

EXCERPT



Becoming an Ordinary Mystic *Spirituality for the Rest of Us*

August 27, 2019 | \$16, 176 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4657-3

“With scriptural insights and practical exercises, Albert Haase reminds us that God has an ardent longing for a deeper and deeper relationship with each of us. The disciple’s journey is a mystical journey that leads to a deeper experience of the ordinary and mundane. To plumb the depths of the secular is to scale the heights of the sacred. An authentic expression of the Franciscan vision of the world!”

Richard Rohr, Center for Action and Contemplation

We Are All Called to Be Mystics

I was ten years old. I was sitting on the floor of my bedroom and paging through a picture book about the lives of the saints. It was December 14. I know the date because I distinctly remember turning to that day’s page to see whose feast day the Catholic Church celebrated. I remember scratching my head over the first sentence about that day’s saint: “Saint John of the Cross was a Carmelite mystic of the sixteenth century.” I was old enough to know the Carmelites were a religious order like the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines. But a mystic?

Later that day, I asked my mother, “What’s a mystic?”

My mother was accustomed to answering my precocious questions. “That’s a special friend of God.”

“I want to be one!” I instantly blurted out, knowing that being a *special* friend of God would be like what I had with my best friend, Dennis, who lived across the street.

“It doesn’t quite happen like that,” she said. “You don’t choose to be one. You are chosen.”

I didn’t believe her. I was determined to become a special friend of God and would spend the subsequent years trying to prove her wrong.

Twenty years later, I sat with my spiritual director. It was one of those days—I was a bit discouraged. After telling him about that first childhood encounter with John of the Cross and my reaction to my mother’s comment, I began to think out loud:

- I should be further along on the spiritual journey.
- Why don’t I see any progress?
- What am I doing wrong?

After twenty years of trying to be chosen as a special friend of God, I felt like I was just walking in spiritual circles.

“Now I understand why St. Teresa of Avila, having been knocked out of her carriage and fallen into a water puddle, said, ‘O God, if this is how you treat your friends, no wonder they are so few!’”

“But, Albert,” my spiritual director replied, “Teresa of Avila was a mystic. That’s how mystics sometimes feel. And I suspect, because you’re feeling the way you do, you’re a mystic too. We’re all called to be mystics.”

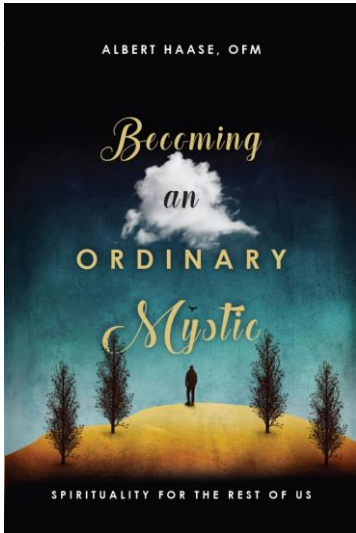
Me, a mystic? Had I been chosen as a special friend of God and not known it?



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“Franciscan Albert Haase is a master storyteller. Throughout *Becoming an Ordinary Mystic* his pithy, down-to-earth anecdotes draw a reader in. But these tales have a decided plumb line. Into them he skillfully weaves insights from Christian wisdom figures—from Job to Teresa of Ávila to Thomas Merton. What emerges is a surprisingly accessible guide to a mature Christian life saturated with the divine presence.”

Wendy M. Wright, professor emerita of theology, Creighton University

He continued, “In every moment of our lives, God is asking us to respond to grace—and grace is simply God’s ardent longing and enthusiastic invitation to a deeper relationship, a mystical relationship. Mystics are ordinary Christians who do what we are all called to do, respond to grace. I know you well enough to know you are intentional about prayer. So you’re responding to God’s invitation to spend time with him. You’re deliberate about doing acts of charity. So you are responding to God’s call to move beyond your selfishness. You make an annual retreat. You keep working at forgiveness. And you keep trying to become more attentive and sensitive to what God is asking of you. I think it’s safe to say you’ve been chosen like everyone else to be a ‘special friend of God,’ as your mother called it. You’re an ordinary mystic.”

A-n o-r-d-i-n-a-r-y m-y-s-t-i-c. I had to let the words sink in. I never would have known it but it certainly now made sense.

Even while naively trying to make myself worthy of being chosen, I had mistakenly thought mysticism meant acquiring esoteric knowledge or having rarefied experiences—but where were the wisdom and the supersized feelings? That’s why I was discouraged.

After more than thirty years since sitting down with that spiritual director, I’ve discovered mysticism is more commonplace than I originally thought. It is living with sensitivity to the divine presence and responding to God’s ardent longing and enthusiastic invitation to a deeper relationship at this very moment: in a burning bush as happened to Moses, in the tiny whisper of a sound as Elijah experienced, in the call to come out of hiding like Zacchaeus, in the mysterious stranger who suddenly appears and offers hope as one did with two disciples walking to Emmaus.

Mystics teach us to celebrate Jesus’ offer of forgiveness right here, right now, and not live in the past, submerged in guilt over sinful actions. Mystics have distractions in prayer—Teresa of Avila mentions times when, during prayer, her attention was focused more on the grains of sand in the hourglass than the crucifix—but they acknowledge and respect distractions as potential teachers in the spiritual life. Mystics pray from their current feelings, even the ones other people consider inappropriate to express to God—think again of Teresa falling out of the carriage. Mystics sometimes lose the feeling of having God in their life—John of the Cross called it the “dark night” and Mother Teresa of Calcutta experienced it for almost fifty years. Mystics are waitresses, welders, writers, and web designers who heartily respond to the direct and enthusiastic invitation of Jesus, “Come, follow me.” It’s the ordinary call singularly offered to all. The mystics’ journey is, in fact, the disciples’ journey: “We’re all called to be mystics,” as my spiritual director said.

—Taken from the introduction



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BIO



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Other titles by Albert Haase include *Athanasius: The Life of Antony of Egypt*, *Coming Home to Your True Self: Leaving the Emptiness of False Attractions*, *Living the Lord's Prayer: The Way of the Disciple*, and *This Sacred Moment: Becoming Holy Right Where You Are*.

Albert Haase, OFM

Born in New Orleans, I have always been called by the French pronunciation of my first name, "Al-bear." Growing up on Apricot Street, I spent a lot of time in the backyard trying to dig a hole to China. I thought I would never get there, until 1990 when the General Minister of the Franciscan Order asked for volunteers to once again bring the Franciscan presence to the Chinese. And so on August 15, 1992, I made my way to the island of Taiwan to begin two and a half years of Chinese language studies. After that, I finally achieved my childhood dream of making it to mainland China. I taught English in Wuhan for one year. From there, I went north to the Chinese capital of Beijing where I lived for ten years. I taught English for two years and then became the Director of Human Resources for Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. (I jokingly tell people that Saint Francis started off in the business world and then dedicated his life to God. I did it backwards by dedicating my life to God and then entering the business world!) My weekends in Beijing were spent ministering to the English-speaking Roman Catholic community; I was the priest and pastor of a community of five hundred Catholics from twenty-seven different countries.

I entered the Franciscan Order in 1976 and was ordained a priest in 1983. I received a PhD in Historical Theology from Fordham University in 1990, and I wrote my dissertation on Franciscan hagiography, specifically Bonaventure's *Major Life* of Saint Francis of Assisi. In September 2016 while preaching at a parish mission in Farmington, New Mexico, I had the opportunity to meet Mario Bernardone, the direct descendant of one of Saint Francis of Assisi's brothers.

After twelve years of living out of a suitcase as an itinerant preacher and earning 1.3 million frequent flyer miles on United, I accepted the invitation in September 2018 to become the chaplain and join the retreat team at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Temple, Texas, in the diocese of Austin. That includes my ministry of spiritual direction and training future spiritual directors as I have done in Peoria, Illinois, as well as at the Chiara Center, Springfield, Illinois. I also continue my ministry as a writer in the area of spirituality.

From 2010–2015, along with my sister "the sister," Bridget OSU, I was the co-host of *Spirit and Life*, a show that aired every weekend on the Relevant Radio Network. Our listeners said the show "cackled with sibling rivalry and crackled with the revelation of God's presence in our everyday lives." Over the five years, we discussed just about every aspect of spirituality and the spiritual life: the Beatitudes, discernment, the fruit of the Spirit, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, spiritual darkness and dryness, and gratitude.

As a member of the Sacred Heart Province of the Order of Friars Minor, I am so proud of my brothers and the way we minister to the poor, the marginalized, and the forgotten. You can read about it at FranciscanCharities.org.

AlbertOFM.org



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