

## **Early Mysticism**

**What follows are a sample of sayings by some of the most prominent early mystics. These individuals are particularly important to the Orthodox tradition of Christianity, which is deeply committed to the early mystical writings of the church, as found in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.**

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God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped, he would not be God.

~ **Evagrius of Pontus**

One day some of the brethren came to see Abba Antony, and among them was Abba Joseph. Wishing to test them, the old man mentioned a text from Scripture, and starting with the youngest he asked them what it meant. Each explained it as best he could. But to each one the old man said, 'You have not yet found the answer.' Last of all he said to Abba Joseph, 'And what do you think the text means?' He replied, 'I do not know.' Then Abba Antony said, 'Truly, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he said: I do not know.'

~ **The Sayings of the Desert Fathers**

As a friend talking with his friend, man speaks with God, and drawing near in confidence he stands before the face of the One who dwells in light unapproachable.

~ **St Symeon the New Theologian**

Imagine a sheer, steep crag, with a projecting edge at the top. Now imagine what a person would probably feel if he put his foot on the edge of this precipice and, looking down into the chasm below, saw no solid footing nor anything to hold on to. This is what I think the soul experiences when it goes beyond its footing in material things, in its quest for that which has no dimension and which exists from all eternity. For here there is nothing it can take hold of, neither place nor time, neither measure nor anything else; our minds cannot approach it. And thus the soul, slipping at every point from what cannot be grasped, becomes dizzy and perplexed and returns once again to what is co-natural to it, content now to know merely this about the Transcendent, that it is completely different from the nature of the things that the soul knows.

~ **St Gregory of Nyssa**

Think of a man standing at night inside his house, with all the doors closed; and then suppose that he opens a window just at the moment when there is a sudden flash of lightning. Unable to bear its brightness, at once he protects himself by closing his eyes and drawing back from the window. So it is with the soul that is enclosed in the realm of the senses: if ever she peeps out through the window of the intellect, she is overwhelmed by the brightness, like lightning, of the pledge of the Holy Spirit that is within her. Unable to bear the splendour of unveiled light, at once she is bewildered in her intellect and she draws back entirely upon herself, taking refuge, as in a house, among sensory and human things.

~ **St Symeon the New Theologian**

Anyone who tries to describe the ineffable Light in language is truly a liar - not because he hates the truth, but because of the inadequacy of his description.

~ **St Gregory of Nyssa**

The form of God is ineffable and indescribable, and cannot be seen with eyes of flesh. He is in glory uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in loftiness inconceivable, in strength incomparable, in wisdom inaccessible, in love inimitable, in beneficence inexpressible. Just as the soul in a man is not seen, since it is invisible to men, but we know of its existence through the movements of the body, so God cannot be seen by human eyes, but he is seen and known through his providence and his works.

~ **Theophilus of Antioch**

We do not know God in his essence. We know him rather from the grandeur of his creation and from his providential care for all creatures. For by this means, if using a mirror, we attain insight into his infinite goodness, wisdom and power. .

~ **St Maximus the Confessor**

The most important thing that happens between God and the human soul is to love and to be loved.

~ **Kallistos Katapbygiotis**

I know that the Immovable comes down;  
I know that the Invisible appears to me;  
I know that he who is far outside the whole creation  
Takes me within himself and hides me in his arms,  
And then I find myself outside the whole world.  
I, a frail, small mortal in the world,  
Behold the Creator of the world, all of him, within myself;  
And I know that I shall not die, for I am within the Life,  
I have the whole of Life springing up as a fountain within me.  
He is in my heart, he is in heaven  
Both there and here he shows himself to me with equal glory.

~ **St Symeon the New Theologian**

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