

Mystical Phenomena compared with their human and diabolical counterfeits.

by Albert Farges. Second edition of 1926. Translated by S. P. Jacques.
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This book is subtitled 'A Treatise on Mystical Theology in agreement with the principles of Saint Teresa set forth by the Carmelite Congress of 1923 at Madrid'. It was written by Monsignor Albert Farges, Doctor of Philosophy and Theology at the Institut Catholique of Paris.

On page ix Mgr. Farges writes 'The means which we propose to adopt towards the attainment of our object may be summed up thus: we shall confine ourselves as closely as possible to Saint Teresa and Saint Thomas Aquinas, without omitting the other great mystic saints, giving preference in the description of mystical phenomena to Saint Teresa, of whom it may be said that she eclipses all others by the depth and clearness of her psychological analyses. The authority which they enjoy in the Church is incomparable.

For the interpretation of such facts, at the constant bidding of the Church, we follow Saint Thomas; because his philosophy is but the systematizing of the "natural metaphysics of the human intelligence," as Bergson himself has felt forced to confess. After having made clear the enigmas of nature and of this world, this philosophy proceeds to expand for us those, still more wonderful as they are, which belong to the supernatural, and throws unexpected light on the most obscure mystical phenomena.'

After the two prefaces, there is an introduction to mystical science and its method followed by an historical survey of mysticism throughout the ages. Part I has firstly a didactic section on 'the essential phenomena of the mystical life: infused prayer of contemplation'. This is discussed in enormous detail. The second section of part one is apologetic and consists of 14 replies to controversies that were around at the time. Part II is described as 'Accidental or Marvellous Mystical Phenomena and their Natural and Diabolical Counterfeits'.

Here are 265 pages of description and detailed analysis of psychic and spiritual phenomena the likes of which the CFPSS are concerned with. The first chapter looks at marvellous phenomena of the cognitive order. It looks at visions in general, external, imaginative and intellectual visions, supernatural hearing and their hallucinatory counterfeits. It has physiological, intellectual and moral tests for hallucinations. It looks at supernatural dreams, vision through opaque bodies, telepathy and second sight. It looks at diabolical or divine supernatural explanations for these things and ends with a consideration of infused knowledge. The second chapter looks at marvellous phenomena of the affective order. This considers ecstasy and its psycho physiological forms, defines ecstasy and compares ecstasy against madness, catalepsy, hysteria and hypnosis. It considers ecstasy and subconscious forces. The third chapter looks at marvellous complements of divine ecstasy. These are stigmatisation, levitation, luminous effluvia, fragrant effluvia, supernatural abstinence and empire over creatures. This part II ends with a synthesis and conclusions.

There are six appendices; the first concerning non-Christian mystics. The book concludes with a bibliography, index of subjects and index of proper names.

I will give an example of the care and depth by which topics are considered. On pages 405 - 6 we read '...how should supernatural dreams be distinguished from those that are not so; by what *signs* should they be recognised?

The *first* is the extremely reasonable nature of divine dreams; instead of being extravagant and absurd, like the greater number of common dreams, they are always quite coherent and connected; they appear to be deliberate and reasoned out, because they are the work of a higher intelligence, guiding the human imagination and preventing it from wandering. Here we have already a first indirect characteristic of transcendence, for the natural dream is freed from all intelligent guidance.

The *second* character is the essential transcendence of this intelligent guidance. It is shown by the revelation of facts or truths which are clearly beyond the capacity of the seer's mind, and occasionally beyond the scope of any human mind, such as the prophetic announcement of contingent future events. Thus the dream of Joseph, the son of Jacob, which foretold his future greatness beyond his brethren, could not be the result of human intelligence of human intelligence.

The *third* sign is the deep and ineffable impression of certainty that is left in the soul by divine dreams, as opposed to ordinary dreams which are quickly forgotten. God's intervention is no doubt very rare, but when he does intervene he is careful to add striking circumstances and confirmations in virtue of which it is impossible to doubt that it is he who is acting. Such dreams produce so great an evidence of truth to our minds and such presentiments in our hearts that it becomes impossible for us to confuse them with common dreams. They are obviously a warning from heaven for us which remains deeply graven on our souls.

We would add a *fourth*, though very rare sign - that of several dreams occurring to several persons without previous agreement or mutual suggestion, in which they experience an identical vision at the same moment, by which they are induced to co-operate in the same work for the glory of God. Such was the simultaneous vision of Pope Liberius and the two benefactors who founded the church of Saint Mary Major, or Our Lady of the Snows, on the Esquiline, at the spot where snow had just fallen in the middle of summer.'

This is followed by twenty-one pages on Telepathy and second sight.

We are greatly indebted to Monsignor Farges for this monumental forensic work. It aids the CFPSS in one of its objects: in the words of our past president Michael Perry, we are to help folk 'to spiritualize the psychic'.

As we enter what may be a considerable period of social distancing, this profound and searching work would pass many an happy hour. I would encourage all readers of the CP to get a copy and read this for themselves. It is 'paranormal research gold' to quote our new editor.