

2-1-2019

Soul Journey: Rediscovering the Sacred Paths for Body, Heart, and Mind

Christopher Fillingham
cfillingham16@georgefox.edu

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Fillingham, Christopher, "Soul Journey: Rediscovering the Sacred Paths for Body, Heart, and Mind" (2019). *Doctor of Ministry*. 319.
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/319>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SOUL JOURNEY:
REDISCOVERING THE SACRED PATHS FOR BODY, HEART, AND MIND

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
CHRISTOPHER FILLINGHAM

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Christopher Fillingham

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 11, 2019
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: David Robinson, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Carole Spencer, PhD

Lead Mentor: MaryKate Morse, PhD

All Scripture references, except those quoted by other authors within quotes, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Copyright © 2019 by Christopher Fillingham
All rights reserved

DEDICATION

To those who love the Church and those who have given up on the Church.

To those communities and individuals who have guided my soul in their own way.

And to my children, who need the Church to become all that it was created to be, so they might become all they were created to be: Noelle, Elijah, Theodore, and Brandt. May you discover the immensity of God's life and love for you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work has been stirring deep in my soul for a long time thanks to a pastor, mentor, and friend of mine, Burt Burleson. Not only did he help me discover my own calling in the way he lived out his calling, but Burt introduced me to contemplative Christianity and the gift of ancient guides. In the process, he may have just saved my soul.

Since then, there have been a number of people who have nurtured the curious longing in me that gave birth to this work, including various spiritual directors, guides, and teachers: Doug Hardy, who first taught me to listen to my body; Paul Ritter, who encouraged me to take the leap into a D.Min; Belden Lane, whose *Backpacking with the Saints* cultivated my imagination and whose spirit made the spirit in me leap; Suzanne Stabile, who not only taught me the Enneagram and centers of intelligence, but taught me about myself and gave a great gift to my marriage; John Phillip Newell, whose pilgrimage and conversations on Iona in May 2018 continue to reverberate in my soul.

I am also grateful to Portland Seminary, especially MaryKate Morse who listened to my muddled thoughts and spiritual questions, encouraged my writing, allowed the space for this work to find its own way into the world, and, most importantly, nourished my body, heart, and mind in the Leadership and Spiritual Formation program. I am indebted to my advisor, David Robinson, who helped me find my way through countless ancient voices and whose early feedback on Bonaventure sparked my idea for the framework of this dissertation. Special thanks to Rochelle Deans, whose edits, suggestions, and personal feedback were a gift. And to my LSF2 cohort, thank you for

encouraging me to believe that I have something worth writing and for your life-giving friendships. Jason, Ken, and Mike, you have made the journey rich.

I want to also offer my deepest gratitude to Dayspring Baptist Church in St. Louis who provided the time and resources to make this program possible. Thank you for your generosity, your encouragement, and your love. You are a delight to pastor. A special thanks to everyone who read chapters along the way and have been conversation partners, both at Dayspring and online: Jerry, Shirleen, Trisha, David, John, Margarett Ann, Dean, Gail, Jordan, Chuck, Aaron, Candice, Rob, Dad, and Mom.

To my family, who have loved and supported me, who kept me honest, who cheered me on, and who made me laugh, thank you. And to my love, my journey companion, my first editor of every chapter, my conversation partner, my encourager—Jessi, without your hours of sacrifice and grace, none of this would have been written. You inspire my soul.

EPIGRAPH

Thou art above us, O God.
Thou art within.
Thou art in every living thing,
Yet contained by no thing.
Teach us to seek Thee in all that has life,
That we might see Thee as the light of life.
Teach us to search for Thee in our own depths,
That we might find Thee in every living soul.

—John Phillip Newell, Iona Pilgrimage, May 2018.

Table of Contents

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
EPIGRAPH	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER 1: HERE WE GO AGAIN.....	1
We Are Lost	1
What Are We Looking For?.....	6
Misconceptions About Spirituality	6
Spirituality as Eros.....	8
Aim of our Eros	11
Cultivating Eros.....	14
Lost in the Weeds	15
The Fallacy of Knowledge	16
The Deception of Experiences	18
The Rigidity of Behaviors.....	19
The Container or the Contents?.....	20
Mirages: The Enlightenment and Rationalism.....	22
Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness?.....	22
The Reduction of Creation	24
The Reduction of Humanity	25
The Reduction of God.....	26
Consequences for the Soul.....	27
In Search of Guides	28
CHAPTER 2: A SACRED MAP – BONAVENTURE AND THE THREE ESSENTIAL PATHS.....	31
Looking for Maps	31
Map-Maker Extraordinaire	32
The Seraphic Vision.....	35
Map Key.....	36
Wordplay: Itinerarium Mentis in Deum	37
Three Pairs of Wings—Three Contemplative Paths.....	39
The Crucified One—One Central Road.....	40
Desire—The Essential Fuel.....	41
The Three Paths.....	42
The Outward Journey of Francis	42
The Inward Journey of Augustine	45
The Upward Journey of Dionysius.....	48
The Braided Road—Restoring the Reductions	51

The Necessary Equipment: The Centers of Intelligence	53
Bonaventure's Perennial Wisdom	53
Our Three-Brained Selves	55
Riding a Two-Wheeled Tricycle	58
Presence: Full Soul Awareness	60
Prayers to Begin the Journey	63
A Blessing	63
A Prayer of Illumination	63
CHAPTER 3: THE OUTWARD PATH – CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THE BODY	
.....	64
The Body of Christ	64
Jesus of Nazareth	64
Creation	65
The Gathered Body	67
Celtic Christianity Guides the Way	68
Ancient Roots	69
The Divine Entwined	73
Holy Creation	74
Holy Flesh	77
Loving God with All Your Body	83
Clarifying the Body Center	84
Classic Christian Body Practices	86
Practices for Holy Flesh	88
Practices for Holy Creation	90
Prayers for the Outward Path	92
Blessing	92
Invocation	92
Whispers from the Journey	93
CHAPTER 4: THE INWARD PATH – JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE HEART ..	94
Heart to Heart	94
Probing Peter	94
Probing the Passions	96
John of the Cross Guides the Way	99
Poverty, Prison, and Poetry	99
Loved But Locked Up: The Heart's Condition	103
The Dark Night: The Journey of Liberation	106
A Dawning: The Living Flame of Love	112
Loving God with All Your Heart	116
Clarifying the Heart Center	116
Practices for Engaging the Heart	118
Practices for Liberating the Heart	120
Prayers for the Inward Path	124
Blessing	125
Invocation	125
Whispers from the Journey	126

CHAPTER 5: THE UPWARD PATH – GREGORY OF NYSSA AND THE MIND .	127
Mind Bending.....	127
Illuminating Darkness.....	127
Thoughts on Thinking.....	129
Gregory of Nyssa Guides the Way	132
Trail Blazer.....	132
The Life of Moses.....	135
Loving God with All Your Mind	143
Clarifying the Mind Center	144
Practices for Engaging the Mind	146
Practices for Awakening the Mind	152
Prayers for the Upward Path	155
Blessing.....	155
Invocation.....	156
Whispers from the Journey	156
CHAPTER 6: BECOMING GUIDES.....	157
Speaking of Soul.....	157
Calling All Churches	161
First Steps.....	166
APPENDIX A: <i>EROS</i> AND <i>AGAPE</i> – QUALITIES OF DIVINE LOVE	170
APPENDIX B: THE ENNEAGRAM AND THE CENTERS OF INTELLIGENCE...	176
APPENDIX C: AWAKENING THE CENTERS OF INTELLIGENCE	182
APPENDIX D: SIGNS OF THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL	183
APPENDIX E: SKETCH OF MT. CARMEL	186
APPENDIX F: THE ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SOUL.....	187
BIBLIOGRAPHY	189

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – The Enneagram.....	177
Figure 2 – Christopher Heuertz Prayer Postures and Intentions	181
Figure 3 – Sketch of Mt. Carmel	186

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – The Structure of Bonaventure's Itinerarium	39
Table 2 – The Correlation Between Bonaventure, the Centers of Intelligence, and Neurobiology	58
Table 3 – Personalities Defined by the Centers of Intelligence	178
Table 4 – Enneagram, Temptations, and Contemplative Practice.....	180
Table 5 – Centers of Intelligence: Asleep vs. Awake.....	182

ABSTRACT

The spiritually thirsty are leaving the church in the West. They do not find the church to be a place of spiritual wisdom and nourishment. This dissertation follows various ancient guides within Christianity to recover a life-giving spirituality for the Western Church in the twenty-first century. Chapter 1 draws on the desert monastics as it explores the lack of a transformational spirituality in the modern Church. It defines spirituality in terms of *eros*, clarifies the aim of spirituality as union, and explores the common reductions that have led the Church astray. Chapter 2 connects the three spiritual paths outlined in Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey Into God* (outward, inward, and upward) with the three centers of intelligence articulated by Gurdjieff (body, heart, and mind) that form the basis of the Enneagram. Each of these paths and centers of intelligence are explored in successive chapters using a different saint or spiritual tradition as a guide. Chapter 3 follows Celtic Christianity on the outward journey to learn the wisdom and spirituality of the body. Chapter 4 follows John of the Cross on the inward journey to recover the wisdom and spirituality of the heart. Chapter 5 follows Gregory of Nyssa in the upward journey to uncover the spirituality of the mind. Each chapter ends with particular spiritual practices to engage the intelligence centers in the journey of awakening to our union with God. Chapter 6 concludes by reimagining the calling of the Church and pastor as spiritual guide. When the Church learns to navigate the three essential paths of Christian spirituality, it will become enflamed with the life of God, transforming the world.

CHAPTER 1:

HERE WE GO AGAIN

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

But they said, “We will not walk in it.”

—Jeremiah 6:16

We Are Lost

The Church lost its way. Christianity became more a civic religion than a transformative religion. Many of its leaders became drawn to political power rather than the power of God. The gospel of Jesus became co-opted as a tool for social control and domination. Consequently, the spiritually hungry were leaving the church in droves. It was the fourth century.

It began with St. Anthony in the year 270. Those longing for a deeper life with God fled the anemic Church of their day. They followed the biblical tradition of seeking God in the wilderness. In fact, many fled to the same desert that Moses and the Hebrew people spent 40 years wandering. Others fled to the desert in which John the Baptist and Jesus fasted. Gradually, the deserts of Egypt and Palestine became populated with men and women looking to recover the same deep awareness of God that Moses, John, and Jesus embodied. According to Anthony’s biographer, Athanasius, by the time Anthony died, the mountains and deserts were “colonized” by the spiritually hungry.¹

¹ Saint Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony of Egypt* (N.p.: Waxkeep Publishing, 2012), 14.

These men and women are referred to as the desert monastics. The wisest among them were given the titles of Amma (mother) or Abba (father). Their spiritual insights and wisdom have come down through history to us in the form of short stories or sayings. In one of them, an elder is asked about the meaning of the phrase, “the straight and narrow way.” He says that the narrow way is found when we cut off our judging spirit and stop following the desires of our own will. “This is what was written of the Apostles: Behold we have left all things and have followed Thee.”² At first glance, this might appear obvious. The narrow way is simply following Jesus. However, Jesus warns us, “the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.” (Matthew 7:13). Jesus’s words have proven to be prophetic. The church of the twenty-first century is eerily similar to the church of the fourth century. We are lost.

A growing number of Christians are realizing it. Study after study comes out to remind us what we already know: the spiritually thirsty are leaving the church.³ In the American church, this phenomenon cuts across demographics. According to the Pew Research Center, the rise in the spiritual-but-not-religious “has been broad-based: It has occurred among men and women; whites, blacks and Hispanics; people of many different ages and education levels; and among Republicans and Democrats.”⁴ To address this pattern, there has been a surge in innovative worship, adoption of technologies, and a

² Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, Rev. ed. (New York: New Directions, 1970), 86.

³ See “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project (blog), October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>. Followed by Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual but Not Religious,” Pew Research Center (blog), September 6, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>.

⁴ Lipka and Gecewicz, “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual but Not Religious.”

broad-based increase in the number of member-oriented and mission-oriented programs in the American church.⁵ These “solutions,” however, coincide with continued increase in congregational conflict, a drop in financial health and attendance patterns, and a decline in spiritual vitality. Roozen notes, “To the extent it has been true of every generation of young adults in America since the baby boomers that they tend to gravitate to the spiritual more than the religious, then the sharp downtrend in the self-assessed spiritual vitality of American congregations... must be particularly concerning.”⁶ There is a spiritual emptiness at the heart of the American church that is manifesting itself in the gradual collapse of congregational life.

A suspicion is stirring that Christianity does not have anything meaningful to offer the world. According to Jacob Needleman, millions in the modern world believe “Christianity simply has no force, no power to bring about change. Christianity as we know it does not produce Christian results, either in the individual or in the world.”⁷ The Church’s history of abusive postures toward the environment, women, and minorities suggest that Christianity in particular and religion in general have been a source for harm, not good. The enslavement of black Africans and the genocide of Native Americans is seen as case in point. Likewise, “[e]litism, classism, torture, homophobia, poverty, and the degradation of the earth are still largely unaddressed by the ordinary monotheistic

⁵ David A. Roozen, “A Decade of Change in American Congregations,” Faith Communities Today, accessed September 14, 2018, http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Decade%20of%20Change%20Final_0.pdf.

⁶ David A. Roozen, “A Decade of Change.”

⁷ Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2003), 119.

‘believer.’”⁸ To many, Christian identity has little effect on transforming people or society.

Dallas Willard has described this dynamic at length.⁹ He suggests that in most churches, you can be considered perfectly right with God without any need for personal transformation. In conservative and liberal churches alike, transformational spirituality has been pushed to the margins. Even the majority of pastors admit that they do not believe the Church is effective at discipling its members.¹⁰ Consequently, there is a growing question of whether or not the Western Church addresses the things that matter most to us as human beings. J. Philip Newell describes it this way: “There is despair about much of what Christianity has to offer. So many of its teachings and practices seem either irrelevant to the deepest yearnings of the human soul or flatly opposed to them.”¹¹

There are others who have remained deeply committed to a Jesus-centered spirituality but do not see the Church as either helpful or relevant to their life with Christ. Roxanne Stone, editor-in-chief of the Barna Group, reports that those who “Love Jesus but Not the Church” have “lost faith in the church.”¹² In fact, many who have discovered the riches of Christian spirituality have had to go looking outside their local churches.

⁸ Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 42.

⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

¹⁰ “Is Discipleship Effective in U.S. Churches?” Barna Group, December 21, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/is-discipleship-effective-in-u-s-churches/>.

¹¹ J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), viii.

¹² “Meet Those Who ‘Love Jesus but Not the Church,’” Barna Group, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>.

Esther de Waal writes, “I have not found a church that has taught me [how to grow spiritually], and it is only in recent years that I have begun to find books and retreats that have given me some practical help and experience and wisdom.”¹³ Likewise, in *Searching for Sunday*, Rachel Held Evans describes her journey of leaving the church and looking for a community that is more centered in Jesus’ way and spirituality.¹⁴ There are a growing number of deeply committed Christians today (just as there were in the fourth century) who will no longer tolerate a Church that does not look, sound, smell, or act like Jesus.

The spiritual ailment in the Western Church is also festering in the hidden dynamics of the church’s leadership. The child abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are but one example.¹⁵ The moral failures of Protestant pastors such as Bill Hybels is another.¹⁶ Scott McKnight shares one study analyzing the well-being of America’s Protestant pastors. It reveals a troubling dichotomy that demonstrates just how lost the Church’s leaders have become.

- 86% of pastors say they would choose ministry as their career if they had to do it all over again. However, 70% of pastors report having a lower self-esteem than when they started and 45.5% of pastors say that they’ve experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.

¹³ Esther de Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination*, Reprint edition (New York: Image, 1999), 95.

¹⁴ Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

¹⁵ Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, “Catholic Priests Abused 1,000 Children in Pennsylvania, Report Says,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/us/catholic-church-sex-abuse-pennsylvania.html>.

¹⁶ Laurie Goodstein, “He’s a Superstar Pastor. She Worked for Him and Says He Groped Her Repeatedly,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/05/us/bill-hybels-willow-creek-pat-baranowski.html>.

- 91% of pastors feel very satisfied about being in ministry. And yet, 80% believe that it affects their families negatively, and 33% *confess to “inappropriate” sexual behavior with someone in the church.*
- 75% of pastors say they want to stay in ministry, while 45% of pastors’ spouses say the greatest danger to them and family is physical, emotional, mental and spiritual burnout.¹⁷

Too many pastors are blind to their own spirituality. We have churches full of clergy who will not acknowledge how lost they have become.

The problem in the Western Church is not primarily a problem of institutional survival. It runs much deeper, striking at the center of our being. The fire of the Spirit that enlivens the Church has been neglected. Our spirituality is on life support. Our life with God grows dim. Stumbling around in the waning light, we are lost.

What Are We Looking For?

Misconceptions About Spirituality

Before we can begin to find our way, we have to clarify what we are looking for. The ideas about spirituality are legion. “Spirituality is ‘in the air,’” Eugene Peterson writes.¹⁸ Since the church in America has given up its calling as a place of deep spiritual life and wisdom, our culture is making it up as we go, without the wisdom to do so effectively. The consequences are devastating, both individually and socially.

Out of the grab bag of celebrity anecdotes, media gurus, fragments of ecstasy, and personal fantasies, far too many of us, with the best intentions in the world, because we have been left to do it “on our own,” assemble spiritual identities and

¹⁷ Scott McKnight, “Burnout for Pastors,” Jesus Creed (blog), August 13, 2007, <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/jesuscreed/2007/08/burnout-for-pastors.html>. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 5.

ways of life that are conspicuously prone to addictions, broken relationships, isolation, and violence.¹⁹

These “spiritual identities” can take more sophisticated, but equally misguided, forms. Some develop an eclectic spiritual identity that begs, steals, and borrows from the world’s major religious and spiritual traditions in the most superficial ways. This kind of consumerism in the marketplace of religion rarely honors the rich insights and wisdom of these traditions. Moreover, these spiritual consumers remain lost in the ebb and flow of the latest spirituality to come their way. Their spirituality never develops deep roots. It cannot ground and guide them in the midst of life’s complexities. This eclectic spirituality is partially the result of a common misunderstanding that spirituality is, “somehow, exotic, esoteric, and not something that issues forth from the bread and butter of ordinary life.”²⁰

For others, their spiritual identity, or “way of life,” has become defined by the American values of productivity and status. Both employers and societal pressures drive individuals to soul-crushing work routines. Accomplishment, productivity, and salary raises begin to define their lives. At first glance, many would not consider these things “spiritual” because spirituality has been misunderstood as something “mystical, churchy, holy, pious, otherworldly.”²¹ However, at the root of these cultural patterns is the deep, wild, and profoundly human condition of *desire* that is the essence of spirituality.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 5.

²⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, Reissue ed. (New York: Image, 2009), 6.

²¹ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 6.

Spirituality as Eros

Desire is at the core of every human being. In each of us there is a restlessness, a dis-ease, a longing that will not let us go. Ronald Rolheiser describes it well:

We are not restful creatures who sometimes get restless, fulfilled people who sometimes are dissatisfied, serene people who sometimes experience disquiet. Rather, we are restless people who occasionally find rest, dissatisfied people who occasionally find fulfillment, and disquieted people who occasionally find serenity. We do not naturally default into rest, satisfaction and quiet but into their opposite. Why? Because at the center of our lives lies a fiery energy, a perpetual disquiet, a lingering loneliness, an inchoate ache for something we can never quite name.²²

Human beings are desiring creatures. Philosophers, writers, and psychologists around the globe have described this in a number of ways. Plato is attributed with saying, “We are fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods and which would have us believe that we can have a great love, perpetuate our own seed, and contemplate the divine.”²³ Bruce Springsteen puts it more simply: “Everybody’s got a hungry heart.”²⁴

Desire, fire, longing, and restlessness are ways of describing the same reality at the center of human experience: *eros*—the quality of passionate love that longs for union. James K. A. Smith notes that many Christians have a misconception of and even an allergic reaction to the word *eros*.²⁵ It has been mistakenly equated with our pornographic

²² Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, iv.

²³ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 3.

²⁴ Bruce Springsteen, *The River* (New York: Columbia Records, 1980).

²⁵ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 9-10.

culture and set up in contrast to *agape*, the “Christian” ideal of love. However, *agape* is better understood as rightly ordered *eros*.²⁶

Origen (184-253) was the first to make this connection. While he acknowledged that *eros* is most often experienced between human lovers, he taught that its source is in God. For Origen, the phrase “God so loved the world” (John 3:16) is an expression of the divine yearning.²⁷ Consequently, he adapts Platonic *eros* to his faith, making “a daring breakthrough—God himself must be Eros”²⁸ Human *eros*, then, is an expression of the *eros* (or yearning) of God planted in us to drive us back to God. McGinn explains, “If, as Origen believed, *eros* has its source above and has been implanted in us by God-Eros (we could call this EROS I), the motive force powering the soul’s ascent must be the transformation of the *eros* gone awry in us (*eros* ii) back to its transcendental starting place.”²⁹ Origen’s paradigm is further developed by later writers such as Dionysius (ca. sixth century). Dionysius essentially thought of *eros* and *agape* as synonyms; however, he believed that *eros* has more force or energy. “[H]e regards Eros as simply a more

²⁶ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 10. For a full discussion of this topic and a defense of this dissertation’s use of *eros*, see Appendix A: *Eros and Agape – Qualities of Divine Love*.

²⁷ The Greek for love in John 3:16 is *agape*. Origen understood there to be a quality of yearning in *agape*. In other words, true *agape* includes *eros*.

²⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 119.

²⁹ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 120.

intense form of Agape.”³⁰ This understanding of *eros* fundamentally shaped the history of Christian spirituality and is in need of recovery today.³¹

In its truest sense, *eros* is the fire of desire that is at the center of every human being. It is part of our created nature. “*Eros* is ultimately the energy of divine creativity,”³² writes John O’Donohue. It is the creative life-force breathed into us at creation (Genesis 2:7) and breathed into the disciples on Easter night (John 20:22). It is the fire pictured at Pentecost enlivening the disciples (Act 2:3). *Eros* is the seat of our spirituality.

Rolheiser explains that spirituality is “how we channel our *eros*.... [It is] what we do with the fire inside of us.”³³ It is not something that only religious people have. It is not something you choose by praying, going to church, fasting, or reading “spiritual” books. It is something essential, something at the very core of our being. “Long before we do anything explicitly religious at all, we have to do something about the fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality. Thus, we all have a spirituality whether we want one or not, whether we are religious or not.”³⁴ He clarifies further, noting that desire can grip us in different ways. It can come to us as something painful and aching. At other times it comes “as a deep energy, as something

³⁰ John M. Rist, “Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, no. 4 (December 1966): 235–43.

³¹ For the necessity of reclaiming *eros* today, see Appendix A.

³² John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 31.

³³ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 11.

³⁴ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 7.

beautiful, as an inexorable pull... toward love, beauty, creativity, and a future beyond our limited present. Desire can show itself as aching pain or delicious hope.”³⁵

Aim of our Eros

Our culture loves to celebrate desire, but we fundamentally misunderstand it. The “wisdom” of our culture encourages us to use our fiery energy on any impulse that comes our way: creativity, sex, love, hate, sports, politics, economic gain, power, esteem, security. All these are expressions of our *eros*. However, they are not its aim. The wisdom of the major world religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, point to a deeper *telos*.³⁶

The aim of the spiritual life has been described throughout the centuries and across cultures by one word: union. Our holy longing is a profound desire for nothing less than union with the unfathomable depths of God’s own life. Augustine (354-430) famously describes this in his *Confessions*. “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”³⁷ More recently, John Philip Newell has described it this way: “Deep within us is a longing for union, for our genesis is in the One from whom all things have come.”³⁸ Like a love-sick soul seeking his lover, *eros* is fired into our being in order to drive us toward union with God. The Psalmist poignantly

³⁵ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 6.

³⁶ “An ultimate object or aim.”

³⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

³⁸ Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 4.

expresses this dynamic, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” (Psalm 42:1).

This was understood in the ancient church, but our time suffers from a spiritual-theological amnesia. Originally, Christology was mystical rather than propositional. The early church affirmed the scriptural notion that Christ came so that we may become “participants in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Athanasius (296-373) writes, “[T]he Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, ...might become the son of God.”³⁹ In other words, the incarnation joins the life of God with the life of humanity. This is especially emphasized by Irenaeus (130-202). “[H]ow could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality?”⁴⁰ Irenaeus also describes Jesus as the archetypal human being.⁴¹ Jesus reveals what it means to be fully human and the way to get there. Augustine echoes this by writing, “Christ is at once the way you must follow and the goal you must reach.”⁴² This was not to suggest that we ourselves become God. Rather, we “become by grace what God is by nature.”⁴³ In other words, Jesus shows us

³⁹ Quoted in Allyne Smith, ed., *Philokalia-The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts: Selections Annotated & Explained*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2012), xiii.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 42.

⁴¹ Hans Boersma, “Accommodation to What?: Univocity of Being, Pure Nature and the Anthropology of St. Irenaeus,” *Crux* 41, no. 3 (September 2005): 9.

⁴² Quoted in Olivier Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from Patristic Era with Commentary* (New York: New City Press, 1996), 55.

⁴³ Allyne Smith, ed., *Philokalia-The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, xiv.

the way to an ever-deepening participation in the *energies* of God (as opposed to the *essence* of God).⁴⁴ This is known as divinization, or *theosis*.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215), who has been called “the founder of Christian mysticism,”⁴⁵ was the first Christian theologian to make extensive use of the notion of divinization. He emphasizes that participating in the divine life (i.e., union) is the goal of our spiritual lives.⁴⁶ Later writers such as Evagrius (345-399) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) continue to develop this idea. For Gregory, the *telos* of the soul is depicted in the biblical image of Moses’s encounters with God (as we will explore in Chapter 5), and the bride longing for the groom in Song of Solomon.⁴⁷ He emphasizes that our union with God is not a static reality.⁴⁸ Since God has no ending, our ability to grow in awareness and likeness of God is an unending journey, just as Paul describes it in his letter to the Philippians (3:10-14). Gregory describes this as *epekastasis*, the “perpetual progress of the soul.”⁴⁹

This journey is driven by an ever-growing and deepening desire, nurtured in and through Christ. Olivier Clement explains that Christ “quenches and renews our thirst at

⁴⁴ Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 238.

⁴⁵ A title coined by A. Levasti, noted in McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 101.

⁴⁶ Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 105.

⁴⁷ See Gregory’s commentaries on the *Song of Songs*, and *The Life of Moses*, as noted in Hans Boersma, “Becoming Human in the Face of God: Gregory of Nyssa’s Unending Search for the Beatific Vision,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 2 (April 2015): 133.

⁴⁸ This was a watershed moment in which Greek Patristic theology broke from platonic ideals.

⁴⁹ Paul M. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of ‘Perpetual Progress,’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, no. 2 (June 1992): 156.

the same time.”⁵⁰ The more we drink, the more we awake to our thirst. Augustine says as much in his *Confessions*. “You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you.”⁵¹ In other words, as the *eros* within encounters Christ, our fiery longing for God grows, creating more desire, drawing us deeper into union with God, stoking the fire of love and life even more, in an eternal cycle. To put it more simply, God’s love in Christ pulls us deeper and deeper in. Gradually we discover that our longing and desire for God is but an echo of God’s longing and desire for us.⁵² In fact, Richard Rohr suggests that union with God is not something we work toward at all. Instead, we *awaken* to the union that is already given. “True spirituality is not a search for perfection or control or the door to the next world; it is a search for divine union *now*. The great discovery is always that what we are searching for has already been given!”⁵³

Cultivating Eros

Unfortunately, the American church does not understand the *eros* that fires our spirituality, or the aim to which it calls us. Eugene Peterson notes that in other cultures and times, the religious institution is the obvious place to go in matters of the soul and God. Our churches, on the other hand, do not understand how to deal with the deep

⁵⁰ Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 244.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 201.

⁵² Belden C. Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65.

⁵³ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 16. Emphasis original.

desires of our lives.⁵⁴ Newell suggests that people are leaving the church precisely “because we have been taught to distrust our deepest yearnings rather than to see them as sacred,” and “also because we have been given the impression that Christ comes to subdue and deny our deepest desires rather than to nurture and heal them.”⁵⁵

This has tragic consequences. *Eros* has the power to create greater integration or disintegration. When the fire of life in us is suffocated, we lose all vitality, joy, and meaning. On the other hand, when the fire of desire is stoked into a wild blaze, our lives, relationships, hopes, and dreams can be torched into a heap of ash. Both ends of the spectrum create devastating disintegrations that plague our society and the Church. However, a fire nurtured in the hearth can radiate warmth and light. When it is tended and kept, it becomes a gathering place where meals are prepared and community is created. A healthy spirituality is one that keeps the fire in your veins alive and focused, cultivating a deeper integration of your life. Belden Lane explains that the goal of spirituality “isn’t to eradicate desire, but to enlarge and refocus it.”⁵⁶ Cultivating our *eros* for its intended purpose can no longer be neglected. It is central to the calling and life of the Church.

Lost in the Weeds

Instead of cultivating a robust spirituality, the Church has continuously gotten lost in the weeds of secondary issues. That is not to say that the Church is lacking committed

⁵⁴ Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 4.

⁵⁵ Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, viii.

⁵⁶ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 62. This is not to suggest that the Christian spiritual life does not involve sacrifice or ascetic discipline. Sacrifice and ascetic practices, properly entered into, actually awaken holy desire and open us to God. This will be explored further in Chapters 3 and 4.

members and leaders. However, passion and commitment are not virtues in and of themselves. The *aim* of our commitment and passion is key. Unfortunately, the Church tends to aim toward something less than what the soul longs for.

Dallas Willard suggests that in a majority of churches, being a Christian or being “saved” (however that is defined) has been divorced from a deeper life in God. Instead, what is required is either correct doctrine, denominational affiliation, or a vague or intense identification with issues that Jesus stood for, a social ethic that resembles Jesus’s social ethic.⁵⁷ Richard Rohr sounds a similar warning. “Most people have not been offered a different mind, only different behaviors, beliefs, and belonging systems. They do not necessarily nourish us, much less transform us.”⁵⁸

This is nothing new. The desert monastics encountered this pattern as well. In fact, I would suggest that across the history of Christianity, the *telos* of our faith has often been reduced to knowledge, experiences, and behaviors.

The Fallacy of Knowledge

In most Western traditions, a person’s Christianity is measured by their *knowledge*. There is a particular set of ideas that one is required to give mental assent to. The set of ideas shift depending on the tradition. Regardless, the aim of the Christian life is to correct a person’s thinking. Growth in the Christian life is defined by gaining more knowledge, be it biblical or theological. This enables one to “always be ready to make

⁵⁷ Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 47.

⁵⁸ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 91.

your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). This goal may make you good at arguing, but it does not necessarily make you good at loving. It is a vision of Christianity that fundamentally lacks the fruits of the Spirit. (This will be explored further in the next section).

The tendency to elevate knowledge has a number of problems. It creates an implicit bias toward those with more education. It also fundamentally fails to acknowledge Jesus as our model. Jesus certainly was not anti-intellectual, but he was critical of learning as an end in itself. We see this in his constant criticism of the scribes and Pharisees.⁵⁹ Knowledge, while helpful, is not the same as transformational faith. “Faith is not blind assent, or even reasoned assent, but an essential part of spiritual transformation.... What set us on the wrong path was making the object of religious faith ‘ideas’ or doctrines.”⁶⁰

This is an ancient tendency. One day a well-respected desert elder from another region went to visit Abba Poemen. Poemen greeted him warmly and invited him to sit. The elder then began to go on and on about scripture and the latest theological ideas. Poemen turned his face away and didn’t say a word. The elder left frustrated. “I have made this long journey in vain.... and [the Abba won’t even talk to me.]” Later, when Poemen was asked why he remained silent, he replied, “He speaks of heavenly things; and I am lowly and speak of earthly things. If he had spoken to me about the passions of the soul, I would have replied.” Even in the desert, knowledge was a way to avoid actually opening the soul to God. When the elder heard what Abba Poemen had said, he

⁵⁹ For examples, see Matthew 23 and Luke 11.

⁶⁰ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 116–117.

returned repentant, asking, “What should I do, Abba, for the passions of the soul control me?” Abba Poemen welcomed him with joy. “This time you come as you should.”⁶¹

The Deception of Experiences

Many traditions elevate *experiences* of one kind or another as the ultimate aim of our Christianity. In fact, spirituality is often confused with emotional experiences. As a result, the spiritual worth or significance of a community, event, or even a person is measured by the level of emotional response we have to them. We see this when charismatic leaders are conflated as “great spiritual leaders” without regard to their level of integrity or the degree to which they emulate Christ. Another version of this same tendency is the temptation to build a spirituality by stringing together an ongoing series of experiences, be they exotic mission trips, time spent in nature, or chasing the newest music to get another hit of “feeling the Spirit.”

This is especially problematic in our modern consumerist culture. From supermarkets to malls to online shopping, we are trained to consume goods without any connection to its source. Consequently, there is an unconscious assumption that we can consume spiritual experiences without the ongoing work of connecting to the Source. Although this is made worse in our consumer-driven context, it also is not new. In the fourth century, many tried moving out into the desert simply for the novelty of it. One day, one of these individuals was visited by the Abbot Ammonas. The man eagerly told him about all the things he was considering: withdrawing into the wilderness, or traveling

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), chap. 8, Kindle.

to a foreign land, or going into total isolation. Today, this might be comparable to thinking another spiritual retreat, mission trip, or extreme spiritual discipline will give you the spiritual fix you are after. “None of these will do you a bit of good,” Abbot Ammonas said to him. “But rather sit in your cell, and eat a little every day, and have always in your heart the words which are read in the Gospels.”⁶² In other words, deep spirituality is built by faithfully engaging in simple daily practices and being present to one’s life as it is.

Chasing spiritual experiences will not get us very far. An experience-centric Christianity is both easily manipulated and unsustainable. It leaves people in the lurches, waiting for a next great moment that may or may not come. It reduces the work and presence of God to our shifting emotions, and it disconnects our spirituality from our everyday lives. Perhaps even more critically, it misses the important spiritual work that can happen when our experiences no longer give us the “spiritual high” that we mistook for God’s own self.⁶³

The Rigidity of Behaviors

The third patch of weeds in which the church gets lost is *behaviors*. This also looks different across various traditions. For many, Christian maturity is measured by particular behaviors that become the boundaries between the moral and immoral.

⁶² Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 77.

⁶³ In Chapter 4 we will explore this theme through the wisdom of John of the Cross. Saint Ignatius is also helpful in understanding how God works through both spiritual consolations and desolations. See Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. S. J. George E. Ganss (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

Although these behaviors are often defined by culture more than the gospel, they take ultimate place in the eyes of some religious communities.

This takes place in both conservative and liberal traditions. The only differences are the behaviors in question. In one, it is abstinence before marriage. In the other, it is asking people which pronouns they prefer. In one, it is denouncing abortions. In the other, it is denouncing capitalism. In one, it may be a prohibition on cursing or drinking. In the other, it may be a prohibition on wearing clothes made by certain companies or eating genetically modified foods. Likewise, behavior-centric spirituality can be defined by emphasizing particular kinds of activism. On the right, evangelism becomes the defining marker of a mature Christian. On the left, it is advocating for social justice. If you are not actively doing what your community expects, your spirituality is deeply suspect.

When these things become the ultimate aim of our faith, Christian spirituality is reduced to a list of particular behaviors. Consequently, the church becomes more rigid and less like Jesus. One day, Abba Amoun asked Abba Antony why Antony was more widely respected than him, even though he, Amoun, was clearly dedicated to more spiritual practices. Abba Antony had a simple but important answer for us all. “It is because I love God more than you do.”⁶⁴ What seems obvious, we so often forget. Spiritual disciplines, Christian morality, and activism are not the same as loving God.

The Container or the Contents?

When knowledge, experiences, or behaviors are our primary focus, our Christian spirituality will be anemic. That does not mean that these things are not important. In

⁶⁴ Chrysavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert*, chap. 8, Kindle.

fact, they are immensely important. The trouble comes when we make them the essence or goal of Christianity rather than aspects of it. To use Richard Rohr's image, we have confused the container with the contents.⁶⁵ Knowledge, experiences, and behaviors are all things that help us hold and shape our spirituality. They are the container. The container is good and important. In fact, in Chapter 2 we will explore the ways that these containers (knowledge, experiences, and behaviors) parallel the three centers of awareness for all human beings (mind, heart, and body) as well as the three essential paths of our spirituality (upward, inward, and outward). That said, it is essential that we keep in mind the difference between the container and the contents—union with God. Otherwise we end up with a Christian spirituality that is nothing more than an empty box.

As we have seen, even the desert monastics had to guard against this. "Seek God and not where God lives," said Abba Sisoës.⁶⁶ Whenever we confuse the container with the contents, we are worshiping "where God lives" rather than the One who lives there. The content of our faith is an ever-deepening intimacy and oneness with God, a union from which all life, transformation, and shalom flow. When anything less becomes our aim, we are lost in the weeds.

The tendency to confuse the container and the contents is a universal pattern, crossing religious traditions and cultural contexts. However, there is a unique struggle within Christian spirituality that has taken root in the West. When it comes to the depths of Christian spirituality, the Enlightenment—and its older sibling, the Scientific

⁶⁵ See Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

⁶⁶ Joan Chittister, *In God's Holy Light: Wisdom from the Desert Monastics* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2015), 68.

Revolution—has been anything but enlightening. What appeared to be the Promised Land has turned out to be a mirage.

Mirages: The Enlightenment and Rationalism

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness?

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an intellectual and social movement known as the Enlightenment began to emphasize reason and individualism in the West.⁶⁷ This movement was led by thinkers such as Descartes, whose famous line, “I think therefore I am” epitomizes the ethos of this time. Ultimate authority began to shift from rulers and religious traditions to individuals, logic, and rationalism.

The rise of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment sparked great hope about the future of the world. Ultimate trust in empirical evidence brought new discoveries, inventions, and possibilities. Politically, it paved the way for the birth of a new kind of country, one that is self-determining and ruled by agreed-upon laws rather than the dictates of a king.⁶⁸ Together, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment asked the West to trust completely in the mind’s ability to make rational choices, discover truth, and determine the best path to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

This time of social and political change brought new crises to the Church. Many began to believe that, “one could not be a person both of reason and Christian faith. One

⁶⁷ Oxford English Dictionaries, s.v. “enlightenment,” accessed April 9, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/enlightenment>.

⁶⁸ Both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are full of the ideas from Enlightenment thinkers. See, “US Constitution - Enlightenment Influence on America,” accessed April 16, 2018, <https://sites.google.com/site/enlightenmentinfluenceamerica/us-constitution>.

must choose between the two.”⁶⁹ Moreover, they insisted that rationality and logic did more to cultivate morality and offer clear, universal principles for life than traditional Christianity.⁷⁰ In response, Christian leaders began to use the tools of rationalism to combat the apparent eroding effects of the Enlightenment on its power. Rohr suggests “Christianity became rational to oppose rationalism.”⁷¹ Unfortunately, this led to the loss of the Church’s own life-giving spiritual wisdom. Christianity’s spiritual core has always existed on the edges of the Church. However, the Enlightenment “drove the final nails in the coffin... because religion became even more oppositional and defensive in its fear of its ‘new enemies.’”⁷²

While the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment brought about major human advancements, they also left a trail of carnage with devastating effects on humanity, creation, and the soul. The “enlightened” Christianity of the West was the predominant religious consciousness in the society that created two World Wars and brought us global warming.⁷³ By the end of the twentieth century, Western civilization

⁶⁹ This was the Deist perspective. Deism has been referred to as “the religion of the English and North American Enlightenment.” Mark C. Mattes, “Review of *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, by Gerald McDermott,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2002): 119–120.

⁷⁰ Mattes, 121.

⁷¹ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 111.

⁷² Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 110.

⁷³ For Christianity’s responsibility for World War 1, see Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014). Jenkins convincingly argues that the First World War was fought as a holy war between the world’s leading Christian nations. Not only was the war “thoroughly religious”; it redrew the global religious map. For the ongoing contribution of Christianity to global warming, see Thomas P. Ackerman, “Global Warming: Scientific Basis and Christian Responses,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 59, no. 4 (December 2007): 250–64.

had cultivated approaches to life (both inside and outside the church) that are “aridly rationalistic, consisting of definitions, explanations, diagrams, and instructions... or impersonally functional consisting of slogans, goals, incentives, and programs.”⁷⁴

Similarly, John O’Donohue writes, “Our times are driven by the inestimable energies of the mechanical mind.... When it dominates, the habit of gentleness dies out. We become blind: nature is rifled, politics eschews vision and becomes the obsessive servant of economics, and religion opts for the mathematics of system and forgets its mystical flame.”⁷⁵ In other words, what promised to answer humanity’s lasting problems has turned out to be a mirage. This mirage led to three devastating reductions: the reductions of creation, humanity, and God.

The Reduction of Creation

Unlike most of human history, we now live in a time in which creation is reduced to its utilitarian functions. The Scientific Revolution debunked old superstitions and has given us insights in the areas of physics, chemistry, and biology. As wonderful as these are, we have simultaneously developed a tendency to see the world as a machine that can be manipulated to serve human whims. Many no longer see themselves as part of creation but as consumers of creation.

This has led to devastating consequences for how we engage with all of creation: both nature and other people. Humanity’s God-given vocation to “have dominion” over the earth (Gen. 1:28) has been reimagined from that of a gardener to a self-absorbed

⁷⁴ Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 4.

⁷⁵ John O’Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 5.

tyrant. In fact, our interaction with creation has become disassociated from our relationship to God. At the same time, we have lost an awareness of how deeply we are connected to creation. Hans Boersma writes, “Once modernity abandoned a participatory or sacramental view of reality, the created order became unmoored from its origin in God, and the material cosmos began its precarious drift on the flux of nihilistic waves.”⁷⁶

The Reduction of Humanity

The Enlightenment also led to a reduction in how we understand what it means to be a human being. Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” suggests that at our core, human beings are “thinking creatures.” We operate under the assumption that the more information we have, the better choices we will make. If someone is making poor life choices, it is simply a lack of information. A person can become more like Christ if they are simply given more information. Smith playfully suggests we imagine human beings as “brains-on-a-stick.”⁷⁷

When we see humanity in this way, we subconsciously reduce people to their utilitarian value. After all, under-functioning “information machines” can be discarded for “upgrades.” Moreover, our actions toward one another and beliefs about others are more easily justified by cold calculus. All the while, we remain naively unaware of what is actually shaping our lives.

There is a growing consensus that humans are not nearly as logical as we once believed ourselves to be. Sociologists, neuroscientists, psychologists, and economists are

⁷⁶ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 2.

⁷⁷ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

all recognizing the same phenomenon. Information is not the primary factor shaping our opinions or actions. We are primarily driven by a milieu of unconscious patterns and *desires*.⁷⁸ We have fundamentally missed the *eros* at the core of our being. We ignored the power of desire, longing, and love that shapes our lives and gives us meaning.

The Reduction of God

Another devastating result of the Enlightenment is the way in which rationalism has reduced God to logical constructs and propositions. Certainly, theological constructs are helpful and needed guideposts on our journey into union with God. However, God has too often been reduced to lists of ideas. This reduction allows our logical mind to stay in control. It places logic over and above the unfathomable mystery of God.

As long as God remains neatly within our constructs, personal presence with the divine is unnecessary. As a result, a person's ideas about God become easily disassociated from their actions. It becomes possible to "hold doctrinal beliefs and not demonstrate them, and even act contrary to those beliefs."⁷⁹ A god that is simply analyzed and defined is not a god able to change us at the deepest levels. According to Jacob Needleman, "Something else is required, something far more difficult and elusive. [People] must not place [their] hopes in the isolated intellect."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ For example, see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013); Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Vintage, 2000). For a journalist overview of the wider research, see David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011).

⁷⁹ Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 103.

⁸⁰ Needleman, *Lost Christianity*, 39.

Consequences for the Soul

John Philip Newell does not directly articulate the three reductions described above (the reduction of creation, humanity, and God). Nevertheless, he intuitively recognizes them deep in the longing of the soul today.

There is a longing in the human soul for what is real, for what connects with the new vision of reality that recognizes that all things are interconnected [a result of the reduction of creation]. There is a longing in the human heart for what is personal, for what addresses the most intimate core of our being in its eternal yearnings for love and union [a result of the reduction of our humanity]. There is a longing in the human spirit for what is immense, for what expands our vision further into the unboundedness of the universe [a result of the reduction of God].⁸¹

The legacy of the Enlightenment and these three reductions has left us longing, without any guiding understanding of the soul. In fact, we no longer know how to speak to the soul. “The modern world... has denied the soul and forced it to eke out its existence on the margins,”⁸² writes John O’Donohue. Out there in the margins, we have forgotten what it looks like and how it operates.

Recovering the soul’s journey means we have to learn to speak to its longing once again. Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the author of *The Little Prince*, understood this well. “If you want to build a ship,” he writes, “don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”⁸³ The Enlightenment helped us discover the properties of wood and water, but it neglected the fathomless depths and beauty of the sea. It actually encouraged us to forget

⁸¹ Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 119–120.

⁸² O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 121.

⁸³ Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Wisdom of the Sands* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), quoted in Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 11.

the wisdom about the soul that Christianity once knew. In order to find our way again, we need to find ancient guides.

In Search of Guides

Even in our individualistic culture, there comes a point when we realize we can no longer forge ahead on our own. Our intelligence, institutions, and containers “cannot hold what the heart longs for.”⁸⁴ We need someone to help us navigate the mysterious longings of our *eros*. Joan Chittister makes this point well:

To move beyond where we are in our rigid attitudes, our narrow perspectives on life, takes a fresh view of the spiritual terrain we’ve already traveled. The soul needs a guide to navigate these deep waters. A good friend, a spiritual model, a holy person—all bring another way of looking at what we take for granted but cannot really unravel for ourselves.⁸⁵

Likewise, Donald Miller suggests that “nearly every human being is looking for a guide.”⁸⁶ It is part of the way we understand the narrative of our lives. The mythic stories of our culture express this repeatedly. Luke Skywalker needed Yoda. Harry Potter needed Dumbledore. Frodo needed Gandalf. There is a deep longing in the subconscious of our culture for wisdom guides. In fact, the desire for a wisdom guide or a sage is a universal longing of the soul. It is a typology that can be found across time and cultures.

⁸⁴ Ken Van Vliet, conversation with author, Cannon Beach, OR, March 2017.

⁸⁵ Chittister, *In God’s Holy Light*, 26.

⁸⁶ Donald Miller, *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen* (New York: HarperCollins Leadership, 2017), 32.

We need to be clear that a wisdom guide is not simply someone with information. Rohr clarifies, “Information is not knowledge. And knowledge is not wisdom.”⁸⁷ According to Cynthia Bourgeault, wisdom requires a “participative knowledge, a recognition from deep within.”⁸⁸ The difference between knowledge and wisdom is the difference between “vicarious knowledge” and “direct, participative knowing.”⁸⁹ Abbot Theodore’s words from the desert illustrate this well. “As yet you have not found a ship, and you have not put your baggage aboard, and you have not started to cross the sea: can you talk as if you had already arrived in the city to which you planned to go? When you have put into practice the thing you are talking about, then speak from knowledge of the thing itself!”⁹⁰ A wisdom guide, in other words, is someone who has been “there and back again.”

Fortunately, Christian history is full of these kinds of guides. We have often called them saints. The Roman Catholic Church has canonized some of them but certainly does not have a monopoly on them. The saints are those women and men across culture and time whose wisdom and spirituality can open paths for our own spiritual recovery and help us to see what we cannot see on our own.

Many Protestants have begun recognizing this. Robert Webber often emphasized that the future of the church would be found in the ancient church. He taught that

⁸⁷ Richard Rohr, quoted by Suzanne Stabile, “A Thinking, Feeling, and Doing Church,” (conference, Christ Church, Nashville, April 13, 2018).

⁸⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming An Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 13.

⁸⁹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 16–17.

⁹⁰ Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 61.

“Christian wisdom for a postmodern world can be found in a return to ancient voices who never fell prey to modern reductionism.”⁹¹ Gerald Sittser suggests that the voices of the saints “echo to us across the centuries, saying, ‘There is more, so much more!’”⁹² He goes on to write,

History will show us that there is more to the Christian faith than what we think and have experienced. It will teach us truths that our contemporary religious blind spots prevent us from seeing, challenge us to read Scripture with new eyes, beckon us to practice spiritual disciplines we never tried before, and enable us to view our own time and place from a fresh perspective. *The Holy Spirit will use the knowledge of history to send us on a journey that could lead us into the depths of God.*⁹³

In this dissertation, we will explore the wisdom of a handful of saints and spiritual traditions. Some we have already begun encountering, such as the desert monastics and the early church leaders like Gregory of Nyssa. We will also hear the voices of the Celtic Christians who followed in the footsteps of the desert monastics, and who drew from their own perennial awareness of the Creator God. We will explore the poetry and insight of St. John of the Cross. All of these will be shaped through the lens of the great Franciscan, St. Bonaventure. Together, these voices will guide us down three essential paths of spirituality. These paths will enable us to counter the three reductions of the Enlightenment and channel our *eros* past the edges of the container into the unfathomable depths of God’s own life.

⁹¹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 7.

⁹² Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 17.

⁹³ Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 19. Emphasis mine.

CHAPTER 2:

A SACRED MAP – BONAVENTURE AND THE THREE ESSENTIAL PATHS

Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?

—Thomas, the disciple of Jesus (John 14:5)

Looking for Maps

In every generation, there are new voices describing the way to God. Many offer helpful insights from their own journey, but few offer us a comprehensive map. A map lays out the whole terrain. It gathers the insights from different angles and draws them out on the page. Maps offer clues to where you are in relationship to where you desire to be. When you are lost, a good map can save your life.

There have been a handful of cartographers of the spiritual life throughout Christian history. In the seventh-century Sinai desert, John Climacus mapped out an upward journey to God as thirty rungs on a ladder in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. In sixteenth-century Spain, Teresa of Avila mapped an inward journey to God through seven concentric circles, or “dwelling places,” that make up her famous *Interior Castle*. These maps (and others like them) describe a specific path. They illuminate one well-worn journey but miss others. John Climacus lays out an upward journey. Teresa of Avila teaches an inward journey. Neither gives us an outward journey.

In thirteenth-century Italy, there was a map-maker for the soul who pulled together the wisdom of the three major paths of Christian spirituality: outward, inward, and upward (as we will explore below). He brought these paths together in one of the

most robust and concise maps in the history of Christian spirituality.¹ The cartographer's name is John Bonaventure (c. 1217-1274); his map is "The Soul's Journey into God" (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, often referred to as the *Itinerarium*, Latin for "journey"). Bonaventure's map masterfully integrates both Eastern and Western Christian spirituality.² It is distinctively Christian while also being cosmic in scope,³ making Bonaventure "one of the most brilliant cartographers of the mystical."⁴ All this was achieved not as a hermit in a cell, but as an active leader of an emerging religious community dealing with personality conflicts and political dynamics. In other words, Bonaventure's spiritual wisdom is not divorced from the realities of everyday life. He is a map-maker who understands the landscape of an active and engaged life. His map is for us all.

Map-Maker Extraordinaire

St. John Bonaventure was born Giovanni di Fidanza in Italy around 1217, a time when the new Franciscan Order was rising within Christianity. The Order was formalized in 1209 and grew rapidly. Franciscans attracted followers from all walks of life and

¹ Louis Dupre and James A. Wiseman, O.S.B., eds., *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 2d ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 131.

² Broadly speaking, Western Christianity refers to the Latin tradition centered in the Bishop of Rome embodied by the Roman Catholic Church. Eastern Christianity refers to the Greek tradition centered in Constantinople embodied by the Eastern Orthodox Church. After centuries of growing political, ecclesiological, and theological differences, a formal split took place in the eleventh century, now known as the Great Schism.

³ Mary Carman Rose, "Maximal Mysticism of Bonaventure," *Anglican Theological Review* 58, no. 1 (January 1976): 60–75. Rose explores how Bonaventure's work gives significant insight into various types of mysticism, even those outside the Christian tradition.

⁴ William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79.

began spreading across Europe.⁵ Francis himself died in 1226, when Bonaventure was still a boy. Francis was venerated as a saint and acclaimed for his vision of a seraph and the gift of the stigmata, which he received just two years earlier while on a forty-day fasting retreat.⁶ Throughout the Middle Ages, the stigmata was seen as a sign of unique divine favor and special proof of Francis's status as one who embodied the life of Christ.⁷ It is unlikely that Bonaventure ever met Francis personally, but he attributes his healing from a serious childhood illness to a vow his mother made to St. Francis (likely after Francis's death and canonization). This healing had a lasting impact on him.⁸

When Bonaventure was seventeen, he traveled to Paris to begin his university education. He once again encountered the Franciscans, this time as a student. Bonaventure was attracted to both the intellect of the Franciscan scholars who taught him and the simplicity of Francis's life. After joining the Order, he was appointed as a teacher. By the time he was forty, Bonaventure was elected Minister General to the entire Franciscan Order. He was chosen both for his own intellectual prowess and his great humility. "His innocence and dove-like simplicity were such that [other church leaders] used to say of him that it seemed as though Adam had never sinned in him."⁹

⁵ Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Pr, 1978), 3.

⁶ The seraph is described by the prophet Isaiah as a six-winged heavenly creature that lives in the throne room of God singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Is. 6:1-8). The stigmata are the physical wounds of the crucified Christ that somehow became manifest in Francis's hands and feet. The Apostle Paul describes a similar experience in Gal. 6:17, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."

⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200-1350*, 2d ed. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 50.

⁸ Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 4.

⁹ Quoted in Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 5.

Bonaventure's tenure as Minister General was incredibly fruitful for the Order. He was faithful to the ideals of Francis while also allowing adaptation and evolution as the Franciscans continued to expand. In addition to his busy teaching and administrative role, Bonaventure continued to write extensively, developing the rich theological and spiritual tradition within the Franciscan Order. Eventually he became known as the "Second Founder of the Order"¹⁰ and was declared "the prince of mystical theology" by Pope Leo XIII.¹¹

While in Paris as a young man, Bonaventure began a lifelong friendship with Thomas Aquinas.¹² Aquinas is widely recognized as the premier scholastic theologian, especially for his *Summa Theologia*.¹³ In Protestant circles, Aquinas is much better known than Bonaventure. However, when it comes to spiritual wisdom within Christianity, Bonaventure is by far a superior guide. In fact, Bonaventure is considered one of the two premier mystical teachers of the medieval West, alongside Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁴ Scholars have come to see his *Itinerarium* as a spiritual summa. Ewert

¹⁰ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 173.

¹¹ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 88.

¹² Dupre and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 131.

¹³ Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* is his most famous work and considered a masterpiece of Western philosophy and theology. It is an integration and explanation of all the major theological teachings of Western Christianity through his lifetime.

¹⁴ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 87. For a comparison of the two, see Dupre and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 132.

Cousins poignantly suggests, “Bonaventure achieved for spirituality what Thomas did for theology and Dante for medieval culture as a whole.”¹⁵

In this one work, Bonaventure draws together the three essential paths of spirituality (outward, inward, and upward) by synthesizing three distinct Christian traditions: the way of Francis, the way of Augustine, and the way of Dionysius. At the same time, Bonaventure manages to integrate cataphatic and apophatic mysticism,¹⁶ speculative and affective mysticism,¹⁷ and Trinitarian and Christocentric/passion mysticism.¹⁸ In Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*, we glimpse the heart and mind of a pastor, theologian, and church leader who “seems always to be urging everyone to believe, to understand, to contemplate, and to become enflamed with the love of the triune God.”¹⁹

The Seraphic Vision

Bonaventure became the Minister General during a tumultuous time. His predecessor was forced out over a controversy. The Franciscans were veering

¹⁵ Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 2.

¹⁶ Cataphatic mysticism is the use of images and metaphors to encounter or know God. Apophatic mysticism maintains that God is always beyond the confines of any images, names, or definitions. They are two prominent streams of mysticism that seem paradoxical but are actually essential partners. See Harvey D. Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism,” *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 1978): 399–426.

¹⁷ Speculative mysticism is the use of the intellect and philosophy to encounter or know God. Affective mysticism is the use of love and the heart to know God. See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 106.

¹⁸ Dupre and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 135. See also McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 106.

¹⁹ F. Edward Coughlin, *Writings on the Spiritual Life: Works of St. Bonaventure, Volume X*, ed. Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006), 2.

dangerously close to formal condemnation, even as they exploded in numbers. The rapid growth and unwieldy nature of the Order created “both potential divisions internally and continued serious criticism externally.”²⁰ After two years serving as the Minister General, Bonaventure was exhausted. He longed for a place of quiet, peace, and clarity. In need of renewal, he decided to take a retreat to the very place Francis had received the stigmata and the vision of the seraph thirty-five years earlier.

While there, he spent time deeply meditating on the vision Francis had received. Gradually, he began to see the seraph as a map for our spiritual journey.

While I was there reflecting on various ways by which the soul ascends into God, there came to mind, among other things, the miracle which had occurred to the blessed Francis in this very place: the vision of a winged Seraph in the form of the Crucified. While reflecting on this, I saw at once that this vision represented our father’s rapture in contemplation and the road by which this rapture is reached. (Prologue.2)²¹

Bonaventure interprets the seraph as a symbol of both the journey and the goal of the spiritual life. He imagines the seraph’s three sets of wings as the three essential paths that carry us deep into the life of God. The seraph became so associated with Bonaventure that in 1588, three hundred years after his death, Pope Sixtus V bestowed on him the title *Doctor Seraphicus*.

Map Key

Understanding a map requires studying the map key. It tells you what you can expect to find along the way. It also gives hints about what kind of journey its map lays

²⁰ Harmless, *Mystics*, 83.

²¹ All quotations of *The Soul’s Journey into God* and *The Life of St. Francis* are taken from Cousins, *Bonaventure*.

out. If you try to study the journey without examining the key, you are likely to misunderstand what you see. You may even end up more lost than you began. In the same way, we need to understand Bonaventure's overall framework and use of particular words before we can explore the paths on his map.

Wordplay: Itinerarium Mentis in Deum

Bonaventure is a wordsmith. Like a poet, he is rich and concise, using only 10,000 words for his masterpiece. The mystical historian Bernard McGinn notes, "No other treatise of comparable size in the history of Western mysticism packs so much into one seamless whole."²² The first part of our map key is an examination of the words in the title. Each has important implications.

Itinerarium, as we have noted above, is the Latin for "journey." However, there are other significant connotations. For example, it can mean exactly what the English "itinerary" means, "a journey's outline." Less obvious is the way this word was used to mean "travelogue," especially an account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.²³ Bonaventure plays with all these meanings in his use of *Itinerarium*.²⁴

The most difficult word to translate into modern understanding is *mentis*. Literally translated, it is "mind." Many scholars use this English word in the title.²⁵ However, the medieval meaning of "mind" is quite different from our own. It is more than the seat of

²² McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 105.

²³ Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 21.

²⁴ Harmless, *Mystics*, 85.

²⁵ Both Bernard McGinn and William Harmless.

intellect or an organ of the body. Rather, it encompasses all the faculties of our personhood. Other translators have chosen to translate the title as “soul” to avoid this misconception.²⁶ Unfortunately, “soul” has its own trappings. There is a tendency for the modern audience to imagine a disembodied journey, also misunderstanding Bonaventure’s intention. Nevertheless, to the ears of twenty-first century readers, “mind” is often more misleading. It is important to remember that “soul” is an encompassing word. To understand Bonaventure’s map, we need to recognize that this is a journey of the whole human being made in the image of God,²⁷ returning to our home in God. It encompasses our very personhood: engaging our body, heart, and mind (as we will see below), and carrying us beyond them into God.

Finally, this is not a journey “to” God (*ad Deum*) but “into” God (*in Deum*). This is a map for divine union. It leads us along the road of transformation in which we pass over (*transitus*) into God. In fact, Bonaventure makes repeated use of the image of “passing over.” When you follow this map, you make

the Pasch, that is, the passover, with Christ. By the staff of the cross [you pass] over the Red Sea, going from Egypt into the desert, where [you] will taste the hidden manna; and with Christ [you rest] in the tomb, as if dead to the outer world, but experiencing, as far as is possible in this wayfarer’s state, what was said on the cross to the thief who adhered to Christ; *Today you shall be with me in paradise*. (7.2 Emphasis original.)

Ultimately this passing over takes us *excessus mentis*, literally “beyond the mind” or beyond one’s self to the “ecstatic, suprarational, apophatic understanding of divine

²⁶ Both Ewert Cousins and Zachery Hayes.

²⁷ Bonaventure makes the connection between *mentis* and the *imago Dei*, “*mentem nostram quae est imago Dei*” (1.2).

union.”²⁸ For Bonaventure, the spiritual journey is a passing over into the unfathomable depths of God.

Three Pairs of Wings—Three Contemplative Paths

The *Itinerarium* contains seven chapters. The first six chapters represent the six wings of the Seraph. The chapters are laid out in pairs, just as each wing is part of a pair. Each pair represents a major contemplative path in the Christian spiritual tradition and is paired with a significant guide from the tradition (see Table 1).

*Table 1 – The Structure of Bonaventure’s Itinerarium*²⁹

Chap.	Guide	Contemplative Path	Ways of Knowing God	Biblical Image
1	Francis of Assisi	Outward Journey: “we must pass through [God’s] vestiges... outside us.”	Body/Senses “[W]e are led to contemplate God in all creatures... through our bodily senses” (2.1)	Temple’s Outer Court
2				
3	Augustine of Hippo	Inward Journey: “We must also enter into our soul, which is God’s image... within us.”	Heart/Spirit “All of this is accomplished by a most sincere love of Christ which is poured forth in our hearts” (4.8)	Temple’s Sanctuary
4				
5	Pseudo-Dionysius	Upward Journey: “We must go beyond to what is eternal... and above us, by gazing upon the First Principle.”	Mind “We can contemplate God not only outside us and within us but also above us... through the light which shines upon our minds” (5.1)	Mercy Seat in The Holy of Holies
6				
Citations		(1.2)	(In 1.4 he uses the language of senses, spirit, and mind.)	(3.1, 5.1)

²⁸ Kevin L. Hughes, “Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2017), 294.

²⁹ Adapted from Harmless, *Mystics*, 89, and McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 107.

- Chapters 1-2 are the outward path, as exemplified by Francis of Assisi (ca. 1182-1226). This path involves knowing God beside us, through creation and the five senses. It is a path that engages body knowing.
- Chapters 3-4 are the inward path, inspired by Augustine of Hippo (354-430). In this path we come to discover God within us, through the image of God planted in our own psyche. This path engages heart knowing.
- Chapters 5-6 are the upward path, taught by Pseudo-Dionysius (5th or 6th century). This is the path of knowing the God beyond us, through contemplating God as Being and Goodness itself. This path engages mind knowing.

The Crucified One—One Central Road

Throughout the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure gathers these three paths together within the motif of Francis's life and the driving passion of Bonaventure's spirituality: the centrality of Christ. "Christ is the way and the door; Christ is the ladder and the vehicle." (7.1) Here we encounter what McGinn describes as the "genius" of this map. It represents "a Christological reworking of the traditional models of ascent to God."³⁰ While there are three distinct contemplative paths (outward, inward, and upward), Bonaventure intertwines the paths into one road, "the burning love of the Crucified" (Prologue.3).

³⁰ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 106.

Desire—The Essential Fuel

As described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, spirituality is what we do with our *eros*, the fiery longing in our soul. Bonaventure understood this.³¹ He insists that desire is the only thing that will move us along these paths. Before he begins to lay out the three paths, he gives a clear warning: studying the paths and practicing the paths without desire for God will get us nowhere. “No one is... [ready] for divine contemplation that leads to mystical ecstasy unless like Daniel he is a *man of desires* (Dan. 9:23)” (prologue.3). To start the journey, Bonaventure invites us into deep

groans of prayer, through Christ Crucified...
so that [we] not believe
that reading is sufficient without unction,
speculation without devotion,
investigation without wonder,
observation without joy,
work without piety,
knowledge without love,
understanding without humility,
endeavor without divine grace...” (Prologue.4)³²

This beautiful litany leads up to an invitation to be “inflamed with a desire” for God (Prologue.4). We are invited into this journey only once our desires are stirred.

After outlining all three paths, chapter seven ends the *Itinerarium* by once again insisting on the role of affection and desire. No one will be fully carried over into God “except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit” (7.4). Bonaventure insists

³¹ Bonaventure does not specifically explore the Greek word *eros*. However, *desidero* (the Latin for desire) plays a prominent role in his work. *Desidero* is derived from *de* + *sidus*, or “from the stars.” Likewise, the etymology of the English word, *desire*, is drawn from “fire in the heavens,” from the stars.

³² At times, Cousins breaks Bonaventure’s text into short lines centered on the page for clarity. Since this functions like poetry, I will follow the guidelines for quoting poetry when this occurs in block quotes. Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure*.

if you wish to know how these things come about,
 ask grace not instruction,
 desire not understanding,
 the groaning of prayer not diligent reading,
 the Spouse not the teacher,
 God not man,
 darkness not clarity,
 not light but the fire
 that totally inflames and carries us into God
 by ecstatic unctions and burning affections.
 This fire is God...
 and Christ enkindles it
 in the heat of his burning passion. (7.6)

In the Prologue and in the final chapter, Bonaventure sounds the same warning as Antoine de Saint-Exupery from our last chapter. If you want to build a ship, you cannot simply assign people tasks, or, in Bonaventure's case, you cannot simply assign people spiritual paths and practices. You have to teach people "to long for the endless immensity of the sea."³³ If we do not cultivate the deep desires stirring in our souls, each of Bonaventure's paths becomes another empty container, void of its life-giving contents.

The Three Paths

Once you have examined the map key, you are ready to study the paths marked out. As noted above, this map lays out three paths that make up the soul's journey into God. Each path takes us in a unique direction and is led by a different guide.

The Outward Journey of Francis

Chapters one and two of the *Itinerarium* represent the way of Francis, encountering God through and in all of creation. St. Francis is remembered for his chosen

³³ Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Wisdom of the Sands* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), quoted in Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 11.

poverty and his deep love for nature. Both of these flow from an awareness of God in the world around him. Early on, Francis felt drawn to give his wealth to the poor he encountered. In Bonaventure's biography of Francis, he writes, "God implanted in the heart of the youthful Francis a certain openhanded compassion for the poor" (*Life*, 1.1). "To beggars he wished to give not only his possessions but his very self" (*Life*, 1.6). He goes on to tell a story of the young Francis traveling to a shrine of St. Peter, where he encountered many poor. "He gave his own clothes to one of the neediest among them. Then he dressed in the poor man's rags and spent that day in the midst of the poor with an unaccustomed joy of spirit" (*Life*, 1.6).

Francis's most famous written legacy is the "Canticle of Brother Sun." This prayer, along with the many legends of Francis's interactions with animals, has become central to understanding Franciscan spirituality.³⁴ In this canticle, he spoke fondly of "Brother Sun" and "Sister Moon," as well as the four elements of creation, "Brother Wind" and "Sister Water," "Brother Fire" and "Sister Earth." This kinship language reflects an awareness that we are not somehow separate, above, or outside creation, but another thread in its fabric. Our lives are profoundly intertwined with all that is. All of creation is full of life, sacred and pulsing with the divine.³⁵

Bonaventure sees this deep love of nature as the essential quality of Francis's spirituality:

In beautiful things [Francis] saw Beauty itself and through [God's] vestiges imprinted on creation he followed his Beloved everywhere, making from all

³⁴ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 54.

³⁵ Consequently, scholars have recognized that "Francis is an innovator in Christian attitudes toward the environment." McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 54.

things a ladder by which he could climb up and embrace him who is utterly desirable. With a feeling of unprecedented devotion, he savored in each and every creature—as in so many rivulets—that Goodness which is their fountain-source. (*Life*, 9.1)

Bonaventure makes these same connections in the first two chapters of his *Itinerarium*. Creation is imprinted with the Divine. It is full of God’s “vestiges” (footprints) that can be followed on our journey. The journey begins by “presenting to ourselves the whole material world as a mirror through which we may pass over to God” (1.9).

Bonaventure also describes creation as a book that “clearly indicates the primacy, sublimity and dignity of the First Principle” (1.14). The “book of creation” metaphor is a favorite of Bonaventure’s,³⁶ but it is not original to him. As we will see in Chapter 3, John Scotus Eriugena, a ninth-century Celtic, said that God speaks to us through two books, the little book of scripture and the big book of creation.³⁷

In order to read the book of creation and follow God’s vestiges in creation, Bonaventure tells us to engage all our bodily senses. “The bodily senses convey [God] to the inner senses” (1.10). The body is, in fact, the necessary equipment for the outward path. Rather than seeing the body as evil, unspiritual, or simply peripheral, Bonaventure teaches that it is essential. He repeatedly reflects on all five of our physical senses. Our five senses are “like five doors through which knowledge of all things which are in the sense world enters [the] soul” (2.3). In the outward journey, we discover that beauty, sweetness, delight, and pleasure are sacramental. They are means by which we are carried deeply into the life of God. They reveal something about the essence of God, for God is

³⁶ Harmless, *Mystics*, 93.

³⁷ J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 50.

the fountainhead, the source, and the origin of them all (2.3-10). In other words, the journey into God *requires* an engaged, bodily spirituality.

The Inward Journey of Augustine

The second set of wings, chapters three and four of the *Itinerarium*, represent the way of Augustine. They describe the ways we come to know God through the divine image planted deep within. Augustine insisted that to know God, we have to come to know ourselves. This “double knowledge” (knowledge of self and knowledge of God) develops as we journey inward. For Augustine, “knowledge of God and knowledge of self are... so closely [related] that it is by withdrawing into the depths of the self that one comes to encounter God.”³⁸ Bonaventure leads us down the way of Augustine with an invitation. “Enter into yourself, then, and see that your soul loves itself most fervently; that it could not love itself unless it knew itself... [Y]ou will be able to see God through yourself as through an image” (3.1).

Augustine was born to a devout Christian mother and pagan father. His mother tried to raise him as a Christian, but he abandoned Christianity when he went to study at Carthage as a young man. In his famous spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*, Augustine told the story of his reckless youth, sexual escapades, and the deep yearnings that continuously drove him in search of pleasure and purpose.

The Greek philosopher Plotinus first taught Augustine to look for God deep within himself. Eventually, Augustine discovered that God was both the source and the

³⁸ John Macquarrie, *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 88.

aim of his restless desires. God had always been the love at the center of his being. He simply did not know it. He described this in a famous passage of the *Confessions*:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there.... You were with me, and I was not with you.... You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.³⁹

Once Augustine became a Christian, he combined the insights of Plotinus with the biblical idea that God's image is imprinted within the human being, producing "a new and lasting synthesis" of classical philosophy with Christian insight.⁴⁰ Augustine saw the soul in three parts, a reflection of the Trinity. Bonaventure explains, "When the soul considers itself, it rises through itself as through a mirror to behold the blessed Trinity" (3.5). There we discover that God is so close to our souls that it is hard to imagine being unaware of God's presence deep within. "It seems amazing when it has shown that God is so close to our souls that so few should be aware of the First Principle within themselves" (4.1).

This awareness of God comes as the heart is purified through love. Augustine taught that "the heart must be healed before God can be seen."⁴¹ In fact, the restoration of the divine image within us is the primary work of Augustine's spirituality. The inward journey is the path through which our compulsions, ego wounds, and disordered loves are

³⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.27.38.

⁴⁰ Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001), 53. Harmless writes, "Bonaventure's call to 'enter into yourself' is one that he—and the entire Latin West—inherited from Augustine." Harmless, *Mystics*, 93.

⁴¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 259.

healed and liberated (as we will explore in Chapter 4). Bonaventure explains that the soul has inner senses, just as the body has outer senses.⁴² These inner senses have become dulled, but they can be renewed by the three great virtues: faith, hope, and love. When they are cleansed, we become capable of “passing over into [God] through ecstatic love” (4.3).

Bonaventure then makes the connection made by many mystics: the love between God and the soul is like the passionate love and longing of the bride and the bridegroom in the Song of Songs. In fact, Bonaventure says that the Song of Songs was composed specifically for guiding us on this inward journey. “Having recovered these senses, when it sees its Spouse and hears, smells, tastes and embraces him, the soul can sing like the bride in the Canticle of Canticles, which was composed for the exercise of contemplation in this [path]” (4.3).

Just as the body is the primary faculty for the outward journey, the heart is the means of the inward journey. Bonaventure explains that once the spirit is ordered, it can pass over by descending through the heart. In fact, no one can enter the “new Jerusalem” unless we first “descend into [the] heart” (4.4). He draws the inward journey to a close by explaining, “All of this is accomplished by a most sincere love of Christ which is poured forth in our *hearts* by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (4.8).⁴³

⁴² These “inner senses” are what will be described as the “heart” below.

⁴³ Emphasis mine.

The Upward Journey of Dionysius

The final set of wings, chapters five and six, take us on an upward journey through an encounter with the God beyond us. In this journey, we are led by the great mystical master, Dionysius. Until modern times, the writings of Dionysius (or Denys in the vernacular) were thought to be those of Paul's convert from the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Consequently, his works were seen as semi-apostolic and had significant influence on both Eastern and Western Christian spirituality. Through the insights of textual criticism, we now know what Bonaventure and others did not. Dionysius is actually Pseudo-Dionysius, a sixth-century Syrian monk writing under the pseudonym of Paul's convert.⁴⁴

Almost nothing is known about this monk, but his influence on Christian spirituality cannot be overstated. He was the first to use the paradigm of purgation, illumination, and union to describe the stages of the soul's movement to God.⁴⁵ This became the standard paradigm throughout the Christian mystical tradition. Dionysius's works are also considered the epitome of Christian apophatic spirituality. He taught that God is ultimately beyond the power of the intellect. While God does reveal something of God's own self, these revelations are nothing more than glimpses of the mystery of God. The soul can move deeper into the mystery of God "only by negating and transcending what [God] has revealed of [God's self]," as Ursal King explains.⁴⁶ Dionysius used the

⁴⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 158.

⁴⁵ King, *Christian Mystics*, 56.

⁴⁶ King, *Christian Mystics*, 57.

metaphor of a sculptor as an example. Just as a sculptor has to gradually remove more and more of the marble to reveal the image hidden within, God gradually removes all our surface images of God and “plunges the true initiate into the Darkness of Unknowing” where we gain “a knowledge that exceeds understanding.”⁴⁷

Bonaventure invites us into the way of Dionysius by contemplating two names for God: Being (I AM) and The Good.⁴⁸ God’s name given on Sinai, I AM, is opened to us with a beautiful, paradoxical litany that Bonaventure creates. God is “the origin and consummating end of all things.” God is “at once and the same time the center and circumference...” or rather, God is the one “whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.” God is “within all things, but not enclosed; outside all things, but not excluded; above all things, but not aloof; below all things, but not debased” (5.8). In image after image, we are carried over into the mystery of God’s paradoxical transcendence and immanence.

In chapter six, Bonaventure again follows the lead of Dionysius, describing “The Good” as self-giving or “self-diffusive.” Since God is the ultimate Good, then God must be self-emptying within God’s own being, which the mystery of the Trinity reveals. Bonaventure then leads us into a beautiful Trinitarian reflection on the three persons within God emanating love, pouring themselves out one into the other for all eternity (6.2-3).

⁴⁷ Quoted in King, *Christian Mystics*, 56–57.

⁴⁸ The first is from Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush in which God reveals the divine name as *YHWH* or “I AM.” Exodus 3:14. The second is the name Dionysius used, following Christ’s words to the rich young ruler. “No one is good but God alone” in Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19.

This leads to Bonaventure's other great image, the two cherubs on either side of the Ark of the Covenant facing one another. Each cherub embodies one of the two names for God, "Being" and "Good," as well as one of the two great Christian mysteries. The first cherub, "Being," embodies the mystery of the Incarnation—that Being itself joined with temporal humanity in the person of Jesus (6.5). The second cherub, "Good," embodies the mystery of the Trinity—One God in an eternal self-giving community of love (6.6). These two mysteries look across the mercy seat, contemplating one another in wonder "that in Christ personal union exists with a trinity of substances and a duality of natures" (6.6). When we contemplate these mysteries with the cherub, we are carried back and forth across the mercy seat, higher and higher, into an illumination that carries us over into the perfection of God. As we are carried over, Bonaventure says we will move into that apophatic space. "[I]f it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God" (7.4). He then quotes Dionysius at length, saying that "in this state of unknowing" we will be "restored, insofar as is possible, to unity with him who is above all essence and knowledge" (7.14).

Again, this path engages a different way of knowing. Just as the outward journey engages the body and the inward journey engages the heart, the upward journey occurs "through the light which shines on our minds" (5.1). Dionysius used the image of light to describe the way in which the mind is flooded and blinded at the same time. Bonaventure explains this by using the illustration of a bat blinded by the brilliance of the light of day. "[Our] mind, accustomed to the darkness... when it glimpses the light of the supreme

Being, seems to itself to see nothing. It does not realize that this very darkness is the supreme illumination of the mind” (5.4).

The Braided Road—Restoring the Reductions

As explained above, these three paths are all part of one road in Christ. They are braided together in such a way that we cannot remain faithful to Christ while attempting to travel only one or two of these paths. Doing so will keep our spirituality anemic and contribute to the modern reductions described in Chapter 1: the reduction of creation, the reduction of humanity, and the reduction of God. Bonaventure’s genius is not simply the architecture of his three sets of wings, but his ability to integrate the three essential paths into a seamless whole.⁴⁹ All three ways are essential for a vibrant and life-giving Christian spirituality.

To ignore the way of Francis is to become both gnostic and narcissistic in our spiritual formation. We may ponder the mysteries of God and search for God in our souls, but all this becomes a self-absorbed Quietism, disconnected from life. When this happens, we can become dismissive of the divine in other people and in the environment. At best, creation is reduced to its economic and utilitarian value. Even worse, creation is seen as evil. Coming to see and know God outside ourselves enables us to recognize our oneness with all of life, including all people. As we recognize God in the other, we are carried beyond the smallness of our life into an awareness of our fundamental connection with all that is. This connection allows even the mundane aspects of life to become sacred

⁴⁹ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 106.

and a means to our soul's journey. In the outward journey, all of creation becomes sacred again.

If we ignore the way of Augustine, we live blind to and trapped by our impulses and ego drives. While we might enjoy God in nature or we might like to ponder the mysteries of theology, our lack of self-knowledge will weigh us down in self-destructive behaviors, patterns, and relationships. This blindness also keeps us from recognizing the divine life within us, which can lead to self-loathing or self-hatred. On the other hand, when we begin to recognize the Divine within our own soul, we break out of unconscious patterns of living and come to see the eternal goodness and value of our own life. In the inward journey, our humanity is restored, and our hearts become open and loving.

Finally, if we ignore the way of Dionysius, we become disconnected from any reality larger than our own making. We lose the essential "fear-of-the-Lord" that keeps us in awe and wonder before God.⁵⁰ God becomes a trinket we put in our pocket that we pull out to suit our needs. Our language about God becomes trite, and we end up making God in our own image. While we may see creation and humanity as sacred, we remain unconsciously arrogant and self-righteous, convinced that we have the whole truth. However, when we peer into the mystery of God as Being and Goodness, we are caught up in a cosmic life beyond our control or boundaries, keeping us pliable and humble. In this holy gaze, we are carried over into beauty and wonder beyond our ability to define or even comprehend. In the upward journey, God is no longer reduced, but wilder and more alive than we can imagine.

⁵⁰ Eugene H. Peterson writes, "Fear-of-the-Lord is not a technique for acquiring spiritual know-how but a willed not-knowing" in *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 44.

The Necessary Equipment: The Centers of Intelligence

Bonaventure's Perennial Wisdom

Since all three of these paths are essential, we need to learn how to travel each one. As noted above, each path requires a different faculty: the body, the heart, and the mind. Hughes explains, “[T]he wings of the seraph are modes of human knowing by which we may come to recognize... God.”⁵¹ The body, heart, and mind are like different kinds of equipment that are collectively known as the intelligence centers.⁵² Each one is suited to travel a different kind of path. Hiking a mountain requires a different set of shoes than running a marathon. Likewise, you would not wear your hiking boots to swim into a cave and explore the mystery of an underground river. In the same way, each path requires a different human faculty. The journey becomes almost impossible when we neglect one of these essential faculties, and yet, that is exactly what most of us do.

To be clear, Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium* is not primarily an exploration of the centers of intelligence. His focus is the paths themselves, but any description of traveling the sea will naturally include references to ships. Likewise, the centers of intelligence show up in the *Itinerarium* by default. The closest complete reference comes early on when he describes “three principal perceptual orientations,” the senses, spirit, and mind (1.4). His use of “senses” and “spirit” correlate to a broader usage of the “body” and the “heart” as “principal perceptual orientations” (or “ways of knowing”). These appear

⁵¹ Hughes, “Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure,” 293.

⁵² See Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 27-28; and Christopher L. Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 87-89.

throughout the spiritual wisdom of Christianity and most great spiritual traditions. “Every mystical tradition has its own culturally correct description of the mental, emotional, and body-based centers,” explains Helen Palmer.⁵³

In that regard, Bonaventure’s spiritual map taps into a perennial wisdom.⁵⁴ A “perennial wisdom” refers to a common core of wisdom that appears throughout the world’s great spiritual traditions across time, cultures, and religious expressions.⁵⁵

Vanessa Gurin summarizes these recurring themes into three basic statements:

1. There is a Divine Reality underneath and inherent in the world of things.
2. There is in the human soul a natural capacity, similarity, and longing for this Divine Reality.
3. The final goal of all existence is union with this Divine Reality.⁵⁶

Acknowledging a perennial tradition is not an attempt to blend all religions, nor does it ignore the striking differences between them. The distinctives of each religious and spiritual tradition remains important.⁵⁷ Indeed, “[t]he distinctives allow each separate

⁵³ Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram in Love and Work: Understanding Your Intimate and Business Relationships* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995), 26.

⁵⁴ Gregory LaNave writes, “If one dares to speak of a ‘perennial theology,’ Bonaventure may enter the lists as a worthy contestant” in “Knowing God through and in All Things: A Proposal for Reading Bonaventure’s ‘Itinerarium Mentis in Deum,’” *Franciscan Studies* 67 (2009): 299. The idea of a perennial tradition across all religions is certainly not without controversy. For a discussion of its philosophical validity, see Huston Smith, “Is There a Perennial Philosophy?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (September 1987): 553–66.

⁵⁵ Huston Smith and Henry Jr. Rosemont, “The Universal Grammar of Religion,” *Religion East & West* 10 (October 2010): 137–46.

⁵⁶ Vanessa Gurin, “Editor’s Note,” in “The Perennial Tradition.” Special issue, *Oneing* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 5.

⁵⁷ For a discussion on the important distinctives for Christian spirituality, see Cynthia Bourgeault’s chapter “Blueshift” in *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three: Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston: Shambhala, 2013).

tradition to speak with its own voice and tell its own story, but the common core allows us to hear that story in broader and deeper terms.”⁵⁸

Recognizing Bonaventure’s three paths as part of this “common core” not only adds weight to his insights but enables us to clarify their importance and implications for us today. In other words, the perennial nature of Bonaventure’s map suggests that this is not just one obscure Christian tool among many. It is actually a Christ-centered expression of the deepest spiritual wisdom known to humanity. It clears the fog obscuring the journey of Christian spirituality. It helps us to recover an awareness of the body, heart, and mind, as the “natural resources of our souls.”⁵⁹ The *Itinerarium* teaches us how to employ all three centers of intelligence for our journey into God.

Our Three-Brained Selves

The first to describe the centers of intelligence at length was G. I. Gurdjieff (c. 1876-1949). Gurdjieff spent his early adulthood traveling the world, exploring different streams of spiritual wisdom. In 1912, he began gathering a group of students and teaching them what he called “The Fourth Way,” a system for spiritual and psychological development. His teachings have been essential in developing the awareness of a perennial spirituality and laid the foundation for the modern version of the Enneagram.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ David Benner, “Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living” in “The Perennial Tradition,” Special issue, *Oneing* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 24.

⁵⁹ Kathy Hurley and Theodorre Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential: Using the Enneagram to Awaken Spiritual Vitality* (Lakewood, CO: WindWalker Press, 2012), 32.

⁶⁰ What we will explore for the rest of this dissertation has significant implications for spiritual work with the Enneagram. See Appendix B: The Enneagram and the Centers of Intelligence.

Gurdjieff taught that human beings are “three-brained” creatures.⁶¹ The three brains are the body, heart, and mind. Each has ways of perceiving unavailable to the others. In order to perceive the fullest truth of anything, all three brains (centers of intelligence) must be engaged. One of his original pupils, P. D. Ouspensky, explains,

With the help of the *mind* we see one aspect of things and events, with the help of *emotions* another aspect, with the help of *sensations* a third aspect. The most complete knowledge of a given subject possible for us can only be obtained if we examine it simultaneously with our *mind, feelings, and sensations* [i.e., mind, heart, and body]. Every [person] who is striving after right knowledge must aim at the possibility of attaining such perception. In ordinary conditions [people see] the world through a crooked, uneven window.⁶²

Ouspensky goes on to explain that each center “work[s] as receiver for different and sometimes very distant influences.”⁶³

For many, it is hard to imagine that the body or even the heart can “know” things just as the intellect “knows” things. These ways of perceiving “have been beaten out of us,” writes Newell. “Our inner ears have been silenced, either because of modern materialisms that have stripped matter of its ancient music or because of religious dualisms that have separated the spiritual from the material. In both cases, the essential elements of the universe have become empty notes, devoid of sacred sound.”⁶⁴

Some of this is beginning to change. Scientists have now verified what Gurdjieff synthesized from the world’s great religions and what we see in Bonaventure’s

⁶¹ G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson: All and Everything, First Series*, Rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2006).

⁶² Peter D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (N.p.: Library of Alexandria, 2001), 107, Kindle. Emphasis mine.

⁶³ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 115, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 51.

Itinerarium. Human beings are, in fact, “three-brained” creatures.⁶⁵ Our brains (like all mammals) are made up of three distinct but interconnected regions. These are the brain stem, the limbic system, and the cortex. Each region corresponds to what many traditions have intuited as the body, heart, and mind centers of intelligence.⁶⁶ The three centers also correlate to the three basic human needs⁶⁷ and core emotions rooted in those needs (see Table 2). There is a growing consensus that each intelligence center is suited for certain kinds of awareness that the others are not. In other words, the body and the heart can each help us know things that the mind simply is unable to perceive. Belden Lane puts it quite poignantly. “The body can be an extremely reliable guide.... What the mind hardly fathoms, the body already knows.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ P. D. MacLean, *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990). MacLean’s book was groundbreaking in developing this paradigm for understanding the brain.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Hurley and Theodore Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction: Going Deeper to the Three Centers,” *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*, 4, no. 2 (May 1998): 50. For a full but concise explanation of the brain science and the centers of intelligence from an M.D., see Dr. David Daniels, “Our Neurobiology – The Biology of Love, Relationships, and the Enneagram: The Three Centers,” accessed May 6, 2018, <http://drdaviddaniels.com/our-neurobiology/>.

⁶⁷ Thomas Keating describes three basic biological needs that become our programs for happiness. Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 9-10.

⁶⁸ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 7.

Table 2 – The Correlation Between Bonaventure, the Centers of Intelligence, and Neurobiology

Bonaventure's Path	Center of Intelligence	Brain Region	Function	Ego Need	Core Emotions
Outward	Body	Brain Stem and Spinal Cord (Reptilian Brain)	Regulates bodily functions. Initial sensory processing. Heart rate and hormonal levels. Fight-or-flight response.	Power and Control	Anger/Rage
Inward	Heart	Limbic System (Midbrain, or Mammalian Brain)	Regulates emotional responses: attachment, social interactions, relationships.	Esteem and Affection	Shame/Panic
Upward	Mind	Neocortex (Neo-mammalian Brain)	Cognition: language, abstraction, planning, analyzing.	Security and Survival	Fear/Anxiety

Riding a Two-Wheeled Tricycle

Bonaventure teaches us that we need to travel all three paths together or our spiritual journey will be distorted. Likewise, we need to have all three centers of intelligence fully engaged, open, healthy, and receptive. Cynthia Bourgeault emphasizes that we need to “bring the heart and mind and body into balance.... The One can be known—not in a flash of mystical vision but in the clarity of unitive seeing.”⁶⁹

Unfortunately, human beings predominately rely on one center of intelligence. Ouspensky explains, “We take people to be much more alike than they really are. In reality, however, there exists between them great differences in the forms and methods of their perception. Some perceive chiefly through their mind, others through their feeling, and others through sensation.”⁷⁰ Ouspensky is not speaking about people who have more

⁶⁹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 9.

⁷⁰ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 107.

or less feelings or more or less intelligence. Instead he is reflecting on the differences between our natural assumptions and motivations as expressed through our dependence on one center of intelligence over others.

People who see the world through the thinking center tend to value information, analysis, logic and discovering patterns. People who see the world through the feeling center generally value emotion, feeling, relationships and interpersonal dynamics. People who see the world through the [body] center usually value action, determination, vitality and protecting their own safety.⁷¹

Whether we realize it or not, all of us have developed patterns of relying on one center and supporting that with a second center, while the third center of awareness remains asleep.⁷² This is like trying to ride a tricycle with one wheel missing and a second wobbling. While you may be pedaling hard with an enlarged front wheel, the back side makes it impossible to move ahead with any kind of momentum or grace. Most of the time you are stuck. So you work harder, pounding on that one front wheel, sure that it can move you ahead if you just keep trying. The problem, explains Beatrice Chestnut, is that each center of intelligence (or wheel) “has its advantages and its disadvantages—its positive uses and its misuses—ways it helps us interpret and interact with the world around us, and ways it can steer us off course.”⁷³

Riso and Hudson explain that all this focus on the front wheel of our tricycle creates an ego distortion around that particular center. “The function in question [body, heart, or mind] is the function that the ego has most strongly formed around, and it is

⁷¹ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 28.

⁷² This pattern is what makes up the combination of the Enneagram’s nine personality types. See Appendix B.

⁷³ Beatrice Chestnut, *The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2013), 18.

therefore the component of the psyche that is least able to function freely.”⁷⁴ Hurley and Donson imagine each center as both a blinder and a high-end camera lens that focuses on certain parts of a picture while obscuring the rest.

As a lens, it focuses our attention while distorting the image. As blinders, it treats as unimportant the values of the other two centers. The result is a point of view that sees only a third of what is being experienced. It misinterprets everything because either the wrong center is being used to explain the situation at hand, or the situation requires values that the preferred center does not possess.⁷⁵

In spiritual language, this is often referred to as being “asleep.” “A state of sleep, the Wisdom tradition warns, can always be traced back to finding oneself exclusively and unconsciously in one center only.”⁷⁶ This “sleep” is far from restful or restorative. When we do not recognize and engage all three centers “we crush and deplete our souls.”⁷⁷ With one side of the rear axle grinding on the concrete behind us, a second one only kept up by a wobbling wheel, we pound away on the front wheel. We exhaust ourselves and distort reality.

Presence: Full Soul Awareness

To make the soul’s journey into God, we need to rediscover, develop, and engage all three centers of intelligence given to us by God. We have a beautiful picture of this

⁷⁴ Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*, 11th ed. (New York: Bantam, 1999), 50.

⁷⁵ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 29.

⁷⁶ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 37.

⁷⁷ Hurley and Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction,” 54.

process in *The Wizard of Oz*.⁷⁸ Dorothy is “asleep,” lost in her dream world, longing to go home. Along the way she discovers three companions: the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion. Each of these characters longs for one of the centers of intelligence.⁷⁹ The scarecrow wants a brain. The tin man needs a heart. The lion lost touch with his body (what he describes as courage). In the journey, they discover they already have these capacities; they simply needed to use them. Once they are fully awake to their mind, heart, and body, Dorothy is ready to “wake up” or “cross over” (to use Bonaventure’s phrase).⁸⁰

The soul’s journey into God requires each of us to wake up. The Apostle Paul says as much. “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5:14). It is only when we are awake that we develop what Cynthia Bourgeault calls “presence.”

When a person is poised in all three centers, balanced and alertly there, a shift happens in consciousness. Rather than being trapped in our usual mind, with its well-formed rut tracks of issues and agendas and ways of thinking, we seem to come from a deeper, steadier, and quieter place. We are *present*, in the words of Wisdom tradition, fully occupying the now in which we find ourselves.⁸¹

Presence marks the profound difference between knowing about God and knowing God, or, as Jesus describes it in John 15, abiding in God. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from

⁷⁸ *The Wizard of Oz*, Victor Fleming, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc., 1939. The parallels here are explored in Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 101-103.

⁷⁹ For more on awakening the centers of intelligence, see Appendix C.

⁸⁰ There is even a hint that this crossing over could happen aboard a modern-day seraph, the hot air balloon.

⁸¹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 36.

me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). The fruit Jesus is describing is a quality of wholeness, one that is transformational and life-giving for oneself and others around them. Rohr writes, “Wholeness (head, heart, and body, all present and positive) can see and call forth wholeness in others. This is why it is so pleasant to be around whole and holy people.”⁸² When *presence* is lost, the fruit of *wholeness* goes with it. Again, Bourgeault explains, “[R]eal Wisdom can be given and received only in a state of presence, with all three centers of our being engaged and awake. Anything less... results in an immediate loss of receptivity to higher meaning.”⁸³

In order for the church to find our way back to a vibrant and healthy spirituality, we will have to recover *presence*. To use the metaphors above, we need to learn to utilize all three kinds of equipment, or to ride on all three wheels of our tricycle. We have a map, but to follow the map requires all three of our centers to be fully engaged.

Learning to engage each center in a healthy and productive way is not easy. In fact, it can be counter-intuitive. Insights from experienced travelers can take us a long way. The saints, remember, are our experienced travelers. Exploring their writings is like reading reviews on TripAdvisor with tips, tricks, and insights for the things we will encounter. However, not all reviews are the same. Helen Palmer notes that every spiritual tradition “emphasizes certain qualities of knowing over others.”⁸⁴ In other words, some

⁸² Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 106.

⁸³ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 37.

⁸⁴ Helen Palmer, *Inner Knowing: Consciousness, Creativity, Insight, and Intuition* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1998), 174.

spiritual traditions or saints are better guides for certain paths than others. With that in mind, we will follow a different guide for each path, just as Bonaventure did.

Prayers to Begin the Journey

The journey ahead requires the whole of our lives. It will take us to dark valleys and beautiful vistas, and it is not without cost. A soul journey is never as simple or straightforward as we would like it to be. Even with a map in hand and guides before us, it requires divine grace, holy blessings, and ongoing intention. With that in mind, we will pause for blessings and prayers from the tradition along the way. These simple prayers offer us courage and clarity.

A Blessing

May God make safe to you each steep,⁸⁵
 May God make open to you each pass,
 May God make clear to you each road,
 And may [God] take you in the clasp of [God's] own two hands.⁸⁶

A Prayer of Illumination

Thou art above us O God.
 Thou art within.
 Thou art in every living thing,
 Yet contained by no thing.
 Teach us to seek Thee in all that has life,
 That we might see Thee as the light of life.
 Teach us to search for Thee in our own depths,
 That we might find Thee in the depths of every living soul.
 Amen.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Steep" as a noun refers to a steep mountain slope.

⁸⁶ Esther De Waal and Alexander Carmichael, eds., *The Celtic Vision: Prayers, Blessings, Songs, and Invocations from the Gaelic Tradition*, Rev. ed. (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001), 86.

⁸⁷ John Philip Newell, conversation with author, Iona, Scotland, May 2018.

CHAPTER 3:
THE OUTWARD PATH – CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THE BODY

Surely the Lord was in this place—and I did not know it.

—Jacob (Gen. 28:16)

Glorify God in your body.

—Paul (1 Cor. 6:20)

The Body of Christ

Jesus of Nazareth

“The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you...’” (1 Cor. 11:24-25). Jesus and the disciples were gathered together in a small room in the crowded city of Jerusalem. Pilgrims from all over had descended on the ancient holy city to celebrate the Passover. Heaps of humanity filled every room, bed, nook, and cranny. The smells of the festival permeated the air: cooking fires baking unleavened bread, animals and blood, sweaty bodies crammed in close proximity. The smells were matched by the sights and sounds that companioned them. The streets, market, and temple were alive all day and late into the night. Children could be heard crying in the wee hours of the morning. The afternoon was marked by the tastes of festival food, sold by those who made their living from pilgrims. During the Passover, Jerusalem was a feast for the senses.

The disciples' meal was just as sensual. There was no polite spacing and delicate eating like that of a grand Victorian banquet table. Their bodies rubbed up against one another as they reclined at a table the height of a modern-day coffee table. They could feel one another's breath. Their crumbs landed on one another's clothes. There was no modern fear of germs and mess inhibiting the blending of the holy and the human. The disciples and Jesus came from a tradition that said they were made of both dirt and breath, a sacred combination that reflected the image of the divine. Their scriptures were full of sensual stories of holy food and holy sex, of sweet honey and sweet wine, of sacred creation and sacred bodies.

In the midst of this messy, sacred meal, the scriptures record that John leaned against the bosom of Jesus (John 13:23-25). This moment is a doorway into the sacred wisdom of the body. It was said in the Celtic world that flesh to flesh, body to body, John heard the heartbeat of God.¹ This image became an invitation to listen for the heartbeat of God in all things.

Creation

Deep in the body of creation, the pulsing of the divine can be felt and heard. It is in the rhythm of the waves lapping against the shore and in the rhythm of the seasons. It is the energy that flows through the trees and the sky, the lark and the bullfrog. "At the heart of matter is the heart of God," writes the twentieth-century French mystic Teilhard

¹ J. Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1. The author spent time on pilgrimage with John Phillip Newell on the island of Iona, Scotland, April 25 – May 5, 2018. This dissertation, and especially this chapter, draws from time spent with Newell in that setting as well as his published works.

de Chardin.² An ancient Irish saint, Columbanus (543-615) puts it similarly: “If you want to know the Creator, [understand] created things.”³

Albert Einstein’s desire to understand created things led him to discover that all matter is simply a concentration of energy.⁴ Likewise, Eastern Orthodoxy speaks of the “energies of God” as the Trinitarian dance of love that spills out creating the world. “The energy is the expansion of the Trinitarian love,” explains Olivier Clement. “It associates us with the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons.”⁵ The Celtic imagination has long recognized what Eastern Orthodoxy explains theologically and Einstein explained scientifically. The very life of God is known in the deepest energies of the earth. A common Gaelic blessing suggests as much.

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
 Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
 Deep peace of the Prince of Peace to you.⁶

The heartbeat of God is pulsing through it all, able to be touched, heard, smelled, tasted, and seen. Our bodies are a connection to the wild divine presence.

² Quoted in J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 96.

³ Esther de Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 72.

⁴ Einstein’s famous theory of relativity, $E=mc^2$ (Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared) explains how this is so. “On the most basic level, the equation says that energy and mass (matter) are interchangeable; they are different forms of the same thing. Under the right conditions, energy can become mass, and vice versa.” “Einstein’s Big Idea,” *Nova*, PBS, accessed December 10, 2018. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/einstein/lrk-hand-emc2expl.html>.

⁵ Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 238.

⁶ A Gaelic rune adapted by John Rutter and others.

The Gathered Body

Body wisdom is a strange notion for most of us who have been shaped by the Western Church. Cynthia Bourgeault notes that the body has often been viewed with fear and suspicion, “considered to be the seat of desire and at best a dumb beast that must be trained and brought into submission to the personal will.”⁷ From the ancient influence of Platonism and Gnosticism, to the Augustinian view of sex, to the modern influence of escapist eschatologies,⁸ we have inherited a cultural subconscious that is deeply suspicious of the body. “[D]iverse forms of alienation from the body are visible in modern Western society... for which Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic), with its emphasis on belief and the processes of the mind and persistent tendency to denigrate the physical, must take some responsibility.”⁹

Our ignorance around body wisdom has caused spiritual havoc in the church and in our culture. On the Christian Right, there is often a deep suspicion of body vibrancy and pleasure, paired with a complete disregard for the body of creation. Both sexual desire and environmental advocacy are viewed with suspect. On the Christian Left, a legalistic environmentalism is sometimes paired with a hedonistic sexuality. In other words, tight moral boundaries for the body of the earth coincide with little to no boundaries for the human body. Both the Right and the Left are unaware of the spiritual wasteland they are creating. “[T]he marketplace trains us to despise our bodies (in the

⁷ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 28.

⁸ The popularity and the cultural influence of the *Left Behind* books are case in point.

⁹ Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, eds., *Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 24.

guise of loving them), and... evangelical theologians have overlooked them (with eternity in view),” explains Cameron Anderson.¹⁰

Any transformational spiritual work will necessarily include the body. Through its actions, instincts, and senses, the body shapes the soul and connects us to God. It also uniquely anchors us in *presence*. Riso and Hudson write, “[O]ur minds and feelings can wander to the past or the future, [but] our body can only exist here and now, in the present moment... [V]irtually all meaningful spiritual work begins with coming back to the body and becoming more grounded in it.”¹¹

Celtic Christianity Guides the Way

On the outskirts of the Roman empire, a Christianity emerged in the Celtic world that had a deep relationship to the human body and the body of creation. “There is something very physical about Celtic Christianity,” explains Ian Bradley. “It is there in... all that standing in cold water, wearing hair shirts, endlessly genuflecting and living off a diet of bread and water. It is also there in the strong consciousness of the power of physical elements reflected in numerous prayers about the sea, mountains, storms, wind, rain, and fire.”¹² Esther de Waal echoes this sentiment. “The sheer physicality of the Celtic tradition is indeed one of its greatest strengths.”¹³

¹⁰ Cameron J. Anderson, *The Faithful Artist: A Vision for Evangelicalism and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 79.

¹¹ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 51.

¹² Ian Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way: A New Assessment of Celtic Christianity* (London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2018), 57.

¹³ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 24.

Christianity of the Celtic world is a natural guide for the outward path. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that Francis's spirituality was influenced by the great Celtic pilgrim Columbanus.¹⁴ Columbanus was one of the many Christian Celts between 600 and 1000 that pilgrimaged from the British Isles across Europe, reintroducing Christianity to the continent. He founded important monasteries in France, Switzerland, and Italy, including the monastery in Bobbio in 614 that would become one of Italy's largest. Hundreds of years later, Francis visited this monastery. It is quite possible this is where Francis caught the spirit of the Celts manifest in his own love of nature, animals, and strangers.¹⁵ Kenneth McIntosh suggests, "The next time you see a Saint Francis statue offering water for the birds in a garden, picture Columbanus the Celt standing behind him!"¹⁶ Just as they did for Francis, the ancient witness of Celtic Christians can awaken us to the heartbeat of God in all things. In their stories, teachings, and prayers we find a way of interacting with the physical world that engages the body and honors its wisdom.

Ancient Roots

Around 500 BC, the ancient Celts were a loose confederation of tribes spread across central Europe from Turkey to Spain and into the British Isles. The Greeks referred to them as *Keltoi*. They were known as *Galli* by the Romans, hence the regions known as Galatia (Turkey) and Gaul (France). The Celts shared a common language and

¹⁴ Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2004), 17.

¹⁵ Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, 17.

¹⁶ Kenneth McIntosh, *Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2011), 24.

culture. Their art was influenced by nature, and their religion was rooted in it. Their priests, known as Druids, were held in high esteem. Their sacred rituals took place outdoors, in the great cathedral of earth, sea, and sky.¹⁷

Today, Celtic Christianity is a debated concept with fuzzy boundaries and often romanticized characteristics. The idea of a “Celtic Church” as a cohesive church system opposed to a “Roman Church” is no longer accepted. However, the term “Celtic Christianity” is still widely used, even as there remains debate over what this term entails.¹⁸ Ian Bradley suggests a Golden Age for Celtic Christianity can be marked by the arrival of Patrick in Ireland around 432 and ends with the death of Aidan in 651. However, he recognizes the validity of using broader parameters. John Philip Newell explores broad themes that continue to emerge in the Christian spirituality within the British Isles throughout the centuries. These include the sacredness of nature, the sacredness of the human soul, spiritual practices, and justice in the sharing of creation.¹⁹ He suggests that every time these themes emerge in the British world, we are hearing echoes of Celtic Christianity. Following this paradigm, the theological and spiritual movements started by John Wesley and George Fox, as well as the poetry of Gerard Manly Hopkins and R. S. Thomas, could be included.

However it is framed, it is clear that a unique stream of Christianity emerged in the British Isles out of this ancient Celtic culture. The Christianity there came through the

¹⁷ Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, 3–5.

¹⁸ For an updated and robust exploration of the scholarly material and current conversation, see Ian Bradley’s new book, *Following the Celtic Way*.

¹⁹ See John Phillip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, and *Christ of the Celts*.

region of Gaul, especially Lyons and Tours.²⁰ By the second century, Gaul had already produced one of the first great Christian theologians, Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202).

Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, himself a student of John the disciple. The influence of John's gospel and spirituality is one of the dominant characteristics of Christianity in the Celtic world.²¹ Not only is John leaning on the breast of Jesus a cherished image, the poetic exploration of the incarnation in the prologue of John's gospel plays a significant role in the writings of the great Celtic theologian John Scottus Eriugena (810-877).²²

The cosmic vision of John's prologue allowed for a natural integration of Christianity into the religious consciousness of the Celtic people. Since all things came through the eternal Word who is the "light to all people" (John 1:1-4), their pre-Christian awareness of God did not need to be rejected or repressed. Instead, Christ was incorporated as the fulfillment of Druidic spirituality, just as he was the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish tradition. "Druidic wisdom is the Celtic Old Testament," explains Newell.²³ Columba (521-597), the Irish monk who founded the community of Iona, was known to say, "Christ is my Druid."²⁴ Likewise, one of the most important Irish saints,

²⁰ Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, 8. It was also highly influenced by the desert monastics. Images of St. Anthony can be found on many of the high standing crosses.

²¹ Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, 7.

²² Eriugena's "Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John" is part of his cherished legacy and representative of his theology. See John Scotus Eriugena, *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity*, trans. Christopher Bamford, 2d ed. (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2001).

²³ John Philip Newell, "Pelagius and Celtic Christianity" (lecture, Iona, Scotland, April 30, 2018).

²⁴ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 40.

Brigit (454-524), was named after a Druid goddess and serves as a “link between pagan and Christian spiritual traditions.”²⁵

The Druidic backdrop, fulfilled by the wisdom of John’s gospel, created a stream of the Church that offers a deeply embodied spirituality. Celtic Christianity helps us to see the many ways God comes to us through the fleshy bodies of humanity. This is the heart of the incarnational mystery, as Irenaeus so beautifully expresses in his defense against Gnosticism.

The tender flesh itself
will be found one day
—quite surprisingly—
to be capable of receiving,
and yes, full
capable of embracing
the searing energies of God.
Go figure. Fear not.
For even at its beginning
the humble clay received
God’s art, whereby
one part became the eye,
another the ear, and yet
another this impetuous hand.
Therefore, the flesh
is not to be excluded
from the wisdom and the power
that now and ever animates
all things. [God’s] life-giving
agency is made perfect,
we are told, in weakness—
made perfect in the flesh.²⁶

²⁵ Edward C. Sellner, “Brigit of Kildare—A Study in the Liminality of Women’s Spiritual Power,” *Cross Currents* 39, no. 4 (1989): 412.

²⁶ Saint Irenaeus, “Capable Flesh,” in Scott Cairns, *Love’s Immensity: Mystics on the Endless Life* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 5–6.

The Divine Entwined

One of the striking images at the heart of Celtic consciousness is the Celtic knot. The knot and its characteristic style of interwoven patterns can be found everywhere in the Celtic world, from cups to crosses to the beautiful pages of scripture in the Book of Kells. The pattern reflects the natural world of vines and trees, but it is much more than ancient artistic expression or modern branding. The Celtic knot is a way of seeing. It is “symbolic and metaphorical, designed to express mystery and... to draw those who view it into deeper contemplation and meditation.”²⁷ The lines that never begin or end echo the eternal flowing of all things one into another. It reveals the entwining of the divine and the human, the eternal and temporal, the spiritual and physical.

When the Celtic knot becomes our lens, we begin to see with the eyes of the nineteenth-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” he writes.²⁸ In another poem, he moves from the body of creation to the body of humanity:

Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.²⁹

In Celtic Christianity, Christ is continuously manifest in both the body of creation and the body of humanity.

²⁷ Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way*, 64.

²⁸ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” Poetry Foundation, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur>.

²⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,” Poetry Foundation, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44389/as-kingfishers-catch-fire>.

Holy Creation

The Celtic imagination saw the divine presence illuminating trees, mountaintops, rock formations, rivers, and holy wells. St. Patrick (385-461) was once confronted about who God is and where God lives. His response took the form of a creation-centric confession of faith, one that is strikingly different from our Western creeds.

Our God, God of all [people]
 God of heaven and earth, seas and rivers,
 God of sun and moon, of all the stars,
 God of high mountain and lowly valleys
 God over heaven, and in heaven, and under heaven
 [God] has a dwelling in heaven and earth and sea
 and in all things that are in them.³⁰

Patrick's confession is by no means an anomaly in the Celtic world. Columba referred to God as "The Lord of the Elements."³¹ "For the Celtic people, nature was not matter, rather it was a luminous and numinous presence that had depth, possibility, and beauty," writes O'Donohue.³² Esther de Waal suggests "The Celtic celebration of creation is unparalleled... and is without doubt one of their greatest gifts to us."³³

Worshiping the "Lord of the Elements" didn't come from romanticized notions of creation. Ancient Celtic Christians were not cut off from the wildness of nature the way modern people are. "Celtic Christians lived close to nature.... This gave them a respect

³⁰ Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing*, 56.

³¹ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 17.

³² O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 131.

³³ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 141.

for the physical environment, as well as a fear of it.”³⁴ Their lives were full of “almost unbelievable hardship.”³⁵ It was in the midst of freezing rain and hot sun, insect bites and animal life, sea tides, storms, and constantly fluctuating weather that their awareness of God was cultivated.

There are a striking number of stories that express this connection with the natural world. Cuthbert (634-687) is said to have prayed for hours in the icy sea. When he came out of the water, two otters came to warm his feet with their breath and dry them with their fur.³⁶ Columba once stopped the Loch Ness monster from attacking a swimmer by making the sign of the cross and shouting “You will go no further!” On the day of his death, Columba’s old white horse wept, rubbing his head against the monk.³⁷ Brendan (486-578) followed “the flight of the wild goose” in search of God.³⁸ Brigit gave sanctuary to a wild boar that was being chased by hunters and later asked a wild fox to help her appease an angry king.³⁹ While these and other ancient stories have the sentiment of hagiography, they represent a consciousness of connection. They invite us to see ourselves in relationship to creation, part of its unfolding life, connected to the One life from which all life flows, as the great Irish theologian Eriugena taught.

³⁴ Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way*, 58.

³⁵ Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing*, 27.

³⁶ Edward C. Sellner, *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1993), 106–7.

³⁷ Sellner, *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints*, 93–97.

³⁸ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 36.

³⁹ “The Life of St. Brigit the Virgin by Cogitosus,” in Davies and O’Loughlin, *Celtic Spirituality*, 129.

Eriugena spoke of two books that reveal Christ to us, the little book of scripture (little in size) and the big book of creation. Creation exists to be an expression of the divine life. He taught that “the fundamental purpose of created being is found in its ability to illuminate and reveal the hidden divine nature.”⁴⁰ A nineteenth-century student of Eriugena, A. J. Scott, put it this way, “Earth is a transparency through which God can be seen.”⁴¹ Everything is a theophany. “Even a stone or a piece of wood is light, Eriugena asserts.”⁴² This is because creation’s deepest essence is the life of God. Every river and tree, every star and planet, every bird and fish, every wave of the sea and stirring of the air are manifesting God’s life. “God is within the world as its deepest reality..., but at the same time [God] is not in the world.... God is simultaneously and reciprocally *within and beyond* all things.”⁴³

Eriugena’s complex dialectical theology was not disconnected from the consciousness of everyday people or the practices of worshiping communities. It was expressed in a number of ways, including the iconic crosses scattered across the Celtic landscape. These massive stone crosses, twelve to fifteen feet high, date from the mid-eighth to the early eleventh centuries.⁴⁴ Many have scenes from the little book (scripture) carved on one side and scenes from the big book (creation) carved on the other. Just as

⁴⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 101.

⁴¹ John Philip Newell, “Alexander John Scott” (lecture, Iona, Scotland, May 2018).

⁴² McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 103.

⁴³ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 98. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way*, 29.

the ancient Celtic people did not worship in buildings, these outdoor crosses likely marked places for communal worship out in the great cathedral of earth, sea, and sky.

The most striking and consistent characteristic of these crosses is the orb circling the center. The circle is an archetypal symbol found across cultures and religions. It commonly evokes an awareness of the eternal, never beginning or ending, as well as completeness. More concretely, it is an image of the earth, moon, and sun. The encircled cross, towering on the Celtic landscape, invites the worshiper or pilgrim to recognize the eternal Christ, the *logos*, at the center of all creation.

In towering crosses, theological reflections, and celebrated stories, Celtic Christianity challenges us to recognize and commune with God through the body of creation. Our physical interactions with creation are sacred encounters shaping the soul. Again, Teilhard de Chardin explains, “There is a communion with God, and a communion with earth, and a communion with God *through* earth.”⁴⁵ Our journey into God requires us to move more deeply into creation, not away from it. There is something of God that can only be known through the natural world.

Holy Flesh

While some modern Christians are able to appreciate the sacred within nature, they have a much harder time recognizing God’s presence flowing in and through their own flesh. This was much more natural for Celtic Christians. Christ was known through the work of their bodies, their five senses, and in the flesh of strangers.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 101. Emphasis mine.

In the late nineteenth century, Alexander Carmichael traveled the Hebrides islands collecting songs, incantations, and prayers that permeated the lives of the people who lived there. He spent long hours in the homes of men and women, “listening while they intoned in a low, recitative manner.... [T]heir voices rose and fell in slow modulated cadences, sounds which reminded him of the moaning of the waves or the sighing of the wind on the seashore.”⁴⁶ Carmichael gathered these prayers and their stories into the *Carmina Gadelica*.

It is impossible to date the origin of these prayers. Carmichael romantically suggested “some of the hymns may have been composed within the cloistered cells of Derry and Iona” in Columba’s time.⁴⁷ While this is unlikely, they do represent an oral tradition that had been passed down for centuries. More importantly, they reveal a consciousness of the divine flowing to us not only through nature, but through human flesh.

Simple prayers were interwoven into all of life. They were spoken in the midst of action, not on the side of the action. The Celtic world had prayers for waking up and lying down at night, for fishing, sailing, herding flocks, and churning milk. There was “no separation of praying and living; praying and working flow into each other.”⁴⁸ A woman would wake up and splash her face with water three times, invoking the Trinity:

⁴⁶ Waal and Carmichael, *The Celtic Vision*, xvii.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way*, 38.

⁴⁸ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, xi.

The palmful of the God of Life
 The palmful of the Christ of Love
 The palmful of the Spirit of Peace
 Triune
 Of grace.⁴⁹

Then she might kneel on the earthen floor in her small hut and awaken the fire that had been banked the night before, reciting one of many prayers for the hearth.

I will kindle my fire this morning
 in the presence of the holy angels of heaven...
 God kindle Thou in my heart within
 A flame of love to my neighbor,
 To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all,
 To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall...
 From the lowliest things that liveth,
 To the Name that is highest of all.⁵⁰

Praying this way connected the work of her body to her soul. “Just as the fire is kindled on the hearth each day,” Waal explains, “so also there must be the kindling of an inner fire that mirrors this external fire.”⁵¹

As is evident above, Celtic prayers were not characteristically flat prose or a laundry list of needs. They were poetic and rhythmic, evoking the imagination, and inviting awareness. They were recited in the rhythm of work, of kneading bread and milking cows. They could also be quite sensual. Imagine someone sitting on a stool, milking their cow. With each squeeze of the cow’s teat and each squirt of milk into their pail, they recite a familiar refrain:

Teat of Mary,
 Teat of Brigit,
 Teat of Michael,

⁴⁹ Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing*, 1.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 30–31.

⁵¹ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 31.

Teat of God....

No fear shall lie,
No ill-will shall lie,
No loss shall lie
On my own [sweet gal.]⁵²

Invoking Mary's teats, Brigit's teats, or any other teats while imagining your own lover is not likely to be found in any Catholic prayer book or Protestant hymnal. Celtic prayers like these reveal a different relationship to the body than our own. Sexuality was part of their spirituality. It was celebrated and woven into many prayers. Newell notes that some evening benedictions asked for a blessing on "the bed-companion of my love," while others prayed for their "virile sons and conceptive daughters."⁵³ Celtic Christianity challenges us to recognize the shame we have placed on bodies (especially women's bodies), and instead see them as holy conduits of grace.

Our body's longings and experiences can open us up to God's goodness and life. For Celtic Christians, the sensual is sacred. "The senses [are] thresholds of the soul," to use O'Donohue's phrase.⁵⁴ This is also expressed in stories of the Celtic saints. Brigit, for example, was renowned for her love of beer. In an echo of Jesus, she famously turned well water into beer.⁵⁵ She also loved to share it with strangers and friends, bringing joy and celebration to all. If she could, she would share it and feast with the heavenly hosts.

I should like a great lake of ale
For the King of Kings.
I should like the angels of Heaven

⁵² "Prayer of the Teats," in Waal and Carmichael, *The Celtic Vision*, 41.

⁵³ Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, 47.

⁵⁴ O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 58.

⁵⁵ Sellner, "Brigit of Kildare," 413.

To be drinking it through time eternal...
 I should like cheerfulness to be in their drinking.
 I should like Jesus to be there among them.
 I should like the three Marys of illustrious renown to be with us.
 I should like the people of Heaven, the poor, to be gathered around us from all parts.⁵⁶

Celtic Christians celebrated the goodness at the heart of life. “[P]eople had no hesitation in looking to God at times of festivity and fun.”⁵⁷

Paradoxically, delighting in the sensual went hand in hand with ascetic practices. The Celtic saints were renowned for following the example of the desert monastics in this way. Cuthbert’s hours of prayer in the sea (mentioned above) is but one example. Celtic Christianity helps us to recognize that ascetic practices are not about denying life. They are a way of honing the *eros* of the body.⁵⁸ In our over-indulged society, our senses become dulled. We miss the nuance, delight, and potency of our sensual world. Ascetic practices, on the other hand, heighten the senses, opening up the body to wonder. Thomas Merton writes, “Our five senses are dulled by inordinate pleasure. Penance makes them keen, gives them back their vitality, and more.”⁵⁹ In the Celtic world, honing the senses is an essential part of developing a vibrant Christian spirituality. The senses are sacramental in that way. They are a conduit of God’s life flowing to us, as this prayer expresses.

Bless to me, O God,
 Each thing mine eye sees;
 Bless to me, O God,
 Each sound mine ear hears;

⁵⁶ Quoted in Sellner, “Brigit of Kildare,” 410.

⁵⁷ Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, 47.

⁵⁸ Art historian Cameron Anderson puts it this way, “A deep and rich spiritual life will be lived only when aesthetic delight and ascetic discipline walk hand in hand.” *The Faithful Artist*, 116.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Anderson, *The Faithful Artist*, 116.

Bless to me, O God,
 Each odor that goes to my nostrils;
 Bless to me, O God,
 Each taste that goes to my lips;
 Each note that goes to my song,
 Each ray that guides my way,
 Each thing that I pursue,
 Each lure that tempts my will,
 The zeal that seeks my living soul,
 The Three that seek my heart,
 The zeal that seeks my living soul,
 The Three that seek my heart.⁶⁰

Through fasting and feasting, delight and discipline, the senses open the soul to the energies of the Triune God always coming to us.

Human flesh is holy flesh. Every part of the body can play a part in shaping the soul and opening us to God. A prayer used by St. Fursey (597-650) as he wandered the British Isles invites concentration on one part of the body at a time, allowing an awareness of the holy to seep into each part.

May the yoke of the Law of God be on this shoulder
 May the coming of the Holy Spirit be on this head
 May the sign of Christ be on this forehead
 May the hearing of the Holy Spirit be in these ears
 May the smelling of the Holy Spirit be in this nose
 May the vision that the People of Heaven have be in these eyes
 May the speech of the People of Heaven be in this mouth
 May the work of the Church of God be in these hands
 May the good of God and of the neighbor be in these feet
 May God be dwelling in this heart
 May this [person] belong entirely to God the Father.⁶¹

Whether Fursey used this prayer for himself or while laying hands on another, it is clear that he sees the body as a conduit of the divine. The prayer moves us from part to part,

⁶⁰ “Bless to Me, O God,” in Waal and Carmichael, *The Celtic Vision*, 6.

⁶¹ Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 156.

recalling its sacred purposes, including senses and service. Each part of the body finally leads to the whole person belonging “entirely to God.”

The Celtic reverence for the flesh changes not just the way we see our own bodies, but also the flesh of poor and stranger. There are many stories of the Celtic saints radically caring for the needs of others. Aidan (d. 651), for example, was once given “an extremely fine horse” by King Oswin. As soon as Aidan met a poor man on the road, he gave it away with all its royal trappings. When the King heard of this, he was beside himself. “Have I not many other horses of less value, and of other kinds, which would have been good enough to give to the poor?” Unlike others, Aidan saw the holy even in the flesh of the beggar. “Is that foal of a mare more dear to you than that son of God?” he asked.⁶² When we recognize human flesh as a holy conduit of God, the bodies of stranger, foe, and outsider are no longer easily discarded. We begin to see the world similarly to the twentieth-century Celtic saint, George MacLeod (1895-1991). This Scottish pacifist and pastor was known for his poignant refrain: “Matter matters.”⁶³

Loving God with All Your Body

Following the lead of Celtic Christianity, we can begin to learn the wisdom of the body, to love God and be loved by God through our bodies, and to know our deep oneness with the Life within all bodies. In other words, Celtic Christianity teaches us to know God not through propositions, but the way lovers come to know one another: flesh

⁶² Benedicta Ward and Rowan Williams, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: An Introduction and Selection* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012), 94.

⁶³ Quoted by Newell, “George MacLeod” (lecture, Iona, Scotland, May 2018).

to flesh. A. J. Scott puts it well, “Through sun, moon, and stars, through earth and sea... trees and flowers, through the bodies of men and women, the looks of human consonances, and the tones of human voices... [It is through these that God’s soul is being expressed to our soul, and we may express our soul to God.]”⁶⁴

Clarifying the Body Center

Hurley and Donson’s explanation of the body center echoes the world of Celtic Christianity. The body center is “the home of harvest and festival, joy and delight, creation, beauty and guidance.”⁶⁵ Through play and dance, action and rest, productivity and leisure, the body is the place where the soul “intertwin[es] with human experience,” creating “an interface between us and material reality.”⁶⁶ The body does this through two sub-centers: *instinct* and *motor*.

The *instinct center* (sometimes referred to as the *gut*) “regulates the inner operational systems of the body.”⁶⁷ This includes the autonomic nervous system that regulates heart and breath rates as well as the fight-or-flight response. Our instincts create constant responses within our body. These responses are “a source of information about both yourself and your environment.”⁶⁸ Changes in our body’s tension, heart rate,

⁶⁴ Quoted by Newell, “Alexander John Scott” (lecture, Iona, Scotland, May 2018).

⁶⁵ Kathy Hurley and Theodorre Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential: Using the Enneagram to Awaken Spiritual Vitality* (Lakewood, CO: WindWalker Press, 2012), 208.

⁶⁶ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 208.

⁶⁷ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 28.

⁶⁸ Frances Vaughn, “Mental, Emotional, and Body-Based Intuition,” in Helen Palmer, *Inner Knowing: Consciousness, Creativity, Insight, and Intuition* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1998), 186.

sensations, and even chronic pains are ways that our bodies speak to us, offering us wisdom and insight. The body often knows things we hardly recognize. “[Y]our body rarely lies,” O’Donohue says. “Your mind can deceive you and put all kinds of barriers between you and your nature; but your body does not lie. Your body tells you, if you attend to it, how your life is and whether you are living from your soul or from the labyrinths of your negativity.”⁶⁹ Riso and Hudson echo this sentiment. “[T]he *instincts* of the body are the most powerful energies that we have to work with. Any real transformation must involve them, and any work that ignores them is almost certain to create problems. The body has an amazing intelligence and sensitivity, and it also has its own language and its own way of knowing.”⁷⁰

The *motor* center (sometimes referred to as the *doing* center) is the body’s “outward and voluntary interactions with the physical world through our five senses and in movement and rhythm.”⁷¹ Beatrice Chestnut explains, “When thought initiates movements within you, your motor center is activated.”⁷² The *motor* function includes both action in the world (such as work, play, and exercise) as well as sacred gestures (prostration, kneeling, yoga, the sign of the cross). Gurdjieff taught that some of the “most subtle lessons of the spiritual path are conveyed in gesture, not in words; there

⁶⁹ John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 48.

⁷⁰ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 51–52. Emphasis mine.

⁷¹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 28.

⁷² Beatrice Chestnut, *The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2013), 19.

exists, in fact, an actual ‘alphabet’ of gestures through which sacred knowledge has traditionally been handed down.”⁷³

Through *instinct* and *motor*, the body shapes the soul and connects us to the divine. In fact, after studying the body center, Hurley and Donson came to believe “that the body lives in the soul,” not the other way around.⁷⁴ In other words, the soul is not hidden deep within the shell of the body, separate from creation and other people. It is entwined with the body and interacting with all that is around it, as Celtic Christianity suggests.⁷⁵ Our relationship to Christ, then, is profoundly shaped through our bodies. “Coming to know the mind and heart of Christ happens through our bodies,” MaryKate Morse writes. It takes place “through our nervous system, our brains, the beating of our hearts, the touch, smell, and sight of life around us. In this world, our spiritual attachments [develop] in finite bodies that are constantly relating to other bodies.”⁷⁶

Classic Christian Body Practices

Learning to recognize our soul’s relationship to God through the body will require intentional practice for most. When practices intermingle with the wisdom of the saints, a transformational synergy happens. “Practice deepens reflective, critical theory at the

⁷³ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 30.

⁷⁴ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 4.

⁷⁵ John O’Donohue echoes this idea. “Your soul reaches out farther than your body, and it simultaneously suffuses your body.” O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 98.

⁷⁶ MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 30–31.

same time that theory deepens experiential practice.”⁷⁷ Together, practice and theory create holy intention, a critical posture for any spiritual work.

There are many classic practices within Christianity that engage in body spirituality. Tony Jones writes about several in his book *The Sacred Way*.⁷⁸ These include: walking a labyrinth, praying the stations of the cross, taking a pilgrimage, making the sign of the cross, kneeling, sabbath keeping, and serving. These practices have always invited Christians to engage our bodies in our spirituality. The modern church, unfortunately, is often lacking experience with many of these practices and the theory of body spirituality to go with it. A renewed integration of the two would be an important step in the right direction.

At the same time, we need more than practices that *engage* our body. To recover the wisdom of the body, Christians need practices that *awaken* our bodies.⁷⁹ This will be true for each of the three centers of intelligence. The *eros* of the body, heart, and mind each need to be engaged, awakened, and channeled.⁸⁰ The two most essential Christian practices for awakening the body have already been alluded to above: communion and fasting. Celtic Christianity helps us to recognize communion and fasting as a sacred expression of feasting/celebration paired with asceticism in general. Of all the classic Christian practices, communion and fasting may be simultaneously the most practiced

⁷⁷ Steven Chase, *A Field Guide to Nature as Spiritual Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 1.

⁷⁸ Tony Jones and Phyllis Tickle, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

⁷⁹ In Enneagram language, this would refer to practices that bring up the “repressed center” or “stance work.”

⁸⁰ See Appendix C: Awakening the Centers of Intelligence.

and the most in need of renewal. They are neglected by many churches and lacking intention in others. A renewed engagement in these practices with the intention of opening our bodies to God would be a powerful combination. Together they could renew Christians' experience of the senses as thresholds of the soul.

Practices for Holy Flesh

Beyond the classic practices, Celtic Christianity reminds us that almost anything can become a spiritual practice when entered with intention. Clearly defined, *a spiritual practice is any practice of the body, heart, and/or mind, habitually entered into with soul intention, that cultivates an awareness of the presence of God within us, around us, and beyond us.*⁸¹

The Celtic pattern of prayers and blessings woven into their lives is an invitation to allow the work of our hands and the rhythm of our days to become their own spiritual practices, awakening us to the presence of Christ at play “in ten thousand places.” This would be easy to emulate today.⁸² Whether one works a blue-collar or white-collar job, whether one works in the home or out of the home, a holy awareness could begin to awaken our bodies to God by beginning each day with the simple prayer, “Bless to me, O God, my...” fill in the blank with each part of the body, each of the senses, and/or each of the tasks for the day.⁸³

⁸¹ The author's definition.

⁸² For an excellent example, see Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and "Women's Work"* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

⁸³ For examples of simple modern prayers in the Celtic spirit, see Ray Simpson, *Celtic Blessings: Prayers for Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1999). For more poetic and robust prayers in the

Another simple practice is to cultivate a sacred word or phrase that could be repeated, such as: “My body is a holy vessel. God speaks to me through my body. God comes to me through my body.” This phrase can be used in congregational settings in which everyone is invited to place their hands on their chest or gut and repeat it together several times. It can also be repeated individually while exercising, gardening, in rhythm with breathing, or any number of physical activities.

As we begin to see our bodies as a holy conduit, a deeper understanding of our sexuality comes into view. The Church’s current debates around sexual ethics would be transformed if they were reframed through the wisdom of body spirituality.⁸⁴ When we begin to imagine the body living within the soul (instead of the other way around) as well as the sacramental nature of sensuality, the debates are no longer centered around traditional ethics verses modern sensibilities. Instead, the conversation becomes centered in the beauty, gift, and power of our sexual practices to shape our souls, channel our *eros*, and offer us life. “When you are sexual with someone, you have let them right into your world. The world of sexuality is a sacred world of presence,” explains O’Donohue. “Since the body is in the soul, when you let someone so near, you let the person become part of you.... The outer shell and contour of identity become porous. You suffuse each other.”⁸⁵ This wisdom is deeply needed today. Sexuality is too often exploited by some

Celtic spirit, see John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

⁸⁴ I’m referring both to debates around LGBTQ sexuality and debates around sex outside of marriage.

⁸⁵ O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 74, 13.

and suppressed by others. Embracing and engaging our sexuality with soul intention can deeply open us to the One life within all life. Spiritual director W. Paul Jones explains,

Sexuality is a powerful expression of [spirituality], experienced in the surge of desire, the ache, the longing, the arousal, the waves of moreness, the sensuality of every senses, the choreography of the body, the elasticity of time, the rhythm and crescendo, the ebb and the flow. So it can be with every living thing, for all is composed of energy in motion, wrapped in time as becoming.⁸⁶

Practices for Holy Creation

Most importantly, Celtic Christianity invites us outdoors. Bill Plotkin suggests that moving outdoors, into the wild, is the most needed practice for the soul today.⁸⁷

While not many of us are likely to stand in the freezing sea as long as Cuthbert, taking a dip can open the body in a profound way. Whether or not we live by the sea, we can engage the elements more fully. This could include:

- Allow yourself to be soaked in a rainstorm.
- Stand in the sun and feel your sweat pores begin to open in the summer humidity.
- Breathe in the frosty winter wind and feel the sharp edge in your lungs.

By stepping outside and paying attention to the elements with soul intention, we can begin to connect to the divine presence coming to us through our bodies.

Steven Chase offers a number of ways to do this in his book *A Field Guide to Nature as Spiritual Practice*. One suggestion is to notice the wind, however much or little

⁸⁶ W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 150.

⁸⁷ See Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003).

there is.⁸⁸ Chase reminds us that the Hebrew word for wind, *ruach*, is also the word for breath and spirit. Likewise, God's sacred name, YHWH, is the sound of breath. It is simultaneously never spoken aloud and whispered with each breath we take. With this awareness, turn toward the wind and feel it on your hair, skin, and clothes. Breathe in the wind knowing that you are breathing in the breath of God, as Theophilus of Antioch (d. 185) suggests. "God has given to the earth the breath, which feeds it. It is [God's] breath that gives life to all things... [God's] breath vibrates in yours, in your voice. It is the breath of God that you breathe—and you are unaware of it."⁸⁹

Celtic Christianity also reminds us that the instincts of wild animals are deeply encoded into our own physiology. Again, a number of practices entered with soul intention can open us to this awareness, including: caring for pets, bird watching, fishing, hiking in the wild, and even noticing the animals that live hidden in your neighborhood. The Celts did not romanticize all animals, as we saw with Columba and the Loch Ness monster. They revered the wildness within them. Perhaps the animals that eat our flowers and tear up our perfectly manicured lawns invite a similar reverence. They might reconnect us to the wildness in our own soul and open us to God's untamable wildness making a mess of the perfectly manicured plans we have made for a successful life.

Choosing just a few of these practices can begin to help us awaken the body and cultivate a Celtic consciousness, one in which we recognize the divine entwined. The more we practice listening for the heartbeat of God in all things, we will discover "the notes of the universe are not empty. They are filled with God," as Newell puts it. "This

⁸⁸ Chase, *A Field Guide to Nature as Spiritual Practice*, 147–8.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 73.

will radically change the way we touch matter, the matter of human bodies, the matter of the earth, the matter of the body politic and how we relate as sovereign nations. And it will set us free to move in relationship, rather than fear, with the deepest energies that pulse within us, within our bodies, and within the earth.”⁹⁰

Prayers for the Outward Path

Once again, we are wise to gather prayers for God’s guidance on the path. In so doing, we will hear the sacred invitation of creation and the whispers of those who have traveled this path before us.

Blessing

May your body be blessed.
 May you realize that your body is a faithful and beautiful friend of your soul.
 And may you be peaceful and joyful and recognize that your senses are sacred thresholds.
 May you realize that holiness is mindful, gazing, feeling, hearing, and touching.
 May your senses gather you and bring you home.
 May your senses always enable you to celebrate the universe and the mystery and possibilities in your presence here.
 May the Eros of the Earth bless you.⁹¹

Invocation

As the light of dawn awakens earth’s creatures
 and stirs into song the birds of the morning,
 so may I be brought to life this day.
 Rising to see the light,
 to hear the wind,

⁹⁰ Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 55.

⁹¹ O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 77.

to smell the fragrance of what grows from the ground,
 to taste its fruit,
 and touch its textures,
 so may my inner senses be awakened to you,
 so may my senses be awakened to you, O God.⁹²

Whispers from the Journey

When I love God I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of all this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me.

For a long time I looked for you within myself and crept into the shell of my soul, shielding myself with an armor of inapproachability. But you were outside—outside myself—and enticed me out of the narrowness of my heart into the broad place of love for life. So I came out of myself and found my soul in my senses, and my own self in others.

The experience of God deepens the experiences of life. It does not reduce them. For it awakens the unconditional Yes to life. The more I love God, the more gladly I exist. The more immediately and wholly I exist, the more I sense the living God, the inexhaustible source of life and eternal livingness.⁹³

⁹² J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2000), 50.

⁹³ Jurgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Auto Biography*, trans. Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 349-50. Quoted in Angela H. Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 147.

CHAPTER 4:

THE INWARD PATH – JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE HEART

I am wounded with love.

—Song of Solomon 2:5

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

—Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 5:8)

Heart to Heart

Probing Peter

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” (John 21:17) The disciples had been out fishing all night and caught nothing. Just as the night’s darkness began to break, an obscure¹ stranger on the shore told them to try again. “Cast your nets on the other side of the boat.” They did, and their nets were filled. In the bounty, they recognized Jesus. Peter, always impetuous, jumped into the lake fully clothed to swim to Jesus. It was only the third time Jesus had appeared to them since his resurrection. In an echo of the Eucharist, Jesus prepared breakfast with the bounty of bread and fish. God’s grace was taken and received. Then, it was time for Peter to examine his heart.

Three times Jesus asked him the question. With each ask, Peter is more exposed. His heart was being probed. “Simon... do you love me?” The charcoal fire where Jesus

¹ An echo of John of the Cross’ language in “The Dark Night.”

had cooked their breakfast was still smoldering. Its smoke gave the air a unique smell, like that of another charcoal fire, the one Peter stood around when he denied Jesus three times. “Simon... do you love me?”

Peter answered “yes” every time. He was, after all, the passionate type, always leading with his heart. When Jesus came walking on the water to the disciples in the middle of the night, Peter jumped out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. Of course, once he began to see the storm raging around him, his heart began to fill with fear and his body began to sink (Matt. 14:25-30). In another scene, Peter is the first disciple to blurt out a confession about Jesus: “You are the Messiah.” (Mark 8:29). Jesus then begins to tell them about his coming suffering. In a self-protective reflex of the heart, Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him.

Peter’s heart is leading at every step. At the last supper, Peter resists Jesus washing his feet: “You will never wash my feet.” But when Jesus says it is necessary, Peter exclaims, “not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” (John 13:8-9). Again and again, Peter is tossed back and forth by the shifting of his heart. He is pulled by so many things he cannot see. So much so that he does not know himself. At the last supper, Peter is confident that he is willing to go and die with Jesus. “Even if all fall away..., I never will.... Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you,” he insists (Matt. 26:33-35, NIV). Just hours later, obscured in the night shadows of Jesus’ trial, the cock crows. Peter learns the truth about himself, “[a]nd he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75).

Peter’s heart was passionate, but not free. It was clouded and controlled by much he did not recognize. And so, in the very last story of the resurrected Jesus, John writes

about Jesus' insistent question. The question is repeated, not as salt in the wound of Peter's recent denials, but as an invitation to a deeper exploration of the heart. What we believe about ourselves often turns out to be false constructions of our ego. What drives our actions often turns out to be unconscious motivations, attachments, and desires. For the soul to fully love, the heart has to be freed and open, a process that can be confusing and painful. Jesus tells Peter it will feel like he is being taken "where you do not wish to go" (John 21:18). The scriptures suggest this indicates the kind of death by which Peter will glorify God. The liberation of the heart is exactly that kind of death. John of the Cross describes it as "a dark night of the soul."

Probing the Passions

Peter is symbolic of a common misunderstanding of the heart, one that permeates our culture. When people follow their feelings, we celebrate that person as being "authentic." Passionate feelings are often rewarded in our politics, even when those feelings are controlled by fear. In our movies, the impulse of a character's affections for a new lover are cheered on by the audience, even when those affections betray the character's (or the audience's) deepest commitments and values. Cynthia Bourgeault suggests, "The real mark of personal authenticity is not how intensely we can express our feelings but how honestly we can look at where they're coming from and spot the elements of clinging, manipulation, and personal agendas that make up so much of what we experience as our emotional life today."²

² Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 33.

As explored in Chapter 1, the church has often reacted to these cultural impulses by condemning desires. Unfortunately, this leads to more repression and ego distortion, which can express itself in a variety of destructive impulses. “What isn’t transformed will be transmitted,” Rohr often repeats.³ Desire is not the problem. The spiritual problem is that we do not know ourselves well enough to distinguish between true and false longings.⁴

Until we travel the inward path, our hearts remain controlled by impulses we do not understand or recognize. We are not “authentic,” but enslaved to what the desert monastics and other early Christians called “the Passions.” The Passions are not simply emotions, but the compulsive desires that became classified as the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, sloth, greed, anger, and lust. Christian wisdom taught that the spiritual journey involves purification of the passions. Again, this does not mean the goal is to become cold or stoic (another common misunderstanding). When the heart is free and open, emotion does not lose its depth or power. Instead, it loses “that sticky, sentimental, confused quality so characteristic of the smaller self and is set free to swim in the deeper waters of divine love and compassion.”⁵

The inward journey is the path in which the heart is set free and open. It is the way to a deeper knowing of oneself in which we also discover the divine. This path is essential for any life-giving spirituality. Thomas Merton asks, “What can be gained by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?”

³ For example, see Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 123.

⁴ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 61.

⁵ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 36.

This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it all the rest are not only useless but disastrous.”⁶

In order to make this voyage, we will follow the wisdom of John of the Cross (1542-1591), one of the most open-hearted mystics in Christian history. He has, at times, been mischaracterized as a harsh, life-denying ascetic, obsessed with suffering. However, those who delve into his writings find quite the opposite. Ronald Rolheiser suggests that John of the Cross “is not a masochist, but an eroticist; he is not hung up on suffering, but on consummation; he is not fixated on Good Friday, but is impatient for Easter Sunday.”⁷ Moreover, John’s contemporaries described him as a man of compassion and deep charity who “constantly taught that play is the ultimate goal of the spiritual life.”⁸

For John, the soul’s deepest center is the place that has been struck with the “wound of love,” an image from Song of Solomon used by many mystics. This wound comes from union with God. “The soul’s center is God,” John declares.⁹ As a spiritual guide, he invites us to go deep within to discover the “living flame of love / that tenderly wounds the soul.”¹⁰

⁶ Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 11.

⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, “John of the Cross—The Man, the Myth, and the Truth,” 9, accessed November 28, 2017, http://ronrolheiser.com/me/uploads/2014/02/joc_man.pdf.

⁸ Rolheiser, “John of the Cross—The Man, the Myth, and the Truth,” 11.

⁹ *Flame* 1.12. All quotations from John of the Cross come from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 1991). I will use the common shorthands for John’s major works: *Flame* for *The Living Flame of Love*, *Ascent* for *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Night* for *The Dark Night*, and *Sayings* for *The Sayings of Light and Love*. For his poetry I will use the common initials: LF for “The Living Flame of Love” and DN for “The Dark Night.”

¹⁰ LF st. 1.

John of the Cross Guides the Way

Poverty, Prison, and Poetry

John of the Cross was born Juan de Yeppe in a small Spanish town in 1542. His father, Gonzalo de Yeppe, came from a wealthy family of silk merchants who disowned Gonzalo when he married a poor weaver beneath his station, Catalina Alvarez. John was their third son. They lived in a deep poverty that likely contributed to the illness and death of John's father when John was only two. A few years later, John's middle brother Luis also died, possibly of malnutrition. Desperate for work, Catalina moved with her two remaining sons to Medina del Campo. John was nine when they arrived. He was put in a school for poor children (similar to an orphanage). There he received food, clothing, and an education. In his early teens, he was enlisted to help as an orderly in a hospital for the poor. He was surrounded by "people with the plague or other contagious diseases."¹¹

Although John was mentored by Jesuits, he was drawn to the contemplative spirit of the Carmelite tradition. In 1563, at the age of twenty-one, he chose to become a Carmelite and took the name Brother John of St. Matthias. From there he went to seminary. During this time, he gradually became disillusioned with some of the opulence and lack of focus in his order. After ordination, he considered leaving his order for a more solitary and austere spirituality until a fateful meeting with Teresa of Avila (1515-

¹¹ Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *The Collected Works*, 10.

1582). John was twenty-five when they met. This marked what McGinn calls “the first major turning point in his life.”¹²

Teresa, fifty-two at the time of their meeting, had already begun a controversial reform movement within the Carmelites. She traveled to Medina to start a second reform house and hoped to recruit a male Carmelite to lead it. John was exactly what she was looking for. While different in many ways, they complemented one another well. John had the theological training and intellect that Teresa admired. He also shared her deep devotion to God and prayer. She later wrote to a friend, “Even though he is small [in stature], I understand him to be huge in the eyes of God.”¹³ Teresa, on the other hand, was earthy, playful, and practical. She represented what John deeply admired: an honest devotion to Christ without the trappings of material wealth or power. John agreed to join her reform and took on the name by which he is now known—Juan de la Cruz, or John of the Cross.

The second great turning point in John’s life came ten years later. He had become the spiritual director at a convent in Avila where Teresa was a prioress. Their reform efforts were increasingly under attack. On the night of December 2, 1577, John was abducted by other Carmelites, carried over the mountains, and hidden away in a monastery prison in Toledo. There he was treated savagely. John was psychologically tortured, beaten by the whole community once a week, gradually starved with wretched food, and never allowed to bathe or change clothes. After two months, he was moved to

¹² Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 231.

¹³ Quoted in Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 8.

solitary confinement in a room “narrow and dark, without air or light except for whatever filtered through a small slit high up in the wall.”¹⁴ There he suffered Toledo’s freezing winters and sweltering summers. His treatment was “totally inhuman.”¹⁵

In the midst of his imprisonment, John’s deep soul and spiritual wisdom was painfully stretched to new depths. All the assurances of faith were stripped away. John’s experience was not a loss of faith, but rather a longing for a seemingly absent God. While in prison, he began to compose “some of the most moving poetry—religious or secular—in any language,”¹⁶ including one of his three greatest poems, “The Canticle.” Inspired by the Song of Solomon, John expressed the deep longing of his heart:

Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag
after wounding me;
I went out calling you, but you were gone. (st. 1)

After nine months, weak in body and drawing near to death, John managed to escape. He had gradually worked the screws loose on the lock. Then, on “one dark night,”¹⁷ when the friars seemed to be asleep and the “house all still,” he pushed hard on the door, and the lock failed. He found a window and used a “hidden ladder” he made from tattered rags. Once out on the city streets, he found his way to a convent of Teresa’s nuns in Toledo. From there, he was secretly taken to a hospital to be cared for.

¹⁴ Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *The Collected Works*, 18.

¹⁵ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 233.

¹⁶ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 234.

¹⁷ Each of these quotations are echoes from DN.

Shortly after his escape, John began sharing his prison poetry with the reformed nuns and friars. He also composed his second great poetic work, “The Dark Night.” This poem uses the story of his escape to describe the hidden work of God in the soul that frees the heart and opens us to a deep awareness of our union with God. Later, John composed his other great masterpiece, “The Living Flame of Love.” Iain Matthew describes this poem as a “hymn to the Holy Spirit,” “John’s most authentic witness to God,” and “his Magnificat.”¹⁸

John’s spiritual counsel was deeply valued before his imprisonment, but the demand for his poetry, spiritual direction, and wisdom grew significantly afterward. The more John shared his poetry, the more he was asked to explain its meaning. Eventually he wrote a number of lengthy treatises that function as commentaries on his poems. These treatises were “an outgrowth of his vocation as a spiritual director.”¹⁹ They can be difficult at times and not all are complete, but these larger works are key to understanding John’s profound wisdom and spiritual insight.

Poetry, however, remained John’s first and greatest language. “[W]e must see that it is as a poet rather than as a prose writer that [John] is a Doctor of the Church,” writes Balthasar.²⁰ The God that John knows is best discovered in the hidden and potent language of poetry, not prose. Likewise, the spiritual journey is much more poetry than prose. Prose always falls short of the fullness of meaning. It limits. It creates boundaries.

¹⁸ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 20–25.

¹⁹ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 236.

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “St. John of the Cross,” in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 3, *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986) 105-171, here 171, quoted in McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 239.

Poetry, on the other hand, opens up. It creates space and possibility, surprise and encounter. Like John of the Cross, poetry is the heart's first language. An exploration of two of John's most important poems, "The Dark Night" and "The Living Flame," will lead us down the inward journey in which the heart is liberated for love.²¹

Loved But Locked Up: The Heart's Condition

Divine Union. To understand John's writings, it is important to understand his basic assumptions. John believed that divine love is at the core of every human being. This is not just true of the spiritual or religious. According to John, there is an essential union with God even in "the greatest sinner in the world."²² Union with God, then, is not something to be achieved; it is something to awaken to.

John describes the soul as having deep caverns in which this union takes place. "The capacity of these caverns is deep, because the object of this capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite," writes John. "Thus in a certain fashion their capacity is infinite, their thirst is infinite, their hunger is also deep and infinite."²³ Our deepest desire cannot be satisfied by anything other than God's own life flowing into the expansive space within. "Anything less than the infinite fails to fill them."²⁴

²¹ The following draws significantly from Gerald May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. May uses twenty-first-century paradigms of spiritual direction and psychology as a helpful interpretive framework for John's writing.

²² *Ascent* 2.5.3.

²³ *Flame* 3.22.

²⁴ *Flame* 3.18.

Compulsions, Attachments, and Denial. Unfortunately, we are unaware of our essential union with God. The deep caverns of the soul are “obscure and blind.”²⁵ We try to fill them with either a trivialized (and thus small) God, or with things other than God’s own self.²⁶ We focus on simple gratifications, successes, affection, and accomplishments. May explains, “We are naturally drawn to the things we can feel and see and grasp.”²⁷ Unaware that our desire for God has been redirected to lesser things, our thirst drives us back to these things again and again. This creates compulsive behaviors, controlling us in ways we do not recognize. The classical spiritual term for our compulsions is *attachment*.²⁸

Everyone has attachments of some kind. Our culture describes unwanted attachments as “bad habits.” Destructive attachments we call “addictions.” In the Christian tradition, they are known as “idols.”²⁹ Attachments are the things that consume our energy and hold our hearts. Regardless of what we call them, they are in control. Like John’s guards at the monastery prison, attachments keep the heart locked up. We are unable to become what God has created us to be. “[A] person has only one will,” explains John. “[I]f that is encumbered or occupied by anything, the person will not possess the freedom [necessary] for divine transformation.”³⁰

²⁵ LF stz. 3.

²⁶ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 97.

²⁷ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 59.

²⁸ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 60.

²⁹ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 61.

³⁰ *Ascent*, 1.11.6.

Attachments develop even with good things. We easily mistake the conduits of love for Love itself.³¹ “We gravitate to the things of God, to things that we sense as good, true, beautiful, and loving. We expect these good things to satisfy us,” but they cannot.³² Iain Matthew explains how seemingly virtuous pursuits can actually be compulsive attachments.

[It] can occur with the holiest things. There is an infection in people who neglect their children, whether for their sport or for their prayer group. There is disorder in the person who has to have the last word, be it in the office or in the religious community. There is something not quite right when we need to feel emotionally high all the time, whether the feelings are coming from parties or from religion. Dependence: it may be on fashion, on status, on being needed, on feeling secure, or on a sense of spiritual well-being. John is seeking a radical cure, and a surface change is not enough.³³

John tells us quite directly, “freedom cannot abide in a heart dominated” by compulsions.³⁴ Good or bad, our compulsions are destructive precisely because they rob the heart of its freedom. “We act not because we have chosen to, but because we have to. We cling to things, people, beliefs, and behaviors.”³⁵ Of course, we do not see our relationships, beliefs, and behaviors this way. All of us live in various states of denial. Denial is a natural part of our psychological defense system. Unfortunately, “[a]ttachment thrives on denial.”³⁶

³¹ This is why we mistake “the container” for “the contents,” as explored in Chapter 1.

³² May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 59.

³³ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 42.

³⁴ *Ascent* 1.4.6.

³⁵ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 60.

³⁶ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 63.

Moments come for all of us when our denial no longer works. The things we expect to satisfy our heart's desire fall short. Our beliefs no longer make sense with the complexity of our lives. Something happens and, thanks be to God, there is a crack in our denial. This crack can be confusing and disorienting, but John sees it as an opening. The lock on the prison door has loosened. A deeper love and longing is drawing us out of our attachments. We are in the dark night.

The Dark Night: The Journey of Liberation

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
—ah, the sheer grace!—
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

In the darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
—ah, the sheer grace!—
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

On that glad night
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
—him I knew so well—
there in a place where no one appeared.

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

Upon my flowering breast,

which I kept wholly for him alone,
 there he lay sleeping,
 and I caressing him
 there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

When the breeze blew from the turret,
 as I parted his hair,
 it wounded my neck
 with its gentle hand,
 suspending all my senses.

I abandoned and forgot myself,
 laying my face on my Beloved;
 all things ceased; I went out from myself,
 leaving my cares
 forgotten among the lilies.³⁷

As mentioned above, John wrote this poem shortly after escaping. The details of his escape are especially present in the first five stanzas. At the same time, the images of the Lover and beloved, one of John's favorite metaphors for God and the soul, tell us something deeper is being described. In John's two treatises on this poem, *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, he unpacks the depths of the spiritual journey that this poem explores.

As John speaks about darkness, it becomes clear he is describing something hidden or unseen, but not sinister or evil. The words he uses to describe the night are "happy," "lovely," "guiding," and "sheer grace." The Spanish word here, *oscura*, might better be translated "obscure."³⁸ For John, "night" is an image that explores the hidden ways in which God is at work in the soul. For clarity, a definition is helpful. The Dark Night is any season in which God creates space within the deep caverns of the soul for

³⁷ "The Dark Night."

³⁸ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 67.

the inflow of God's love by liberating us from our attachments. It is "the means by which we find our heart's desire, our freedom for love."³⁹

May suggests the night can be painful or joyful. While suffering may be one common experience, it is not the primary marker of the night. "The only characteristic...that is certain is its obscurity. One simply does not comprehend clearly what is happening."⁴⁰ This could be experienced in terms of a growing peace, openness, or freedom from the need for control or certainty. At other times (and perhaps more often), it comes as a suffering, either internal or external. John uses night language for "the most unmystical afflictions: financial difficulties; loneliness; being let down by friends; being misjudged by authorities; friction in community."⁴¹ Whether experienced painfully or not, *night* involves some kind of relinquishment or loss.⁴² Our compulsions and attachments are broken. Space is opening up within the soul.

Nada.⁴³ In John's view, spiritual growth happens as space is created for an ever-deepening relationship with God. The point is not self-realization, mortification, or perfection. Matthew explains, "progress will be measured, less by ground covered, more by the amount of room God is given to maneuver. 'Space', 'emptiness', are key words; or as John puts it, *nada*."⁴⁴

³⁹ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 67.

⁴⁰ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 68.

⁴¹ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 81. For more on discerning the signs of the dark night, see Appendix D: Signs of the Dark Night of the Soul.

⁴² May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 70. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ "Nothing."

⁴⁴ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 37. Emphasis in original.

John develops the idea of *nada* most fully in his complex *Ascent*. To make his teaching more accessible, John sketched an image of “Mount Carmel” and placed it at the beginning of *Ascent* as a summary of the treatise.⁴⁵ In his sketch, the central path up the mountain is “nada, nada, nada...” The ascent toward God’s fullest presence happens as we relinquish all our desires and attachments, even the sweet consolations of God’s presence. God is always more than our awareness and experience of God. This is the meaning of John’s famous repetitions of *nada*:

To reach satisfaction in all
 desire satisfaction in nothing.
 To come to possess all
 desire the possession of nothing.
 To arrive at being all
 desire to be nothing.
 To come to the knowledge of all
 desire the knowledge of nothing....⁴⁶

As we relinquish all things, the “obscure and blind” caverns of the soul open up for more and more of the inflow of God. The peak of the ascent, then, does not arrive at a singular point. Rather it opens up to a vast expansive space where the fullness of God dwells. It is not emptiness, but rather total and complete *presence*. Here there is peace, joy, happiness, delight, wisdom, justice, fortitude, charity, and piety. In other words, John’s *nada* is not about denial of joy. He is not interested in rigid perfectionism or even simple self-help. His “priority is... relationship (union).”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See Appendix E: Sketch of Mt. Carmel.

⁴⁶ *Ascent* 1.13.11.

⁴⁷ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 36.

The only meaningful asceticism, then, is the kind that clears the ground for the work of God, the “living flame of love,”⁴⁸ in us. “In contrast to life-denying asceticism that advocates freedom *from* desire, [John sees] authentic transformation as leading to freedom *for* desire.”⁴⁹ As we heard from Belden Lane in Chapter 1, “The goal... isn’t to eradicate desire, but to enlarge and refocus it.” Lane goes on to write, “The honing (and stripping) of desire is the only true measure of progress in the spiritual life.”⁵⁰

Four Nights. John actually describes four kinds of nights: the dark night of the *senses* and the dark night of the *spirit*, both of which can be *active* (chosen spiritual work in which we participate with God’s activity in us) or *passive* (un-chosen seasons of confusion, spiritual dryness, and loss in which God is working).⁵¹ The active night involves cultivating spiritual practices and virtues that are familiar to Christians today.⁵² In the passive nights God is the sole actor. “The key difference between the active and the passive nights... [is] the soul loses its sense of *cooperating* with God in the emptying process and is placed in a situation where it has no control or activity, where its efforts mean nothing.”⁵³

⁴⁸ LF stz. 1.

⁴⁹ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 73. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints*, 62, 69.

⁵¹ Ascent 1.1.2.

⁵² See Appendix F: The Active Night of the Soul.

⁵³ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 280. Emphasis original.

In the passive night of the *senses* we are freed “from the idols we have made of possessions, relationships, feelings, and behaviors.”⁵⁴ Our spiritual practices, such as prayer, worship, or study, also begin to seem empty and dry. Doubt and confusion often accompany this loss because of our unconscious assumption that we should be able to control our spiritual lives. John suggests the passive night of the *senses* “is common and happens to many [who regularly seek God].” However, “The *spiritual* night is the lot of very few.”⁵⁵

The passive night of the *spirit* takes the heart to its deepest freedom. In it, our attachments to our beliefs, expectations, and morality all become loosened. Even our very idea of God can begin to come undone. While the spiritual life is in turmoil, it can be hard to trust that there is a grace in any of this. However, what is lost is not God, only our addiction to the feelings we had turned into God. May explains that what feels like losing our faith can actually be an expansion.

We easily become so attached to feelings *of* and *about* God that we equate them *with* God. We forget that these sensations are only speaking to us of the divine One. They are only messengers. Instead, we take them for the whole of God’s self, and thus we wind up worshipping our own feelings. This is perhaps the most common idolatry of the spiritual life.⁵⁶

This is the root of the confusion between our feelings and spirituality discussed in

Chapter 1.

Whether the nights are of the sense or the spirit, active or passive, they are always “sheer grace.” They are more than psychological developments. They are the presence of

⁵⁴ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 86.

⁵⁵ *Night* 1.8.1.

⁵⁶ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 93. Emphasis in original.

God working deeper into the caverns of the soul. “This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul,” John writes, “which purges it of its habitual ignorances and imperfections, natural and spiritual.”⁵⁷ The dark night, then, is not some impersonal force, like a difficult situation or psychological condition, although it can be brought on by those. Constance FitzGerald suggests, the dark night “is not primarily some thing... but someone, a presence leaving an indelible imprint on the human spirit and consequently on one’s entire life.”⁵⁸ The night, she suggests, is the personal, loving presence of Christ drawing us deeper into God.⁵⁹ It liberates us to live in love, from love, and for love. As John puts it, the night fuses “the Lover with his beloved, / transforming the beloved in her Lover.”⁶⁰ John’s favorite image for this transformation is the “flame.” It appears in all his works, and eventually becomes his master metaphor.⁶¹

A Dawning: The Living Flame of Love

O living flame of love
that tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center! Since
now you are not oppressive,
now consummate! if it be your will:
tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

O sweet cautery,
O delightful wound!

⁵⁷ *Night 2.5.*

⁵⁸ Constance FitzGerald, “Transformation in Wisdom,” in *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, eds. Kevin Culligan and Regis Jordan (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000), quoted in May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 96.

⁵⁹ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 96.

⁶⁰ DN st. 5.

⁶¹ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 302.

O gentle hand! O delicate touch
 that tastes of eternal life
 and pays every debt!
 In killing you changed death to life.

O lamps of fire!
 in whose splendors
 the deep caverns of feeling,
 once obscure and blind,
 now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
 both warmth and light to their Beloved.

How gently and lovingly
 you wake in my heart,
 where in secret you dwell alone;
 and in your sweet breathing,
 filled with good and glory,
 how tenderly you swell my heart with love.⁶²

From beginning to end, our lives are bathed in divine love. It is always there, even if our “caverns of deep feelings” are “obscure and blind.” At times we receive glimpses, but even then, this love seems hidden behind “the veil” of those sweet encounters. Nevertheless, these glimpses swell our hearts, awakening in us a longing for more of God’s love. It is this awakening that we hear in the final lines:

How gently and lovingly
 you wake in my heart...
 how tenderly you swell my heart with love. (st. 4)

This awakening is also a kind of wounding, one that always leaves us longing for more, swelling our heart with evermore desire for God. The wound of love is “searing.” It imprints God’s life on our soul. But those that have been burned know it is a “sweet cautery,” a “delightful wound,” one that is given with a “gentle hand” and “delicate touch.” John draws from Gregory the Great to describe how the wound of love draws us

⁶² “The Living Flame of Love.”

further into God's love. "The more the soul desires God the more it possesses [God], and the possession of God delights and satisfies it.... [T]he greater the soul's desire, the greater will be its satisfaction and delight."⁶³ Love, then, is the entire point of the dark night. Love requires our attachments die, but "in killing" the divine love changes "death to life."

John helps us to see that spirituality is not only dynamic, it is transformational. We are drawn into love and become love. He explains this with a new metaphor for the soul, the "lamps of fire" (st. 3). John explains that lamps "possess two properties: They transmit light and give off warmth."⁶⁴ As the soul becomes more enflamed with God's love, "the soul, like God, gives forth light and warmth."⁶⁵ In other words, as we awaken to our deep union with God, we become more and more a conduit of God's light and warmth to the world.⁶⁶

John also describes the soul as a log set afire with the love of God. In the fire of God's love, the log is dried out (i.e., space is created). It then begins to darken, exposing the darkness within. John says that this exposure can be a painful growth in self-knowledge. "Thus it is not glorious for the soul, but rather makes it feel... distressed in the spiritual light of self-knowledge."⁶⁷ There is a profound humbling as we awaken to

⁶³ *Flame* 3.23.

⁶⁴ *Flame* 3.2.

⁶⁵ *Flame* 3.2.

⁶⁶ This is key to understanding why a missional church paradigm not grounded in transformational spirituality will always end up less effective at deep and lasting change in the world. This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

⁶⁷ *Flame* 1.19.

the truth of ourselves before the truth of God's love. Like the log, the person is then gradually transformed into light, heat, and the fire of God's own love.

"The Living Flame" gradually reveals the gifts that come through the dark night, gifts that are realized in the dawning of Love. May suggests that these gifts come in three movements.⁶⁸

- **From Slavery to Freedom:** Our attachments begin to lose power. They may still pull on us, but we are able to recognize them for the smallness they represent. We are now freed to love without being attached to the objects of our love. We love in and through the divine love, rather than loving to fill a need or obsession. This love has a different quality. There is an energy, life, and graciousness to it.
- **From Willfulness to Willingness:** Freed from our personal agendas, there is a gradual softening of spirit. This allows room for grace to flow to ourselves and others. John describes it this way: "So the person no longer gets annoyed and upset at herself because of her faults, nor at her neighbor because of his, nor will she be displeased at God and disrespectfully quarrelsome for not making her good at once!"⁶⁹ A deeper trust of the divine love allows us to live with open hands, surrendered in hope. In this posture, love arises spontaneously in the moments of our lives. We shift from being *driven* to being *drawn*.
- **From Isolation to Union:** As we discover the divine presence at our deepest center, there is a blurring of the edges between our self, God, and the rest of creation. A deeper awareness of our union grows. We discover our true essence,

⁶⁸ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 183–85.

⁶⁹ *Night* 1.13.7.

or what Basil Pennington (and Thomas Merton before him) calls our True Self.⁷⁰

Now we live in deep participation with the divine love even in the practical situations of everyday life. There is a light and life-giving energy that naturally flow through us to the world around us.

Loving God with All Your Heart

John teaches us that the heart “is where freedom and slavery are played out.”⁷¹

Like Peter, we are not free to truly love God or our neighbor until the heart is free and open. Loving God requires a journey deep inside the contours of our hearts, “a journey of *consciousness*.”⁷² It involves a deep self-knowing and opening of the heart.

Clarifying the Heart Center

The heart is home of connection and relationships. It is the place of spiritual intuition and perception. Although it is often equated with emotion, its purpose is much greater than personal expression. It is for connection with others and God. It is the center where union is experienced. “The higher purpose of the [heart] center is to transcend the meaninglessness of accidental living, to create the understanding that eliminates violence, and to live the awareness of divine love,” explain Hurley and Dobson.⁷³ Spiritually

⁷⁰ M. Basil Pennington, *True Self/False Self: Unmasking the Spirit Within* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000).

⁷¹ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 40.

⁷² May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 47. Emphasis original.

⁷³ Hurley and Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction,” 53.

speaking, it has been described as the center of epiphany. It is associated with the same images John uses: fire, spiritual energy, mysticism, transformation, and divine love.⁷⁴

All the centers of intelligence also have a shadow side. The shadow is the way they function when the ego is wrapped around it or they are stuck in compulsions. When the heart is not free, “we expend its energy on justifying our likes and dislikes, blaming others for life’s difficulties, and allowing habitual emotional reactions to determine our relationships to others.”⁷⁵ In this way, our emotions take over and control us. “The little wills of emotions drag us in one direction and then in another when our emotions control our lives... [W]e become inconsistent and undependable.”⁷⁶ In a striking echo of John’s wisdom, Hurley and Donson go on to suggest, “One of the most exalted goals of inner work is to recognize the many little wills that run our lives and to tame them so that they all desire one object. The person who has a single will, all the emotions magnetized in the same direction, is a fully conscious being.”⁷⁷

The heart center is also the seat of your personal identity. It’s the place where you discover your *essence*, the reality of love that is deeper than your personality, popularity, or other False Self constructs. “When your heart opens, you know who you are,” write Riso and Hudson, “and that ‘who you are’ has nothing to do with what people think of you and nothing to do with your past history. You have a particular quality, a flavor, something that is unique and intimately *you*. It is through the heart that we recognize and

⁷⁴ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 204–5.

⁷⁵ Hurley and Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction,” 53.

⁷⁶ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 207.

⁷⁷ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 207.

appreciate our true nature.”⁷⁸ That true nature, or *essence*, is love. A person’s “particular quality” is their unique expression of love in the world. When we are connected to the heart center, love becomes our ground and energy.

However, when our hearts are closed off, “we lose contact with our true identity.”⁷⁹ When that happens, we fall back into our compulsive patterns that try to create personal value, importance, and identity. In the pursuit of affection and esteem, we are constantly tossed back and forth, like a wave of the sea, by the tyranny of other people’s opinions. Freedom in Christ is the freedom to love and know we are loved. This requires lifelong practices of opening and liberating the heart.

Practices for Engaging the Heart

There is a lot we can learn from John of the Cross about both engaging and liberating the heart. His poetry is a perfect example. As noted above, poetry, not prose, is the heart’s first language. The heart both hears and speaks through impressions, not precisions. It intuitively rather than explains. This is why our prayers and liturgy are more effective in opening the heart when they are poetic, simple, and light, rather than heavy prose, thick with theological terms. To open the heart, we have to use the language of the heart. In addition to poetry, this can include music, art, and beauty. “Beauty for John is an obsession,” explains Balthasar. “It is not only the end, it is also the means.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 55. Emphasis original.

⁷⁹ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 55.

⁸⁰ Balthasar, “St. John of the Cross,” 151-52. Quoted in McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 248.

Music can be found in every sacred tradition across human history. It is a fundamental practice for cultivating *soul presence* in part because it can engage all three centers of intelligence. The body can be engaged in creating the music, in the pulsing of a drum circle, or in a danced response. The mind can be engaged by lyrics that teach sacred story and sacred truths. However, at its most fundamental, music opens the heart. This is especially true when the mind does not have to work hard to understand difficult text, or when the body does not have to focus on performing complicated moves. When the mind and body consume our energy, the heart will rarely be opened. Consequently, familiar hymns from one's childhood create a different response than a new hymn. They are said to be sung "without thinking" and "from the heart." It is also why sacred chanting, like that coming from the community of Taizé, can be profound.⁸¹ The simplicity of both the text and melodies allow for the heart space to open up and become present.

Like music, visual art can awaken the heart. Visual art has the ability to short-circuit our rational neocortex and speak to the limbic brain. With symbols and images, colors and textures, art bypasses logic and speaks directly through impressions.⁸² Using art in worship, prayer, and other formational experiences can open the heart to deeper levels of receptivity. Likewise, insightful pastoral leaders recognize the role that artfully crafted sacred space plays in engaging the heart. Using cloth and candles, thoughtfully

⁸¹ See "Songs," Taizé, accessed August 24, 2018, https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique2603.html.

⁸² For example, Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey explore how various images of Christ have shaped culture and thinking. It demonstrates the way in which art speaks on the limbic level, and short-circuits our rationality both for good and evil. See *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, new ed. ([Chapel Hill]: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

arranging the communion table, and even adding sacred art around the sanctuary can all open the heart.

Ultimately art, music, and poetry are all expressions of beauty. Balthasar writes, “In the experiences of extraordinary beauty—whether in nature or in art—we are able to grasp a phenomenon in its distinctiveness that otherwise remains veiled.”⁸³ In other words, beauty allows us to grasp things we otherwise could not. This ability reflects the heart’s way of knowing. It is the result of a profound opening of the heart before the beautiful. “The wonder of the Beautiful is its ability to surprise us. With swift, sheer grace, it is like a divine breath that blows the heart open,” writes O’Donohue.⁸⁴ In addition to the standard arts, beauty can be found in the most ordinary material of life: a child’s play, the flirt between lovers, the wrinkled eyes of wisdom, a mathematical equation, or a dinner prepared. With eyes of wonder, we can scan the horizon of life for moments of beauty. When we do, our hearts will surprise us with tender receptivity.

Practices for Liberating the Heart

As explored in Chapter 3, we need to do more than simply engage each center. They need to be awakened, developed, and set free. John of the Cross offers us two primary practices for this: prayer and spiritual direction. “Of all the contributions [John has] made to our appreciation of the spiritual life, their insights into spiritual companionship are second only to their wisdom about personal prayer.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 52.

⁸⁴ John O’Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 7.

⁸⁵ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 168–69.

Explorations in Prayer. For many people, prayer has been reduced to a list of petitions we make to God. This is a much smaller concept of prayer than what John and other mystics have taught. For this reason, the word “prayer” can be unhelpful. At minimum, a clear definition is needed: *Prayer is the practice of being present to God and to our soul before God.*⁸⁶

John would teach us that prayer requires two things: silence and solitude. He considered these the two most essential practices.⁸⁷ “Our greatest need is to be silent before this great God,” writes John.⁸⁸ This wisdom goes all the way back to the desert monastics. When a certain brother went to Abba Moses and asked him for spiritual insight, the old man replied, “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”⁸⁹ This advice would not be welcomed by many today, but that makes it all the more pressing. “One of the reasons so many people are suffering from stress is not that they are doing stressful things but that they allow so little time for silence,” suggests O’Donohue.⁹⁰

Some avoid silence and solitude precisely because they are afraid of what will surface. Silence and solitude are the practices that reveal our attachments, but they also give us space to trust them into God’s loving embrace. MaryKate Morse explains, “The

⁸⁶ The author’s definition.

⁸⁷ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 271.

⁸⁸ John of the Cross, “Letter 8,” *The Collected Works*, 742.

⁸⁹ Gregory Mayers, *Listen to the Desert: Secrets of Spiritual Maturity from the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2014), 1.

⁹⁰ John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 109.

primary ingredients for spiritual attentiveness are time and space. Enough time is needed to experience rest and openness with God. A quiet and reflective space is necessary to minimize distractions and allow the inner emotional psyche and spirit to surface. The Holy Spirit moves in us at those deeper levels.”⁹¹

It can be disorienting when the “inner emotional psyche” begins to surface. We often do not know what to do with unwanted feelings besides stuff them back down or cut them off, both of which reinforce our attachments through denial. A more liberating approach is The Welcoming Prayer.⁹² In this prayer, we actually welcome the negative emotions, trusting that they are an honest reflection of what is hiding in the caverns of the heart. Again, Morse explains, “Strong emotions are doorways to understanding yourself and your relationship to God. In particular, pay attention to emotions such as anger, anxiety or fear, jealousy or frustration.”⁹³ Under these emotions, there is often some truth or action that needs to be pursued. After the emotions and thoughts are allowed to have their say, they quiet down and become less controlling. “This is the slow and difficult work of self-retrieval,” writes O’Donohue. “Every person has certain qualities or presences in their heart that are awkward, disturbing, and negative. One of your sacred duties is to exercise kindness toward them.”⁹⁴ The more the heart is liberated, the less “willful” we are toward these qualities. We learn to listen to them appropriately,

⁹¹ Morse, *Making Room for Leadership*, 162–63.

⁹² See Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2004), 135-152.

⁹³ Morse, *Making Room for Leadership*, 164.

⁹⁴ O’Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 117.

discerning what wisdom they offer us. We may also learn to companion them with grace and gentleness, the way we would a needy child.

Another helpful practice within silence and solitude is the Examen developed by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).⁹⁵ Ignatius, also from Spain, was an older contemporary of Teresa who died when John was fourteen. He was also committed to helping people develop a deeper life with God. Rather than joining or reforming an existing order like Teresa and John, Ignatius began a new order known as the Jesuits. In his practice of Examen, we learn to review our day and notice the “consolations” and the “desolations.” These are the moments when our heart was open or closed. Over time, the Examen enables us to recognize patterns that reveal attachments. As this awareness grows, our denial cracks and the journey toward both self-knowledge and liberation moves forward.

The Examen also helps prepare us for the practice of confession. Confessing our sins has become unpopular in some streams of Christianity in part because it is misunderstood. Confession is not a groveling, but a clear and honest seeing of ourselves. It is recognizing and naming our “idols” or attachments. At stake in our confession is our ability to love freely and unhindered. Confessing our sin can be a great gift any time there is a crack in our denial.

Spiritual Direction. John of the Cross was a master spiritual director. It was the primary work of his life. He clearly understood its profound importance. Several of his *Sayings of Light and Love* reflect this. For example, “Those who fall alone remain alone

⁹⁵ See Father Kevin O’Brien SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 75-77.

in their fall, and they value their soul little since they entrust it to themselves alone.”⁹⁶

Likewise, a significant portion of *Flame* is devoted to explaining what spiritual direction is and is not.⁹⁷ “[D]irectors should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls.... [T]he principle guide is the Holy Spirit who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls.”⁹⁸

Spiritual direction can be a profound gift through the dark night. When we cannot see where we are or what God is doing, a director may be able to offer us new insights and hold the light of hope out for us. Likewise, when denial blinds us to our attachments, the wisdom of a director can nudge us to new self-awareness. In other words, good spiritual direction develops a deeper awareness of God and our soul that can lead to liberating the heart.

Prayers for the Inward Path

The inward journey reveals that Christian spirituality is nothing less than a love affair with God. It is not cold, life-denying, or rigid. It is not simply a set of spiritual disciplines or even a self-actualization program. It is the pursuit of the God whose passionate love has struck every heart. John of the Cross would remind us that no two people’s journeys proceed in the same way.⁹⁹ The only common factor is where the

⁹⁶ *Saying* 8. *Sayings* 5-9 all deal with spiritual direction.

⁹⁷ *Flame* 3.30-62.

⁹⁸ *Flame* 3.46.

⁹⁹ *Flame* 3.59.

journey leads. “When evening comes, you will be examined in love.”¹⁰⁰ This love is known within the liberated heart. No matter the nature of our journey, the invitation remains the same. “Enter within yourself and work in the presence of your Bridegroom, who is ever present loving you.”¹⁰¹ As we do, we are wise to carry with us prayers and wisdom for this beautiful journey.

Blessing

May you realize that the shape of your soul is unique,
that you have a special destiny here,
that behind the facade of your life
there is something beautiful, good, and eternal happening.
May you learn to see yourself with the same delight, pride, and expectation
with which God sees you in every moment.¹⁰²

Invocation

In the darkness of the evening
the eyes of my heart are awake to you.
In the quiet of the night
I long to hear again intimations of your love.
In the sufferings of the world
and the struggles of my life
I seek your graces of healing.
At the heart of brokenness around me
and in the hidden depths of my own soul
I seek your touch of healing, O God,
for there you reside.
In the hidden depths of life, O God,
there you reside.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Sayings*, 60.

¹⁰¹ *Sayings*, 90.

¹⁰² O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*, 125.

¹⁰³ J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction*, 56.

Whispers from the Journey

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
 We are quite naturally impatient in everything
 to reach the end without delay.
 We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
 We are impatient of being on the way to something
 unknown, something new.
 And yet it is the law of all progress
 that it is made by passing through
 some stages of instability—
 and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
 your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
 let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
 Don't try to force them on,
 as though you could be today what time
 (that is to say, grace and circumstances
 acting on your own good will)
 will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
 gradually forming within you will be.
 Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
 that [God's] hand is leading you,
 and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
 in suspense and incomplete.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin," Ignatian Spirituality, accessed August 24, 2018, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/8078/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin>.

CHAPTER 5:
THE UPWARD PATH – GREGORY OF NYSSA AND THE MIND

The people stood at a distance,
while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

—Exodus 20:21

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

—Paul (Romans 12:1)

Mind Bending

Illuminating Darkness

“[A] cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice” (Mark 9:7). Peter, James, and John were alone on a mountain with Jesus. To their astonishment, Jesus became like light. Moses and Elijah, two ancient figures known for their mountain epiphanies, appeared in the light with Jesus. Before the disciples could grasp what was taking place, the mountain was overshadowed with the divine cloud. Light and darkness became one presence. A voice echoed, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mark 9:7).

A few years later, a highly educated young Pharisee led the charge against a growing heresy known as “The Way.” Saul knew every jot and tittle of the law and followed it blamelessly (Philippians 3:5-6). He also understood the power of ideas to reshape reality. On his way to root out this heresy, Saul was knocked to the ground by a blinding light (Acts 9:3). Again, light and darkness were one presence, and a voice spoke,

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). The darkness lasted days for Saul. Once it cleared, Saul began a lifelong journey to understand this encounter. The questions drove him to eventually break open all his previously held theo-sociological categories. He later wrote, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In his knowing and unknowing, Saul became Paul, the first major theologian-mystic of the Church.

Late in life, Paul sat in prison and wrote a letter in which he reflected on his life. Even after years of preaching, teaching, and church planting, Paul wrote longingly, “I want to *know* Christ... and become like him” (Philippians 3:10, emphasis mine). He recognized the unending nature of this desire. God is always more than we can understand and invites us to become more than we are. “Not that I have already obtained this,” Paul continued (3:12). Still, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly [literally “upward”] call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14). Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-395) repeatedly referenced this passage from Paul to explain the upward journey.¹ It is a never-ending process in which the mind is drawn into the divine presence beyond comprehension.

Gregory and Paul both recognized the same paradox that Peter, James, and John encountered on the mountain with Jesus. The more our minds are illuminated with the divine truth, the more they are moved to both understanding and unknowing. The light and the cloud are one and the same presence. Both invite us into a deeper awareness of

¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 141.

the incomprehensible God. Both light and darkness are essential qualities of the upward path in which the mind opens to God.

Thoughts on Thinking

The human ability to think, reason, learn, and draw new conclusions is a remarkable faculty. It enables us to add to past discoveries and solve new problems. As explored in Chapter 1, the Scientific Revolution, with its emphasis on reason and logic, led to a vast array of insights into our world. In the Christian household, it laid the foundation for critical scholarship that gave new ways of understanding the scriptures. Thinking critically, asking questions, learning, and studying are all gifts of the mind's way of knowing.

While the mind has taken a supreme role in modern times, valuing the mind is nothing new. Moses emphasized the importance of teaching the next generation.² The wisdom of Proverbs includes many sayings directed to the mind, such as, "Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still."³ Jesus' last words to the disciples in Matthew emphasized the importance of teaching.⁴ The intellect has always been one way that human beings encounter God.

Unfortunately, the Western Church's thoughts about thinking have become skewed. In more conservative streams of the Church, there is deep skepticism around academia. Any learning outside their particular theological or hermeneutical stream is

² Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

³ Proverbs 9:9 (NIV).

⁴ Matthew 28:20.

seen as a threat and rejected out of hand. In liberal streams of the Church, rationalism and a hermeneutic of skepticism often reduce both the beauty of the scriptures and the life-giving power of orthodox Christian doctrines. Both conservative and liberal branches of the Church fall prey to different kinds of intellectual rigidity. They are locked in particular mental paradigms, lacking any life-giving imagination. Intellectual rigidity fundamentally fails to recognize the limits of the mind. It suffers from a mixture of pride and naiveté that repeatedly (even if unintentionally) reduce God to particular paradigms. While the intellect enables us to reach out and touch God, it can never comprehend God. The French mathematician and scientist Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) explains, “Reason’s last step is to recognize that an infinity of things surpass it.”⁵ God is the infinity beyond the confines of reason. God is neither rational nor irrational; God is suprarational. “All religious traditions have universally insisted that religious life cannot be done with the mind alone,” explains Cynthia Bourgeault.⁶ Knowing God involves the intellect but takes us beyond the intellect. Ursula King writes, “[T]he mind can progress even further toward the contemplation of God, and yet the more one knows of God, the greater becomes the mystery, the ‘darkness,’ the hiddenness of God’s face.”⁷

One of the greatest minds of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein, warned, “We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but

⁵ Quoted in Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 229.

⁶ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 31.

⁷ King, *Christian Mystics*, 48.

no personality. It cannot lead; it can only serve.”⁸ What we believe, think, and reason to be true (both via scientific exploration and theological doctrine) can be extremely helpful, but they are not an end in themselves. The early Church understood this. For them, teaching and preaching had the practical aim of assisting the believer toward the goal of their life, a transformation of their being in the divine nature.⁹ They were never simply teaching propositional truths because, for them, there was no separation between theology and spirituality, between ethics and liturgy. It was all integrated. As Evagrius puts it, “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”¹⁰ Theological and biblical study are not intended to be an end in themselves. To use Einstein’s language, they are “servants” of our life with God.¹¹

One of the greatest thinkers of the early Church was Gregory of Nyssa. He has been described as the “keenest metaphysician.”¹² According to McGinn, Gregory is “one of the most penetrating and original thinkers of Greek Christianity and one of the major mystical theorists of the ancient church.”¹³ Balthasar suggests he is “the most profound

⁸ Quoted in Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 32.

⁹ Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Illumined Heart: The Ancient Christian Path of Transformation* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 27.

¹⁰ Quoted in Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 184.

¹¹ Hans Boersma makes this point. “[D]octrinal reflection on the beatific vision was, by default, deliberation on the spiritual telos of human existence.” Hans Boersma, “Becoming Human in the Face of God: Gregory of Nyssa’s Unending Search for the Beatific Vision,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 2 (April 2015): 131–32.

¹² Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 337.

¹³ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 139.

Greek philosopher of the Christian era.”¹⁴ Gregory was highly involved in the theological debates of his day and developed some of the most important philosophical breakthroughs in the history of Christianity. At the same time, like Pascal and Einstein after him, he insisted on the limits of rationalism.¹⁵ In order to break free of intellectual rigidity and develop a spiritually robust understanding of the life of the mind, we will follow Gregory on the upward journey into the illuminating darkness.

Gregory of Nyssa Guides the Way

Trail Blazer

Gregory lived, wrote, and died all within the fourth century. It was a time when Christianity was trying to prove its intellectual credibility to a highly cultured world. After emerging from an era of persecution, it was critical for Christianity to demonstrate that its beliefs were more than a series of folk stories. In 325, the first ecumenical council of the Church was held in Nicaea. There, key Christological debates came to an initial conclusion, but the theo-philosophical debates surrounding Christian belief continued to rage on throughout the century.

Gregory was born in Cappadocia just a few years after the Counsel of Nicaea. He was educated in the classics of Greek culture, and in his thirties, Gregory became a teacher of rhetoric. However, the greatest influences on Gregory were two of his nine

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁵ Clement explains, “Against Eunomius, who claimed that reason can cope with all that is real, [Gregory] declared the unlimited character and therefore the unknowability of the divine essence.” Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 338.

siblings, his sister Macrina and brother Basil the Great. They are the reason Gregory finally devoted his life to the Church.¹⁶ In 371, Gregory reluctantly accepted an appointment by his brother, Basil, as the bishop of Nyssa. Nyssa was an insignificant town in Cappadocia. Basil suggested that he did not want his brother to obtain importance simply by the town in which he was placed. Instead, he wanted Gregory to bestow distinction upon the town.¹⁷ Eventually, this is what happened. Gregory, along with his brother Basil, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, become known as the Cappadocian Fathers. Together, they defended the Nicaea formula of Christology and developed the lasting foundation for Trinitarian theology: God is one essence and three persons.¹⁸

As the bishop of Nyssa, Gregory got more involved in Church affairs, traveling to Jerusalem and Antioch. After his brother Basil died in 379, Gregory became the lead orthodox voice in the most important theological debates of his day. King describes him as “the first systematic theological thinker since Origen.”¹⁹ In 381, he won an important debate at the second ecumenical council at Constantinople, a critical triumph for Trinitarian orthodoxy. Consequently, “Gregory’s name joined those of the bishops of Constantinople and Alexandria as standards of belief.”²⁰

¹⁶ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2-5.

¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), xv.

¹⁸ Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 315.

¹⁹ King, *Christian Mystics*, 47.

²⁰ Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, xvi.

In his later years, Gregory's theological mind began to explore the depths of the mystical. He drew from Greek philosophy and Christian theology to make transformational breakthroughs in Christian spirituality. Balthasar puts it this way:

Less brilliant and prolific than his great master Origen, less cultivated than his friend Gregory Nazianzen, less practical than his brother Basil, [Gregory] nonetheless outstrips them all in the profundity of his thought, for he knew better than anyone how to transpose ideas inwardly from the spiritual heritage of ancient Greece into a Christian mode.²¹

By the end of his life, Gregory was more than a widely acclaimed theologian. He became known as a master of the spiritual life.²² In addition to his famous doctrine of *epektasis* explored in Chapter 1, Gregory laid the foundation for apophatic spirituality. A century later, his work had a profound impact on Dionysius.²³ As seen in Chapter 2, Dionysius was the foundation for Bonaventure's description of the upward journey. In other words, Gregory of Nyssa was the trail blazer of this path of Christian spirituality.

The crowning work of Gregory's mysticism is *The Life of Moses*.²⁴ It was likely written in response to a request for guidance in the spiritual life.²⁵ In this one work, he draws together all the faculties of the mind: the power of the intellect, the "riches of reason" (II. 115), the gifts of imagination, and the insights of contemplation. With these tools, Gregory leads us on a journey with Moses from the teachings of Egypt to the light

²¹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 15.

²² Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

²³ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 141.

²⁴ Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 11.

²⁵ Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 2.

of the burning bush, up the holy mountain into the darkness of God's mysterious presence.

The Life of Moses

Historia and Theoria. Gregory follows the common pattern of his day for reading and teaching the scriptures. Like all the early Church teachers, he practices two levels of interpretation.²⁶ He explains the approach at the end of the prologue. "First we shall go through in outline [Moses's] life as we have learned it from the divine Scriptures. Then we shall seek out the spiritual understanding which corresponds to the history" (I.15). In order to make this movement between the historical and spiritual meanings clear, the entire work is divided into two parts—the *historia*, or narrative, and the *theoria*, or contemplative/spiritual meaning.

Book I, the *historia*, tells the basic information of Moses's story. The goal of the *historia* is to explain the actual events and lay out the literal meaning of the text. In many ways, it functions as a basic biblical commentary. Although Gregory's methods differ from modern critical scholarship, his intent does not. Gregory draws from the insights of his day to teach the whole story with as much clarity as possible. His approach suggests any deep spiritual meaning of a text must begin with a study of the text itself. In other words, the tools of critical scholarship do not diminish the meaning of the text. They are the beginning of the mind's ability to know and understand.

²⁶ Robert Jenson, "Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses," *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (January 2006): 533.

Unfortunately, the modern Church has often stopped after a *historia*, as if learning the literal meaning of the text is the goal of study. For Gregory, the literal meaning is important, but it is always the smallest meaning. Discovering the wisdom of the scriptures requires a shift from analytical literalism to contemplative insight. Gregory explains, “We need some subtlety of understanding and keenness of vision to discern from the history how... we shall embark on the blessed life” (I.14). Gregory’s ultimate aim is to imaginatively bring the story into the present realities of his readers’ lives to guide them to the blessed life. Without that movement, “the text would not fulfill the purpose of its inspiration” writes Jenson.²⁷ He goes on to explain Gregory’s approach by suggesting that “inspiration” requires that the text become “about us; indeed, it must *train* us, it must in some respect bring us forward in spiritual life.”²⁸

The shift from the literal to the spiritual is the content of Book II, the *theoria*. This book is the larger of the two and clearly the main goal of Gregory’s work.²⁹ In it he explains that the historical meaning reveals what happened, but the deeper spiritual meaning points to what is always happening, even in our lives. “What we hear from the history to have happened, then, we understand from contemplation of the Word always to happen” (II.119). This kind of reading requires imaginative connections that are not confined by a rigid one-to-one interpretative framework. “If, while trying to parallel completely the historical account to the sequence of such intellectual contemplation, someone should somehow discover something in the account which does not coincide

²⁷ Jenson, “Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses,” 534.

²⁸ Jenson, “Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses,” 534. Emphasis original.

²⁹ Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 7.

with our understanding [that person] should not reject the whole enterprise. [They] should always keep in mind our discussion's goal" (II.48). Gregory continues to try to explain his hermeneutic. "If the events require dropping from the literal account anything written which is foreign to the sequence of elevated understanding, we pass over this on the grounds that it is useless... so as not to interrupt the guidance to virtue at such points" (II.50). In other words, drawing out deep truth from the narrative is more important than being confined by the exact details of the text. The spiritual insights Gregory discovers in the narrative are, then, more important and, in a way, *more true* than the literal details that might derail these insights.

Unfortunately, today's academic environment often insists on detailed literalism. It would disapprove of Gregory's hermeneutical approach, and it certainly fails to teach it. Nevertheless, Gregory's approach yields important fruit for the mind's way of knowing God. This is especially evident in Gregory's treatment of Moses's life and education in Egypt as well as his encounters with God on the mountain.

The Riches of Egypt. Egypt is where Moses is born and taught. It is from there he flees and to there he returns as a deliverer. It is the land of power, education, and status that both gifts and curses Moses. Among other things, Gregory treats Egypt as a symbol of secular culture and learning. Undoubtedly, he found connections between Moses' experience in Egypt and his own experience of the Greco-Roman culture in which he lived. Since these connections are "always to happen," as we saw above, it is appropriate to interpret Egypt as any dominant culture, including our own. Three moments of Moses' life in Egypt, along with his marriage to a foreigner, are particularly instructive for our exploration of the mind's journey to God.

First, Gregory compares the basket that the infant Moses was placed in to that of education in various disciplines. Like the basket, education keeps us afloat in the turmoil of life. “Although he is borne along by the rushing of the waves, the child is not carried far by the tossing of the waters where there is education” (II.8). In other words, Gregory recognizes the deep importance of the whole life of the mind. All the academic disciplines are gifts that guide and sustain us in life. They keep us from being tossed back and forth by every intellectual whim.

At the same time, there remains a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Gregory suggests that some of the philosophy of his day never produces fruit. It is “so long in labor” that it “never come[s] to term” and “miscarr[ies]” before producing any real awareness of God (II.11). Consequently, just as Moses encounters an Egyptian task master beating a Hebrew slave, there are times when a deep conflict arises between secular philosophy and the wisdom of our tradition, or “the doctrine of the fathers” as Gregory put it (II.13). Then, “the noble soul like Moses” is to put to death that which is false (II.13). It is worth noting that “what is false” is not just referring to ideas. “The fight of the Egyptian against the Hebrew is like the fight of idolatry against true religion, of licentiousness against self-control, of injustice against righteousness, of arrogance against humility” (II.14).

Later in the story, Moses encounters a conflict between two Hebrew slaves. This is an image of the conflict within our own religious tradition or even within our own mind. These are the most difficult struggles of all. “We by ourselves are too weak to give the victory to what is righteous” (II.16). O’Connell suggests that the inner struggle “reveals the inadequacy of reason as a sole guide... since reason is itself fallible and

prone to deception.”³⁰ Stang explains, “For Gregory, reason helps and hinders thought’s efforts to know God.”³¹

After encountering the Hebrew slaves, Moses flees Egypt to the wilderness. The mind often requires time and space to move past the competing voices, arguments, and demands of the moment. Moses’s withdrawal into solitude creates an environment in which the mind can quiet down so that “all the movements of our soul” can be “shepherded” by a clear head, or by “guiding reason” (II.18).

While in exile, Moses marries Zipporah, a Midianite woman. Gregory uses this marriage to return to the importance and gifts of secular learning. “[T]here are certain things derived from profane education which should not be rejected when we propose to give birth to virtue. Indeed moral and natural philosophy may become at certain times a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way” (II.38).

A similar sentiment appears once Moses is back in Egypt delivering the Hebrews out of slavery. Gregory says that the riches taken from Egypt by the Hebrews were not primarily material. They were “the wealth of pagan learning,” including “such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else [will be useful when] the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason” (II.115). Gregory goes on to emphasize that many Christians have been able to use their secular skills and education for the building up of the Church.

³⁰ Patrick F. O’Connell, “The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28, no. 4 (1983): 304.

³¹ Charles M. Stang, “Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), 169.

It is clear that Gregory values a broad and deep education. All the capacities of the mind can become great gifts when the Church learns how to engage them with wisdom. Truth, if it is true, is always of God. It does not matter whether it is learned in “Egypt” or in the Hebrew camp. However, the mind’s journey to God does require discernment. “[Gregory] recommends neither outright rejection nor whole-hearted endorsement, but a nuanced response in which profane learning has a necessary but subordinate status.”³² This nuanced response is one the Church today has struggled to navigate, as mentioned above. In its uneasy relationship to the life of the mind, more conservative traditions have pitted the Christian faithful against scientific, archeological, and historical evidence, rather than allowing these to be “a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way,” as Gregory puts it (II.38). In more liberal branches of the Church, science and secular philosophy have become like the Egyptian taskmaster, rigidly beating the life of the mind into submission, limiting it from any broader awareness of and faith in God’s mysterious presence.

The mind’s capacity to know God both includes and transcends education. This is what Gregory sees in Moses’s life. “He teaches, I think, by the things he did that the one who is going to associate intimately with God must go beyond all that is visible and (lifting up his own mind, as to a mountaintop, to the invisible and incomprehensible) believe that the divine is *there* where the understanding does not reach” (I.46 Emphasis original). In an unending desire for Truth, the mind is driven beyond the limits of what it can know, up the mountain, into the divine presence. In fact, the mind’s yearning desire for truth is ultimately a desire for God. “[T]ruth is God,” writes Gregory (II.20). It is “the

³² O’Connell, “The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” 304.

sure apprehension of real Being” (II.23). This “apprehension” may begin as an experience of light, like that of an illuminated bush. Eventually, however, it becomes a holy darkness.

Mountainous Moments. The most important passages of *The Life of Moses* are Gregory’s reflections on Moses’s three encounters with God on Mount Sinai: the burning bush, the revelation of the Law, and Moses’s request to see God.³³ At the burning bush, Moses first encounters “the truth that will shine, illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays” (II.19). This experience of light is how our initial encounters with God are often experienced. “[R]eligious knowledge comes at first to those who receive it as light” (II.162). In these experiences, what is contrary to God, or evil, is experienced as darkness, “and the escape from darkness comes about when one participates in light” (II.169). This is what our most common language about light and darkness implies. To complete the quote above, “[T]ruth is God and truth is light” (II.20).

After Moses leaves the burning bush, he confronts Pharaoh, delivers the Hebrews out of slavery, crosses the Red Sea, cleanses the bitter waters at Marah, eats the manna in the wilderness, and more. Gregory interprets each of these events as different kinds of spiritual work. Now, when Moses returns to the mountain, he will have a very different and more profound experience of God. God comes in a cloud and thick darkness. Gregory emphasizes that Moses is only ready for this ascent because of his long journey of preparation. “Scripture teaches us by these things the nature and number of things one must accomplish in life before he would at some time dare to approach in [their] understanding the mountain of the knowledge of God” (II.152). In fact, “The knowledge

³³ Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 14.

of God is a mountain steep indeed and difficult to climb—the majority of people scarcely reach its base” (II.158).

For those who continuously seek to know God, the mind’s desire will drive them forward beyond the boundaries of what can be known into the illuminating darkness.

For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence’s yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. (II.163)

Unlike early experiences of darkness, this darkness is not false or evil. It is the consuming presence of the God beyond limits, definitions, or human constraint. It is the Truth in which all truth exists.

Divine darkness breaks open our sacred definitions. It pushes past our mental constructs. Consequently, Moses is given the command that there are to be no images or idols of this God. Gregory suggests that the command is not simply referring to wooden statues or golden calves. Our very ideas of God can become idolatrous. An idol can be any constraining boundaries we use to define, and thus reduce, the limitlessness of God (II.165).

Moses comes down from this holy encounter changed, but this is not the end of his journey. The divine darkness is not an arrival but an entry into the immensity of God’s own life. It stirs more desire for God. “Thus, what Moses yearned for is satisfied by the very things which leave his desire unsatisfied” (II.235). Out of his growing desire, Moses asks for more of God’s presence. “Show me your glory, I pray” (Exodus 33:18). Gregory explains, “[Moses] still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to

capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being" (II.230). In other words, Moses wants more of God than he has the capacity to receive. For Gregory, this is the sign of an authentic encounter with God. "This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see [God]" (II.239).

Gregory writes *The Life of Moses* to train us in the spiritual life (II.319). He understood that what fills our minds shapes who we become. Likewise, Richard Rohr repeatedly insists, "Your image of God creates you."³⁴ In other words, Gregory's apophatic invitation is not a dismissal of theological reflection. Good theology is essential to healthy spirituality. The life of the mind can open us up to become more fully one with God, or it can obstruct that very journey. Moses, the great lawgiver, is a paradigm for the deepest wisdom of the mind. He is "a pattern of beauty" (II.319) who is "the recipient of Divine knowledge"³⁵ that becomes the "friend of God" (II.319). By following Moses's pattern, we too will be drawn into the illuminating darkness where we can "be known by God and [become God's] friend" (II.320). According to Gregory, "becoming God's friend is the only thing worthy of honor and desire" (II.320).

Loving God with All Your Mind

Our desire to know, see, and understand more of God is the holy desire of the mind. Gregory recognizes that desire in both Moses and the Apostle Paul. All three

³⁴ Richard Rohr, "A Toxic Image of God," Center for Action and Contemplation, January 28, 2016, <https://cac.org/a-toxic-image-of-god-2016-01-28/>.

³⁵ Jenson, "Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses," 535.

suggest that this longing will never be satisfied. The more the mind progresses in this upward journey, the greater it recognizes the vastness of God beyond comprehension. Lost in holy wonder, this illuminating darkness is where we also discover the deepest friendship with God. This is what it means to love God with the whole of our mind. It includes intellectual rigor but not rigidity. It discovers that logic is simply the groundwork for imaginative seeing. It moves past formulaic answers into holy wonder.

Clarifying the Mind Center

The mind center should not be confused with the brain as a whole, nor with Bonaventure's use of *mentis* (mind or soul) explored in Chapter 2. Instead, it refers to a particular quality of awareness through the intellect. In Western culture, the mind is often associated with analytical functions, such as those used in math and science. While the mind includes this, it involves much more. The mind center is also the home of the imagination. It is the place where we develop new ideas, discover possibilities, and make meaning out of our lives. Hurley and Donson describe it as the place where we ponder the connections between the seen and unseen, a dynamic that is often symbolized as “the mystery of overshadowing.”³⁶

It is important to clarify that the mind center is not measured by the amount of knowledge it possesses. A bias toward factual knowledge is common in Western culture. However, the mind center is best measured by its ability to both receive and discern new insights. Hurley and Dobson explain, “The true purpose of the *thinking* center is initiating new ideas, questing for consciousness and truth, and living in the reality of divine

³⁶ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 204.

light.”³⁷ David Daniels describes the highest qualities of the mind as “thoughtfulness, discernment, wisdom, and peace.”³⁸ These qualities do not exist in a mind that is locked in certitudes or clouded by mental noise. What is required is a mind that is open and present. In some traditions, this has been described as the *quiet mind*. Riso and Hudson explain that the *quiet mind* has a “spacious quality” without the “inner chatterbox” and restless thoughts that usually plague our mind and clutter our mental vision.³⁹

Unfortunately, “the mind is not quiet and not naturally ‘knowing’” most of the time. “It is forever trying to come up with a strategy or a formula so that it can do whatever it thinks will allow us to function in the world.”⁴⁰ When the mind is restless in this way, full of compulsive thinking, we lose the ability to perceive reality and trust our inner guidance. Our confidence to act is diminished. Fear and anxiety grow.⁴¹ Iris Murdoch, a British moral philosopher and novelist, recognizes this. “We do not necessarily see what confronts us,” she writes. “Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world.”⁴² This anxious self-preoccupation undermines the very faith and trust that is the foundation for our friendship with God. “Trust is the leap of inner

³⁷ Hurley and Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction,” 53. Emphasis original.

³⁸ David Daniels, “Our Neurobiology.”

³⁹ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 58.

⁴⁰ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 58.

⁴¹ Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 51.

⁴² Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts,” in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conradi (London: Chatto, 1998), 368, quoted in Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 45–46. Emphasis original.

knowing beyond factual knowing,” explain Hurley and Donson.⁴³ Without trust, the inner knowing that creates deep friendship is diminished. When the mind is open and clear, trust is able to grow. “Trust is the transcendental expression of the thinking center.”⁴⁴

Wisdom, discernment, and thoughtfulness all require the mind to be quiet but engaged, questioning but trusting, curious but rooted. These postures can be cultivated through a number of essential practices of the mind. Through these practices, our friendship with God grows, a friendship in which our longing to know God is met with a growing awareness of the One in whom we have always been known.

Practices for Engaging the Mind

Study. We have already seen examples of some of the key practices for engaging the mind from Gregory. Study and critical thinking are as important now as they were in his time. This certainly includes biblical and theological study. Alister McGrath insists, “We must see ourselves as standard-bearers for the spiritual, ethical, imaginative and intellectual vitality of the Christian faith, working out why we believe that certain things are true and what difference they make to the way we live.”⁴⁵ However, biblical and theological study are not enough. The riches of Egypt are not to be left behind in our journey with God. The Church needs to learn from and incorporate the best insights from all academic traditions. This especially includes the sciences.

⁴³ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 207.

⁴⁴ Hurley and Donson, *Discover Your Soul Potential*, 207.

⁴⁵ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 21.

Scientific knowledge is the epistemological foundation for most of Western civilization. When the Church ignores new science in favor of rigid dogma, it both loses social credibility and diminishes its wisdom. However, when the Church holds the tension between science and doctrine, it often discovers new depths of spiritual wisdom. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician quoted above, is just one example. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is another. Chardin was a twentieth-century paleontologist and geologist who became one of the great mystics of his time.⁴⁶ In the twenty-first century, Alister McGrath was a molecular biophysicist who has become a theologian and Christian apologist. McGrath writes, “It is important that the Christian church engages our scientific culture positively yet critically.... Far from being a challenge to faith, the sciences—if used rightly and wisely—might even become a gateway to discovering the glory of God.”⁴⁷ McGrath, Chardin, and Pascal all drew from the best thinking of their day, just like Gregory. Each gave deeper credibility to Christian spirituality in their time. Even more importantly, they expanded the wisdom and insights of the Christian household.

Imagination. As important as study and critical thinking are, they are only the initial step to engaging the mind. Just like Gregory’s *historia*, study is simply the prelude to deeper and more profound insights. The great gift of the mind is not simply its ability to learn as many facts as possible. Rather, it is to enable new, imaginative ways of seeing the world. Albert Einstein suggests, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For

⁴⁶ For more, see Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Ursula King, *Pierre Teilhard De Chardin: Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁴⁷ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 118.

knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”⁴⁸ The Western Church is used to valuing the intellect. However, it has too often neglected the essential faculty of the imagination. “[O]ur problem is not an overactive imagination. The real threat is a lack of imagination,” writes Brandon O’Brien.⁴⁹ In order for the Church to fully engage the mind in the journey to God, it needs to recover a robust practice of imagination.

The imagination is our God-given faculty for seeing new possibilities. “[I]magination is not the opposite of reality or the enemy of truth,” explains O’Brien.⁵⁰ It is the way in which we make meaning. Thomas Merton describes it this way: “Imagination is the creative task of making symbols, joining things together in such a way that they throw new light on each other and on everything around them. The imagination is a discovering faculty, a faculty for seeing relationships, for seeing meanings that are special and even quite new.”⁵¹

For Gregory, the point of the *historia* was always to get to the imaginative meaning of the *theoria*. Gregory’s hermeneutical approach was not unique. It was shared throughout the early Church. Unfortunately, it has been lost in much of our engagement with the scriptures today. Anneke Viljoen laments, “[B]iblical scholars are more inclined

⁴⁸ “Albert Einstein, Quotable Quotes,” Goodreads, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/556030-imagination-is-more-important-than-knowledge-for-knowledge-is-limited>.

⁴⁹ Brandon O’Brien, “Can You Imagine?” *Christianity Today*, July 26, 2011, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/theology/canyouimagine.html>.

⁵⁰ Brandon O’Brien, “Can You Imagine?”

⁵¹ Thomas Merton, quoted in Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, xiv.

to focus their engagement with the text on the rational aspects of the text to the detriment of the imaginal engagement.”⁵² In the attempt to determine a single accurate interpretation of a passage of scripture, the transformational possibilities are neglected and the scriptures become reduced. “[W]e do ourselves an enormous disservice when we ignore the imagination (whether intentionally or accidentally) and only develop the intellect. For the intellect is only half the equation. Imagination is the partner of the intellect.”⁵³

Walter Brueggemann has repeatedly called for a deeper engagement of the imagination in biblical interpretation. “The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*,” he writes.⁵⁴ In another work, he explains why this is so. “If we wish to have transformed obedience (i.e., more faithful, responsive listening), then we must be summoned to an alternative imagination, in order that we may imagine the world and ourselves differently.”⁵⁵ Brueggemann challenges the Church to recognize that the imagination is the only way we can break free of our current patterns of living. People are entrenched by the social consciousness they live in. Imagination offers us a way to break out of that entrenchment.⁵⁶ Preaching, then, must be centered on the task of reshaping the imagination.

⁵² Anneke Viljoen, “Theological Imagination as Hermeneutical Device: Exploring the Hermeneutical Contribution of an Imaginal Engagement with the Text,” *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1.

⁵³ Brandon O’Brien, “Can You Imagine?”

⁵⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 40. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes The Poet* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 85.

⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 39.

Poetic [i.e., imaginative] speech is the only proclamation worth doing... the only proclamation, I submit, that is worthy of the name preaching. Such preaching is not moral instruction or problem solving or doctrinal clarification. It is not good advice, nor is it romantic caressing, nor is it a soothing good humor. It is, rather, the ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age.⁵⁷

Likewise, McGrath insists that the point of theological reflection is to reshape our imagination. He compares theology to a pane of glass. You can certainly stare at the glass itself as an object of interest. However, the glass is there to be a window, “a gateway, a means of gaining access to a greater reality.”⁵⁸ In fact, the glass itself can become a distraction, “in that the viewer focuses on the sign, rather than what is being signified.”⁵⁹ In the same way, the imagination can look through the glass of theology and doctrine to envision “a transformed reality.”⁶⁰ While studying doctrine is a worthy endeavor in its own right, “its supreme importance lies in its capacity to allow us to pass through its prism and behold our world in a new way.”⁶¹ The imagination, then, is the critical connection between the mind and the soul. “While we should never neglect the importance of reason and understanding, we must also value the power of the human imagination as the gatekeeper of the human soul.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *Finally Comes The Poet*, 3.

⁵⁸ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 52.

⁵⁹ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 53.

⁶⁰ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 52.

⁶¹ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 52.

⁶² McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 46.

One classic practice for engaging the imagination is *lectio divina*, or sacred reading. This approach to meditating on the scriptures was developed and spread by the Benedictines. David Robinson's book on Benedictine Spirituality lays out a number of helpful suggestions for this practice, including the four classic steps.⁶³

- *Lectio*—Read. Choose a selection and study the text for its basic meaning and context.
- *Meditatio*—Reflect. Read portions aloud as you begin to reflect on the meaning of particular words or phrases for your life.
- *Oratio*—Respond in Prayer. As you read the text slowly a third time, allow the words and images to become a prayer, drawing you to God.
- *Contemplatio*—Rest in God. Stay in simple silence before the divine presence. Like Moses in the illuminating darkness, allow God's spirit to work in you in that place beyond words or thoughts.

Another classic practice for engaging the imagination is *The Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Kevin O'Brien explains that *The Exercises* are a school of imaginative prayer that uses both meditation and contemplation. In meditation, we use our intellect to reflect on the scriptures. "In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius."⁶⁴ *The Exercises* gradually lead us through an imaginative engagement that enables the life of Christ and our theological beliefs to become the prism that McGrath describes.

⁶³ David Robinson, *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 100–103.

⁶⁴ O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 15.

Practices for Awakening the Mind

As explored in previous chapters, each center of intelligence needs to be both engaged and awakened. For the mind, awakening is akin to developing the *quiet mind* described above. In this context, “quiet” does not suggest “sleepy” but rather settled, clear, and open.⁶⁵ When the mind is awakened, there is a mental spaciousness that is able to receive the present moment and be led by inner wisdom.

Centering Prayer. One practice for developing this openness is Centering Prayer.⁶⁶ This practice is modeled after an ancient Christian manual for prayer, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.⁶⁷ In this practice, you consent to God’s presence as you gently allow your thoughts to come and go without engaging in them. It is important to understand that there is nothing to achieve in this prayer. The goal is not to make your mind empty. In fact, the thoughts will continue to come. However, the invitation is to allow them to pass by without engaging the thoughts. Keating compares this to boats on a river that will continuously pass by. The challenge is to allow them to pass without going aboard.

To begin, choose a sacred word. This word is a symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action. Set aside about 20 minutes. Sit comfortably with

⁶⁵ See Appendix C: Awakening the Centers of Intelligence.

⁶⁶ This practice was developed by Fathers William Meninger, Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating. For more information and guidance on this practice, see, “Centering Prayer,” Contemplative Outreach, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/centering-prayer>; Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2006); Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*.

⁶⁷ Carmen Acevedo Butcher, trans., *The Cloud of Unknowing: With the Book of Privy Counsel* (Boston: Shambhala, 2009).

your eyes closed and offer your word as a symbol of your intention. Whenever you find that you are caught up in a thought, repeat your sacred word as a way of letting go of the thought and return to your intention to be present to God. Keating invites us to “Resist no thought. Retain no thought. React to no thought. Return to the sacred word.”⁶⁸

This practice is simultaneously the simplest and one of the hardest forms of prayer. Since we have often become over-identified with our thoughts, our ego experiences frustration and restlessness. Many often feel discouraged in their inability to clear the barrage of thoughts running through their mind. Again, it is important to understand that the real potency of centering prayer is not achieving a state of mental blankness, but in the intention of being present to God and the repeated act of letting thoughts go. Over time, this practice develops the capacity to be less attached to our thoughts in situations throughout the day. In other words, the prayer develops a capacity for a *quieter mind*.

Wonder. One of the most important practices for awakening the mind is cultivating wonder. William Brown writes, “Any experience of wonder is an awakening, an opening of our eyes, to see the world anew.”⁶⁹ Wonder is not something we typically think of as a practice. It more often comes to us unbidden. However, an open curiosity to the given moment can create the space for wonder. Brown suggests that wonder actually has two sides: “awe and inquiry. Born of awe, wonder is ultimately more active than

⁶⁸ See Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, 39-40.

⁶⁹ William P. Brown, “Wonder: Stewards of God’s Mysteries,” *Journal for Preachers* 36, no. 4 (2013): 13–14.

awe.”⁷⁰ Likewise, Rohr suggests that holding questions with grace-filled curiosity can open up wonder. He describes this as,

Standing in disbelief,
Standing in the question itself,
Standing in awe before something.⁷¹

If we allow all three standings to remain open inside us, without moving into skepticism or negativity, wonder becomes a means of deep spiritual growth. Ultimately, wonder “invites us to discover Something More.”⁷²

Richard Fuller outlines a sequence for wonder that parallels nicely with Moses’s three great encounters with God on the mountain.⁷³ According to Fuller, wonder begins as a curiosity that suspends our usual way of looking at the world and draws us into a creative engagement with our surroundings. This is what happens in Moses’s first encounter with God. His curiosity is piqued by a bush that is on fire but not burning up. Moses turns aside to see this and discovers a holy presence. Second, wonder draws us into an extended engagement with something that is beyond the limits of our rational mind. In Moses’s second encounter with God, he is called up the mountain into the divine darkness, the presence beyond rationality. Third, wonder excites and expands our imagination to make new connections and see new patterns in the universe. In the divine darkness, Moses discovers the Law, a pattern for the Israelite people to be in relationship

⁷⁰ William Brown, quoted in Cameron B. R. Howard, “Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God’s Word and World,” *Word & World* 37, no. 1 (2017): 95.

⁷¹ Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 46.

⁷² Richard Fuller, quoted in Hardison, “Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 366.

⁷³ Hardison, “Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality,” 365.

with the great I Am, Being itself. Finally, wonder entices us to consider that our highest meaning might require that we begin to reflect a metaphysical or ultimate reality. In the third encounter, Moses asks to see God's glory. After he is allowed to see God's back, his face reflects the ultimate reality of God's radiance.

Cultivating eyes of wonder awakens the mind to new and unexpected encounters. John O'Donohue writes, "When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us... Too often we squander the invitations extended to us because our looking has become repetitive and blind. The mystery and beauty is all around us, but we never manage to see it."⁷⁴ Moses managed to see it. He had enough curiosity that his encounters with God grew more and more profound. In the same way, when we practice wonder, our minds become open and awake to God in new ways.

Prayers for the Upward Path

The upward journey is beautiful and exciting, but also disorienting. It is a path that cultivates *fear of the Lord*. This fear, however, has long been recognized as "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Gathering simple blessings and prayers will guide us into this wisdom. They will help channel the desire of the mind as it moves upward into the illuminating darkness.

Blessing

May your mind be blessed.
May the curiosities of life lead you to new questions.
May a hunger to know the Holy provoke you to seeking.

⁷⁴ O'Donohue, *Beauty*, 145.

May the light you encounter open up new journeys and carry you beyond what
can be named or defined
So that you may become more alive to the unending glory of all that is.⁷⁵

Invocation

Source of all being
draw me.
Light of all souls
flood me.
Mind of all truths
waken me.
Heart of all hearts
hold me.⁷⁶

Whispers from the Journey

In the infinity of night skies
in the free flashing of lightning
in whirling elemental winds
you are God.
In the impenetrable mists of dark clouds
in the wild gusts of lashing rain
in the ageless rocks of the sea
you are God and I bless you.
You are in all things
and contained by no thing.
You are the Life of all life
and beyond every name.
You are God and in the eternal mystery I praise you.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The author's prayer.

⁷⁶ Burt Burleson, unpublished, shared with author.

⁷⁷ Newell, *Celtic Benediction*, 20.

CHAPTER 6:

BECOMING GUIDES

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

—Luke 24:30-32

Speaking of Soul

The guides we have followed along the outward, inward, and upward paths of Christianity have gradually begun to reveal a great paradox at the heart of our spirituality. The Christian life is not something we accomplish by what we do, but it requires engaging the energies of our bodies. It is not measured by what we feel, but it is deeply intertwined with our hearts. It is not defined simply by what we know, but it is formed by the expansion of our minds. Together the body, heart, and mind shape the soul and connect us to God.

When the body, heart, or mind is disengaged, or when one is controlled through our ego attachments,¹ we move through life unconnected from our grounding in God, a grounding born of an awareness of the divine presence. To use the metaphor from Chapter 2, if we continue to pound away on our two-wheeled tricycle with one wheel enlarged, one wheel wobbling, and one wheel missing, our soul will remain distorted. This distortion of the soul keeps us focused on the container while missing the

¹ In the language of the Enneagram, the disengaged center is referred to as “repressed.” The center our ego is attached to is referred to as the “dominant” center. See Hurley and Dobson, “Enneagram in Spiritual Direction,” 52. Also, Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 50.

transformational contents of Christian spirituality—the very presence of God. It also keeps us less present to one another and to our own self. It is the reason we are compulsively lonely and selfish, anxious and greedy, controlling and afraid. Collectively, it contributes to our society remaining stuck, unable to make changes that we know could bring about the well-being of all. In other words, the distorted soul is unable to offer its great gifts to the world.

Parker Palmer suggests that the soul is shy. It is unwilling to reveal itself until it knows its environment is safe and it will be understood.² A kind of safety comes as we learn to honor the holy *eros* of the body, the heart, and the mind. The more we recognize the longings of each intelligence center, the more we are able to cooperate with God's grace to empower and enliven the soul. The soul longs to bring goodness, reconciliation, and redemption. It wants to create beauty and blessing. It desires connection and trust, meaningful work and purposeful action. The soul yearns for understanding and transformational insight. All these are born from the true desires of the intelligence centers. However, they only surface as the soul trusts that we understand and will honor its deepest longings.

This does not mean we are to follow every desire. At their best, each of the intelligence centers can connect us to God. However, when the desires of the body, heart, and mind are disconnected from their true *essence*,³ they will lead the soul astray. The

² Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 58.

³ Riso and Hudson explain that "Essence" is the divine life within each of us. "The fundamental ground of our Being is Essence... but it takes a dynamic form we call 'the soul.' ...Our soul is 'made of' Essence. If [Essence] were water, soul would be a particular lake or river." Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 27.

eros of the body can lead us to meaningful action and soulful intimacy, but it can also drive us to wound others and ourselves. In the same way, the heart can open us to deep connections and guide us to healing beauty, but it can also keep us confused, defensive, and lost. Likewise, the longings of the mind can draw us into holy wonder before the mystery of God, but they can also deceive us with compulsive thoughts and intellectual rigidity. A deep understanding of all three enables us to live from the soul's true *essence*—love.

Only as the body, heart, and mind come together in a unified awareness, and only as the *eros* of the body, heart, and mind are channeled redemptive, will the soul no longer be controlled by our needs for power and control, affection and esteem, security and survival.⁴ Only then will the soul find its way out of the shadows of anger, shame, and fear.⁵ By understanding the *eros* of the body, heart, and mind, each can be cultivated to their deepest purpose: to awaken us to our union with God.

Karl Rahner is often quoted as saying, “The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic’ ... or [they] will cease to be anything at all.”⁶ He taught that we have the capacity for mysticism, for that same experiential awareness of God that we find in the saints of old. We simply need to rediscover this capacity. “Even today it is still

⁴ Thomas Keating describes these as the three biological needs that become our programs for happiness. At times they are referred to as our ego needs. Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 9–10. Each of these ego needs are rooted in one of the intelligence centers. The mind center needs security and survival. The body center needs power and control. The heart center needs affection and esteem. See Appendix B: The Enneagram and the Centers of Intelligence.

⁵ These core emotions are each a primary ego defense of one of the centers of intelligence. The body responds with anger, the mind with fear, and the heart with shame. See Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 51. See also Appendix B.

⁶ Karl Rahner, quoted in Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 38.

possible, indeed it is more urgent than ever, to have a theology and, even beyond this, an initiation into the human being's personal experience of God."⁷ The centers of intelligence engaged along the three essential paths are the needed theology and initiation.

Through our body, heart, and mind, we gradually come to know the profound oneness we have with God and with all that is. Together, they enable us to hear from God and express our soul to God. "Each of these Intelligence Centers offers us a different way of experiencing the loving presence and voice of God," writes Enneagram master Christopher Heuertz.⁸ He goes on, "Can we learn to listen to God in our minds, trusting the silence underneath the clutter of noise? Can we learn to trust the voice of God that speaks in our hearts, through feelings of pain and peace? Can we learn to sense God at work in our bodies, speaking to us through our resistances and our openness?"⁹ In other words, the intelligence centers are not just the way we practice loving God; they are the means through which we experience God's love to us. God comes to us, speaks to us, and expresses love to us through our body, heart, and mind.¹⁰

This is the ground of transformational spirituality that can cultivate the "abundant life" Jesus describes (John 10:10). The more we awaken to our divine union through these centers, the more the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow in us. This does not happen

⁷ Karl Rahner, quoted in Harmless, *Mystics*, 266.

⁸ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 88.

⁹ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 89.

¹⁰ Heuertz goes on to connect these centers to the process of discernment. See Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 91.

quickly. Traveling these paths is a lifelong journey. The fruit of the Spirit are like seeds of possibility that can grow and flower when nurtured. As the body, heart, and mind are increasingly opened to God, we gradually discover the sweetness of love, joy, and peace growing in our lives. Later on, there may be a different quality of patience, kindness, and goodness that seem to be easier to access. One day we find ourselves more faithful, gentle, and self-controlled than we had been in the past.¹¹ All of these fruits are the outflow of our soul becoming more present, more awakened to our divine union.

Calling All Churches

At their best, churches are communities enabling and nurturing the soul's journey into God. It is the journey in which we become like Christ and from which we begin to embody the Spirit of Christ. James Wilhoit insists, "Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period.... Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form."¹² Spiritual formation happens as the soul is awakened to the God beside us, within us, and beyond us. If spiritual formation is the *task* of the Church, then becoming guides for the soul is its *calling*. As stated in Chapter 1, there is a deep need and longing for guides. While the saints are guides for Christianity, the Church is meant to be the guide for Christians, and pastors are called to be guides for churches.

Despite the individualist impulse of our culture, the journey of the soul is almost impossible to navigate alone. Parker Palmer offers three practical reasons why this is so.

¹¹ Galatians 5:22-23.

¹² James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 15. Emphasis original.

- The journey... is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road.
- The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.
- The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.¹³

Angela Reed echoes this sentiment. “We cannot come to maturity without the companionship and support of human community.”¹⁴ The church is the natural place where this companionship and community can be created. As we gather together and tend to our soul before God, we create the very conditions in which transformation can take place. Moreover, we help those who join us to restore their own soul and encounter God in ways they could not on their own.

This is not wishful thinking. Numerous studies in various disciplines have shown that human beings are profoundly formed by the relationships they keep and the social network in which they interact.¹⁵ Consequently, the more the soul of the church community becomes open to God and is formed by the life of Christ, the more those who interact with the church will be formed. Richard Rohr explains quite simply, “It comes down to this: transformed people transform people.”¹⁶ It is past time for the church to

¹³ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 26.

¹⁴ Angela H. Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 135.

¹⁵ For a journalist overview of this material, see David Brooks, *The Social Animal*; for a neurobiological explanation of how we shape one another, see Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*.

¹⁶ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 86.

realize that it will impact the world in more profound and lasting ways the more it becomes a guide for the soul. This is the reason for its existence.

For over twenty years, the missional church movement has been a dominant paradigm shaping the Church's identity in America.¹⁷ This paradigm is rooted in the belief that the Church was created for mission and must return to its missional identity. It has been an important corrective in many ways. For example, it has awakened the Church to a deeper care for and participation in the life of the world, just as Jesus embodied. However, in the desire to participate in God's redeeming work in the world, some churches have reduced their identity to becoming a social service agency or a community center. Others have become frantically busy with more programs. While serving the world is a holy impulse, the missional paradigm by itself has not led to the transformation promised nor has it addressed the spiritual longings of our communities. "[A] missional mind shift alone doesn't lend itself to the capacity building that actually brings change," writes leadership guru Tod Bolsinger.¹⁸ The capacity building the church needs certainly requires skilled leadership, but a leader has to be clear about what the purpose and mission of the church actually is—guiding the soul. This identity is not opposed to a missional impulse nor does it permit ignoring the life of the world. On the contrary, it is the very means by which the Church changes the world. Of course, it is much easier for church leaders to rally congregations around a particular social need than to help them

¹⁷ The idea of a missional church is rooted in the belief that the church is called to participate in the *Missio Dei*, or "mission of God." This paradigm grew throughout the latter half of the twentieth century through Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, and Darrell Guder. It has become dominant in the last twenty years since the publishing of Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁸ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 31.

navigate the mysterious waters of the soul. Consequently, a missional focus has actually contributed to a neglect of the Church's deepest calling.

It should not be surprising, then, that people have stopped seeing the church as a place of spiritual wisdom and nourishment, either for themselves or for the life of the world. In fact, those who still “love Jesus but not the church” are leaving churches precisely because their souls encounter God outside of the church more often than within.

Roxanne Stone, editor-in-chief of Barna Group, explains,

The critical message that churches need to offer this group is a reason for churches to exist at all. What is it that the church can offer their faith that they can't get on their own? Churches need to be able to say to these people—and to answer for themselves—that there is a unique way you can find God only in church. And that faith does not survive or thrive in solitude.¹⁹

Churches will not reach these and future generations by becoming a non-profit social service agency. Other organizations are more equipped for that purpose. The unique gift of the Church is its ability to be a community that helps nourish and guide the soul.

In order for the Church to become a guide, its leaders and pastors need to re-learn the nature of soul, a wisdom unfamiliar to many today. When a church only teaches people about one of the paths or only values one intelligence center, their congregants are more likely to end up lost and confused in their journey into God. For example, if someone is only taught faith through their intellect by a series of belief statements, they may eventually end up disillusioned when holes are poked in their belief structures or when there are questions the intellect cannot answer. Since they were never taught that there are some things only the heart can know or that the heart has its own kind of

¹⁹ “Meet Those Who ‘Love Jesus but Not the Church,’” Barna Group, March 30, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>.

wisdom, they may end up wondering if God was simply made up. Or, a person may begin to believe that God is either distant or non-existent simply because their own heart is closed off. Their church never taught them to encounter the divine presence through their body. If Rahner was right and the Christian of the future will either be a mystic or be nothing at all, then the Church of the future needs to renew its identity as a guide or it may end up nothing at all. In other words, the Church needs to re-learn and implement the theology and practice of the soul, as Rahner suggests. By doing so, congregations can help its members and surrounding communities to cultivate an ever-deeper awareness of God around them, within them, and beyond them.

Many practices to engage and awaken the soul through the intelligence centers have been explored in the previous chapters. However, becoming a guide requires more than implementing a program or a new set of spiritual practices. It requires a shift in the culture of the church. Soul wisdom needs to permeate all the church does. Preaching, worship, small groups, outreach, missions, and even care for buildings and property can be infused with wisdom about the nature of the soul. All that a church does can be examined through the lens of how it can contribute or detract from the body, heart, and mind's awareness of God. Youth ministry, children's ministry, and even decision-making processes take on a different quality when they are attentive to opening the soul to God. This kind of culture shift can only happen as pastors learn the wisdom of the soul and begin to imagine their work primarily as guides for the church.

Angela Reed has written about pastors who have been trained in spiritual direction and taken the metaphor of guide as their primary lens for ministry. One pastor she interviewed "believes that he does the work of a shepherd or CEO at times, but this

involves specific tasks rather than an overarching role. Instead, [this pastor] looks at all he says and does in ministry through a lens of spiritual direction.”²⁰ This was a common theme she discovered in her research. Pastors who have been trained in spiritual direction “are intentionally seeking to become spiritual guides for congregations.”²¹ She goes on to explain that it has become a transformational paradigm and organizing principle for these pastors’ ministries. “What this means is that spiritual guidance does not become just another thing pastors do in ministry.... [A]ll that they do is a part of their spiritual guidance of the congregation.”²²

As pastors become guides for the church, and churches become guides for Christians, souls will be awakened and set free to offer their great gifts to the world. Churches will begin to more faithfully reflect the personhood, wisdom, and ministry of Jesus. To use Jesus’s metaphors, the Church will become salt and light. This is what the world is longing for the Church to be. It is what Christians are longing to become for the world. It is time to begin.

First Steps

Instead of beginning by prescribing a new spiritual practice, the wise guide will begin by discovering and nurturing desire for the journey. This desire may be hidden or clearly present. Either way, it must be attended. As we saw from Bonaventure in Chapter 2, we are not ready for this journey until we are inflamed with desire for God. In an

²⁰ Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 52.

²¹ Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 57.

²² Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 163.

ancient story from the desert, a seeker once asked one of the wise elders what they should do to grow closer to God. “Not all works are alike,” the old monk replied. “For Scripture says that Abraham was hospitable, and God was with him. Elias loved solitary prayer, and God was with him. And David was humble, and God was with him.” In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to God. Instead, the question needs to be reframed. The monk explained, “[W]hatever you see *your soul to desire* according to God, do that thing.”²³ The best question for beginning is, “Where is the desire for God already manifesting itself?” The journey only begins by noticing the desire for God that is already present and calling that desire forward.

As the soul’s desires for God are awakened, spiritual practices become critical. These practices can create new pathways to God and reshape the culture of congregations. Christine Pohl explains, “Practices are at the heart of human communities.”²⁴ Likewise, the authors of *Influencer* explain how one or two vital behaviors can greatly influence the culture of any organization.²⁵ As a desire for God grows in the congregation, pastors can begin to gracefully examine different areas of the church and look for one or two vital behaviors or practices that could make the most significant impact. These would be practices that would cause minimal conflict while opening the congregation’s soul in new ways. For example, the pastor might examine the worshiping patterns of the congregation and ask, “How are we engaging and opening the

²³ Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 32. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), chap. 1, “Sorting Out What’s Going On,” Kindle.

²⁵ Joseph Grenny et al., *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013), 36–37.

body, heart, and mind? Is there one intelligence center or one of the three essential paths we are neglecting? Is there one element of worship we might change, add, or renew to connect the soul more deeply to God?” In the same way, pastoral leaders can regularly examine different areas of the church’s ministry. This could lead to one or two new practices within decision-making processes, staff meetings, pastoral counseling, sermon crafting, and more.

Creativity and willingness on the part of both pastoral leaders and congregations are key. At all times, the wise guide will keep in mind that the goal is not one particular practice. It is to reshape the congregational culture and identity so that the church becomes a community in which the mystery of the soul is honored, nurtured, and opened to God. It is a process that has to be rooted in invitation, not force. It requires discernment, not formulas.

The most effective guides, be they individuals or communities, will be like experienced travelers of old who have learned through trial and error how to cultivate an evening fire. There is an art to both building and tending the fire, whether that fire is at a campsite along the trail or back home in the hearth. Too much wood tightly packed together and the fire will never get started. Too little or spread out and the initial flames will die out before any lasting coals have been made. There are times for small and simple pieces of wood and times for heavier logs. There are times to actively tend the fire and times to enjoy its heat. There are times to add wood and times to simply stoke what is there. But the goal is always the same: to nurture the fire so that it is able to offer its gifts—light and heat, warmth and a good meal. The same is true of tending the soul, whether that is the soul of a person or the soul of a community. It requires experience and

wisdom. It involves both regular attention and space to be. There are times for simpler practices and times for weightier practices. But the goal is always the same: that our souls become enflamed with the life of God.

In one of the ancient desert stories, an experienced teacher, Abbot Lot, came to an even more wise and experienced monk, Abbot Joseph, asking for guidance. “Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, and my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence: and according as I am able, I strive to cleanse my heart of thoughts: now what more should I do?” Abbot Joseph did not reply with words. Instead he stood up, stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. Then he asked the essential question, “Why not be totally changed into fire?”²⁶ This is the invitation of Christian spirituality. It is what our souls long for. It is the Church’s deepest calling. As our souls journey the outward, inward, and upward paths, we too can become all aflame: awakened to our union with God, enlivened by the Spirit of God, enacting the shalom of God.

²⁶ Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 105.

APPENDIX A:

EROS AND AGAPE – QUALITIES OF DIVINE LOVE

Protestant Christians have often been averse to the idea of *eros* as a positive attribute of our love for God. Anders Nygren’s work *Agape and Eros*¹ was especially influential in dismantling the traditional use of *eros*. Nygren argued that Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and the vast array of Medieval theologians who equated *eros* with God’s love did not understand the Christian ideal of *agape*.² He insisted that *eros* is a self-seeking love and *agape* is a self-giving love. To Nygren, the two are fundamentally opposed to one another. Consequently, “[n]o compromises or synthesis between *eros* and *agape* is possible.”³ C. S. Lewis continues this pattern of distinction using the terms “Need-love” and “Gift-love.”⁴ Lewis describes *eros* as powerful, dangerous, and in need of ruling. Charity, or *agape*, is the one that should do this ruling.⁵ In other words, any love that is rooted in yearning or desire is fundamentally less than what Lewis, Nygren, and others suggest is the Christian ideal of love—*agape*, or pure self-giving.

This rejection of *eros* is bolstered by two arguments. First, the word *eros* does not appear in the Greek New Testament and only appears twice in the Septuagint, the Greek

¹ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

² Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Love, the Pope, and C.S. Lewis,” *First Things*, January 2007, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/001-love-the-pope-and-cs-lewis>.

³ Dulles, “Love, the Pope, and C.S. Lewis.”

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Reissue edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017).

⁵ Steven Grimwood, “Beyond the Four Loves,” *Theology & Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (September 2002): 89.

Old Testament. Second, the use of *eros* by Origen, Dionysius, throughout the Middle Ages, and continued by some modern Catholic teachers like Rolheiser is a result of sublimating sexual urges in a tradition that glorifies celibacy and demands it of its clergy. According to this argument, the use of *eros* is both a misunderstanding of pure love and a result of the demonization of sexuality.

These arguments have created a dichotomy between *eros* and *agape*. They suggest one is self-serving and thus selfish; the other self-giving and generous. One is secular, and the other is biblical. One originates in our base human urges, and the other originates in God. One we are saved from; the other we are saved for. Robert Adams explains, “[T]he contrast between *Agape* and *Eros* is popularly seen as a special case of the contrast between altruism and self-interest. *Agape*, Christian love, is identified with benevolence, and *Eros* is identified with self-interested desire.”⁶

These unfortunate dichotomies, initiated by Anders Nygren, are both destructive and fundamentally flawed understandings of both *agape* and *eros*. “The conception of love, and particularly of *Eros*, has suffered much from being forced into this dichotomy,” Adams suggests.⁷ Likewise, McGinn notes that even Plato did not understand *eros* as primarily a selfish love. “Plato’s notion of love is not purely egotistical and self-serving, as Anders Nygren claimed; rather, true *eros* is love for the Good that seeks to beget the good, either the good of human offspring or of virtue.”⁸ In other words, the desire or yearning of *eros* is primarily a desire to be in relationship with ultimate goodness, and to

⁶ Robert M. Adams, “Pure Love,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8, no. 1 (1980): 95.

⁷ Adams, “Pure Love,” 95.

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 27.

become a conduit of The Good. Adams goes on to make the case that *eros* is necessary for love to include a quality of relationship. “The central case of *Eros* is passionate desire for a personal relationship.”⁹ Adams explains that if *agape* love is simply “benevolence,” then no relationship is required. “The benevolent person need not care who promotes the well-being of the one whom he wishes well, so long as it is promoted.”¹⁰

Certainly, the biblical use of *agape* involves more than impersonal benevolence or even self-giving without regard for relationship. The biblical witness is that God *longs* to be in relationship. God is described as a jealous husband (Jeremiah 2:1-3, 5), loving father (Luke 11:12), caring mother (Isaiah 66:13, Matthew 23:37), and sacrificial groom (Ephesians 5:25-27). Consequently, the *agape* of the Bible must include both benevolence and the desire for relationship, a desire that is the essence of *eros*. “*Eros* and *Agape* are not opposites. *Eros* is generally present as a strand in love,” explains Adams. He goes on, “*Agape* includes a sort of *Eros*—not every sort of *Eros*, for there are certainly selfish, sick, and destructive forms of *Eros* that have no place in the Christian ethical ideal. One of the distinguishing characteristics of *Agape* is the kind of *Eros* that it includes—the kind of relationship that is desired in *Agape*.”¹¹

In the same way, Origen used *eros* to describe God’s love, not to the neglect of the scriptures, but as a reflection of the nature of God’s yearning to be in relationship with Creation expressed in the scriptures. McGinn explains,

The Christian belief in a transcendent God who “chooses” (however we understand this) to “go out” of [God’s self] in creation implies something like the

⁹ Adams, “Pure Love,” 95.

¹⁰ Adams, “Pure Love,” 96.

¹¹ Adams, “Pure Love,” 97.

yearning desire of *eros*, and hence Origen says “I do not think one could be blamed if one called God Passionate Love (*eros/amor*), just as John calls [God] Charity” (*agape/caritas*). . . . Therefore, “you must take whatever scripture says about charity (*caritas*) as if it has been said in reference to passionate love (*amor*), taking no notice of the difference in terms; for the same meaning is conveyed by both.”¹²

Eros, then, is an essential quality of biblical *agape*, the quality of yearning desire for relationship. When we remove the quality of *eros* from *agape*, we reduce the quality of God’s love for the world. Self-giving without desire for relationship can become nothing more than resigned obligation, or, worse, an unhealthy disregard for one’s own well-being. In other words, *agape* without *eros* is potentially anemic, cold, lifeless, and destructive.

Regarding sexuality, the celibate tradition of the mystics certainly redirects and channels the sexual energy of the body toward intimacy with God. However, McGinn insists that the erotic language used by Origen and other mystics is not a sublimation of their sexuality. This interpretation actually suggests more about our modern reduction of *eros* to sexuality than it does about the spirituality of the mystics.

The arguments of some modern psychologists that the introduction of considerable erotic language about God into a mystical account cannot be more than a disguise and an attempt at sublimating hidden sexual urges, and the claims of some philosophers that Western philosophical and theological notions of love are erotic idealizations that remove the subject from the reality of desire by making it the basis for some form of mental glorification, illustrate the fundamental differences between the way traditional Christian mystics viewed love and desire and how this force is often seen in the contemporary world. The mystics insisted that they were neither disguising or idealizing *eros*, but rather transforming it by leading it back to its original form.¹³

¹² McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 119–20.

¹³ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 119.

Certainly, unhealthy and misguided understandings of sexuality plague the Christian tradition, as is addressed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. However, the Protestant tendency to divorce *eros* from *agape* has only aggravated these tendencies and created more problems. Treating *eros* as fundamentally different from *agape* has added to the notion that desire at large, and sexual energy in particular, are not holy expressions whose origin is in God. Instead, they are treated as unholy expressions that must be removed if we are to become more like Christ and in true relationship with God. This is evident in C. S. Lewis's treatment of love. Grimwood convincingly argues that Lewis's dissection of love denigrates the body at large and sexuality in particular.

The dangerous implication [of Lewis's writing] is that the higher and purer the love is, the *less* it has to do with the guts, nerves and physicality. The further one is able to "get away from all that" brutish physicality the closer one gets to the angels... Physicality, sexuality, or for that matter any form of love which is intermingled with such elements, can therefore have no part to play in what for Lewis is the most spiritual love, friendship. Further, those forms of love which are linked to the body are rendered unclean—they are shot through with abjection.¹⁴

On the other hand, Origen and others who expressed our spirituality in terms of *eros* enable us to recognize the mystical connection between our sexual energies and our relationship with God. All love and yearning originate in God's yearning for us and is a reflection of our deep desire for union with God. According to McGinn, Origen "agreed with Plato and the other sages that although *eros* is usually experienced in relation to a human love, it is in reality a heavenly force: 'the power of love is none other than that which leads the soul from earth to the lofty heights of heaven, and... the highest beatitude can only be attained under the stimulus of love's desire.'"¹⁵ At its best, this idea does not

¹⁴ Grimwood, "Beyond the Four Loves," 94. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 119.

imply that spiritual maturity, or the Beatific vision, is achieved by repressing our sexuality. Instead, healthy sexuality becomes a vibrant expression of our spirituality (as explored in Chapter 3). It awakens in us a deeper awareness of oneness with God in the energies of our body.

In order for Christian spirituality to be transformational and life-giving, ethical and practical, biblically faithful and universal, historically grounded and currently resonant, the Church needs to reclaim an awareness of *eros* at the center of our spirituality. This is not to suggest *eros* replaces *agape* or that *eros* of any kind, by itself, expresses the totality of love. The aim of this dissertation is not to define love, but rather to clarify the essence of spirituality in particular. Spirituality, whether it is healthy or unhealthy, religious or not, is what we do with the fiery longing of desire at the core of every human life.

APPENDIX B:

THE ENNEAGRAM AND THE CENTERS OF INTELLIGENCE

The word Enneagram derives from the Greek *ennea* (nine), and *gram* (something written or drawn). Essentially, it is a map of nine fundamental personalities of human nature. However, it is much more than mere caricatures of different quirks and traits. It does not statically describe the human personality or try to put people in a box. Instead, it aims to help us recognize the box we are already in and find our way out. It helps explain why we act differently in different contexts. It exposes our shadow side as much as our gifts. Christopher Heuertz explains:

[The Enneagram] exposes nine ways we lie to ourselves about who we think we are, nine ways we can come clean about those illusions, and nine ways we can find our way back to God.... It explains the “why” of how we think, act, and feel. It helps us to come to terms with our gifts as well as the addictive patterns that tether us to our greatest interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional challenges. The Enneagram invites us to deeper self-awareness as a doorway to spiritual growth.¹

The Enneagram is represented by a circle with nine points and interconnecting lines that show relationships between the numbers and the personalities they represent (see Figure 1). Suzanne Stabile is a master at describing the characteristics of the nine personalities. She summarizes them as follows,

TYPE ONE: The Perfectionist. Ethical, dedicated and reliable, they are motivated by a desire to live the right way, improve the world, and avoid fault and blame.

TYPE TWO: The Helper. Warm, caring and giving, they are motivated by a need to be loved and needed, and to avoid acknowledging their own needs.

TYPE THREE: The Performer. Success-oriented, image-conscious and wired for productivity, they are motivated by a need to be (or appear to be) successful and to avoid failure.

¹ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 25–26.

TYPE FOUR: The Romantic. Creative, sensitive and moody, they are motivated by a need to be understood, experience their oversized feelings and avoid being ordinary.

TYPE FIVE: The Investigator. Analytical, detached and private, they are motivated by a need to gain knowledge, conserve energy and avoid relying on others.

TYPE SIX: The Loyalists. Committed, practical and witty, they are worst-case-scenario thinkers who are motivated by fear and the need for security.

TYPE SEVEN: The Enthusiast. Fun, spontaneous and adventurous, they are motivated by a need to be happy, to plan stimulating experiences and to avoid pain.

TYPE EIGHT: The Challenger. Commanding, intense and confrontational, they are motivated by a need to be strong and avoid feeling weak or vulnerable.

TYPE NINE: The Peacemaker. Pleasant, laid back and accommodating, they are motivated by a need to keep the peace, merge with others and avoid conflict.²

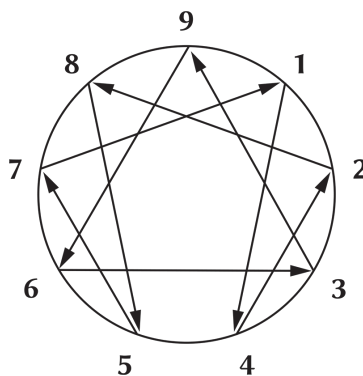


Figure 1 – The Enneagram³

These nine personalities are created by the ways we engage our different centers of intelligence (body, heart, and mind). Each of us relies primarily on one center to navigate the world. This is known as our *dominant center*. It is the center through which

² Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 25-26. Emphasis original. See also Suzanne Stabile, *The Path Between Us: An Enneagram Journey to Healthy Relationships* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018); For additional resources and group curriculum, see Stabile's website, <https://www.lifeinthetrinityministry.com>.

³ "The Enneagram," *The Chestnut Group*, accessed December 28, 2018, <https://beatricechestnut.com/the-enneagram/>

we first experience most things we encounter, be that a person, situation, problem, or gift. We then try to understand or respond to that encounter through a second center, known as the *supporting center*. The third center tends to be undervalued or ignored. This is referred to as the *repressed center*. Nine, Three, and Six are known as the core numbers. They are unique in that their dominant center is the same as their repressed center. This means that they first encounter or experience things through their body, heart, or mind respectively (the dominant center). However, they do not engage that same center in how they process or respond to what they encounter. It is repressed. This combination of dominant, supporting, and repressed centers make up the nine personalities (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Personalities Defined by the Centers of Intelligence

Number: Personality	Dominant Center	Supporting Center	Repressed Center
1: Perfectionist	Body	Heart	Mind
2: Helper	Heart	Body	Mind
3: Performer	Heart	Mind/Body	Heart
4. Romantic	Heart	Mind	Body
5. Investigator	Mind	Heart	Body
6. Loyalist	Mind	Heart/Body	Mind
7. Enthusiast	Mind	Body	Heart
8. Challenger	Body	Mind	Heart
9. Peacemaker	Body	Heart/Mind	Body

The Enneagram is made up of many triadic groupings. The personalities that share a dominant center are known as *Triads*. These are found in consecutive order

around the circle. The 8, 9, and 1 are in the Body Triad, often referred to as the Instinctual or Gut Triad. The 2, 3, 4 are in the Heart or Feeling Triad. The 5, 6, and 7 are in the Head or Thinking Triad. The personalities that share a repressed center make up three different *Stances*.⁴ The Stances can be easily recognized by grouping one of the core numbers (9, 3, and 6) with the two numbers across the circle from it. For example, 9, 4, and 5 share a Stance because they all have the same repressed center, the body. This is often referred to as the *Withdrawing Stance*. They lack the body energy to act or engage in the way needed. The 3, 7, and 8 all are in the *Aggressive Stance*. Their repressed center is the heart. In other words, they are often unaware of their own feelings, and their actions are not constrained by the feelings of others. So, they can seem to have an aggressive energy to them. The 6, 1, and 2 are all in the thinking-repressed center known as the *Dependent Stance*. This is not to say they are unintelligent. It simply means they are either unaware of what they think about a situation or they do not trust their own thinking to guide their response to the situation they are facing.

Christopher Heuertz's book *The Sacred Enneagram* is one of the best resources for using the Enneagram as a tool for spiritual transformation. He rightly connects each of the Triads with one of the "programs for happiness" that Thomas Keating describes, one of the lies about our identity that Henri Nouwen articulates, and one of the three great temptations of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). He then pairs these with three contemplative prayer postures—stillness, solitude, and silence (see Table 4). These particular practices

⁴ These are also known as the Hornebian Groups, named after Karen Horney, a psychiatrist who identified three fundamental ways in which people attempt to solve inner conflicts. The stances indicate a "social style" of being either withdrawing, aggressive, or dependent. See Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 59-63.

each help free one's corresponding center of intelligence from its compulsive patterns.

Heuertz goes on to explore how the three numbers that share a dominant center each need to approach their prayer posture with a different intention: consent, engage, or rest (see Figure 2).

Table 4 – Enneagram, Temptations, and Contemplative Practice⁵

Dominant Center	Enneagram Number	Nouwen's Identity Lies	Keatings's Ego Needs	Jesus's Temptations	Contemplative Practice
Body	8: Challenger	"I am what I do."	Power and Control	Turn stones into bread.	Stillness
	9: Peacemaker				
	1: Perfectionist				
Heart	2: Helper	"I am what others say about me."	Affection and Esteem	Throw yourself down.	Solitude
	3: Performer				
	4: Romantic				
Mind	5: Investigator	"I am what I have."	Security and Survival	All this I will give to you.	Silence
	6: Loyalist				
	7: Enthusiast				

⁵ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 189.

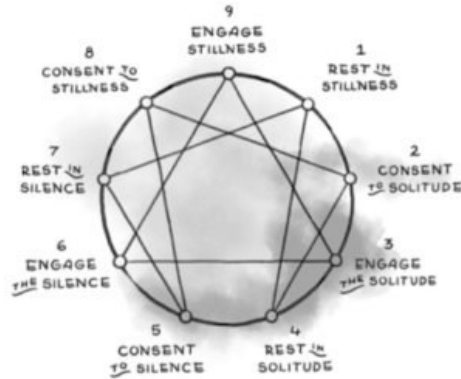


Figure 2 – Christopher Heuertz Prayer Postures and Intentions⁶

Much of the power of the Enneagram for transformation occurs as people begin to recognize the way in which they habitually respond to life because of how they are attached or asleep to their different intelligence centers. Consequently, this dissertation's exploration of the body, heart, and mind and their corresponding spiritual paths (outward, inward, and upward) provides in-depth insights and transformational practices for those working with the Enneagram. It also offers a way to ground Enneagram wisdom in the history of Christian spirituality.

⁶ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 204.

APPENDIX C:

AWAKENING THE CENTERS OF INTELLIGENCE

Each of the centers of intelligence needs to be fully awake to develop *presence*, as explored in Chapter 2. Enneagram wisdom, inspired by Gurdjieff, teaches that our personality is partly formed by one of the centers being asleep. To become unstuck from our personality and live from our deepest essence, we need to awaken the repressed center. Table 5 shows what it looks like for each center to move from being asleep to awake.¹

Table 5 – Centers of Intelligence: Asleep vs. Awake

Center of Intelligence	Asleep (Personality)	Awake (Essence)
Body	Boundaries	Connected with life
	Tension, numbness	Relaxed, open, sensing
	Defending	Inner strength
	Dissociating	Grounded
	Irritation	Acceptance
	Resistant to present	Here and now
Heart	Self-image	Authenticity
	Stories	Truthfulness
	Emotionality	Compassion
	Holding on to moods	Forgiveness and flow
	Adapting to affect others	Inner-directed
	Past orientation	Here and now
Mind	Mental chatter	Quiet mind
	Figuring it out	Inner guidance
	Strategies, doubt	Knowing, clarity
	Anxiety and fear	Support and steadiness
	Anticipation	Open to present moment
	Future Orientation	Here and now

¹ Adapted from Riso and Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 60.

APPENDIX D:

SIGNS OF THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

John's phrase "the dark night of the soul" has come into wider use both in popular culture and in the American church. However, it is sometimes used in ways contrary to John's wisdom. Most dangerously, it has the tendency to be equated with clinical depression. This leads to dismissing a physiological illness that often needs medical treatment. While mental and physical pain can be entered redemptively, John "was at pains to distinguish what God does in the dark night from the 'melancholia' that was the sixteenth-century equivalent of much modern mental illness, including depression (see *Ascent* Prologue 4-6; 2, 13, 6; *Night* 1, 4, 3)."²

Iain Matthew suggests that for an experience to be a dark night, it must include three things:³

1. An inflow of God. This is the entire point of the dark night.
2. Darkness as suffering, loss, or confusion. This can include great doubts and questions.
3. A creative response of faith and acceptance. When we can bear pain creatively, trusting God's love in the midst of it, it becomes a redemptive process.

² McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 280. For an exploration of the difference between depression and the dark night, see Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992).

³ Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 72.

May also offers three signs to help discern the presence of the night.⁴

1. *Dryness and impotence in prayer and life.* There is “a diminishment of consolation in prayer and of gratification in the rest of life.”⁵ According to John the soul finds no “satisfaction or consolation from the things of God, they do not get any from creatures either.”⁶ In other words, the ways that we are used to connecting with God begin to feel empty or even unavailable to us.
2. *Lack of desire for the old ways.* While this may feel like we are somehow betraying God, there is still a desire to connect with God. The grief of the loss of connection is a sign that the desire is still there, and it is the desire that matters. It is “a sign that the dryness is not due to laxity or lukewarmness, in which there is no such concern. The person hasn’t forgotten God, but rather remembers God with great pain and grief. Nor is the pain and grief due solely to depression,” explains May. When it is simply depression, “there are no such desires to serve God.”⁷
3. *A simple desire to love God.* The most certain sign is that a person only desires “to remain alone in loving attentiveness to God, in inward peace, quietness and rest,” without any of the normal “acts and exercises” associated with spiritual

⁴ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 138–41. These are pulled from John’s discussion of the signs of the dark night in *The Night* book one, chapter nine, as well as *Ascent* book two, chapter thirteen.

⁵ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 138.

⁶ *Night* 1.9.

⁷ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 140.

practice. This desire distinguishes the dark-night experience from other obstacles.⁸

May then goes on to give a scenario in which the dark night is present:

Experiencing the first sign alone, I might say, “I just can’t seem to do it anymore.” If someone asked me if I really *want* to do it, I’d probably think about it a while and then sadly admit the second sign: “No, I guess I don’t really want it anymore.” Then if my questioner were to ask me what I *really* wanted, I’d think about it some more. I’d have to sift through all my images of what I think prayer and life should look like. Finally, I might come to what feels like a deep-hearted desire: “I don’t know what it means or how to do it, but what I really want is just to be with God, just to be in love with God.”⁹

⁸ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 141.

⁹ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 141.

APPENDIX F:

THE ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SOUL

The *active night* includes things that Christians today are familiar with. It can include engaging in various spiritual practices such as prayer, study, retreats, and fasting. These would all be examples of the *active night of the senses*. For John, the two most important practices are silence and solitude, as was explored in Chapter 4.¹ The *active night of the spirit* would involve cultivating the three great virtues: faith, hope, and love. This does not mean striving harder, which only creates deeper attachments.² Instead, John encourages us to develop space for faith, hope, and love to grow by loosening our hold on the intellect and will. May explains that the active nights are the ways in which we follow Jesus' example, both his external behavior and his internal posture before God.³ Rolheiser describes it as "Essential Discipleship, the struggle to get our lives together."⁴

The problem with the active nights is that we tend to think they should have direct results. We tend to approach them with self-determinism, like self-help projects rather than a lover's quest. John notes that some people end up more rigid and angry because

¹ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 271.

² *Night* 1.10.1.

³ May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 83.

⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, Reprint ed. (New York: Image, 2017), 20. In addition to describing the "dark night of the senses" as "Essential Discipleship, the struggle to get our lives together," Rolheiser describes John's idea of "Proficiency" as "Mature Discipleship, the struggle to give our lives away," and the "dark night of the spirit" as "Radical Discipleship, the struggle to give our deaths away." For a condensed version of these parallels, see Ronald Rolheiser, "John and Human Development: The Dark Night of the Soul... A Contemporary Interpretation," accessed November 28, 2017, http://ronrolheiser.com/me/uploads/2014/02/joc_human_dev.pdf.

“they want to become saints in a day.”⁵ He goes on, “Many of these beginners make numerous plans and great resolutions, but since they are not humble and have no distrust of themselves, the more resolves they make the more they break.... They do not have the patience to wait until God gives them what they need.” He playfully ends by noting that others have the opposite problem. “Some, however, are so patient about their desire for advancement that God would prefer to see them a little less so!”

⁵ The following are all from *Night* 1.5.3.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, David. *Aidan, Bede, Cuthbert: Three Inspirational Saints*. London: SPCK, 2006.
- Adams, Robert M. "Pure Love." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8, no. 1 (1980): 83–99.
- Ackerman, Thomas P. "Global Warming: Scientific Basis and Christian Responses." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 59, no. 4 (December 2007): 250–64.
- Anderson, Cameron J. *The Faithful Artist: A Vision for Evangelicalism and the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.
- Athanasius, Saint. *Life of St. Anthony of Egypt*. N.p.: Waxkeep Publishing, 2012. Kindle.
- Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Love Alone Is Credible*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.
- . *Presence and Thought*. Translated by Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- Barna Group. "Is Discipleship Effective in U.S. Churches?" Barna Group, December 21, 2015. <https://www.barna.com/is-discipleship-effective-in-u-s-churches/>.
- . "Meet Those Who 'Love Jesus but Not the Church.'" Barna Group. Accessed March 26, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>.
- Blowers, Paul M. "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress.'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, no. 2 (June 1992): 151–71.
- Blum, Edward J., and Paul Harvey. *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*. New ed. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Boersma, Hans. "Accommodation to What?: Univocity of Being, Pure Nature and the Anthropology of St. Irenaeus." *Crux* 41, no. 3 (September 2005): 2–13.
- . "Becoming Human in the Face of God: Gregory of Nyssa's Unending Search for the Beatific Vision." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 2 (April 2015): 131–51.
- . *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011.
- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Expanded ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018.

- Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2004.
- . *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- . *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three: Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity*. Boston: Shambhala, 2013.
- Bradley, Ian. *Following the Celtic Way: A New Assessment of Celtic Christianity*. London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2018.
- . *The Celtic Way*. 2nd ed. London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2004.
- Brooks, David. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. New York: Random House, 2011.
- Brown, William P. “Wonder: Stewards of God’s Mysteries.” *Journal for Preachers* 36, no. 4 (2013): 11–15.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Finally Comes the Poet*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.
- . *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Butcher, Carmen Acevedo, trans. *The Cloud of Unknowing: With the Book of Privy Counsel*. Boston: Shambhala, 2009.
- Cairns, Scott. *Love’s Immensity: Mystics on the Endless Life*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007.
- Chardin, Pierre Teilhard de, and Ursula King. *Pierre Teilhard De Chardin: Writings*. Modern Spiritual Masters Series edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Chase, Steven. *A Field Guide to Nature as Spiritual Practice*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Chestnut, Beatrice. *The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Knowledge*. Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2013.
- Chittister, Joan. *In God’s Holy Light: Wisdom from the Desert Monastics*. Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2015.
- Chryssavgis, John. *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Rev. ed. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008. Kindle.
- Clement, Olivier. *Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from Patristic Era with Commentary*. New York: New City Press, 1996.

- Conn, Joann Wolski. "John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood." *Horizons* 30, no. 2 (September 2003): 332–35.
- Coughlin, F. Edward. *Writings on the Spiritual Life: Works of St. Bonaventure, Volume X*. Edited by Robert J. Karris. Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006.
- Cousins, Ewert. *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Cron, Ian Morgan, and Suzanne Stabile. *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016.
- Daniels, David. "Our Neurobiology – The Biology of Love, Relationships, and the Enneagram: The Three Centers." David Daniels M.D. Website on the Enneagram and Life (blog). Accessed May 6, 2018. <http://drdaviddaniels.com/our-neurobiology/>.
- Davies, Oliver, and Thomas O'Loughlin, eds. *Celtic Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.
- Dulles, Avery Cardinal. "Love, the Pope, and C.S. Lewis." *First Things*. January 2007. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/001-love-the-pope-and-cs-lewis>.
- Dupre, Louis, and James A. Wiseman, O.S.B., eds. *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. 2d ed. New York: Paulist Press, 2013.
- Egan, Harvey D. "Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism." *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 1978): 399–426.
- Eriugena, John Scotus. *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity*. Translated by Christopher Bamford. 2d ed. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2001.
- Evans, Rachel Held. *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015.
- Grenny, Joseph, Kerry Patterson, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*. 2d ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013.
- Grimwood, Steven. "Beyond the Four Loves." *Theology & Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (September 2002): 87–109.
- Gurdjieff, G. I. *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson: All and Everything, First Series*. Rev. ed. New York: Penguin, 2006.

- Hardison, William B. "Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 361–66.
- Harmless, William. *Mystics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Heuertz, Christopher L. *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.
- Howard, Cameron B. R. "Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World." *Word & World* 37, no. 1 (2017): 94–96.
- Howells, Edward. "Spanish Mysticism and Religious Renewal: Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Julia A. Lamm, 422–36. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012.
- Hughes, Kevin L. "Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Julia A. Lamm, 282–96. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2017.
- Hurley, Kathleen, and Theodore Dobson. "Enneagram in Spiritual Direction: Going Deeper to the Three Centers." *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International* 4, no. 2 (May 1998): 44–54.
- Hurley, Kathy, and Theodorre Donson. *Discover Your Soul Potential: Using the Enneagram to Awaken Spiritual Vitality*. Lakewood, CO: WindWalker Press, 2012. Kindle
- Ignatius of Loyola, Saint. *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*. Edited by S. J. George E. Ganss. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014.
- Jenson, Robert. "Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses." *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (January 2006): 533–37.
- John of the Cross, Saint. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 1991.
- Jones, Tony, and Phyllis Tickle. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Jones, W. Paul. *The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002.
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart*. 20th Anniversary edition. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- . *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.
- King, Ursula. *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the Ages*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001.
- LaNave, Gregory. “Knowing God through and in All Things: A Proposal for Reading Bonaventure’s ‘Itinerarium Mentis in Deum.’” *Franciscan Studies* 67 (2009): 267–99.
- Lane, Belden C. *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. Reissue edition. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017.
- Lewis, Thomas, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. *A General Theory of Love*. New York: Vintage, 2000.
- Lipka, Michael, and Claire Gecewicz. “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual but Not Religious.” Pew Research Center (blog), September 6, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>.
- MacLean, P. D. *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions*. New York: Plenum Press, 1990.
- Macquarrie, John. *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Marshall, Rosalind K. *Columba’s Iona: A New History by Rosalind K. Marshall*. Highland, Scotland: Sandstone Press, 2014.
- Mattes, Mark C. “Review of *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, by Gerald McDermott.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2002): 119–122.
- Matthew, Iain. *The Impact of God*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.
- Mathewes-Green, Frederica. *The Illumined Heart: The Ancient Christian Path of Transformation*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006.
- May, Gerald G. *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005.

- . *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992.
- Mayers, Gregory. *Listen to the Desert: Secrets of Spiritual Maturity from the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2014.
- McGinn, Bernard. *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017.
- . *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200-1350*. 2d ed. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.
- . *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991.
- . *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.
- McGrath, Alister. *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.
- McIntosh, Kenneth. *Water from an Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life*. Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2011.
- McKnight, Scott. "Burnout for Pastors." Jesus Creed (blog), August 13, 2007. <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/jesuscreed/2007/08/burnout-for-pastors.html>.
- Meredith, Anthony. *Gregory of Nyssa*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Merton, Thomas. *The Wisdom of the Desert*. Rev. ed. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- Miller, Donald. *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*. New York: HarperCollins Leadership, 2017.
- Morse, MaryKate. *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Moses, John A. "The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion for Ever." *Colloquium* 49, no. 1 (May 2017): 109–11.
- Needleman, Jacob. *Lost Christianity*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2003.
- Newell, J. Philip. *The Book of Creation: An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.
- . *Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2000.

- . *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- . *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
- Norris, Kathleen. *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and “Women’s Work.”* New York: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.
- Nyssa, Gregory of. *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- O’Brien, Father Kevin. *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011.
- O’Connell, Patrick F. “The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses.” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28, no. 4 (1983): 301–24.
- O’Donohue, John. *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.
- . *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005.
- . *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Ouspensky, Peter D. *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*. N.p.: Library of Alexandria, 2001. Kindle.
- Palmer, Helen. *Inner Knowing: Consciousness, Creativity, Insight, and Intuition*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1998.
- . *The Enneagram in Love and Work: Understanding Your Intimate and Business Relationships*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995.
- Palmer, Parker J. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Pennington, M. Basil. *True Self/False Self: Unmasking the Spirit Within*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.
- Plotkin, Bill. *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003.

- Pohl, Christine D. *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. Kindle.
- Reed, Angela H. *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations*. London: T&T Clark, 2011.
- Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*. 11th ed. New York: Bantam, 1999.
- Rist, John M. "Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius." *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, no. 4 (December 1966): 235–43.
- Robinson, David. *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010.
- Rohr, Richard. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- . *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009.
- Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Reissue ed. New York: Image, 2009.
- . "John and Human Development: The Dark Night of the Soul... A Contemporary Interpretation." Accessed November 28, 2017. http://ronrolheiser.com/me/uploads/2014/02/joc_human_dev.pdf.
- . "John of the Cross—The Man, the Myth, and the Truth." Accessed November 28, 2017. http://ronrolheiser.com/me/uploads/2014/02/joc_man.pdf.
- . *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*. Reprint ed. New York: Image, 2017.
- Roozen, David A. "A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000-2010." *Faith Communities Today*. Accessed September 14, 2018. http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Decade%20of%20Change%20Final_0.pdf.
- Sellner, Edward C. "Brigit of Kildare—A Study in the Liminality of Women's Spiritual Power." *Cross Currents* 39, no. 4 (1989): 402–19.
- . *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1993.
- Simpson, Ray. *Celtic Blessings: Prayers for Everyday Life*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1999.

- Sittser, Gerald L. *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.
- Smith, Allyne, ed. *Philokalia-The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts: Selections Annotated & Explained*. Translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2012.
- Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.
- Smith, Huston. "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (September 1987): 553–66.
- Smith, Huston, and Henry Jr. Rosemont. "The Universal Grammar of Religion." *Religion East & West* 10 (October 2010): 137–46.
- Springsteen, Bruce. *The River*. New York: Columbia Records, 1980.
- Stabile, Suzanne. *The Path Between Us: An Enneagram Journey to Healthy Relationships*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018.
- Stang, Charles M. "Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Julia A. Lamm, 161–76. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012.
- "US Constitution - Enlightenment Influence on America." Accessed April 16, 2018. <https://sites.google.com/site/enlightenmentinfluenceamerica/us-constitution>.
- Viljoen, Anneke. "Theological Imagination as Hermeneutical Device: Exploring the Hermeneutical Contribution of an Imaginal Engagement with the Text." *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–7.
- Waal, Esther de. *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999.
- . *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination*. Reprint edition. New York: Image, 1999.
- Waal, Esther De, and Alexander Carmichael, eds. *The Celtic Vision: Prayers, Blessings, Songs, and Invocations from the Gaelic Tradition*. Rev ed. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001.
- Ward, Benedicta, and Rowan Williams. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: An Introduction and Selection*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012.
- Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: Harper, 1998.

———. “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation.” In *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, 45-60. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

Woodley, Randy. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.