was no longer my prayer, it was the Lord’s. It was His, but I was caught up in it. It’s almost like He took over my prayer. It was like it happened to me. It was not something that I made happening. I was not aware of myself, I was aware of the Lord.

Interviewer: But, yet you still had some sense of identity.

John: No, I was just there. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t do anything. I tried to respond, somehow interact, but I couldn’t. ‘Be still’ is all that happened. I mean, I was not aware of anything around me in the chapel.

Interviewer: How did you regain awareness of yourself?

John: I don’t know how. I just gradually became aware that my prayer was over. Forty minutes passed just like that. It started to sort of fade, and I would be in time and space again. When I went into the prayer and when I came out of the prayer was kind of similar. It was very, very peaceful.

The experience was most intense during the last fourteen days of the thirty-five day period before it dissipated slowly. John said,

I’d go back and try the felt sense occur again, try to make that deep sense of peace happen over again, and I couldn’t do that. And that kind of sadness was there that I couldn’t make this happen, force this again. And now it’s back to ‘everyday formal prayer again.’

John’s account of the mystical experience is almost prototypical of Underhill’s (1955) unitive experience and Otto’s (1958) encounter with the “numinous”,
including Stace's (1969) and James' (1972) categories discussed in the review of the literature. However, the significance of the mystical experience lies in the meaning embedded in the context of the individual's life history rather than a checklist of abstract supposedly universal categories. As will become increasingly evident, John's life gives testimony to this claim.

Little or nothing can be said about what John called "the center of the prayer" where he was not aware of anything, not even himself. Descending into and emerging out of the center, awareness of the "Lord" waxed and waned respectively. The center was a complete, single-pointed focus, absorption, union, being caught up in the Presence. Since all physical and mental agency ceased, intellectual analysis and rational understanding had to be pulled from the sense of non-dualistic, participatory knowing. Trying to translate the ineffable, John said,

The theme that kept coming back over and over while I was reflecting on it was, 'I am with you. Don't be afraid. I'm your companion.' It was a feeling. It was an awareness. That was it.

A further example of the kind of knowledge derived from the experience inadvertently revealed the difficulty of expressing its nature. John said,

Since that time it's not an intellectual knowledge, 'Oh, there is a God.' It's a real deep conviction or belief, or awareness, knowledge, that I know God exists now. It would be hard to shake that knowledge. Not only a knowledge, it's a perception, is all I can say. I can't put it in other words than 'I know'.

The experience also transmitted knowledge about the nature of the relationship between God, John, and others. He said,

It's a knowledge, it's a uniqueness that somehow the Lord loves each one of us with His whole being. Through my experience I feel that I know that He loves me totally. No matter what I do, I can't stop Him from loving me less than that. And that is His attitude toward others too.

Despite the overwhelming power of the experience, John did not spare rational analysis for fear of deluding himself. With a sense of cynicism, he wondered whether he had invited the experiences by his readings and studies or fabricated it through his
imagination inducing self-hypnosis. He consulted his spiritual advisor in order to put things into perspective. But after careful analysis, he said,

The peace was too deep, too powerful. All I can say is, 'It happened to me', and this is twenty years later and still has a very powerful effect on my living.

The mystical experience as rite of passage. The mystical experience was a watershed in John's life. He distinguished clearly between the before and after, indicating the emergence of an ultimate, spiritual reality. In order to give the experience the space it occupies in John's life, an analogy to rite of passage will bring the profound transformation into focus.

Within the context of positioning, Cochran (1990) mentioned the rite of passage as symbolizing transition from one perception of reality to another. For John, it was the transition from the material world to a spiritual reality. The mystical experience is often described as a moment of rebirth into a new life while the old life lies dead (Happold, 1981; Hunt, 1984; James, 1972). Similarly, in rites of passage the death of the old life is symbolically enacted by ordeals, torture, forced inactivity or incubation. Shamanistic traditions talk of dismemberment and consequent reconstruction of the body (Dobkin De Rios, 1989). Without difficulty these descriptions are analogous to John's experience including the repetition of the ceremonial rites over a period of time. John noted the daily occurrence of the experience over thirty-five days while praying in the chapel. His struggle to maintain control over the old way of doing things was finally thwarted by a greater power than himself. He talked about being held, being speechless, motionless, without image, unaware of himself, suspended outside space and time. His faculties were temporarily suspended resembling a symbolic death. He was rendered helpless as if in a womb. As he said, "I would just be there. I would just be still. There was nothing I could do about it." All his sensibilities except the powerful focus and awareness of the new reality or the "Lord" were inactivated. The center of the experience was a period of incubation and passive reconstruction. He
said, "It happened to me. It took me over. It wasn't my prayer, it was the Lord's." It was as if someone or something reshaped him, because he said, "The experience turned me around. I was a different person." The old world was not merely overcome ceremonially, but actually. An old way of being in the world was replaced by a new way.

The culminating experience put John in position for enactment of meaning. The central problem of existence had been solved (Cochran, 1990). His personhood congealed around the root metaphor of being a Christian. Striving for faith and certainty gave way to recognizing himself as someone with a particular life's work to do, as someone with a vocation.

The Middle: The Phase of Positing or the Work of Life

John's description of the effects of the mystical experience or its fruit gives concrete testimony to a new way of being in the world. It is a story of seeking to integrate all of life in harmony with his experience of spiritual reality. Thus, being a 'religious', a counsellor, department head, volunteer, and husband, become expressions of a unified center of meaning. The challenge of this phase is to live up to the promise of the culminating experience. The way to completion as a unity of being and doing progresses through cycles of incompleteness, repositioning, and positing while working out concrete ways of doing things. But periods of incompleteness are now experienced with the significant difference of no longer being chronically stuck. One knows the way out (Cochran, 1990).

John's life is marked by returning again and again to his "Lord experience" as a source of inspiration and strength for meaningful enactment of his central concern. Reflecting on his life, he emphasized his lifelong desire to live wholeheartedly in accordance with reality whatever it may be. The mystical experience radically changed his perception of reality. Although as the hero of the drama he is continuous as a center of experience (Cochran, 1990), the nature of the drama, that is, the meaning that
determines actions, goals, attitudes, and feelings, was redirected. Always vigilant not to delude himself, he was wholeheartedly committed to the new life.

**Materialism vs spiritual reality.** John described the old reality as basically materialistic. Despite his Catholic upbringing, he had learned that it was a competitive, rational, and logical world of an "eye for an eye", requiring as much control as possible over one's life. He said,

I can be a pretty tough fighter when it comes to going after people. That's the way I used to be. When I was in sports I was very competitive. And if we were ahead twenty to nothing I would keep going after the team enjoying, 'Lets kill'em fifty to nothing.' [Without the mystical experience] I'd go into a meeting and I'd walk all over the person or he'd walk all over me, one of the two. I can be like a bulldog in meetings. I mean, I've been described years ago that I was like a bulldog. I'd go!

The spiritual reality does not deny the material world, but subordinates its values. The period of disbelief had brought him to the abyss of meaninglessness that could not be bridged by pursuits of the material world. From his new position of being "rooted", "anchored", "grounded" in the spiritual world, he said,

I don't understand how people who do not believe in God do not commit suicide, because to me, life is meaningless without God. When I went through that struggle back when I was studying philosophy, that's where I was. I mean, you can get caught up in computers, making money, buying a house, travelling. Having a lot of things doesn't excite me. That's not the core of meaning - to me. That wouldn't satisfy me. I went through that.

The shift from material to spiritual pursuits became centered around the experience of being loved to the core of his being and that God extends the same love to everyone. He said,

That has affected my life tremendously, my approach to counselling, my approach to people and business dealings. I've really taken to heart 'what you do to the least of mine you do to me.' That wasn't there before.

John's task was to work out new and creative guidelines of conduct based on this principle of love which was in sharp contrast to his legalistic and narrow religion of rules and regulations. His training as a Catholic and Jesuit had equipped him with a theoretical and practical framework for a Christian life.
While giving examples of his daily conduct, John continued to draw clear distinctions between the spiritual life and what his attitude would have been without the mystical experience. He talked about being betrayed, cheated, and hurt. His former reaction was to translate feelings of anger and resentment into "going after" the person. Revenge may range from "never talking that person again" to destroying his or her reputation or seeking legal redress. But John said,

The spiritual life says, 'that's stupid. That's not the way to do things.' I make a deliberate decision not to do that. I pray for that person.

John acknowledges his initial feelings of anger, hurt, and desire to even the score. He said,

There is a wanting to go after the person. I go to the Lord about it. I mean, He said, 'Forgive them.' I say, 'Who am I especially to condemn anyone for anything.' I feel really comfortable about the whole thing when I pray for the person. The anger goes. I can be angry about it, but at the same time there is a freedom there. I feel more fully myself. I feel integrated, if you would.

Union of intuition and intellect. The above quotation indicates that intellectual discrimination and deliberate effort were also deeply rooted in an intuitive awareness of rightness, integration, freedom, and wholeness. Following Cochran (1990), this unity is experienced as quality of life. A unified pattern enhances the quality of life, fragmentation and division lessens it. The mystical experience had become a benchmark of unity and quality, because John said,

"That is where I found, - experienced a sense of consolation, peace, sense of joy, a real sense of wholeness, and a sense of Jesus.

Surrender of control. However, the price for the experience of unity was the surrender of his much treasured control. John experienced that ultimate control and trust did not rest within himself and his efforts, but with God. Aided by prayer he was now able to let go of controlling the outcome of circumstances such as meetings, important decisions, etc,. He said, "I go in there praying and it usually works out, not necessarily to my satisfaction, but it works out." With reference to decisions he said,
My decisions are based on that ultimate reality. It's not just the material world around me. I take them to prayer. If I were an atheist or agnostic, I wouldn't do that.

Giving up control was not surrender of agency to find solutions or abdication of responsibility. These faculties were now employed according to his perception of the spiritual realm. As John said, "It's not just the rational, logical, sensible thing to do."

The Dark Night: knowing the way out. John demonstrated that living in accordance with the spiritual reality required courage and hope in general and particularly during episodes of spiritual darkness and difficult times. He said,

That is not to say that there is not real darkness at times. I question Him at times. It's not that I don't have darkness or a sense of emptiness at times, or a sense of 'what is this all about?' I feel distant at times from the Lord. But there is this whole other experience. I just recall what happened to me. It pulls me. It doesn't change the feeling [of darkness], but it changes my attitude. I settle down. That is something I grab onto. That's what I meant when I said it was an anchor. It brings me a sense of calmness again, you know. That's what I meant by rootedness. That does not mean there is no pain and suffering. There is another level of my being, - my experience - that I can turn to. It is always with me.

By returning to the experience John reciprocated between infusion and diffusion of spirit or the roles of spectator and participant (Cochran, 1990). Once again, his training as Jesuit has been instrumental in the development of virtues including discipline, regular meditation, and contemplation necessary for his vocation. The mystical experience, though it was powerful and overwhelming, did not find him unprepared for fruitfully employing it's meaning.

There have also been difficult times in John's life when he was aware of Jesus' presence, but not with the same intensity as the first unitive experience. He said,

So, when I go through some difficult times emotionally, psychologically, or existentially, when I'm in that pain, ... I will, for example, pray in the living room when I'm alone and that strong awareness of His presence is there again. It's hard to say whether or not it's imagined, or it may have some imagination to it. It's just an awareness of His presence. I just know it. It's almost like I don't feel it. .... It's a real deep knowledge and nothing is going to change that, and it's not my imagination making it. --- That knowledge brings me a sense of quiet, gives me some peace.
Apart from the earlier described mystical experience it was upon his father's death when the presence of Jesus was overwhelmingly strong and consoling. John had never told anyone about this experience, not even his spiritual advisor. As mentioned previously, John did not offer an analysis of its significance in terms of his relationship with his father and God the Father. But while talking about this encounter, he seemed to reexperience the emotional depth as if it had just happened. He described the experience as follows.

I was sitting in the room in the [father's] apartment by myself. It was morning time and all of a sudden I was just totally overwhelmed by the presence of God. I just had this feeling. It was just totally unexplainable, — ah, caught me completely unprepared. I was sitting there quietly just looking around and all of a sudden I just had this overwhelming (strongly emphasized) experience. It was Jesus ... across from me about five feet away. I just sat there. It was just there. And I became very peaceful. I cried a little bit. I packed everything up and from then on it was easy.

Interviewer: How did you perceive the Presence?

John: Not visibly, but a sense of being there. Someone was there, a person, right there in physical form, but I couldn't see it. In my imagination, I couldn't see it. There was a form there, but I couldn't see the form. It's just weird. It's just strange. It was Jesus! I didn't see Him. I didn't imagine Him. I didn't visualize Him in my imagination. Somehow I could see Him, but I couldn't see Him. So, after a few minutes that was gone.

Interviewer: What did you receive from Him?

John: Terrible, terrific peace. I felt extremely relieved, peaceful. Before that I had been rushing around. I was grieving. I felt peaceful and it was just, --- something happened. I never verbalized it before. As a matter of fact, I was getting a little emotional. But anyway, ------ (He became emotional)------ I guess it was the feeling of 'Jesus was there when I needed Him.' It was very significant. It was sort of a confirmation that ah, this is when I studied philosophy, that was an affirmation that His presence ------ (John broke off overcome by emotion).

John indicated that this experience harkened back to the traumatic time of searching for his faith during philosophy when all that had supported him during his youth was in danger of slipping away into meaninglessness. Perhaps this experience put to rest a deep seated fear of existential abandonment rooted in his chaotic early life, the break-up of the family, and losing his faith in God. In the presence of Jesus, John
experienced once more the closing of the gap bound by the opposing poles of the story of his life. Once more he experienced the fulfillment of his desire of finding ultimate stability, a sense of belonging, wholeness, and love.

The Phase of Completion or the Unitive Life

Story is transcended in completion, because the gap between the opposing poles of what is and what ought to be has been closed. Dramatic unity has been achieved. Personhood is no longer defined by a regnant gap, but by unselfconscious unity of being and doing as timeless activity (Cochran, 1990). The person approaches life with an "inextinguishable gladness of heart" (Underhill, 1955, p. 437) despite persisting adversities.

In John's life, completion began with the unitive experience where the split between being and doing had been overcome in principle. Following Cochran (1990), the shift from action to activity and from intending to being is gradual. There is no dramatic demarcation separating the phase of positioning and striving from the emerging phase of completion. Perhaps a single line uttered by John is sufficient to indicate that completion has begun. Reflecting on his previous need to control others, to be a winner at all cost, or to take revenge, he said, "I don't have to do that anymore. It's no longer a struggle."
Life History Three: Henk

Henk, not his real name, was born in Holland to a Dutch father and a German mother. He has one younger brother. His childhood was marked by the tensions of World War II contributing to his decision to immigrate to Canada at age twenty-one. He is now in his fifties, married and has five children two of whom are of a previous marriage. He obtained a B.Sc. in biology. He elected to be a house-husband and home-school teacher so that his wife may pursue her professional career.

Synopsis of Henk's life. Henk emerged from his childhood with three salient, interconnected issues setting the tenor for his ensuing life. The first and central concern focused on his cultural identity. A second, subordinate theme formed around the refusal and fear of taking responsibility. From the beginning both issues became entangled with mistrust and fear of authority.

The Beginning: The Phase of Incompletion or the Awakening and Unification of Yearning

Repetition of often tacit, primitive dramatic units is instrumental in composing a coherent and enduring structure of desire out of a multiplicity of fragmented, episodic, and perhaps chaotic experiences of early childhood. Why a particular experience becomes salient is not clear. However, temperament and socio-cultural environment conspire in raising a particular experience to a prototype whose boundaries are sufficiently fuzzy and allow more and more of life into a resemblance of experiences and reality. Thus, an awakened salient experience is repeated and dramatically strengthened in ever increasing subtlety and complexity (Cochran, 1990).

Henk’s most salient early childhood memory goes back to kindergarten when he overheard the conversation of two little boys. One boy said, "I know how to speak German you know" and began making strange noises. Henk listened with astonishment. He had grown up fluently bilingual in Dutch and German. Reflecting on the experience, he was still perplexed about his strong, silent outrage to the falsification of his cultural heritage. This salient moment awakened a latent sensitivity
and awareness of his sense of cultural belonging that became increasingly confused. He became aware that language reference to an object is arbitrary rather than an inseparable reality. He said,

The notion of cultural relativity, as I now call it, was sort of my birth right. That was a given to me. That language and object were the same just never arose.

The embryonic notion of cultural relativity grew into a sense of cultural homelessness aided by the extreme hatred Henk's Dutch relatives displayed toward the Germans who had occupied Holland. The messages of hatred began to collide increasingly with his own experiences. He said,

I made visits to Germany for a few weeks every year. My sympathies were actually with the Germans, because those relatives were much warmer and more humane than my Dutch relatives who had this very cold, Calvinistic sort of feel about them.

In the meantime, Henk and his mother came to live with his Dutch grandparents in a small village in order to escape the increasing bombing of the city. His father stayed behind. The dichotomy between the hate messages and his own observations continued. He saw his German mother being kicked under the table by his Dutch grandfather. He listened to his relatives' stories about the helpfulness of the German soldiers while in the same breath professing their hatred. Henk said,

Every story was one of generosity, and consideration, and concern for them by these German soldiers. I mean, they would climb up the [thatched] roof and douse the flames. They would come down with food and keep them supplied. They would warn them when there was an attack, you name it. They would tell you these stories of how pleasant these soldiers could be under the circumstances and then in the next sentence would again express this hatred against the Germans. It made absolutely no sense. You would sit there and listen to this. Crazy! They were embedded in ideology.

Henk summarized his early experiences of cultural dichotomy as follows.

I grew up in this sort of torn world. Half my world was on one side and the other world was on the other side. So, my whole world was sort of torn asunder right from the beginning. There was no coherent whole. I was not embedded in the culture I grew up in. But worse, there was no culture to embed myself into. Right? .... [I felt a] lack of belonging. --- I fell into a crack, yeah.
Out of this "continual confusion" the desire "to heal the split" began to awaken. He said,

There arose the drive to make some sense of it. I mean, both cultures disagreed on just about everything. So, where was the truth? Where was anything to hold on to? So, I was forced from a very early age to sort of look behind things. Of course, I was not equipped to do that as a young child.

His disillusionment with culture and its representatives had suffered an additional blow leading him to a fateful decision at age six. He overheard a conversation between the first grade teacher and his parents discussing his grades. The teacher explained that she was quite concerned that the children would not get too high an opinion of themselves and would automatically assign the equivalent of a `C' to everybody. Only exceptional ability would be rewarded with a better grade. Henk said.

I'm listening there and become quite enraged about being dismissed as a mediocrity by this person. My response to this dismissal is to say to myself, `Well, I'll show her. If that's how it works in this culture, I'll just be a mediocrity,' ah, because I felt unique and individual up to that point. Obviously that is not appreciated or not acknowledged. ' .... I'm not sure what enraged me so much. .... I was very angry at them when I made that decision. Yeah, yeah, I was punishing them. .... It's sort of pissing on authority.

As will become evident in further discussion, the decision to be a mediocrity had a number of disabling consequences hardly foreseeable by a six year old. At the very least, it prevented him from testing his intellectual abilities and building self-confidence. In time he wondered whether he was intelligent enough to find the answers he had been seeking. At the time, being average was not only an escape from corrupt authority, but also a way of preserving a measure of autonomy and a sense of power. He said,

If I become a mediocrity nobody can get a hold of me. Nobody can expect anything. Nobody can make me do anything. Right? I'm not so bad that they can punish me. I'm not so good that they can make use of me. I'm just a nobody that slips through the system without being hassled, without being noted.
Why this particular episode became salient and what roused him to react in this manner is shrouded in early childhood experience. Other options to express his attitude toward authority might have included rebelling, pleasing, or ignoring.

However, a further reason for remaining unnoticed emerged. Henk said, "I don't know how it developed. I have a real thing with authority, a real terror of authority. [I am] really scared of them." The final part of this decision was to renge all responsibility. He said,

The other thing that goes with all this is not taking responsibility as far as I am concerned. This is all part of the package in which, even for myself, I take no responsibility, period!

In anticipation of further discussion suffice it to say that the last decision became fateful after the mystical experience, casting its growing shadow over his ensuing life.

Henk's decision to be a mediocrity remained unchallenged since throughout his youth authority did nothing to redeem itself. In fact, further evidence confirmed earlier observations contributing to a deepening sense of fragmentation.

A temporary respite from hatred and confusion occurred after the war when the family moved to Germany. Almost immediately Henk's father was arrested by the allies for collaborating with the enemy. He was sent back to Holland, tried, convicted, and sent to prison for four years. Nevertheless, the next four years seemed like paradise for Henk and his brother. To this day, whenever possible, the brothers return to their favorite spot by the river seeking to recapture the sense of peace and wholeness of those memorable days.

Upon his father's release from prison, the family returned to Holland. Once again Henk was tossed into the turmoil of unabated hate mongering against Germans. However, a further blatant division occurred. The school system in Holland was divided along denominational lines between Calvinists and Catholics. Henk's choice
was to attend the Calvinist school. Of importance is that the circle of hatred issuing from the irresponsibility of authority widened to include organized religion. He said,

The Calvinists in those days were very militant. It was a war-like situation between the Catholics and the Protestants. It was also a time when they were trying to outbreed each other.

Henk's mother modeled a gentle, open-ended form of religion. His awareness of religion widened through his mother's job as a maid in a minister's home. Henk said,

She was baffled, because the man was constantly in agony because of his beliefs, and she did not feel attracted at all to hard-nosed belief structures. .... But the Church school was something else.

Henk enjoyed religious instructions, Church history, etc., saying, "I just loved it." Then, at age fourteen the major turning point arrived. Henk said,

The split came, ah, the moment of decision. One of the students asked the teacher, "If I believe, do I go to heaven?" The teacher said, "Of course, if you believe you go to heaven." I was a bit baffled by the answer and obviously so was the student, because the next hour the next teacher came, and he asked the same question and gets the opposite answer, "Of course not, just because you believe does not mean you go to heaven." As I grew up and understood more about how the belief system of the Calvinists, both answers are actually correct. But, when I was fourteen they seemed so antithetical to each other. So, I got very upset and very decisive, actually, in a response to that, saying to myself, "If God himself can't make up his mind, everything else is split and God, obviously, is split too. (laughs) I obviously cannot believe authority or what people say, because they have misinformed me as long as I have been conscious. When my grandparents were saying, "All Germans are swine", I mean, I knew better. So, at this particular juncture I decide that for the rest of my life I'm going to devote my life to finding out what is behind all this. I mean, there must be something whole somewhere. There must be something that is ultimately true. The intent was to transcend authority and the cultural given. Even at age fourteen I realized there must be something that is ultimately true, not just cultural truth, you know. That cultural truths are relative, because one person believes this religion and the next culture believes something else, by that time, I knew that. Questions like: "What is the use of religion?" 'Is there a God.' And things like that. ------ So, this is sort of a noble decision. It was a very conscious decision. 'I'm gonna find out!' Very cold blooded!

Following Cochran (1990), Henk's decision to devote his life to find truth and unity underlying all cultural diversity proved to be an enduring, unified, and centrally meaningful composition of desire. The passionate prototypical experience of
falsification of his cultural heritage at age five had sufficient dramatic energy to further interact with a fertile though negatively experienced environment, allowing tacit and overt repetition in various guises incorporating more and more of life. As Cochran pointed out, "passionate judgment could be the beginning of drama" (Cochran, 1990, p. 53). The repeated messages sent by untrustworthy representatives of the culture and adults in general became subsumed and united under the heading of cultural relativity. With each repetition the pattern of experience strengthened the perception that reality seemed inherently fragmented.

According to Cochran (1990), a unified stance is a combination of circumstances and personal responsibility. Henk's contribution to the transformation of desire from passive endurance to a condition of action has its roots in his unflinching assessment of reality and his passionate reaction to it. Although his observations were in conflict with views espoused by culture and authority, he decided for himself what was real. He neither escaped into a pleasant world of make-belief nor did he assuage his pain by compromising his experiences in order to fit more comfortably into his social surroundings. This acute sense of reality and courage to stick to it were crucial in determining the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', thereby creating a plot for life. Each repetition of his painful, fragmented reality included the growing desire to "look behind things." Gradually his inherent temperament and experience of the world gave rise to the notion that ultimate reality ought to be found somewhere. Closing the gap between the opposing poles became "the main business of life (Cochran, 1990, p. 55). Henk's personhood was sufficiently unified in the metaphor of someone who wants to know the truth so that meaningful action is possible.

Reflecting on his late teens and beyond, Henk acknowledged that it became increasingly difficult to act. He felt continuously "hamstrung" by the fundamental confusion of cultural values. Cochran expressed what Henk knew only too well, namely, that "there is no meaningful pattern of enactments in the future unless the
central problem of existence is solved" (Cochran, 1990, p. 58). Through his negative experience of authority and the world around him, Henk knew that he could not rely on others to solve his existential problem for him. Realizing that he was on his own, he assumed responsibility for his quest. At the time of the "noble decision" Henk's goal was largely an ideal. His general approach grew in the assumption that the most useful and comprehensive quest would be the search for the existence of God. Henk had entered the phase of positioning.

The Middle: The Phase of Positioning

Following Cochran (1990), a "person enters positioning with a plan, more or less, for bridging the gap between what is and what ought to be .... one is, yet one is not" (pp. 69, 74). Life is a continuous rehearsal away from incompleteness towards a passionately desired conviction from which to live. Inessentials are discarded, essentials are accepted and developed. Getting into position requires repeated goal setting, adjustment to circumstances, trying out roles and stances, finding ways to make the potential concrete. Possibilities are explored and consolidated into a widening and coherent world view.

Incompleteness and positioning are dominated by the role of spectatorship rather than participant, because the hero of the drama has not yet achieved a unified personhood from which to act centrally. According to Cochran (1990), spectatorship, though it may be active, is largely limited to assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1968), elaboration and revision (Kelly, 1955). The drama is bound up in the infusion of spirit since the proper channels for its diffusion in central enactment have yet to be worked out. Henk's way out of the chaos and turmoil of incompleteness is analogous to the meandering path of a river trying to reach the ocean. There is no immediate or obvious solution (Cochran, 1990).

The quest or the way out. Henk finished high-school as a "true mediocrity". At that time his life underwent a further split. He said,
I did not see my life's work and the quest to be the same thing. Sorry, life's work is the wrong term. But my means for making a living is quite divorced from seeking the truth. The search for truth goes on quite independently as a spare time occupation which I pursued by reading a lot, philosophical and religious discussions, popular science books, and stuff like that.

Without much deliberation, Henk followed in his father's footsteps and went to technical school for two years. He said,

I'm enthralled. For the first time, what I'm learning makes some sense. I get really, despite myself, really interested and get picked up as a genius which I am not able to shake for two years no matter what I'd do. I didn't study. So, anyway, that was the first slip-up (laughs).

 Barely out of technical school, Henk was drafted into the army. He refused to become a lieutenant but could not avoid becoming a sergeant. Being surrounded by authority and having to exercise authority was unbearable. This situation contributed to his decision to immigrate to Canada while still in the military. The second powerful influence to escape was the undiminished hatred toward Germans. In addition, Henk and his brother suffered great mental anguish for what he called "the sins of our fathers." He said,

[We felt guilty] for the sins of our fathers who did all this stuff in Germany and had absolutely no sense of guilt, at least my father didn't. He thought what was done was perfectly normal, and proper, and so on. But my brother and I felt this numbing guilt for the whole thing. This dominated much of our lives, this feeling of 'mea culpa', while at the same time being rather enraged by the hate mongering which seemed totally senseless and served no purpose.

Henk was never persecuted or discriminated against because of his partly German background. He said,

It was strictly an internal feeling. ..... Ah, all this cultural disillusion produced so much confusion, it was difficult to act. I forever had this feeling of being hamstrung, --- not knowing where to go with this stuff.

During that time, he came across Norman Vincent Peal's "positive thinking". Henk said,

So, [it seems that] "positive thinking" provides a way out of that. You just artificially compress reality into ---- 'pow'. It works worth a shit, but I gave it a try. 'If I just do it right, it might work, yeah if I just do it right.'
Nevertheless, Henk's fascination with this message of hope increased the attractiveness of moving to North America, because it is there where it originated.

Henk's quest remained dormant for the first four years in Canada. His life was dominated by adjusting to his new surroundings. Although he had no trouble finding work, loneliness was his constant companion. After one year he met his first wife, who was also a Dutch immigrant. He said, "We were both lonely, and we fell into each other's arms, and we marry for that reason." The father of Henk's wife had been transported to the Dachau concentration camp with three hundred other men from the village in retaliation against the Dutch underground resistance. He did not return. Henk said, "So, here are people who were actually seriously hurt by the war, strangely enough, carrying no hate toward the Germans." Henk noted that both he and his brother married women whose families had been victimized by the Germans. His brother's first wife was Jewish. Both marriages ended in divorce.

The couple moved to a small town and settled down to have a family. Henk resumed his quest. He began by reading science fiction, because he liked the loose constraints on reality allowing imaginative play with what might be possible. He also came across writings on mysticism, including Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, works by Alan Watts, etc.. Increasingly he realized that an answer, should it exist, would lie in mysticism.

His previous experience with "positive thinking" and newly awakened interest in mysticism contributed to his interest in the religious sect of the Emissaries of the Divine Light. Apparently the founder had based his insights on a few nights of automatic writing. Underhill (1955) consigned this practice to the realm of psychic phenomena occurring on the very fringes of mysticism. The product would be heavily contaminated with cultural and idiosyncratic material. Henk soon realized that the basic message was little more than "positive thinking" presented in different guise.
Henk was initially attracted by the freshness of something forming before
dogmatic rigidity sets in. However, within six months he was no longer able to
compromise his intellectual integrity as the price for remaining a believer. He said, "It
was bullshit half of it. Why rationalize the finding of dinosaur bones by saying, 'God
wants to test us.'" Besides, the teachings were becoming repetitious. Nevertheless, it
took some time before he was able to extricate himself from the community and the
sense of belonging he had been seeking since childhood.

Henk found his first and last intimate involvement with a community of
believers wanting in furthering his quest. However, he was intrigued by the sect's
practice of "attunements" he described as follows.

The leader would go with his hands behind our necks and sort of down our
spine, stuff like that, to transfer energy. He healed me once and it was really
spectacular. When I put my hands on someone that did not happen.

Suffice it to say for the moment that after the mystical experience Henk
discovered his ability to administer "attunements". But another very strong theme
began to occupy his awareness. He said,

The most important question became, 'Am I intelligent or not?' You know,
having faith in my intelligence. If only I were intelligent, I'd be able to
understand all this stuff. It gets worse and worse.

In the past he had received mixed messages regarding his intelligence. Aiming
to be a mediocrity had prevented him from testing and verifying his intellectual
abilities, resulting in a lack of self-confidence. Henk remembered an episode while
living in Germany after the war. The German high-school system is hierarchical.
University preparation is only possible at the highest level of schools. Henk overheard
the principal of one of the top schools tell his mother, "He isn't really bright enough to
be here." Later in technical school he was tauted a genius. In contrast to his wife, his
intelligence had not been verified by the proper authorities. His mistrust and rejection
of authority proved to be a double edged sword. He despised them while at the same
time needing them to verify an important part of his self-worth.
Henk was temporarily stuck until his brother arrived from Holland for an extended visit. He had brought a book written by a Dutch psychiatrist whose basic message Henk translated as, 'You never step into the same river twice.'

Reading this book proved to be an important turning point in Henk's life. He said,

I realized that my assumption had been totally Freudian which says, 'By age six, that's it! You are cast in concrete.' So, here all of a sudden, this book proves to me and gives me permission to change. And it is mind boggling. Life isn't over yet. I'm not cast in concrete. It's a revelation. So, movement to freedom and growth was now permitted.

Henk was twenty-nine years old. He nagged his wife to go to university and do something with her life, because her intelligence had been verified. But his brother astutely recognized that it was Henk who wanted another chance and challenged him on that account. Henk rose to the challenge and set out to obtain his grade twelve certificate. Then, with newfound confidence, he decided to go to university. The family moved to the city. Henk said, "I really only went to university to find out whether I could do it or not. I didn't really want to do anything in particular."

However, Henk's life remained split between the quest for truth and earning a living. For practical reasons he chose to study biology. He also continued to follow another ingrained pattern, that of being a mediocrity. After obtaining very high grades initially, he neglected his studies. He said,

Well, getting all 'As' and 'Bs' doesn't fit my self-image. I can't live up to that. I ended up with an exact 3.3 average which is how I see myself, a nice good average.

Although he enjoyed university, his real interest remained in the avocational pursuit of his quest. Henk and his wife became associated with the Unitarian Church where the "biggest action" was taking place. He said,

Our marriage had never been good. Actually it was a bit of a disaster. .... Now, this happens to be the late sixties. That was the time of encounter groups and this sort of thing which the Unitarian Church lovingly embraced. We were gung-ho on all this stuff. So, all hell breaks loose, literally. .... We get involved with encounter groups and it [the marriage] went really sour. It actually gets much wilder than that. .... We get involved with wife swapping and communal living. We tried everything all in search of what is going on.
But, it's a bit more than our good Dutch morals can handle. So, five years, the marriage has just about broken up, but somehow survived

Within this tumultuous experimentation Henk became increasingly despondent. He had read many of the mystics and was confronted with the inadequacy of language rendering the mystical ineffable. Second hand knowledge would no longer do. The only way to know would be to have a mystical experience. He was now in his late thirties and under the impression that with increasing age the likelihood of having a mystical experience decreases. He said,

I was in the third year of biology. I faced the fact that I had missed the boat. I'd given it everything I had. I've come as far as I can. The rest is out of my hands. I can't do anything about it. It's a gift. The answer, if it is there, I can't get at it. I just pooled all my energy into biology.

The Mystical Experience

Henk continued.

About two or three weeks after that decision I come walking down the mountain and all of sudden it hits me. Actually I look at a copse of trees. I'd studied quite a bit biology by that time. So, I look at it as a biological unit. That triggers the whole thing. Ah, to this day, I have absolutely no idea how long I stood there, — or even what came after, or what happened during. But it starts out as an intellectual, ecstatic contemplation of a copse of woods, trees, and then slips into this, this feeling of total unity. I mean, first it's an intellectual unity and all of a sudden it slips into this 'all is one feeling'. Ah, it's not an image. Most people talk about light. I didn't have a light experience except reality starts to shift, you know. I actually withdrew from it. I don't really see anymore after a while, — while I stand there. I don't think it has any intellectual, verbal content. It is just a knowing, but a knowing of such breadth that it takes me half a year afterwards to sort it all out. I had this feeling of being insignificant as a grain of sand on the beach and at the same time being as large as the universe. I felt at the same time infinite as far as time was concerned. Ah, I totally experienced that at the moment. This sort of imagery comes up later. Ah, it's a total sense of rightness. I mean, everything is absolutely the way it should be including my life. Everything I've done to this time is absolutely proper and appropriate. It had to be this way to carry out what needs to be done. Ah, there is a sense of no time, of eternity, well no time is the only way to describe it, transcendence of time. There is a sense of incredible importance of the self, the ego, the individuality and yet, at the same time the total immersion, the seamless unity. It's a rotten word, but I can't think of a better one. Ah, — it's, it's all part of a whole. There are none of these separate perceptions. It is all part of whatever it is. So, I blend out of this again. As I said, I have no idea how long it lasted, whether it was a few seconds or whether it was ten minutes. .... Nobody was there. I was all by myself. I started walking again. .... Well, what the mystics had told me is true. It meant something. I was amazed what was in the experience. There was no end to it. It was like an endless cornucopia. I spent literally six months
every spare minute delving through my memory and everything that was contained in my mind I was holding up for inspection, and about a third of it went `chuck', because it is nonsense. And all the questions I had, the answers to them were obvious, nothing to it. I was actually quite angry, because I had discovered that most of the earthshaking questions were simply language epiphenomena. There was no sense of reality from which to ask the question. It was total nonsense (laughs). Anyway, it was a marvelous house cleaning.

Henk's mystical experience fits the general category of the exterior way as described in the review of the literature. The onset seemed to have been triggered by focusing on the unity of the natural world rather than withdrawing in inward contemplation typical of the interior way. However, his entire life history provided the all inclusive meaningful housing for the experience. Henk's life confirms the observation that mystical experiences are part personal effort part gift which is granted after becoming receptive by surrendering the struggle. His account confirms that the exterior way may lead to a classic, "numinous", unitive experience as suggested by Otto (1932) and Underhill (1955). In a state of complete receptiveness, Henk had transcended all sensory perception and willful cognitive activities. As he said, "I actually withdraw from it [reality] ... I don't think it has any intellectual, verbal content." Though the center of the experience seemed void of content, he described it as absorption in union, "a total sense rightness" and wholeness. Henk's story also validates Otto's (1958) description of the interdependence of the non-rational and the rational. Although the immediate experience surpassed all understanding, it was holistically extremely meaningful and a rich well-spring for his reconstruction of reality. His description also highlights the difficulty surrounding Maslow's assumption of immediately perceivable universal "Being Values" inherent in peak experiences.

Henk was absolutely certain about the rightness, authority, and experiential value of his experience. But he clearly indicated that his interpretations followed afterwards. In order to render his experience meaningful and to conceptualize seemingly inherent values, Henk returned to his socio-cultural context and to language. Yet, he is convinced that he had transcended cultural relativity experientially. His consternation
with the inadequacy of language was not directed at the ineffability of the mystical, because he was aware of the limits of analogy. He was angry, because he felt that he had been misled all his life by language epiphenomena rather than valid representations of reality, rendering his "earthshaking questions" equally illusory. But Henk's desire to overcome the limitations of language, cultural relativity, and inadequacy of authority was fulfilled in holistic participation of ultimate reality he perceived as whole and true.

Despite the profound impact of the experience all was not well. The world had become unified in principle, but Henk remained split. The mystical experience cut like a dividing line across Henk's life. The quest had been successful beyond his expectations. But within the next two years a new question arose. "What now?"

Cochran's (1990) observation that peak experiences do not necessarily unify personhood into a regnant stance from which to commence enactment of life's central concern appeared to have been Henk's new dilemma. He remained in the role of spectator dominated by analyzing and understanding rather than fruitful participation. Henk said,

What I find in a lot of spirituality that always makes me laugh is that people think the spiritual is to get out of this game, but the opposite is true. It points toward wholehearted participation in the game. The key is wholeheartedness. The mystical experience should provide that, but it doesn't always. Ah, I found it very difficult to get wholehearted afterwards. I know that I am not alone in that. I get the whole power in my hand and frankly, I don't know what to do with it. The power is not to control others. The power is for me to shape my life, to play wholeheartedly the space-time game, no bullshit, undivided, and that is the big stumbling block for me. I've rejected responsibility, or what I call responsibility, and it turns out to be the only game in town. That's the ultimate reality, the only thing I'm asked to do, and I get totally stuck. Every time I start thinking about responsibility I get frightened. I go ape, a terror attack and become totally "gelaehmt" (German for incapacitated, limp, lame). You are half way through your life. You had all the success. It was almost a disaster, because all your life you worked toward success, here you are at thirty-seven, and you had ultimate success. It was a catastrophe, because my whole life had been directed toward understanding. The quest for understanding is finished. Now what? With the understanding must come action of some sort. Something needs to be done. The other question has been, "What is the purpose of life?" You realize that's a dumb question. You have to be God to answer that one. The question that becomes important is, "What is the purpose of my life?" So, instead of a general philosophical question, it becomes now a very personal question.
Descent into Limbo

The story appeared to have ended. The gap of what is and what ought to be seemed closed. Henk had no contingency plan for putting insight into action, because the quest and the dramatic energy that had motivated him were supposed to have lasted a lifetime. Gone were wholeheartedness and passionate judgment indispensable for unifying desire. He had lost the navigational beacons of steering away from cultural confusion and moving toward the hope that truth may overcome feeling "hamstrung", freeing him for wholehearted participation. His diffused childhood decision to renege responsibility had suddenly become specific when a different kind of action was required of him. Based on Cochran (1990), Henk found it extremely difficult to make the transition from wholehearted spectatorship or infusion of spirit to wholehearted participation or diffusion of spirit. Ironically, rather than freeing him, the moment of truth froze him in inaction worse than ever. Henk had returned to the phase of incompletion.

Henk spent much of the next twenty years in hopelessness, mourning the loss or paradoxically the success of his quest. He feared that any future achievement would not equal the value of the mystical experience. But ultimately, it was the active avoidance of responsibility for shaping his life in accordance with the perceived truth that proved to be the stumbling block. The deep-seated fear of responsibility seemed to feed on itself, growing in strength like a monster, evoking "terror attacks" every time he faced it. Although Henk tried, there was no escape.

In the meantime, Henk and his first wife divorced. Two years later he decided to marry again. He rationalized his step from a biological point of view and said,

The only true power you have is reproduction. The guy who procreates carries the day. It's also a great way, and I experienced that very well, of not facing the music. If you don't want to cope with anything, children is one of them. They take a lot of work.
Since Henk hated his job, and his wife's career was very successful, the couple resolved that he should stay home as the primary care giver and home-school teacher. However, neither a very stimulating marriage nor numerous family demands were able to break the fall into ever deepening depression. Henk said,

The mystical experience was twenty years ago and for the most of the time that feeling gets deeper and deeper. So, things get from bad to worse. I get more and more depressed. I get more and more lost. You think it can't get any worse, --- the next year it still gets worse. I act less and less, and I become like a vegetable. I don't cultivate my friendships, sit around, watch tv, read newspapers. I can't get turned around --- deciding what to do. It's like being in an aquarium. The world is out there. I know I should be out there doing my thing, but this impenetrable barrier, --- I can't even smell through it. All I can do is see through it. I get downright hopeless. It gets so bad, I get sweat attacks, you know, all kinds of weird and wonderful stuff. Yet suicide, I think about it, is not an option, it's not functional. We are talking about my age fifty-two, that was four years ago. By that time I was getting so hopeless --- and it just seems, no end is in sight, --- going until I'm dead. --- Seems that I'm stuck here which fits my story.

Henk had consulted several counsellors and psychologists over the years, but he had "no use for them" with the exception of one therapist who helped him overcome his psychosomatic symptoms.

**New Hope: Reemerging Unification of Desire**

Despite all appearances, the story does not seem over. Signs indicate that the future meaning of Henk's life lies in the very experience of this limbo. After he had spoken about the non-suicide option, he sighed deeply and said, "I shouldn't underestimate --- there is this sort of training going on. In this strange limbo all these experiments were going on." For instance, after the mystical experience Henk felt the increasing urge to try "attunements" whenever someone was hurt, but he felt very self-conscious and said, "It seemed so freaky to do that." One day, Henk and his first wife went skiing on a blacktop road barely covered with snow. His wife fell and seemed in considerable pain. Since she was "desperate", she allowed Henk to administer an "attunement". To his very surprise the pain and swelling vanished within twenty minutes. The following day brilliant green spots confirmed that his wife had sustained
real trauma. From that day forward, "attunements" became an important part of Henk's life. He began to successfully experiment with psychic states and trances. He paid particular attention to developing his intuition and carefully traced its validity in order to avoid deluding himself. At times, seeking explanations for some of the occurrences challenged his rational understanding. He became involved with Jean Houston who told him, "Develop your sensorium and serve." These words brought into sharp relief what Henk had known all along. To this day he has been pondering this message wondering how he might concretely implement her advise. Through Jean Houston, he came in contact with others who had had mystical experiences which eased his feeling of isolation.

About six month after the mystical experience Henk was gripped by another mystic state. This time he experienced the gamut of all imaginable emotions and various levels of the self while watching the process as if from a higher self that remained untouched by the diversity. He summarized the inherent noetic knowledge as being aware of the inseparable wholeness of the self despite its diversity, including the unity of body and spirit. He said, "All separation is simply linguistic, tearing apart stuff that can't be torn apart. Although he said, "I fiddled around, I really fiddled around," he seemed to be taking an increasingly positive attitude toward the "wasted years".

The preamble to a more positive reassessment of the years in limbo was a visit to Holland about three years previously. He said,

I have this experience all of a sudden, ah, deciding to be responsible for my own response to the world or as close as I can come to it. It's being a total participant without being a spectator, without pulling back, without reservations. I knew that's what I had to do, but couldn't bring myself to do it. The connotations were to limited. That's the first time I sort of tried it, no big deal! Somehow I slipped around this whole thing, 'I'd better take responsibility.' So, I'm really pleased with myself. It actually took my hopelessness away. It totally took away the depression strangely enough. The brick wall wasn't impermeable, maybe --- hope was rekindled.
Although Henk suffered a setback feeling "depressed worse than ever", his next visit to Holland cleared away a mutual dependence between himself and his brother. Henk became suddenly aware that he and his famous professor brother had embarked on very different life paths. With liberating clarity he recognized the legitimacy and value of his own way. Comparison was no longer possible. Henk recognized that the relationship had changed significantly. He felt no longer responsible for the safety and well-being of his younger brother, who was equally no longer responsible for Henk. He said,

What I'm doing is no longer visible to him. It was a very sad experience, but at the same time liberating, because I had the feeling that at last, I was free, totally free to go my own way. He could no longer criticize me. He could no longer judge, because he had not taken my route. He was no longer cognizant of what I was doing. So, that's where I stand now.

Henk was also reassessing the scary monster of responsibility. He said,

I discovered years and years ago that I was taking all sorts of responsibilities which did not affect not taking responsibility in the least. This whole concept of taking responsibility has a meaning I'm not clear of myself, obviously. And what I really mean by taking responsibility is to take responsibility for my own life and not have it dictated by someone else. And I think that came out when I described my relationship with my brother, how it changed.

Henk's emerging desire is to help others with similar experiences of getting stuck after a mystical experience due to the lack of a cultural framework within which to bring insight to fruition. The idea to write a handbook for inadvertent mystics is gaining strength. He recognized the Catholic Church as the only remaining traditional source for guidance in mystical matters. However, he is suspicious of the Church's intentions which he sees as wanting to capture the mystical for Her own self-serving purpose. He is aware of the need to unify his personhood around a metaphor, perhaps that of a "guru". But he is unhappy with the connotations of this concept. His depression has lifted. He is discovering a sense of freedom by increasingly entrusting his life to the present moment which appeared limiting in the past. Trusting the freedom of the present harkens back to the complete
surrender and immersion in the wholeness and timelessness of the mystical experience. Henk is beginning to unify and energize desire through the reappearing dramatic tension between the opposing poles of what is and what ought to be. What appears to be a new plot is nevertheless continuous with everything that came before. The story is still about making his entire life a meaningful whole.
Summary Analysis

The life histories of the participants confirm that humans live in story. Story structures of beginning, middle, and end, including the conceptualization of vocation in the four phases of incompleteness, positioning, positing, and completion, are evident. Thus, narrative methodology as story offers a common framework for exploring the composition of a life into a meaningful whole while allowing for individual differences in their richness, uniqueness, and creativity.

The Beginning: Incompletion

The successful resolution of the phase of incompleteness consolidates the beginning as a necessary precondition to a coherent life story. Incompletion begins with the awakening to an inescapable, positive, or negative existential problem and ends with the unified desire to take responsibility for its solution. Awakening occurs through sudden or gradual passionate judgment infusing the situation with dramatic energy sufficient for the emergence of a prototypical experience capable of binding more and more of life into a meaningful whole. By repetition the embryonic dramatic unit becomes the drama of life.

Sister Chelsea. Sister Chelsea, John, and Henk, each in their own way, awakened to a pervasive existential condition that came to matter "as if very existence is at stake" (Cochran, 1990, p. 50). At age four, Sister Chelsea became aware of her personal God. With passionate judgment she decided that her God was a God of consummate compassion, who did not condemn unbaptized, deceased babies to hell as was popularly believed. God mattered utterly from this moment forward. Her extraordinary religious giftedness allowed the consolidation of her spiritual awareness as early as age six. Through her innate unity of intellect and intuition, she was able to witness wholeness, holiness, or integration of a human being with God in the woman returning from communion. Incompletion had been transcended the way it began, by passionate judgment. Symbolically and in actuality, young Chelsea recognized what
she wanted and where she belonged. She had achieved what proved to be an enduring structure of desire directly accompanied by its meaningful enactment in compassion for others.

Henk. Similar to Sister Chelsea, Henk's story of incompletion began and ended with spontaneous, passionate judgment. At age five Henk became outraged at the "falsification" of his cultural heritage, sensitizing him to the dilemma of growing up between two antagonistic cultures. By age fourteen the primitive dramatic unit had evolved into a universal drama in which his role became to seek wholeness in the face of a seemingly fragmented reality. His passionate decision to embark on a quest for truth transcended the phase of incompletion.

Henk's central experience of incompletion is analogous to a progressive fall from grace through no fault of his own. He became increasingly an outsider to either culture. Cultural relativity and his rejection of authority as transmitter of cultural values and traditions had become all inclusive. In contrast, Sister Chelsea's central experience resembled a progression into grace which included a more favorable but not uncritical accommodation with her socio-cultural environment.

John. John's awakening to a central drama was more gradual and marked from the beginning by the opposing poles of instability and stability. With each repetition of being uprooted and experiencing the constancy of the Catholic Church, his passionate desire to escape instability and embrace stability strengthened. Throughout his youth the permanent break-up of the family remained a constant reminder that instability was a latent possibility motivating his increasing participation in the Catholic community. Similar to Sister Chelsea, John's experience of culture, tradition, and religion were part of the solution rather than the source of the problem as in Henk's life. However, John's critical assessment did not occur until he was well into adulthood, precipitating a crisis that invited a dramatic shift in values,
John's decision to become a priest united his restlessness and desire for stability in a meaningful way. John's, Sister Chelsea's, and Henk's transition from incompleteness to positioning is clearly recognizable by a shift toward greater agency and responsibility toward a solution of their respective existential challenges.

**The Middle: Part One, Positioning**

Although all three participants awakened to an existential problem between the ages of four and six, the resolution of incompleteness and positioning was not so much a matter of age and maturity as developing the resolve to begin trying to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be (Cochran, 1990).

**Sister Chelsea.** Sister Chelsea's fundamental orientation of living singleheartedly in God was never in doubt. Her task during positioning was to find and create the most suitable circumstances and appropriate role for the enactment of her central concern. Her innate sense for balance between intuition and intellect, reflection and participation was nourished by her awareness of God's presence in the world. Consequently, finding a proper expression of that awareness was a matter of listening in silent prayer and her spontaneous, self-confident interaction with the world. For Sister Chelsea, all of reality was from childhood on unified in God. Dividing experience into secular and non-secular simply made no sense, because "God works with whatever happens." Nevertheless, this awareness did not save her from the intense struggle preceding the decision to become a 'religious'. The resolution was achieved by the intimate interaction between intuition and intellect in the unified perception of a call to a particular vocation.

**Henk.** Henk began the phase of positioning from the unified desire to find wholeness and truth as indispensible for meaningful action. Unlike Sister Chelsea, he did not proceed from a fundamental unity of reality but from fragmentation and division. Similar to Sister Chelsea, he knew that action ought to flow from a deep sense of belonging. Although he desired a successful resolution, he felt safe to assume
that the meaning of his life would lie in a journey unlikely to end in a sudden discovery of the desired treasure. A contingency plan was not needed.

Unlike Sister Chelsea and John, Henk lacked a trustworthy cultural framework for the translation of the spiritual illumination into action. He remained stuck between the confusion of incompletion and unsatisfactory attempts at repositioning. Nevertheless, the mystical experience remained the focus of his life and may yet contain the latent possibility of unifying his personhood. It is as if Henk has been waiting for an experience of certainty to continue his quest.

**John.** John's transition from incompletion to positioning seems to have been a natural progression in the search for a meaningful life. In contrast to Sister Chelsea and Henk, John's early life circumstances did not favor a critical assessment of his beliefs. He was concerned with finding stability and a sense of belonging. In retrospect, he had to fall from grace and transcend the innocence and dependence of his youth in order to gain personhood in the awareness of responsibility for who he was, what he believed, and what he wanted to do. John's crisis of faith is particularly dramatic, because his entire way of being in the world had come into question. He returned to incompletion by being tossed into the traumatic abyss of meaninglessness. Failure to resolve the crisis may have required arduous attempts at rediscovering a suitable way to close the gap between instability and stability, possibly outside the Church and perhaps without God. Analogous to a rite of passage, John underwent metaphorical death and rebirth as well as actual transformation from materialism to spirituality. The mystical experience consolidated the basic premises of his religious, socio-cultural environment, facilitating its meaningful integration into personhood and the recognition of a vocation.

**The Middle: Part Two,Positing**

**Sister Chelsea.** Sister Chelsea's central experience of positing may be summarized as a profound test of her personhood, that is, of her resolve and courage to
actualize her vocation against the stubborn persistence of difficult circumstances. This period of trials not only confirmed the genuineness and solidity of what began during early childhood, but served as a transition to an unparalleled unity of being and doing in completion.

The balance between the preservation of her personal integrity and being a member of a religious community proved to be an enduring challenge. This challenge included issues regarding the spiritual life, enduring psychological harassment, accepting the betrayal inherent in the loss of a scholarship, developing personal relationships against official disapproval, and tolerate the lack of human warmth and suspiciousness toward new ideas. Again and again she had to confront her "greatest weakness" of excessive worrying when asked to assume responsible positions. However, none of these matched the spiritual, mental, and physical desolation she suffered during the time of the Dark Night when God seemed to have withdrawn permanently. Sister Chelsea persisted in faith and hope without assurances to ever see the light again at the end of the "curved tunnel".

Analogous to a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960) and the mystic way (Underhill, 1955), Sister Chelsea's time of darkness may be conceived as the death of all self-withholding, of surrendering all support, including God's presence, for the rebirth of the self into the unitive life.

John. John's account clearly indicates the prominence of the mystical, conversion, or culminating experience as a watershed for change and a beacon for continuous orientation. His central concern for the phase of positing was governed by seeking to integrate all of life in harmony with his experience of spiritual reality. Again and again he returned to his "Lord experience" as a source of inspiration and strength when threatened with temporary confusion of incompleteness. Like Sister Chelsea, he kept the faith through times of darkness and challenges to his commitments. He wrestled with the redirection of enactment from the priesthood to a
lay person, counsellor, and volunteer with the handicapped. Increasingly his being and doing became permeated and united by the spiritual reality subordinating material values, need for control, and self-concern.

The End: Completion

For all three participants the beginning of the story included the immersion into an inescapable problem of existence and the birth of desire for wholeness. For Sister Chelsea life would not be whole unless she found a way to singleheartedly belong to and participate in the felt sense of God's presence. John desired ultimate stability for life to be complete. Henk's painful experience of fragmentation led to his conclusion that wholeness was necessary for meaningful action and that it ought to exist somewhere. Of importance is that from a young age all participants had an innate sense of quality of life. They knew intuitively that a good life was the opposite of dissipation, fragmentation, division, and chronic instability. Completion or wholeness became a distant goal. Meaning and meaninglessness became contingent on movement toward or away from their respective destinations of closing the gap. Following Cochran (1990), it is the striving that matters, the keeping of the faith in adversities whether or not completion is realized. However, the end of a story and completion are not necessarily synonymous. Henk's story of his quest ended, but his potential vocation in the new story of fulfilling the promise of the mystical experience might proceed through positing in its movement toward completion.

John. John's account indicates how experience of spiritual reality came to permeate every corner of his life. The distinction between striving and being, acts and activity, self and non-self has become blurred. The regnant gap appears to be increasingly giving way to a dramatic unity that overflows with fullness of being.

Sister Chelsea. Sister Chelsea's unique attainment is an example of harmonious composition of personal integrity, participation in the community and a greater reality that issues from God. Her physical, mental, and spiritual faculties function as an
indivisible whole in an ever-present unselfconscious vigilance directed toward healing division and fragmentation wherever she finds it. The complete self-donation to ultimate reality invites an unparalleled sense of vitality and freedom void of external or internal coercion. However, perfection is not of this world and "life's adversities are not banned, but are approached with an inextinguishable gladness of heart" (Underhill. 1955, p. 437). Sister Chelsea receives reality with complete trust and openness through an attitude of inner listening for creative and spontaneous participation, for "God works with whatever happens." Infusion and diffusion of the spirit of central concern have become a timeless activity in a unity of being and doing.

**Mystical Experiences and Life History**

Sister Chelsea's intuitive awareness of God's presence became indivisibly woven into the fabric of her life. Even its absence during the Dark Night dominated her physical, mental, and spiritual way of being. Wholeness and goodness as qualities of life had become impossible outside the Presence. Sister Chelsea has committed herself to the mystic may. It is conceivable that the Presence may never have returned and the unitive life might have remained a distant goal regardless of a continued central enactment. The point is that completion of the mystic way as well as vocation are experienced as a gift that far surpasses the struggle involved. The struggle for self-fulfillment is paradoxically aimed at self-giving rather than self-satiation.

John's and Henk's mystical experiences emerged from a deep desire for wholeness beginning in childhood. Of particular interest is that the mystical experiences fit the very life histories as lived, providing intimately personal answers to equally personal existential conditions. These answers were more than mere solutions to a problem. The solution seemed to entail a response resembling a personal obligation toward the way life ought to be lived. Henk expressed the inherent personal obligation in the shift from the general question concerning the purpose of life to the personal challenge of, "What is the purpose of my life?"
As for John, the "Lord experience" restored him to himself within the context of his personal history. The perception of a new reality neither trivialized nor rewarded his past struggles, but rendered them meaningful as the very foundation for the transformation to be actualized. Similarly, Henk's intensely negative experiences of his youth and his various experimentations during adulthood were gathered up in the unitive experience. To his surprise, nothing was dismissed or judged unworthy of becoming integrated. Henk's personal history was not violated but became the ground for transcendence. Henk said,

"Ah, it's a total sense of rightness. I mean, everything is absolutely the way it should be including my life. Everything I've done to this time is absolutely proper and appropriate. It had to be this way to carry out what needs to be done."

Sister Chelsea expressed that sense of rightness when she said that "God works with whatever happens." John conveyed the same sense when he said,

"Through my experience I know that He loves me totally. No matter what I do, I can't stop Him from loving me less than that ...."

Sister Chelsea, John, and Henk, each befitting their personal history, live with the seemingly irreversible certainty that a greater, spiritual, or ultimate reality has illuminated and transformed their existence. Henk's twenty year depression does not stand in a cause and effect relationship to the mystical experience but emerged from the entire context of his life. Henk did not in the least diminish the value inherent in the mystical experience. Ultimately he held himself responsible for the ensuing catastrophe of not being able to shape his life in accordance with the perceived values. Unlike Sister Chelsea and John, Henk was unable to find an acceptable cultural framework that might have encouraged a fruitful translation from insight into action.

In sum, all participants intuited the importance of personal integration and intimate belonging to a greater whole. Sister Chelsea intuited God as the guarantor of both individual personhood and the community. John experienced personal restoration
in the unitive experience. Henk felt a "sense of incredible importance of the ... individuality and yet, at the same time the total immersion [into] seamless unity." For Sister Chelsea spirituality is an attitude of listening for a personal relationship with God and its enactment in the world. John's "Lord experience" has remained the spiritual focus of his life guiding every action. Henk expressed a similar sentiment in which spirituality is inseparable from "wholehearted participation in the space-time game."

The life histories in this study confirm that the mystic life is not abstract but concrete. Experience of and belonging to ultimate reality is experienced a personal salvation. But it appears that Maslow's (1983) undifferentiated, universal "Being Values", should they exist, remain trapped in the paradox of being culture specific despite the personal experience of their universality. But John may speak for all participants when he said, "I can't put it any other way than, 'I know'."
CHAPTER V

Limitations

In narrative research, interpretations remain open-ended and may change if new information emerges, because linguistic systems do not operate according to closed systems of mathematics and logic. Similarly, cause and effect are not seen in mechanistic, positivistic terms, but in a common sense manner (Polkinghorne, 1988). Unlike traditional science, narrative research is not based on discrete facts in order to establish truth, but its ultimate aim is to create understanding and wisdom (Cochran, 1989, 1990). Following Polkinghorne (1988), story reality is a construction and reconstruction of experience and describes how something happened retrospectively. Thus, the future of the human realm is not predictable, but can only be anticipated by what went before.

Further limitations arise from the sampling method which was purposeful and opportunistic rather than probabilistic. The sample was small and limited by age, race, culture, and method of information gathering. Information was confined to the participants' field of awareness and by what they were able and willing to convey within the focused scope and time restraints of this study. Exhaustive life histories, involving many hours of interviewing augmented by third party information, may further enrich the interpretations. For the above reasons the results are generalizable to theoretical premises rather than populations (Yin, 1984).

Implications for Theory

Phenomenological descriptions. Beginning with mystical experiences proper, the phenomenological descriptions offered by John and Henk clearly fall within the spectrum of categories outlined by James (1972), Otto (1958), Stace (1960), Underhill (1955), and Wach (1958). These categories include ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, passivity (James, 1972), unifying vision, transcending space-time and ego,
sense of objective reality, peace, sacredness, paradoxicality (Stace, 1960), given-ness, surprise, elated mood, and total involvement (Wach, 1958). Despite the total absorption in seamless union, John as well as Henk experienced a heightened validation of their respective individualities. Perhaps, being familiar with the mystical literature helped in the retrospective conceptualization of the experiences. Nevertheless, both participants clearly put these phenomena beyond the realm of the ordinary and as unaccessible by the senses. The centers of the experiences were free of content, yet the meaning extracted from this apparent void surpassed all ordinary, conceptual understanding. Of further interest is that John's interior way and Henk's exterior way equally resulted in relatively uncommon "numinous" unitive experiences as described by Otto (1958). Otto's "creature feeling" was somewhat evident. John was startled by having control over his prayer gently wrestled away from him by a superior Power. Henk experienced terror while fleeing from the manifestations of the self, but he did not talk about dread before the "numinous" during the first experience. In sum, these mystical experiences fit the classical descriptions in the literature in their phenomenology and as an extraordinary source of knowledge.

The mystic way. It is the contextual nature of the study that contributes most significantly to the body of research. Particularly, Sister Chelsea's life, as an example of the mystic way (Underhill, 1955), might have been missed with an exclusive focus on the mystical as sporadic, powerful, conversion-type experience. Sister Chelsea fits James' description of the "once born" who live naturally in the awareness of a higher order. But it is Underhill's (1955) mystic way that best captures Sister Chelsea's vocation as an ever deepening participation in and cooperation with the Presence. Rather striking is the Dark Night described by many mystics as dreaded isolation from the object of love and stripping of the last vestiges of self-withholding in preparation for the unitive life (Underhill, 1955). All efforts of resolving the utter feeling of abandonment seem to fail. The literature talks about concomitant physical and mental
fatigue, depression, hopelessness, etc.. Sister Chelsea's experience of physical pain during that period appeared to have been part of her "totality reaction" to the withdrawal of God's presence. She was aware of the possibility of pathology and sought help, but her efforts were inconclusive. She continued to function effectively in all areas of her life. Her reality perception with respect to the everyday world remained intact. Sister Chelsea's self-criticalness and fear of self-delusion endow her descriptions of the experience of God's intuited presence or absence with the same air of reality observable in other aspects of her life. By general consensus, the mystic life is an ordered life in all respects (Hidas, 1981; James, 1972; Underhill, 1955). Sister Chelsea leaves no doubt that this is the case. As described by Underhill, the Dark Night lifted gradually accompanied by the return of the Presence in an unparalleled experience of unity.

Sister Chelsea's experiences of God's guiding presence, whether as His inaudible voice, His touch, her premonitions, hunches, dreams, and intuitive sense of staying with a flow of energy, must be seen in the context of her life. Underhill (1955) made allowance for these phenomena as prevailing artistic expressions of the spiritual self embarked on the mystic way. Sister Chelsea's courage to admit to these experiences is admirable since she is very aware of their generally held association with pathology. These experiences are always submitted to rational follow-up for their value and veracity.

Following Underhill (1955), John's non-sensuous perception of Jesus in his father's apartment may also be conceived as an artistic, cultural specific creation of his spiritual self. However, for John, it was simply Jesus. Although he questioned the nature of this manifestation afterwards, his most parsimonious explanation remains unchanged. With respect to research, Hufford (1985) noted that reports of supernatural phenomena persist across all cultures regardless of social acceptance or suppression.
He suggested that these phenomena be accepted as a universal category of thought thereby restoring legitimacy to the experiences without admitting them as proof.

**Life context, meaning, and vocation.** Throughout the individual stories and in the summary analysis the importance and inseparability of life context in the creation of meaning has been demonstrated. The discussions included: (1) the emergence and role of mystical experiences within the creation of coherent and meaningful dramatic composition understood as a life vocation, (2) the inescapability of living in story providing structure for the meaningful expression of experience while allowing for emplotment commensurate with the individuals life history, (3) the gift of quality of life concomitant to successfully shaping fragmentation into wholeness, (4) the similarities between Underhill's (1955) mystic way and Cochran's (1990) conceptualization of vocation.

In sum, with respect to the life histories investigated in this study, mystical experiences are inseparable from a particular dramatic, holistic composition of meaning. This study tentatively suggests that wholeness and quality of life are potential and innate to human nature. Henk’s experience particularly highlights the consuming desire for wholeheartedness and unity by their very absence. His life exemplifies how fragmentation and division can become an unbearably painful condition relentlessly demanding to be addressed. But the solution lies within the entire context of his life history. Henk has become his quest apart from which his life does not makes sense. As Cochran (1990) noted, any resolution estranged from the very life as lived seems artificial and is bound to fail.

**Implications for Counselling**

This study contributes mainly to raising counsellors’ awareness about the complexities surrounding mystical experiences and their role in the unification of life. An effective counsellor would need a thorough knowledge of pertinent traditional and
contemporary literature, including recent research and issues concerning pathology and culture.

Based on recent surveys (Greeley, 1974, 75, 87; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Hay, 1979, 87; Hay & Heald, 1987) it appears that the wide-spread occurrences of mystical phenomena are no longer in question. One of the major challenges facing a counsellor would be to develop a discriminating attitude while remaining open toward accepting mystical experiences, including claims for the supernatural, as a legitimate category of human experience (Hufford, 1985). As is evident, every participant stressed the importance of rational discrimination for assessing the value of the experiences within a trustworthy tradition and the context of their lives. Henk's dilemma was partly due to being unable to find an acceptable cultural framework for understanding and fruitfully developing the experience.

Although the possibility of pathology and self-delusion was taken seriously by all participants, counsellors may encounter clients who are not inclined toward critical, rational analysis.

Proponents of mystical experiences as pathology would be hard pressed to discredit Sister Chelsea's subtle awareness of God's presence through most of her life. Strictly speaking, Sister Chelsea would have lived a life guided by a lingering pathological perception. The Dark Night might be explained in accordance with prevailing theories of depression rather than the withdrawal of the most meaningful aspect of her life. Sister Chelsea's account of "hearing" God and "feeling" His touch would equally challenge an uniformed counsellor. However, in the context of Sister Chelsea's life, her publicly observable daily conduct, her devotion to heal division and to create wholeness point toward saintliness rather than pathology. William James (1972) defined saintliness as:

1. A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power. ....
2. A sense of friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing surrender to its control. ....
3. An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of confining selfhood melt down.
4. A shifting of the emotional center towards loving and harmonious affections, toward "yes, yes" and away from "no" where the claims of the non-ego are concerned" (pp. 220-221)

Similarly, John's thirty-five days of mystical episodes clearly indicate that an inner transformation from fragmentation to unity occurred through a personal experience of God or Jesus. John's ensuing life in his enduring and self-less commitment to others speaks for itself. Again, a counsellor ignoring John's life context and mystical tradition might be tempted to pathologize the experience. The same applies to John's experience of the presence of Jesus after his father's death. The positive and dramatic nature of this experience would be lost without taking John's history with his father and the Catholic Church into consideration.

With respect to Henk, the twin effect of success and catastrophe through the mystical experience would be unintelligible without a thorough knowledge of his life history. Henk's account suggests that the origin of his depression is the central loss of meaning and the inability to overcome hindrances rooted in childhood to regain a purposefully directed unity of desire for a central enactment. Also, Henk reported that he was able to induce non-mystical, ecstatic moods at will after the mystical experience. He said, "I was playing with these new abilities." This practice resulted in complete physical exhaustion. Equally, by an act of will, he stopped these mood swings from occurring. During the entire second mystical experience, Henk was running through the forest, gripped by terror, fleeing from the manifestations of the self while at the same time calmly observing the scenario as if from a higher self. The marks of pathology are disintegration and fragmentation. But Henk experienced the opposite, that is, the multiplicity of the self within a greater unity. A counsellor, aware of Henk's quest for wholeness, would explore the wide range of these phenomena in their context in order to avoid unnecessary associations with pathology.
The participants of this study would also challenge a counsellor to consider the reported interaction between the rational and intuition. Sister Chelsea exemplifies the harmonious flow between heeding her intuition, rational analysis, gaining ego strength or personhood and its surrender in quiet contemplation. Through passive, yet active "listening", she practiced openness to the deeper reaches of intuition, the self, God, or whatever conceptualization befits the experience.

John's control of his contemplative prayer was literally taken away from him. He was invited to surrender all self-concern in order to allow entry into the unitive state. Henk's relentless search for wholeness came to fruition only after he had surrendered his exhaustive efforts. Thus, from the lives investigated in this thesis, counsellors are invited to consider surrender in its context. As Hidas (1981) noted, therapy traditionally focuses on strengthening the weak ego paying little attention to the surrender of a strong one. The literature suggests that an intense struggle for meaning pushes the person beyond despair into apathy and surrender (Hidas, 1981; Hunt, 1984; James, 1972). For John and Henk surrender was neither a trivial exercise nor deliberate but grew out of an exhaustive struggle that left them spent.

At this juncture Cochran's (1990) conceptualization of vocation as a holistic dramatic composition offers the counsellor a contextual framework for assisting persons in their efforts to overcome fragmentation and division in order to enhance the quality of life.

The live histories explored in this thesis corroborate Cochran's (1990) observation that

wholeness and quality experience are mutually involved in life. In this sense, the principle is a promissory guide and perhaps the best one we have for exploring and perhaps helping persons to develop in a more individual fashion" (p. 194).

Following Cochran (1990) the role of the counsellor would be that of a consultant to the production of a life drama. Problems or counselling issues would be
seen in terms of their potential role in furthering a unified life story in its natural progression through the phases.

With reference to the participants in this thesis, Henk exemplifies how extremely negative circumstances of incompletion may be composed into the unified desire of a way out that is also the beginning of a life story. A counsellor would be challenged to recognize young Henk's consuming existential concern and foster its development. The danger is to alleviate Henk's confusion and pain through premature solutions that would arrest their dramatic potential. Henk's rejection of authority and his decision to be a mediocrity might be explored for their consequences. The dramatic energy inherent in his early decisions may be "reframed" and integrated into his quest.

In retrospect, Henk's phase of positioning might have been enhanced by unifying his private quest and the necessity to earn a living since this issue has remained unresolved to this day. However, staying with Henk's account as presented, he may still have explored "positive thinking", declined to become a lieutenant, immigrated to Canada, etc. But a counsellor may have widened and stretched Henk's quest by exploring his responsibility and creative role in shaping the much desired wholeness out of the very the chaos of his life. Henk's search for the existence of God might have been furthered by challenging his cultural conceptualizations and perhaps introducing him to appropriate literature.

After the mystical experience, a counsellor familiar with Henk's life history might have pointed out the necessity to endure a renewed phase of incompletion in order to redramatize his life according to the gained insights. The lingering issue of refusing to take responsibility might have been explored for its consequences in the construction of the new story. The aim would be to assist Henk in achieving a regnant position from which to begin the work of life.

Sister Chelsea's and John's vocation emerged out of the guiding tradition of the Catholic Church. Counselling in the form of spiritual direction is integral to the
religious life in which the mystic way is partly implicit and often explicit. As has been demonstrated, Cochran's (1990) phases meaningfully capture Sister Chelsea's and John's development of vocation. The accounts of all participants concur that a unified life "is not given, but must be earned" (Cochran, 1990, p. 196).

Finally, as Cochran (1990) pointed out, the counsellor will be alerted to the limits of normative stage theories. Sister Chelsea's fundamental, holistic composition of personhood at a very young age would remain unexplained by prevailing stage theories of cognitive development.

Implications for Future Research

Existing research has focused mainly on establishing phenomenological categories, immediate antecedents and effects, personality variables, and quasi-experimental elicitation of mystical experiences. These research efforts indicate that mystical phenomena are common occurrences and as a rule contribute to superior mental well-being. Determined by purpose and design, past research has largely ignored meaning and context in which these phenomena arise. In view of this gap, life history case studies promise to contribute significantly to the holistic, contextual understanding of mystical experiences.

To date, this study appears to be the only one of its kind. Employing narrative methodology, future research could further explore the relationship between mystical experiences and life context. Particular focus might be directed toward the phenomenon's relationship to vocation or quest for meaning by recruiting populations of either gender and various ages, cultures, religious affiliation, believers, agnostics, atheists, etc. As Sister Chelsea's account suggests, children's experiences might be fruitfully explored. Particularly challenging could be longitudinal studies from childhood to adulthood of children who report mystical experiences.
Life history case studies may also shed light on the suggested connection between pathology and diabolical experiences (Spanos & Moretti, 1988) and the confusion surrounding psychosis and "pure" mystical experiences (Lukoff, 1985).

In the past, mystical tradition have selected and prepared gifted individuals for the mystic way (Happold, 1981). Henk suggested that he would have greatly benefited from an acceptable cultural framework for fruitfully integrating his experience. He echoed Maslow's (1983) suggestion to reconceptualize the mystical in accordance with the context of its time in history. Research and practice may explore the possibility for reestablishing a trustworthy, contemporary mystic way.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of mystical experiences within the context of life histories. Existing research has primarily employed traditional methods in its concern for codification, regularization, and generalization at the expense of context and meaning. Qualitative methodologies have received little attention. The primary aim of this study was to contribute to the existing research by a holistic, contextual understanding of mystical phenomena.

This study employed multiple case studies within narrative methodology. Three individuals, one woman and two men, all in their fifties and with appropriate mystical experiences were identified through a network of acquaintances and invited to participate. Intensive interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and presented as "straightened" individual stories. Each story was validated by the respective participant. In addition, a summary analysis or common story was constructed from the individual accounts.

Important for this study were Cochrans's (1990) conceptualization of vocation, Underhill's (1955) mystic way, and Maslow's (1983) concept of self-actualization. These conceptualizations share the common goal of the unitive life in which being and
doing are one. Within this context, Cochran's (1990) discovery of four natural phases toward a unified dramatic composition provided an important framework for understanding the life stories investigated in this thesis. At the time of analogy it became apparent that this method was particularly well suited since all participants had a well developed awareness of either a vocation or life-quest intimately intertwined with the mystical. The findings indicate that the mystical phenomena were intimate to the very lives as lived. Non-contextual research methods would seriously compromise and distort attempts at understanding the depth and importance these experiences occupy in the participants' lives.

This study is also intended to raise the awareness of counsellors with respect to mystical experiences in general and in particular for their potential to foster personal integration, a sense of belonging to a reality greater than the self, and serving society.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: A

Consent Form

Research Project: The Exploration of Mystical Experiences in the Context of Life Histories.

This project is conducted as part of a Master's degree by Tom Biela (263-1071) under the supervision of Dr. Larry Cochran (822-5259) in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The purpose of this study is to investigate the emergence, nature, and impact of mystical experiences in the context of life histories.

Your commitment will involve several hours of audiotaping. As a rule, four hours should be sufficient. The tapes will be transcribed, disguising your identity, and will be available only to the researcher and thesis advisor. In order to further ensure confidentiality, the tapes will be erased after the completion of the project. You will also be asked for your feedback during the analysis so that your experience will be represented as truthfully as possible.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may ask any questions regarding the project and are free to withdraw at any time, without prejudice.

I agree to participate in this study and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form.

__________________________  _______________________
Date                     Signature of Participant
APPENDIX: B

Recruitment Letter

Department of Counselling Psychology,
University of British Columbia,
5780 Toronto Road
V6T 1L2

Date:

To:

The purpose of my study is to investigate the emergence, nature, and impact of mystical experiences in the context of life histories. This project is conducted as part of a Master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Larry Cochran in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. I am interested in finding individuals who have intuited the presence of a benevolent power or have experienced a transformed, unitive "vision" of the world, clearly set apart from ordinary sensory awareness. These experiences may, or may not be expressible in religious terms. The focus of this study is on the entire life context insofar it pertains to the "mystical experience" in order to gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena.

Your commitment will involve meeting with me to further discuss the nature of the study and your role in it. Depending on your needs, several hours of audiotaping might be necessary to tell your life history with reference to the meaning and nature of the experience. As a rule, four hours should be sufficient. You will also be asked for your feedback during the analysis in order to represent your experience as truthfully as possible. Participation in this study might be an interesting and beneficial experience for you.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. All identifying information will be deleted in order to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

Sincerely,

Tom Biela (263-1071)  Dr. Larry Cochran (822-5259)
M.A. Student  Professor
Dept. of Counselling Psychology  Dept. of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia  University of British Columbia