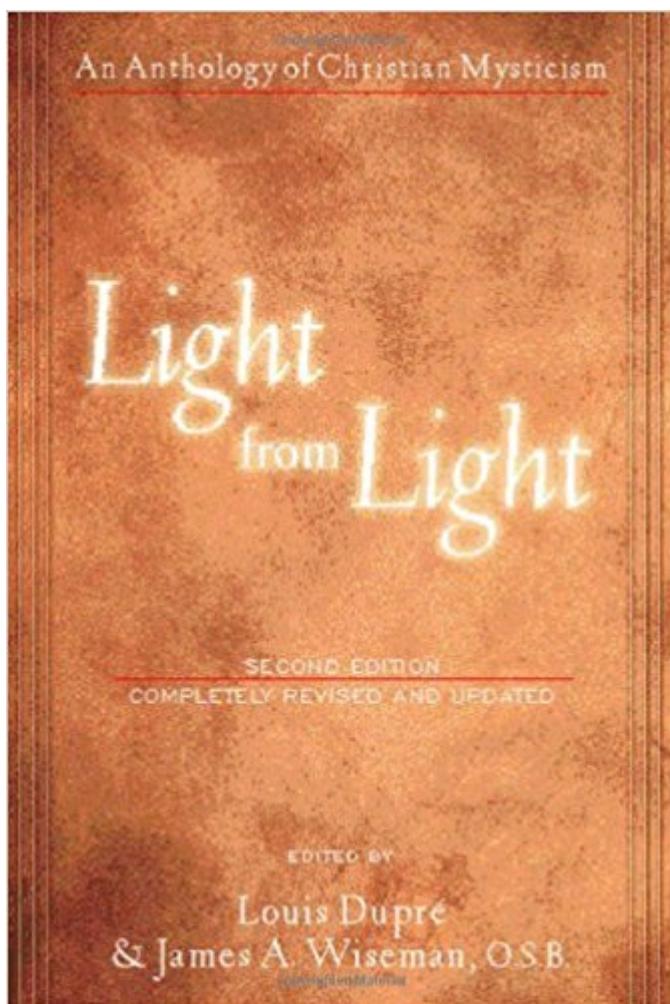


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Light From Light: An Anthology Of Christian Mysticism (Second Edition)



Synopsis

In this revised edition of a longtime best selling anthology of Christian mysticism, editors Louis Dupré and James Wiseman bring together selections from the writings of twenty-three of the most important Christian mystics, from Origen of Alexandria in the third century to Thomas Merton in the twentieth. This edition retains most of the authors included in the first addition, but has replaced some authors from that edition with ones that will be of greater interest to readers today, e.g., Francis and Clare of Assisi, Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal, and Evelyn Underhill. A general introduction discusses the place of mysticism within the Christian life as a whole, while individual chapter introductions place the mystical writers in their historical context and relate their works to others in the anthology. In addition, the editors have completely updated the bibliographies at the end of each chapter. Students and teachers of spirituality, as well as persons interested in their own spiritual growth, will welcome this popular revised resource, because it makes readily available in one volume major works by important Christian mystical writers. Like its predecessor, it is sure to be welcomed in the academic world and spiritual and devotional circles.

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Customer Reviews

A valuable supplementary source. -- *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* In the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Classics of Western Spirituality this is a major contribution. -- *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*

Louis Dupré, who holds a PhD from the University of Louvain, was before his retirement the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor in Philosophy of Religious Studies at Yale University. His books include *The Other Dimension*, *Passage to Modernity*, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection*, *Symbols of the Sacred*, and several studies in the area of Philosophy. James A. Wiseman, OSB, who holds an S.T.D. from The Catholic University of America, is associate professor of theology there. In addition, he serves as prior of his monastic community in Washington, DC.

I am extremely pleased with this anthology, which has several strengths:(1) It covers virtually the entire span of Christian times, beginning with Origen, whose writings date to the first half of the 3rd century AD, to Thomas Merton, whose writings date the 20th century. In total, 23 figures are represented, including some from outside the Catholic tradition. As such, the reader gets a good feel for how later thinkers built on or react against earlier schools of thought. This gives some value-added to the book, above and beyond the content of the selected writings it contains.(2) It is academically very solid. There are concise but still information-rich introductions to each author, which frame his/her thinking and offer a brief biographical sketch. Importantly, each and every one of the introductions is accompanied by a bibliography, which instills confidence that the editors have done their due diligence, gives the reader the chance to double check what the editors' claims (if so motivated), and offers avenues for further reading and study.(3) The selected writings themselves are very rewarding. Despite the need to pick relatively short entries to fit the limits of a single volume, I felt that every selection was substantive enough to meaningfully communicate some aspects of each figure's theology and philosophy.(4) I'll repeat a point the previous reviewer made, because I think it is important. The writers eschewed (correctly, in my view) the position that mysticism represents some sort of fundamental essence of religions ("perennial philosophy"). One great benefit of this approach is that the volume gives a very good sense of each writers' position within the Christian tradition, thereby communicating (in an admittedly limited way, due to the inherent limitations of an anthology) the writers' contributions to the development of Christian thought. This is quite useful for anyone interested in the development of doctrine or in the history of Christianity writ large.Perhaps the most important thing I can say is that I was quite satisfied with the volume when I finished it. Several of selections sufficiently moved me that I have re-read them, which I believe is a testament to the fact that the editors did a fine job of selecting the works they included, and I plan to buy complete--or at least more complete--publications of some of the excerpts in the volume. So I can recommend this book to anyone interested in Christianity generally, Christian mysticism, or mysticism generally. It's a very rewarding read.

Good chronological arrangement which complements McGinn's Essential Writings arrangement by stages of the journey.

Excellent

Quick deliver, pretty good book.

Light from Light is a very well written anthology of mystical christian saints, I especially liked the numerous commentaries on our Transendent Lord.

Offers helpful and interesting excerpts into the writings of the gurus of Christian mysticism from its very beginnings to the present. Appreciate the summary of the life of each of the mystics which sets the context for introducing us to their selected individual works.

As with any anthology, a discriminatory selection process requires an exclusion of some authors and works that some readers may feel should have been included. The editors of this work were painfully aware of this problem, but took into consideration the interests and opinions of their readers when revising and updating this anthology. Those who have the first edition, like myself, will notice that some authors were replaced with others (the editors explain the selection process in the Preface). The first edition included French spiritual writers Fenelon, Guyon and Marie of the Incarnation, as well as Maximus the Confessor, William Law, and Henri Le Saux, the first three omitted because of a lack of response and the last three omitted because of a general lack of recognition. Those that were added this time around include Francis and Clare of Assisi, Francis de Sales, Jeanne de Chantal, and Evelyn Underhill. Those that remained include: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruusbroec, Gregory Palamas, Julian of Norwich, the unknown author of The Cloud of Unknowing, Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Jonathan Edwards, Therese of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton. The General Introduction is concise, clear and well-balanced. It notably rejects the perspective that sees mysticism as the essence of all religion (the "perennial philosophy" or "universal mystical religion" view) while, at the same time, affirming that a mystical element belongs to the very essence of religion, along with other elements (one is reminded of Friedrich von Hugel's masterpiece on mysticism). Christianity is recognized as distinct

from other theistic and non-theistic (pagan) religions. Yet, it is noted that interaction between the various belief systems has influenced Christian theology in general and Christian mysticism in particular. This is an excellent, one-of-a-kind anthology. Each spiritual writer is given a fine introduction, followed by an extended excerpt or two from one or more of their literary masterpieces. Many of the excerpts are taken from Paulist Press' The Classics of Western Spirituality series. Each spiritual writer is given a separate Selected Bibliography, divided into Texts (Edition Used, Other Sources) and Studies. For a general introduction to other Christian mystics, see Ursula King's Christian Mystics. Bernard McGinn's The Presence of God series on Western Christian mysticism provides a more in-depth analysis. See especially his first book, The Foundations of Mysticism. McGinn considers Sidney Spencer's Mysticism in World Religions (OP) as one of the more successful overviews of mysticism in the various world religions. Less successful anthologies include Happold's Mysticism and Huxley's The Perennial Philosophy. Huxley's book assumes that there is only one true universal mystical religion that underlies all the various religions. Again, the editors of this anthology, among many others, reject this reductionistic view which has more in common with the monistic or pantheistic/panentheistic religions than the theistic ones, including the unique Trinitarian theism of Biblical Christianity.

I think many anthologies of Christian mysticism survey too many authors too briefly and the reader struggles to take much out of the book. This anthology does an excellent job of providing accurate and concise introduction to the mystics themselves along with reasonable selections of writings, 10-15 pages in most cases. The book is quite long, but the reader will come away with a good knowledge of each mystic.

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