

Key concepts:

- **Visions** are perceptions beyond normal experience that typically include dream-like qualities; and/or intellectual content (a message or insight).
- Visions can be **corporeal** (physical) in nature (Saul – ‘bright light’), or **spiritual**.
- Visions can be **collective** (Angel of Mons) or individual (St. Bernadette).
- Teresa of Avila (16th century nun) suggested that the highest form of a vision was a sense of God’s presence without sensory aspects.
- A vision can be part of another type of religious experience.

- **Prayer** is communication with God. This ‘communication’ can be an independent request from the devotee, a form of praise or, alternatively take on a more mystical and collaborative encounter with the divine object.
- Teresa of Avila saw the ultimate goal of prayer as union with God.
- She wrote of **types and stages** of prayer through the use of two analogies.
- A **garden** being watered: (a) drawing water from the well is the hard work to help the individual focus; (b) using a winch is becoming more withdrawn from the world and focused; (c) irrigation is being open to the flow of God; and, (d) heavy rain is the moment when all sense of self-effort in prayer is completely diminished and the flow of God is directly united with the soul.
- The Interior **Castle**: (a) mansions 1-3 are the stages just before one achieves unity with God; (b) mansions 4-5 are when one first achieves unity with God and God is implanted in the soul; (c) mansions 6-7 depict spiritual marriage in which there is a sense of spiritual ecstasy and painful longing, and a mystical marriage entailing intuitive and constant awareness of God.

- **Mysticism** is a unique experience of direct access to the divine realm.
- William James outlined 4 characteristics of mystical experience (see next KO).
- Mysticism is also **transcendent**; this is an experience that is **‘otherworldly’** or of a different spiritual dimension that may apprehend a greater reality or insight e.g. Sufi Muslims or Hindu ascetics during meditations.
- The **ecstatic** element involves ‘standing outside of oneself’ and complete absorption with one’s spiritual focus; it may take the form of a trance.
- The **unitive** element is the sense of oneness with the divine or a sense of wholeness within reality, removed from the barriers of the physical realm.

- **Conversion** usually refers to a positive psychological change in conviction and orientation (James). For example, a conversion from atheism/agnosticism to belief (Alister McGrath) or, from one religion to another (Muhammed Ali). It may be **intellectual** (C.S. Lewis) or **moral**, forgiveness of sin (Augustine).
- Like visions, conversions can be a **collective** (disciples in the upper room Acts 2) or individual experience (Saul on the road to Damascus).
- A conversion can be **sudden** (Saul) or gradual (C.S. Lewis).
- Conversions can be **free** (volitional) or **coercive** (instigated by some ‘other’).
- A conversion can be **active** (the participant is engaged with the experience), or, **passive** in which the participant is taken over by the experience.

Key quotes:

- “Mysticism... ever will be one of the great powers of the world.” (William B. Yeats)
- “God is in all things. The more he is within, the more he remains without. The more he is inside, the more outside.” (Meister Eckhart)
- “Prayer and comfortable living are incompatible.” (Teresa of Avila)
- “Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.” (Teresa o Avila)

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

- Key arguments/debates**
- The debates about the types of religious experiences appear to hinge upon their impact on both the individual and the community and how best to measure their value.
- Others debate their authority in relation to established scripture.
- Key questions**
- If mystical experience is ineffable, then of what value is it beyond the individual?
- Religion is grounded in religious experience but how do people differentiate between what is authoritative and what is not?

Key words:

Vision	sensory	dream	corporeal	collective
physical	spiritual	conversion	direction	conviction
sudden	gradual	free	coercive	active
passive	positive	mysticism	transcendent	unique
ecstatic	unitive	prayer	garden	castle