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CHRISTIANITY ON THE WAY: AN EASTERN ORTHODOX- PENTECOSTAL DIALOGUE ON THE JOURNEY OF SALVATION

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CHRISTIANITY ON THE WAY:
AN EASTERN ORTHODOX-PENTECOSTAL DIALOGUE ON THE JOURNEY OF
SALVATION

MASTER'S THESIS

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BY

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ABSTRACT

We seek to develop a theological means of reconnecting the sojourners of the Way with each other through a recognition of common Christ-followership. Since no human life begins with the same conditions as any other, no two journeys with Christ will be the same, yet it is still the same Spirit who leads them all. This is a mystery which we will explore by peering through the theological framework of an Eastern Orthodox portrayal of the Way and bringing it into dialogue with Pentecostalism and Mysticism. This study seeks to show that the Way which Christ calls us to follow is central to the life of a Christian, a process of transformation, and the means by which the body of Christ can be healed.

Key Words: The Way, mysticism, theosis, Christian life, ecumenism, transformation, union with God, soteriology as journey

Dedication

To the Lord who encouraged me and guided my steps,

To my family who have supported me every step of the Way,

And to my love Abigail whose affection and support carried me through to finish strong.

I love you all dearly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	
	a. The Thesis and the Task	1
	b. Structure and Flow of the Argument	3
II.	CHAPTER ONE: THEOSIS, CENTRAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	
	a. Introduction.....	5
	b. The Christian Identity	11
	c. Deification: A Step Towards the Way	14
III.	CHAPTER TWO: MAPPING OUT THE WAY OF SALVATION	
	a. Introduction	19
	b. Mystical Happenings	23
	c. Finding the Secret Place.....	26
	d. A Map Laid Out.....	38
IV.	CHAPTER THREE: A CONVERSATION ON CONVERSION	
	a. Introduction	40
	b. Pentecostal-Mysticism	41
	c. The Altar	42
	d. Ecumenism on the Way	50
V.	CONCLUSION: ON TO THE WAY	54
VI.	APPENDICES	55
VII.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of the desert, where the sun scorches your face and the sand makes all things uncomfortable, we find ourselves listening in on some of the wisest writers of theological thought. Perhaps we are lost in the countryside as we encounter the potent writings from within the ancient monasteries. The contemplative tradition, whether carried out in community or alone, has produced spiritual elders and wisemen and women in ways which the post-modern Western world cannot seem to fathom. Names such as Antony of Egypt, Father Joseph of Mt. Athos, Macrina the Young, and Gregory of Nyssa are only some of those voices not properly emphasized in the West. Their writings, sayings, and experiences, along with many other Mystics like them, have deeply impacted the growth of the global Christian community, through both guiding Christianity's theological development, as well as by helping to shape the Christian identity.

This term, "Christianity," is not the only name coined by the ancient faith community's participants. As Bishop Kallistos Ware points out, a more original name for the followers of Jesus Christ can be found in the scriptural book of Acts: followers of "the Way." He acknowledges, "It is a name that emphasizes the practical character of the Christian faith."¹ "The Way" is a phrase which naturally leads the reader or listener to ask certain questions, such as, "The Way to where?" or even "Why am I traveling?" Here, we will now focus on the question, "Who is traveling?" The journey of the Christian walk is one taken alongside the rest of the community of faith, but more importantly it is also a journey taken with Christ Himself. It is a path of both individual piety and communal commitment.

¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 7.

This path that a Christian follows reaches into the depths of the soul and seeks to explore the horizons of eternity. It is a journey of and towards freedom. This journey is available to all people, and it is because of this free opportunity that the community of The Way is diverse. No single person has the same experience as another, and so completely unique personalities develop, as well as different world views. With this in mind, we can understand the basis for many events of division amongst the people of the Way, such as the schism between the Western Church and the Eastern Church, which eventually fragmented and split into the hundreds of Christian denominations we find today. We can also see, however, a means by which all of this division can be reversed, for if all Christian denominations sprouted from the same source, then there must be a traceable path back to the original Way from which they came. We may not be able to reunite different communities of faith, but we can certainly move closer to understanding what it means to participate in the journey of the Way.

The key to discerning who the sojourners on the Way are is to understand that the Way is not only a path but a person, namely Jesus Christ according to His words in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the truth, and the life..." Thus, only those who find their identity within Christ and in a life of following Him are truly living out the Way. Not only are all other paths false, but they cannot accomplish Christ's mission: to lead us to the Father. The path of the Way is not simply a good choice or a self-benefitting lifestyle. It is the immediate yet continuous experience of salvation and peace leading to the final reunion between the people of creation and their Creator, to harmonize our spirits with Him once again. The Holy Spirit takes us on this journey of reunification, one through which we are both saved from our past and changed for our future. Specifically, we are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

This is the culminating point of this study: we will seek to develop a theological means of reconnecting the sojourners of the *Way with each other* through a recognition of common Christ-followership. While all who follow the *Way* certainly have the same leader, companion, and destination, none who follow the *Way* trod the same soil as another traveler. Just as each person has a unique history, background, and culture, they also experience a different journey with Christ, particularly because of where each of their stories begins. Since no human life starts with the exact same conditions as any other, no two journeys with Christ will be the same, yet it is still the same Spirit who leads them all. This is a mystery which we will explore by peering through the theological framework of an Eastern Orthodox portrayal of the *Way*. First, we will discuss the importance of the need for theological dialogue between Eastern Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism on soteriology (the study of salvation). Secondly, we will take a deeper look into articulating the *Way* from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, both theologically and philosophically. Lastly, the research will be brought together in a conversation between Pentecostalism, Mysticism, and Eastern Orthodoxy on determining the nature and essence of the *Way of Christ*.²

The theologies of the communities of Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostalism, and the Christian Mystics are here brought together to address this theology of the *Way*. With hopes for a brighter future when the people of God will not be divided by contrary belief but will instead be united and led by the Spirit and truth of Jesus Christ, this study seeks to show that the *Way*

² Because of the great diversity of thought and experience found within Pentecostalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Mysticism, it is extremely difficult to concisely determine a single theological stance to represent each of these lines of thought and practice. It is for this reason we are here addressing only that which is considered generally acceptable within the respective traditions. For Eastern Orthodoxy, we will specifically look to Vladimir Lossky and Bishop Kallistos Ware for a general Eastern Orthodox insight on subjects such as theosis.

which Christ calls us to follow is altogether central to the life of a Christian, a process of transformation, and the means by which the body of Christ can be healed.

CHAPTER ONE

THEOSIS: CENTRAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Introduction

“First of all, Joe Biden and I are both people of faith.”¹

Senator Kamala Harris’ calm yet defiant words echoed through Kingsbury Hall in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Vice Presidential debate on October 7, 2020 was well under way as Harris began her response to the stern-looking Republican Mike Pence, current Vice President of the United States. “And it’s insulting to suggest that we would knock anyone for their faith...”² The reply was elicited by Pence’s statement concerning the upcoming court hearings for President Donald Trump’s nominee for the empty seat in the Supreme Court, the Honorable Amy Coney Barrett. Pence’s comment was as follows, “We hope she gets a fair hearing. And we particularly hope that we don’t see the kind of attacks on her Christian faith that we saw before.”³

Regardless of whether Pence’s speculation contained any grounds of truth, or whether Harris’ response was appropriately related to the statements and topic at hand, what *is* worth noting here is the interesting role which Christianity plays in this political arena. While the issue raised by Pence was one of discrimination, his competitor’s response sought to cast a shadow on the former statement by drawing a religious connection between the people of her campaign and those court nominees allegedly attacked for their religious views. To do so, Harris utilizes an extremely broad term, “people of faith,” as a sort of equivalent to the term used by Pence, “Christian”. Those listening to this debate may have not understood the similarities or

¹ Susan Page, “Read the Full Transcript of Vice Presidential Debate between Mike Pence and Kamala Harris,” USA TODAY, accessed October 15, 2020.

² Susan Page, “Read the Full Transcript of Vice Presidential Debate”

³ Susan Page, “Read the Full Transcript of Vice Presidential Debate”

differences between the two ideologies, philosophies, or religions which each candidate so rapidly introduced into the conversation.

Although the word “Christian” does have a somewhat mystical impact on the political arena, there is still no clear consensus as to what a “Christian” actually is. Such confusion leads us to the true crisis at hand, namely a Christian identity crisis. The United States of America, for example, has been branded as a Christian nation since its inception, yet skeptics now understand America’s history differently. Instead of bearing Christian roots, they believe that the foundation of the US is built on philosophies from the Enlightenment which were brought through further development by agnostics and deists within the American colonies. Many of the Founding Fathers of the nation are thought to have been deists themselves. Gary Amos argues against such a position, claiming that there is far more support for understanding America as a firmly Christian nation than what the academic community lets on, particularly found within the Declaration of Independence.⁴ While most historians determine this document to be the result of Enlightenment philosophical thought colliding with the agenda of deist men, Amos believes that an unopinionated view of both the Declaration and the separate writings of the Founding Fathers reveals that the Declaration is deeply comprised of some of the core elements of Christianity. These include the theological concepts of *imageo Dei*⁵ (image of God) and God as the Divine Providence.⁶ Regardless of the immense evidence of America’s philosophical and religious

⁴ Gary T. Amos, *Defending the Declaration: How the Bible and Christianity Influenced the Writing of the Declaration of Independence* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, 1989), 20. Amos’ research into the private and public writings of the Founding Fathers inspired him to write on the greatly misunderstood opinions and worldviews which they bore. He claims that the evidence is not just speculation but rather is outright factual proof that the Founding Fathers were certainly not anti-religious deists with no strong ties to Christianity. Instead, he writes that it is clear to see that they boldly declared the sovereignty of God and their personal allegiance to Christ. A point he regularly makes is on the evidence of John Locke’s vocal and proud Christianity influencing his philosophy, which in turn greatly influenced the writers of the Declaration of Independence.

⁵ Gary T. Amos, *Defending the Declaration*, 82-5.

⁶ Gary T. Amos, *Defending the Declaration*, 153-5.

foundation in Christianity, not only is the past becoming misunderstood by those historians and civilians with biased viewpoints, but America is no longer considered a Christian nation by individuals across the country. Instead of attributing the principles of equal personhood and individual rights to Christian teachings and Biblical knowledge, they are seen as the fruit of philosophical search alone. It is this way of thinking which has led to a popular desire for a separation between the Church and State in America, both because of an agenda to rely on humanity alone rather than trusting in an unknown and possibly false deity, and because of the great amount of violence which the world has seen under the sword of the militant Church.

The number of conflicts in the past resulting from a crisis of confused Christianity is catastrophically high, many with fatal results. Should we look back to the year 1685, we see the politically charged persecution of French Protestants by a Catholic-favoring government, during which thousands of French Huguenots lost their homes or their lives as they fled to the surrounding nations for refuge on the basis of their specific Christian affiliation.⁷ While they may have claimed the title of Christian, the authorities were only concerned with the people's ties to the allegedly heretical Protestantism. We can also look within the newfound Protestant community of that same time and find a common public discreditation of the Anabaptist community. The main leaders of the Reformation, including Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, each contributed openly to this opposition to Anabaptist theology and action.⁸ The heart of the matter for Anabaptists was the recognition of Christianity as separate from society. To blend in with the world was to not truly be Christian in the Biblical sense, according to the

⁷ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity. the Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 185-191. Admittedly, there were political factors largely at play during these persecutions, but this does not negate the religious influence of an anti-Protestant agenda based on a Catholic viewpoint.

⁸ John D Roth, "How to Commemorate a Division?: Reflections on the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and Its Relevance for the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Church Today," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91, no. 1 (January 2017), 20.

movement's theology. While Luther and Zwingli were silent concerning infant baptisms as the means by which one may become a Christian, the Anabaptists were convinced that a personal confession of faith was at the heart of Biblical Christianity and could never be abandoned for the sake of societal integration.⁹ Though the radical theology of the Anabaptists led them to a stance of pacifism, the surrounding Protestant and Catholic communities denounced, rejected, and severely persecuted the Anabaptists in ways quite contrary to both the pacifism of the shamed radicals and the alleged Christianity of the persecutors.

With even execution by drowning as one of the choice responses to the Anabaptist movement, one might ask the question, "Who are the Christians here?". Perhaps there is only one answer which can be given: we simply do not know. The Church has recognized the issue of mixed understandings of Christian identity for centuries, yet this is still what we see in America and the world today. The sad truth before us is a terrifying dissonance between the Church described in scripture and how following the Way has been expressed in action. Simply put, Christians today seem to struggle in following the Way of Jesus Christ.

This, of course, is a broad statement which covers far too wide an array of factors, each requiring a more thorough study, but it does seem to speak accurately for how the outside world *feels* about the Christian religion as a whole. In his book *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*, David Kinnaman brings a message from the research of the Barna Group, a research organization focusing on the intersection of faith and culture within the 21st Century in the United States.¹⁰ About one-third of people ages 16-19 outside of Christian circles claim that Christianity bears a negative image, and 38% of them feel that Christianity has

⁹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 67-68.

¹⁰ "About," Barna Group, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/about/>.

given them a bad impression.¹¹ Kinnaman reminds us that the Christian community has good reason to pay heed to how those outside the Christian community perceive the Church. The Barna Group also found that at least 85% of young people in an American national study viewed Christianity as antihomosexual, hypocritical, and judgmental.¹² This is problematic. Not only are the up-and-coming generations developing a negative view of Christianity; they have begun to see it as a weapon rather than as a means of healing for the world, a tool of harm and destruction instead of salvation. In a sense of battle, we are seen as the enemies rather than the allies of the lost, for “[w]e have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for.”¹³

We have also found over the years that after people within the Church have faced the dark side of Christianity, many have decided it was time to leave. Multiple public figures have openly renounced their faith in God after spending their entire lives in ministry or as a Church member. One such person, Jon Steingard, was the lead singer for the Christian band Hawk Nelson before he, too, made an online social media post announcing his true beliefs in May of 2020. In an open discussion with Steingard one month later, he described some of the signs for him which signaled a flawed belief system, particularly the behavior of Church people. He stated that among all of the various and diverse churches he had visited, “...there’s this little bit of a sense, like ‘Well, we’re all Christians, but *we* got it right.’”¹⁴ Countless other people have reported similar experiences and made the call to leave their Christian faith behind. In a small study in 2014, Lori Fazzino interviewed twenty individuals who all left the Church to then

¹¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity-- and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 22-23. The specific sample group interviewed was from the ages of 16-29.

¹² David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity*, 25.

¹³ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity*, 24.

¹⁴ “Another Worship Leader Loses His Faith. What’s Going on? Jon Steingard & Sean McDowell,” YouTube, 2020.

become either atheist, agnostic, or to consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). Fazzino found that the atheists tended to seriously doubt their Christian faith due to logical discrepancies and apparent cognitive dissonance between their Christian beliefs and the mainstream scientific community.¹⁵ For the agnostics and SBNR, it was chiefly the experiences of negative social conduct which led to an ultimate rejection of the faith community. Particularly named was rejection from the Christian community for failure to meet Christian standards.¹⁶

What can be said in certainty about these circumstances is that the perception of the Christian faith among both outsiders and insiders does not portray the Christianity which Jesus seems to have intended for His followers. Perhaps those negative views of the Church are credible observations, which forces us to ask why such a dissonance has taken place. Why is the Church of Post-Modern America seemingly not consistently following the Way which Christ modeled? Why does it seem that a message of hate and rejection is beginning to speak louder from the Church than the message of love and peace in the gospel? There are multiple factors and variables at play, but perhaps we find a clue within the narrative introduced above concerning a confused “Christian” nation. If the secular world does not know what Christianity is in its truest sense, then we must ask an even more dangerous and scary question than the former: does the *Church* know what true Christianity is? Or at the very least, does the universal Church really know what it is that makes them the Church? To approach this identity crisis, we will here look into the scriptural perspective on the role and identity of the Church, following with an examination of the Eastern Orthodox understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

¹⁵ Lori L. Fazzino, “Leaving the Church behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 2014): 256.

¹⁶ Lori L. Fazzino, “Leaving the Church behind,” 256–57.

The Christian Identity

Identifying the Christian adherent involves many of the aspects of theology, including Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Christology, Pneumatology, and Eschatology. Because of this, the Christian identity is woven into the entire fabric of the Christian walk, giving us reason to seek out a deeper comprehension of Christian life and practice.

There is currently no singular notion of what it means to be a Christian that is agreed upon across the denominations, yet as we investigate the scriptures and Christian practice, we are informed of Christian identity and the community of Christ: The Church. Theologian, historian, and author Alister McGrath gives account for the major themes of the Church's identity within the New Testament, beginning with describing the Church as the people of God.¹⁷ The key here is that the Church has been "chosen" by God to be a "royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9). Christ is recorded in the Gospel of John to have said to His disciples, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit..." (John 15:16), and Paul writes, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). McGrath also notes that the Church is a community of salvation, living both "in response to God's work of salvation and as a means of proclaiming and extending that work to the world".¹⁸ Paul writes in accordance with this, explaining how God "manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14), along with Christ's words to His followers, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).¹⁹ McGrath follows with saying that the Church is the body of Christ,

¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 355.

¹⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 355.

¹⁹ It's interesting that Jesus claims that it is those after Him who are the light in the dark, not Himself, though we might hear it preached differently in churches today. This is a point which we will return to in later discussion concerning the Eastern Orthodox understanding of deification.

citing examples of this focus on the Christian identity within the Pauline letters.²⁰ This understanding is two-fold; Firstly, it involves a personal commitment and experience with Christ (“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” Galatians 2:20), and secondly, it develops a communal embodiment of Christ’s presence in the world stemming from Jesus Himself (“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” John 15:5).

McGrath then moves on to say that the Church is to be a servant people.²¹ Here, we see the divine example set before us all throughout scripture and human history, a history of God serving humanity even to the point of self-sacrifice in Christ. While we are called to serve God as McGrath notes, our service to Him is precisely our service to the world. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and “the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:11) are the words of Christ calling His Church to a life of servanthood. McGrath’s final theme for the Church is its nature as a community of the Spirit, specifically through the integrative presence of the Holy Spirit all throughout the body of Christ.²² Paul writes, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

This active presence of the Holy Spirit has multiple implications for the Church and the world. McGrath points to the Spirit’s presence as a sign of the end and the new age coming to the present.²³ We should also consider the *transformation* which the Holy Spirit brings and through which Christ’s Spirit ushers the kingdom of God into the human context. Also known as

²⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 355.

²¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 355.

²² Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 356.

²³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 356.

sanctification, this transformation is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit changing us into Christlikeness.²⁴ This is what Christ called becoming “born again” (John 3:3), an act of the Spirit within them making Christians fundamentally different from those who are not intentionally following the Way. As such, Christians are committed to seeking communion with God, seeking healing for the world through outstretched arms, and seeking to be changed and made new from the inside out.

Sanctification is the process through which the Spirit transforms the human mind, body, and spirit into Christlikeness, yet it is through God’s salvation for the world that this sanctification is both made possible and carried out. The reunion of God with mankind allows for a relationship of healing and reconciliation to be renewed. Howard Snyder defines sin as the “disruption between humans and God,” which according to him creates an alienation between mankind and God, an internal alienation with oneself, an alienation between people, and an alienation both within and from nature.²⁵ Such a condition leads all creation to groan and cry out for healing and reconciliation, a healing which can only come through a relationship with YHWH. Since the original purpose for all creation was for community with God,²⁶ then salvation must bring healing to the broken relationship between YHWH and humanity, in order for humanity to be rebirthed as newly created beings in perfect union with God.

²⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 440.

²⁵ Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: the Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 68.

²⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 112.

Deification: A Step Towards the Way

While generally any Christian tradition has words to say about the questions of Christian identity and salvation, perhaps the Eastern Orthodox tradition has the some of the greatest new input to give us in the Western context. Not only can this help us diversify our worldview overall, but it can possibly introduce some key theological frameworks not yet publicly trusted or even conceived of by the Western mind. For example, Bishop Kallistos Ware clarifies what is meant by the creedal declarations of belief in God. He notes that it does not say “We believe that there is a God” in the creeds, since this would imply a type of belief that is detached from the daily practice of Christian living. Rather, the belief found in the creeds is that same belief you have in a dear friend, to whom you would say, “I believe in you”. It is a belief that says, “I turn to you, I rely upon you, I put my full trust in you and I hope in you”.²⁷ This relational understanding of the Christian belief in God certainly resonates with the former description of God’s plan of salvation for the world, a salvation which comes through restored relationship.

If we allow this framework of relationship to continue shaping our soteriology, then we must turn to the core theological foundation of the Eastern Orthodox concept of θέωσις (theosis). Largely misunderstood by the Western Church, the infamous quote by Athanasius of Alexandria both adequately and strangely describes this theological idea: “God became human, in order that humans might become God”.²⁸ Perhaps Athanasius actually meant the plain meaning of his words, but in terms of how the Eastern Orthodox community understands it, theosis is the complex process of divine salvation and sanctification experienced by humanity through union with God. Theosis is also known as deification, the means by which humanity becomes divine. However, to leave it there would do an injustice to this theology and to our own theological

²⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 15-16.

²⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 271.

search. A key aspect of Eastern Orthodox theology is a constant return to the precept of God as mystery, for He is one whom we can never fully understand. Even as we draw closer to a knowledge of Him, we find ourselves only in a larger and darker room of the unknown.²⁹ Thus, an Eastern understanding of the statement, “God became human, in order that humans might become God”³⁰ is not simple but complex, and not for complexity’s sake but for maintaining an embrace of the mystery of YHWH.

Before we become distracted by the audacious nature of the claim that humans might become God, we must remember that the goal of deification is not the uprising of humanity alone. God’s intentions are not only to elevate humanity to a new plane of existence (nor is that even the primary objective), but it is also to see His creation brought back into complete relationship with Him again. Deification does not conflict with this revelation of God’s nature and plan, but rather it helps to carry it out. It paints the same picture with a new color scheme, for while the Western understanding is more dissected and categorized, the Eastern view allows for more fluidity of thought by appropriately blending the theological happenings in a cohesive manner.³¹

Yet how can such a concept of seemingly non-Christian origin not compromise the truth of the gospel? What does the deifying of humanity have to do with the salvation of Jesus Christ? Looking now to the renowned Orthodox scholar Vladimir Lossky, who was masterful over Orthodox theology during his lifetime, we are given an answer. Firstly, Lossky points out that

²⁹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 14.

³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 271.

³¹ To be clear, this is not an attempt to convince Western Christians that the spirituality of the Western Church is dead, nor is it a push towards the spirituality of the East. As the late apologist and philosopher Ravi Zacharias argued in both writing and speech, this is a necessary concern in the matter of cross-cultural sharing of theology between the East and the West, as many young people are turning away from Westernized Christianity altogether to listen to spiritual voices in the East. This *is* a push for the Western Church to refuse to ignore the theological input given by brothers and sisters in Christ due to their geographical origin.

θέωσις, in its fullest sense, will not be experienced until the next age, along with the fullness of the kingdom of God come to Earth. Regardless, it is still to be sought after during this life as a process for the Christian to eagerly walk through. In fact, he writes that this process is a “transformation of our corruptible and depraved nature” that is experienced through the repeated term, “union”.³² Specifically, it is union with YHWH in the most intimate of relationships. It is not an intimacy of the mind or body, or even the spirit as the West understands it, but it is a union of the heart.³³ We will return to this thought later, but for now it will suffice to say that deification is transformation which is *produced* as a result of one’s union with God.

On this point, Lossky makes an interesting statement on deification. He describes this process not as an act of God alone but as a co-operative synergy between God and the will of man.³⁴ He goes further to state, “This subjective aspect of our union with God constitutes the Way of union which is the Christian life”.³⁵ This does, of course, take on a specific viewpoint on the workings of God in the world concerning the will of man, but it also leads to a fresh understanding of what it means to be a Christian, or at least an overlooked and key characteristic: a Christian is *free*. This is a constantly recurring theme in both Eastern Orthodoxy and in Mysticism, so we will return to this later, as well. In this discussion, though, we want to note that an Eastern understanding of union with God does not involve a loss of the individual will. Rather, it is *by* the will of a person that they cooperate with the Spirit of God to either develop a union with the essence of God or participate in the divinity of God.³⁶

³² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1944), 196.

³³ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 201.

³⁴ The phrase “will of man” is used here not to exclude women in any way. It is instead in line with the language of traditional writings, including both scripture and academic writers and thinkers like Lossky. It stands to represent the will of all humanity in contrast to the will of YHWH.

³⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 196.

³⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 271. The notions of joining the essence of God versus participating in God’s divinity are two juxtaposed positions within Eastern Orthodoxy.

This is the point at which we connect this process of *θέωσις* with the incarnation of Christ. Conversation and debate over the nature of Christ's humanity and divinity have raged for centuries, and while no answer we can give is perfect, the concept of deification allows for a certain line of thinking which comprehensively grasps the incarnation tightly. The relationship between *θέωσις* and the incarnation is one in which they are juxtaposed to each other. While the incarnation is God partaking in the human experience while still maintaining divinity, deification is a process by which people participate in the life of God while maintaining their humanity. The foundation for such a claim, however, is not based in some former natural law which would allow for such an event to occur. Instead, it is widely conceded in the Eastern tradition that the incarnation of Christ needed to take place in order for deification to be possible for humanity, for while humanity may naturally bear the *imago Dei* from birth, Ware notes that the incarnation "is an essential stage upon man's journey from the divine image to the divine likeness".³⁷ Again, keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is reunion between God and creation, we can determine that the need for humanity to be transformed into the divine likeness is for the purpose of a completely healed relationship with YHWH.

Since God can take no part in sin, then no longer will we, nor will we even desire after sin anymore. This complete undoing of the fall of mankind and the rewriting of the human heart are the results of the core mission of *θέωσις*, which is to bring humanity into union with God. While this may give us some answers, there are also now many more questions. If we are to understand what it truly means to claim both the title of Christian and the assurance of union with God, it would seem we need to dig deeper than mere observance of church attendee behaviors against a scriptural checklist. Instead, we will need to conduct a search into the heart

³⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 71.

of the matter: tracing the path of the soul who chooses to follow Christ's lead on the journey of the Way.

CHAPTER TWO

MAPPING OUT THE WAY OF SALVATION

Introduction

“Are you saved?”

This is quite a loaded question for one so small. In a Westernized Protestant Christian context, the question draws out for the listener both a picture and a message of what we call salvation. But what is salvation? How is this word understood and misunderstood? This message can bring hope, but when misunderstood, the message of love in the gospel of Christ’s salvation may be reduced to a religious conversion event. A nurse’s story is very telling of such a case:

I recall a spunky elderly patient I cared for when he was hospitalized for a malignant pleural effusion... While I was in the bathroom emptying his urinal, another nurse swept into his room and asked him if he was “saved.”

His reply sent her scurrying.

“Saved from what? The likes of you?”¹

While the visiting nurse may have intended to bring hope to the patient, what the writer is testifying to is the harm which the question of salvation has brought to multiple people on their deathbed. The reasons why people can be offended by an inquiry into their religious private lives are varied, but what we can see here is the discontinuity between what the hospital worker evangelist believes to be salvation for the patient and the conversion process which the patient believes Christian “salvation” is.

The theological concept of soteriology is difficult to capture in a single expression or even from a specific viewpoint. Pastor Tim Keller lays out what he calls “languages” with which we understand salvation:

¹ Joy Ufema, “Are You Saved?,” *Nursing* 34, no. 9 (September 2004): 29.

1. The language of the battlefield represents Christ as victorious over evil.
2. The language of the marketplace proclaims that Christ pays the price for us.
3. The language of exile speaks of Christ as exiled so we might be brought home.
4. The language of the temple explains that Christ's sacrifice purifies us before God.
5. The language of the law court displays the image of Christ standing before the judge and taking our punishment upon himself.²

All of these angles are appropriate views of salvation through Christ, each of which is hinted at through the question, "Are you saved?"

This question, however, invites thoughts of yet something else. When this question is asked, the interrogator is seeking an insight on the *identity* of the person, namely his or her religious identity.³ The motive can range from mere curiosity to religious persecution, yet if one were to rewrite the question, it could look more like, "Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?". It should not surprise us that such a question, even one which has little connection to a person's identity, would demand answers concerning who or what the person is. Underneath its literal meaning, the question implies the strong ties between one's personal faith and one's understanding of who or what he or she is. Should we venture even deeper, we see that the question "Are you saved?" draws one's attention to the connection between one's identity and the individual's *condition*. Furthermore, it the language of being saved is Protestant in nature and is most common among those who identify as evangelical. To an outsider from these traditions,

² Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 130.

³ This understanding of what it means to be a Christian places a severe divide between one's faith/religious walk and the rest of his or her life and identity, which does not seem to fall into logical consistency with the Christian tradition.

such a question is always likely to be followed by the appropriate question in response: “Saved from what?”.

Here, we come to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. If we are to understand what a Christian is, we need to understand our salvation and what we are being saved from, since it is already clear that our salvation is closely tied to our identity as a Christian. If the goal of Christ’s salvation is the reconciliation of humanity’s relationships with God, with each other, and with creation, then the rescue occurs as reunion takes place between humanity and the divine, through the act of God cleansing our sin and redeeming our fallen humanity. The follow-up questions should flow naturally: How does this reconciliation take place? And what does this imply about the identity of a believer?

Firstly, we must admit that there are multiple acceptable views of Christ’s atoning work. Referring back to Keller’s languages of salvation, it is important to remember the necessity of each of these viewpoints in understanding salvation and atonement. Alister McGrath describes the different approaches to atonement theory as, “...neither inconsistent nor independent... as partial and potentially complementary accounts of the significance of the death of Christ...”⁴ Here, the language of the Temple will be chiefly employed in connection to the reparation of relationship between YHWH and humanity.

Just as ceremonial sacrifices were made within the Temple for the cleansing of sin, the ultimate act of substitutionary atonement and propitiation for the sin of the world is found at the hill called Calvary.⁵ Like a sacrificial ox being led to the slaughter, Jesus Christ’s life and ministry were purposed for bearing our sin and carrying our burdens to the cross where He would die in our place. As Richard Burridge writes, the universal message of God’s salvation is

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 251.

⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 252.

this: "...that there is one who bears our burdens".⁶ Without Christ's self-sacrifice on behalf of mankind, the atonement for humanity's sin would be incomplete, leaving God and humanity separated forever. Secondly, for YHWH to redeem broken creation, the process of complete salvation stretches beyond the initial act of atonement on the cross. While we may be purified from the spiritual stain of sin, the woundedness of creation is still in need of healing, as, "...creation is groaning in its bondage to decay... waiting in eager, hopeful anticipation for God's salvation to be fully accomplished."⁷ This bondage encompasses both the silent creation and humanity, and it will not be undone quickly. Indeed, if salvation had already come in its fullness, we certainly would see a very different world before our eyes, one in which suffering might have ceased. However, the process has begun and is being carried out, as humanity is slowly returning to a union with YHWH.

This, then, is the role of the Christian: to be one who *participates* in the process of God's healing for the world. As a person returns to a healed relationship with God through salvation in Christ, he or she in turn also moves the world one step closer to the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. This is what the scriptures refer to when we are said to be "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:1). This is the freedom for which we were set free: the ability to participate in the life of YHWH in the world, both as individuals set free from sin and as ambassadors for Christ before the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). This is also what Jesus was speaking to by encouraging His disciples to take part in Him through analogy, in action, and in suffering (John 13:8, 15:4-5, Matthew 16:24). In Matthew 16:24 specifically, we find even more details concerning the connection between followers of Jesus and His salvation. In Christ's

⁶ Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?: A Symbolic Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 131.

⁷ Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 85.

words, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...”. To come after Jesus is to be His follower,⁸ and the instructions which follow are central to beginning this Christ-life to which we are called. We must exercise selflessness rather than selfish living which leads to emptiness. We are to face hardship, suffering, and persecution alongside Christ. While bearing these things as our cross, we are called to walk in Christ’s footsteps and follow as He leads us beyond the crucifixion. This cross-bearing is the first step on the journey of the Christ-life. To be a follower of Christ, then, is to partake in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which is to participate in God’s salvation for humanity.

This participation is what Eastern Orthodoxy refers to as *θέωσις*, the pursuit of perfect union with YHWH, and it is this journey of the soul which can help us fully form and develop a theological grasp on the Way of true Christianity. We will now look more deeply into the writings of the Eastern Orthodox voices who speak to the concept of *θέωσις*. They will lead us as we map out the heart journey of the soul and determine its implications for understanding the identity of a Christian.

Mystical Happenings

We must also first establish what Eastern Orthodoxy and Mysticism each represent and what they share in common. Vladimir Lossky writes, “The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church”.⁹ He describes Mysticism as part of all theology since the study is a venture towards the divine unknown, which begins and ends as a

⁸ B. C. Caffin and A. Lukyn Williams, *Matthew*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones and Joseph S. Exell, vol. 15 (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 139.

⁹ Vladimir Lossky, “Theology and Mysticism in the Tradition of the Eastern Church,” Orthodox Christian Information Center, accessed November 22, 2020, http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/lossky_intro.aspx.

mystery to the theologian. Hieromonk Irenei Steenberg, former Chair of Theology and Religious Studies in Leeds and now serving as the Bishop of London for the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia,¹⁰ tells of a monk who gave Steenberg his blessing under one condition: that he begin every lecture with the statement, “The life in Christ is a mystery”. He points out also that the terms “mystical” and “mystery” are very much sewn into the theological fabric of Eastern Orthodoxy, but the term “Mysticism” often means different things to different people¹¹ and is difficult to determine or use in an academic or theological setting.

Steenberg also draws our attention to some of the key mystical moments which have changed people’s lives and led to a far larger impact on the world around them. In his lecture, he tells four stories to convey his reasoning, though for our purposes here we will only observe one of them, given that he makes the same point through each narrative. Steenberg looks at the conversion of Saul to Paul on the road to Damascus, and what he draws from it is an observation of a human encounter with the divine resulting in complete transformation. Despite Saul’s intellectual and religious knowledge and prestige, the direct encounter with the risen Christ reveals to him the true nature of God: one who is “...a person to be known, and loved, sacrificed for, shared, died for”.¹² The God of self-revelation is more than a concept to study or be taught, so much so that a single moment spent with Him changes everything. For Saul, it meant the beginning of a complete transformation, leading to his public recognition as “the” Apostle among apostles, in spite of him never having seen the physical presence of Jesus. Paul was a chief witness and missionary for Christ, yet how do we understand this to have taken place?

¹⁰ “Bishop Irenei (Steenberg),” Ancient Faith Ministries, accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.ancientfaith.com/contributors/archimandrite_irenei.

¹¹ “Eastern Orthodoxy and Mysticism: The Transformation of the Senses - Hieromonk Irenei Steenberg,” Ancient Faith Ministries, accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/eastern_orthodoxy_and_mysticism/orthodoxy_and_mysticism_part_1.

¹² “Eastern Orthodoxy and Mysticism: The Transformation of the Senses”

Perhaps it is in this realm of mystical happenings that more common language could be employed to communicate the deep truths of the divine experience. Brian McLaren narrates a fictional meeting between his readers and an aged abbess, in which she tells us of the connection between the nature of God and the nature of fire. Using a fireplace poker in the embers of a hearth, she shows her pupil how "...the nature of fire overshadows the nature of iron, and the iron begins to 'catch' the nature of the fire... 'until it becomes light and heat itself'". The abbess then declares that the pupil now understands theosis.¹³ For McLaren, *θέωσις* means that, "We join God in being fire".¹⁴

Returning to the story of Paul's transformation, we find out that shortly after his initial conversion to Christianity, Paul writes that he did not immediately turn to other people in Jerusalem to seek out truth. Instead, he travelled into the desert for three years before finally returning and meeting Peter (Galatians 1:15-18). Richard Foster sees this time of solitude as essential for Paul's formation as the apostle he would become, writing that he needed not the apostles but Jesus alone "in the school of the Spirit in the Arabian deserts".¹⁵ Could this have been Paul's time spent in the fire so that he might catch the nature of God? The kind of life which this contemplative sabbatical produced is one which many observers envy, and few understand. Foster writes this about Paul's confidence in the power of God working through him:

But Paul had learned, through a process of time and experience, that when *he* spoke, *God* spoke. He knew how to discern the movements of the Spirit, and he knew how to work in cooperation with those movements. That knowledge produced a spirit-empowered life.¹⁶

¹³ Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 169-71.

¹⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 172.

¹⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 107-8.

¹⁶ Foster, Richard J. *Streams of Living Water*, 109.

Where, then, does this Spirit-empowerment begin? How does this overshadowing take place? Before we understand fundamentally the interaction between the individual and the divine presence, namely YHWH, from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, perhaps it would be of service to develop a philosophical ground upon which to stand. We will now begin to look closer into the metaphysical level of Christian philosophical comprehension in order to find the journey of the soul into the flame of God.

Finding the Secret Place

Every journey has a beginning, including the sojourn of the human soul. Since this journey is not physical, its starting point is not geographical. Instead, it begins with a realization of truth and culminates in an awareness of the soul's condition. There are multiple angles from which we can observe the created soul, though here we will focus on the theological and philosophical viewpoints. Theologically, the Christian understands the truth of the world as having been *revealed* by God.

Karl Barth understood this phrase in terms of contrast between the *creator* and the *created*. At first, the only firm foundation for the Christian faith for him was the existential contrast between fallen humanity and the Holy God, inspired by Søren Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity".¹⁷ Aside from this recognition of difference between the eternal and the measurable, he struggled to find any means by which the truth of God's reality could be grasped by humanity. However, development in his approach to Christology allowed Barth to embrace the self-revelation of God in a new light: created beings cannot grasp a comprehension of the creator except through the creator willfully *relating* to the

¹⁷ Daniel W Hardy, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 21-26, 25.

creation. For Barth, the relationship between the divinity and the humanity within Christ was paramount in building an understanding of God's revelation of truth to us through relationship.¹⁸

If we step over into a secular philosophical viewpoint, though, without the basis of Christ's incarnation or of the divine message spoken, humanity is at a loss for referenced knowledge. We do not *know* what we believe to know, we only know that which we have a reference to compare with. René Descartes approached this problem thoroughly, and although his philosophical statement "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am,"), is both accepted and rejected by philosophers alike, his conjecture concerning the differentiation between a world created as a dream and an actually experienced reality will help us move forward. He explains that while it is true that "...our senses are sometimes deceptive" and are not altogether trustworthy due to the constant probability of us developing a false sense of reality,¹⁹ he asserts also that even the objects of a dream-like state would be ideas and concepts brought to the mind "...like painted images, which could only have been produced in the likeness of true things," allowing us to then confidently assume that the images seen are at least in some sense "true" or real.

Elaine Scarry seems to build on this thought in her analysis of beauty and justice. She expounds upon the presence and meaning of what people call "beauty" by first determining that beauty is and has been thought to be, in some sense, eternal. By observing ancient literature as well as the modern human behavior, Scarry believed that we can observably say that beauty procreates more beauty.²⁰ Whether it is passively through inspiration or directly through biology,

¹⁸ Daniel W Hardy, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians*, 26.

¹⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 14.

²⁰ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

beauty passes on beauty, and beauty does not come from that which is not beautiful.²¹ Because of this characteristic of beauty, one is enticed to ask the question, where did beauty come from? When and why did it begin? Even if we say that beauty is a value assigned to something by the one who beholds it, then we must ask the question, how can value be truly ascribed unless the direct object has value in its own right? This leads us backwards instead of forwards, for it causes us to ask again, from whence does that which is beautiful receive its beauty? What Scarry notes is that the trail of beauty keeps leading us back further and further with no knowledgeable beginning. She deduces that replicating beauty is what gave great thinkers such as Dante, Plato, and Aquinas the "...idea of eternity, the perpetual duplicating of a moment that never stops."²² More specifically, she writes,

One can see why beauty... has been perceived to be bound up with the immortal, for it prompts a search for a precedent... and the mind keeps tripping backward until it at last reaches something that has no precedent, which may very well be the immortal.²³

Scarry is quite clear in saying that human comprehension falls short when attempting to determine the origins of the beauty found in the world around and within us.

We also find compelling insight in the writings of Rowan Williams concerning the habits of human language. While he agrees in the absence of sufficient human knowledge for a provable existence of reality, he contests that our very nature of communicating and representing with language the reality set before us testifies against the possibility of our perceived reality being a falsehood. Since, as he says, "Whatever we encounter is something that triggers

²¹ This is not to say that something good and beautiful cannot rise out of negative circumstances, but even then the beauty which arises does not find its origin in the negative but rather in the persistent good. This can come in the form of an ideal, a memory, or through natural processes.

²² Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 5.

²³ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 30.

capacities for recognition and representation in our minds...”, then it is logical to conclude that we are in sensible contact with a real world, “...giving itself to be known...”, and for our language to describe.²⁴

What we can take away from these philosophical observations are, first, the basis for a real reality which we find ourselves in, and second, while the fullness or even the nearness of this reality is unknown to us, we do indeed find ourselves in it. This is the first realization on the journey of the soul: *we exist in a world, but we are lost*.²⁵

This metaphysical awareness applies not only to our physical senses but also to our spiritual life and the journey of the soul. C. S. Lewis draws the connection here to the innate desire of each person to see justice done, but not the justice of constructed human laws. Rather, he writes of what was once referred to as the Law of Nature, or the Law of “Human” Nature. Like other natural laws, it seems to present itself without cause or evidence of origin, yet it cannot be ignored. Lewis claims to see this law play out within both (1) the desire of individuals to make decisions which go against instinctual pressures, and (2) the desire of individuals for others to abide by the same unspoken and unwritten code.²⁶ Without explanation, people generally maintain the understanding that certain respects and rights are due to an individual, Lewis argues. This is made particularly clear when a certain injustice is done directly to an individual who then cries out for justice, despite the legality and acceptance of the event by societal standards which contradict his or her claims. Kallistos Ware makes note of this as well, writing that there is a sense of moral obligation within us which points to God. He specifically

²⁴ Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 31-2.

²⁵ As we move forward on this road map of the soul, perhaps it is appropriate to state clearly that the steps of “realization” taking place are not the kind of realization which takes place only in the mind as with enlightenment. Rather, this is referring to an experienced reality of condition which both the senses observe and the soul traverses.

²⁶ Clive S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 17-21.

leads his readers to the personal awareness of transcendence which all people seem to have, asking the question of why we bear a thirst for the infinite.²⁷

This hidden awareness of morality within the individual human is hinted at by Scarry, as well. One could certainly make a fair comparison between the concepts of “good” and “beauty,” arguing that their similarities are far greater than often thought. At the very least, we can say that in the same way one is “convicted” by the presentation of beauty before them,²⁸ one is forced to reconcile within oneself the tension which arises with the presentation of injustice, even if that injustice is, per the societal standards, fair. There are now two main philosophical points which have been argued: (1) we find ourselves lost in the unknown vastness of a real world, and (2) there is a varying sense of morality and truth found within all people. Now, how are these philosophical propositions tied to *θέωσις*? How are they helpful in mapping out the journey of the soul?

For the answer, the voice which will here provide the most guidance is that of Edith Stein, a philosopher and academic mystic of the Modern Era. As an authority on Carmelite Mysticism, her articulation of the metaphysical realm of the human soul is invaluable to our study. Making it her goal to convey with words the interior life of the soul without using imagery, Stein writes of the soul’s journey by describing the inner life as traveling within oneself. While a man can move to the exterior of the soul, this is not the same as saying he has left himself. Instead, Stein contends that one’s location within oneself is directly tied to one’s devotion, whether to something in the outside world or to something within the self. She also

²⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 20.

²⁸ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 31. The conviction which beauty carries is more of an alarm for the conscience than a conviction of morality, though the concept is virtually the same. Beauty convicts a person of non-beauty simply through its presentation developing a comparison in the mind, and the presentation of good follows similarly.

describes the “self” who travels within one’s soul as the “I,” the means “by which she possesses herself and that which moves within her as in its own space.”²⁹ Not only is the I travelling within the soul, but there are outside forces which vie for the attention of the I, yet no outside influence can reach the deepest point of the being—the center of the soul.³⁰ Since this place within the soul is the only point at which the I has no outer influence, then it is also the place of greatest freedom of the will, free from all influences and outer biases. Calling it the inmost region, Stein feels that each person is called to live with the I of his or her soul collected there, for “only from there can one rightly come to terms with the world.”³¹ For her, all other “locations” of the soul are not totally free due to the reaching in by outside things.

Returning to our philosophical points in a metaphysical sense, the I of the soul is lost in the dark, wandering from one outside influence to the next, seeking that which will make it complete and satisfied. While the outside influences are certainly real, whether beneficial or painful, they leave the soul to wander without guidance searching for truth. Yet, deep within the soul, there is somehow a sense of truth, a recognition of beauty and good, and a longing desire for love and justice. Where do these come from? Stein finds the answer within the inmost region of the soul. We will call this inmost region the “secret place,” for Stein believes it is only accessible to two entities: the I of the soul, and God. In fact, she argues that God has chosen to dwell inside the secret place as a sort of holy of holies within each person.³² Angels and demons have no access to the mystery therein, and even the I of the soul cannot fully comprehend it,³³ yet it is still the goal of the I to find its truest self within that secret place.

²⁹ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, ed. John Sullivan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 146.

³⁰ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 146.

³¹ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 146-7.

³² Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 147, 149.

³³ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 147.

Here, we come to the second realization of the journey of the soul: *something leads the soul to the truth*. No longer wandering, the I of the soul finds guidance to something deep within itself, the essence of truth and love which have resonated with the I as long as the person can remember. What catches the attention of the I by this something is what sets it apart from all other and outside things: it is *light*. While all outside forces either are or contain some sense of darkness, the light is only light. It is such a phenomenon to behold, the soul wonders if such a thing is too good to be true, for such an event seems only to be a sign of the divine. Nevertheless, the light cries out through the dark, beckoning the I to draw near.

As suggested, this light *is* the divine. Vladimir Lossky, Edith Stein, Gregory of Nyssa, and mystics alike all agree that this divine inner light is in fact YHWH. Lossky writes, “In so far as God reveals Himself, communicates Himself and is able to be known, He is Light”. This communication is not only an allegory or imagery of “light” in some sense of the concept, but it comes also through mystical experience.³⁴ Kallistos Ware sees this concept of the divine Light as a verbal icon, an image spoken about the nature of God as a means of identifying mystical experience.³⁵ However, he also asserts the nearness of God to the human spirit regardless of His vastly unknown essence. For Ware, the difference is our credible experience of God’s *energies*. While we cannot seem to appropriately describe with language what or who God is, we can recognize His power and nature at work through “his immediate presence in each person and each thing...” “...closer to us than our own heart”.³⁶

Perhaps Ware’s apparent avoidance of reference to YHWH as “light” here was for the purpose of distinguishing between a physical symbol and God’s true energies. Vlossky notes,

³⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 220.

³⁵ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 17.

³⁶ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 23.

though, that the Bible contains many instances of references to the direct relationship between God and light.³⁷ We must bear in mind that these passages of scripture can be any sort of mixture of metaphor with mystical experience, but they must not be brushed aside as unrelated to reality as so often takes place in Western academia. As we take a step back into the scriptures before moving forward, we will analyze a key passage found in 1 John 1:5-9 that is quite applicative to our roadmap of the Way:

⁵ ... God is Light... ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin... ⁹ If we confess our sins..."

Something to be noted about the nature of physical light as we know it is its ability to purify wherever it is. "It visits scenes of corruption and decay, and exercises a cleansing and healing influence there..."³⁸ We can confidently tie this characteristic of physical light to our conception of the holiness of YHWH, and the writer of this passage of scripture seems to vouch for such a theological understanding. Interestingly, not only do we see discussed here the nature of YHWH, but we also see the journey of the soul. This conversation is about walking in the darkness versus walking in the Light, but even deeper are the implications for the one who is journeying.

Firstly, we see that an individual has the choice to walk either in darkness or in the Light. We easily understand that the lost soul wanders in the darkness of confusion both amongst and chasing after the things of darkness, but from what comes the opportunity to walk in the Light? A key note from the passage above is the reference to the gospel, "This is the message we... announce to you". The message came first to them as the form of the living λόγος (logos), the

³⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 218.

³⁸ A. Plummer and C. Clemance, "The Epistles of St. John," in *Epistles of Peter, John & Jude. The Revelation*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 1-13, 13.

Word of God from heaven in Jesus Christ. The message, then, also declares that the λόγος is light, and the gospel is centered on the struggle between the darkness of the fallen world and the Light of the λόγος.³⁹ Humanity has the choice between Light and dark because the Light has now been revealed to us to guide our steps. On the large social scale of all humanity, the Light came in the form of revelation through the λόγος of God—first from revelations of YHWH, and then culminating in the fulfillment of the law in the living λόγος, Jesus. On the smaller scale of the individual, however, while the outside forces of light from evangelism and Christian influence can help guide people to the truth of the gospel, these outer influences simply resonate with the already present inner divine Light of which the individual is usually aware to some degree, as argued above.

We now approach the third and final realization on the journey of the soul, though it is one which must be experienced time and time again. There are different phrases used to identify it, such as the phrase within the passage above, “...walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light...”, but in continuity with our framework of the journey towards θεώσις, we will identify it as follows: *I am meant to be with the Light, and I am called to become the Light.*

To enter into the secret place is to find that deep place of joyful union with God, to commune with the divine Light. Lossky sees the soul as subject to outside passions while it wanders, because it “...leaves its interior simplicity and exteriorizes itself”. He describes conversion as the soul re-entering itself, recovering the security found in that secret place, “...in its return to communion with God”.⁴⁰ This holy communion is directly reflective of the loving community which we find in the Trinitarian Godhead. Concerning the nature of the divine Light, Gregory of Nyssa attested that it is that very nature which binds up the Trinity. Since all

³⁹ A. Plummer and C. Clemance, “The Epistles of St. John,” 3.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 200.

members of the Trinity are indeed the divine Light, then one member could not have created another. Instead, they are harmoniously cooperative and of one will, sharing the same operation of activity in the world.⁴¹ It is this “operation” of YHWH which directly correlates to the process of *θέωσις* and its connection to the divine Light. Just as the Godhead shares its nature of Light with itself to then be the presence of divine Light both in the world and at the center of the human soul, so, too, the human soul takes on both the nature of the divine Light *and* the operation of YHWH in the world when the holy union occurs in the secret place of the soul. Lossky describes it thus: “This ascent is composed of two... levels: that of action (*πραξις*) and that of contemplation (*θεωρία*)”.⁴²

Kallistos Ware addresses the first of these levels through the framework of prayer. He writes that the Desert Fathers were very clear: petition without loving action is fruitless. Turning his attention towards a faith in the Trinity, he argues that one cannot claim faith in the Holy Trinity without living a life of Trinitarian community, in which we love one another. He comes to the point relevant to our current discussion by drawing the connection between the Godhead and how we are to live. “Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven”.⁴³

This reproduction which we are called to carry out cannot be done in human will alone, for it requires a cooperative effort between God and humanity. In an overview of the life of Frank C. Laubach, Richard Foster presents some of Laubach’s personal journals giving insight into his contemplative practices. As Laubach sought to practice the presence of God in every

⁴¹ Hui Xia, “Light Imagery in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology,” *Sino-Christian Studies* 26 (December 2018): 7–42.

⁴² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 202. Lossky clarifies that each of these levels occur simultaneously so as not to create a flawed hierarchy of priority.

⁴³ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 38-9.

minute of every day, he experienced a surprising lesson: it was not while he was quietly attempting to focus on God that Laubach heard from Him most. Instead, it was while he worked. Laubach writes, “Of all today’s miracles, the greatest is this: To know that I find Thee best when I work listening, not when I am still or meditative or even on my knees in prayer, but when I *work* listening and cooperating”.⁴⁴ The truth revealed here is one of the nature of God: the call of God is for us to *join* with Him in work. And what is the chief work of God? To love the world completely. It’s for this reason that Christ declared the greatest commandments to be those of love (Mark 12:30-31), for love is both the sustenance for and the purpose of Trinitarian communion, and it is that communion to which we are called.

There is one final note to be made about the third realization of the journey of the Way. A critique of such a model could be made that points out its generic nature. “What makes this Way different than the Way of Buddha or that of Muhammad?” is a question that might be asked, and rightly so. While Christian terms have been employed, the concepts themselves are applicable to most people who consider themselves to be spiritual. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences between the Christian model of *θέωσις* and a secularized spiritualist view of the enlightened soul. For one, Christians believe that the reunion of the soul with the divine Light is not possible without the intervention of YHWH. Prior to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross,⁴⁵ the secret place of the soul was locked away from the whole world, including the soul to whom it may belong. Indeed, even after Christ’s life, death, and resurrection takes effect in bringing atonement for sin, there still remains one barrier between the I of the soul and the inner sanctum

⁴⁴ Richard J. Foster *Streams of Living Water*, 44.

⁴⁵ The reference to the timing of Christ’s crucifixion is not a chronological observation but a metaphysical one. While the event of the incarnation came many years after the lives of many people, there is still theological debate over the impact of Jesus’ sacrifice on those who had already lived and died before the cross. Here, we will stand by the notion that Christ’s death was the key event which allowed all of humanity to regain free access to the presence of God, regardless of the timing of their lives on earth.

of the secret place with God. St. Symeon the New Theologian writes on the divine Light and those who have not yet received it:

Those who have not yet received, who have not participated in this light, find themselves always under the yoke of the law... all are equally in the shadows and walk in darkness, unless they are willing to repent as they ought to do. For repentance is the gate which leads from the realm of darkness into that of light. Those therefore who are not yet in the light, have not truly crossed the threshold of repentance... The servants of sin hate the light, fearing that it will reveal their hidden works.⁴⁶

The latter statement in this excerpt is key to understanding *why* repentance is the only gate into the secret place. A creature of darkness cannot dwell in a land of light, not because it cannot enter, but because it could not survive, let alone desire to remain. If the I of a soul were permitted into the divine Light without bearing a heart of repentance, it is possible that the soul would be destroyed by its own salvation rather than brought to bliss. At the very least, the will of the soul would be in conflict with the will of God, and this is fundamentally at odds with the process of $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$. Edith Stein describes the union of the soul with God as the “mystical marriage”, the point at which the soul surrenders herself to the divine Light in an act of Trinitarian communal love.⁴⁷

The main point to be noted is her insistence upon the freedom of the will, for she writes that the act of surrender is not only by the soul’s free choice, but it is at this place that the soul is the *most* free to make this choice, for all outside powers and influences cannot touch what is now in communion with the divine Light. Lossky agrees with this, writing that a person entering into this perfect union willfully renounces that which he or she has by nature in order that they might experience a “full realization in grace”.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Stein notes that John of the Cross argues

⁴⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 218-9.

⁴⁷ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 147.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 217.

for a *mutual* surrender in the mystical marriage, one in which both the soul *and* God surrender to each other.⁴⁹ If this kind of free surrender is to remain at the core of *θέωσις*, then a soul still clinging to darkness can never truly embrace the Light. Thus, repentance is the gate which allows access for the soul into the secret place and to communion with God, but only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ is such a path made possible.

A Map Laid Out

We now look back to see our three steps of realization on the path of the Christian Way of *θέωσις*, the journey of finding blissful union with YHWH. They are as follows:

1. *I exist and I am lost in a world of darkness.*
2. *I am being led by the Light to the truth.*
3. *I am meant to be with the Light, and I am called to become the Light.*

While this entire model is of great importance to our search, it is perhaps step two which bears the greatest implications for the main question of our study: how to determine the identity of a true follower of Christ. The Biblical witness gives clear testimony that Jesus Christ is the *λόγος* from God sent to save His people from their sins and to guide them safely out of the darkness. Because of this, it can be safely assumed that most of the theological faculties of the Christian faith community would agree that Jesus is both the divine Light come down and the inner light calling from within the soul, crying out for humanity and the Father to be one.

We must then follow with this question: Is someone a Christian when they begin to follow the Light? Or is it not until the union of the mystical marriage within the secret place? Alternatively, a Christian might be one who is experiencing the journey of following the Light

⁴⁹ Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 149.

towards that ultimate union with YHWH. In the following chapter, we will now address voices from Pentecostalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Mysticism in a joint conversation to develop and articulate an understanding of the Way of salvation and what it truly means to be a Christian.

CHAPTER THREE
A CONVERSATION ON CONVERSION

Introduction

A name in Scripture is always indicative of a character, hence a new name is a new inward character, a divine and heavenly experience, which no one can know but the conscious soul in which it is wrought. Others may see the fruit of a pure heart and hear the testimony to that blessed work of grace... but after all there is an inward core of our being, into which no one can be admitted but our Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier. Our loving Lord has... reserved to himself the inner chamber of our immortal souls... the home of moral intuitions. There is the secret fountain, where the Holy Spirit works the sweet miracles of saving grace.¹

George D. Watson, 1898

We will take two major steps in this chapter towards answering the question of what it means to be a Christian. First, we will aim to join voices from the Eastern Orthodox tradition with those of Pentecostalism and Mysticism to observe and analyze what each group can share with the rest, in the hopes of contributing a newly combined understanding of soteriology on the journey of the Way. Second, we will seek a practical application of the study of the Way within ecumenical efforts between congregations.

¹ George D. Watson, *Steps to the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Pickett Publishing, 1898), 54.

Pentecostal-Mysticism

George Watson is not a name which circulates in academic circles, but his words strangely resonate with the topic at hand. His statement brings up two points: there is a deep, inward place of the soul where God dwells, and it is in this deep place that a complete transformation of the heart and soul occurs.² Watson's approach to the passage of Revelation 2:17 goes beyond a typical biblical hermeneutic to reveal this understanding. It instead reaches into the depths of the inward man, the soul hidden from theological studies and scientific research. Only through metaphysical speculation can we interact with Watson's writings. He writes that these things were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit rather than a human source,³ and while he may have just been another American evangelist of the 19th century,⁴ we cannot ignore the similarity between his assertions and those laid before us in the earlier chapters.

Watson lived almost a century prior to the writings of Edith Stein, yet they bear a similar understanding of the inward meeting place with God. For Stein, this concept was developed through her philosophical and theological reading and searching, while for Watson it was intimately, directly tied to his relationship with the Holy Spirit. While the similarities between Pentecostalism and Christian Mysticism are strong enough for some theologians to claim a close relation between the two,⁵ here it will suffice to express a recognition of the common understandings between the two traditions regarding the identity and journey of a Christian and the dialogue between Pentecostalism and Eastern Orthodoxy on those commonalities.

² Watson even takes special care to give Trinitarian notice, writing that the only One who can enter into the inward place of the soul is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. As God the Father is related to the act of creation, and Christ is connected to our redemption, just so is the Holy Spirit tied to our sanctification and transformation.

³ George D. Watson, *Steps to the Throne*, 5.

⁴ See "George D. Watson," *HARVEY Christian Publishers* (blog), April 4, 2018, <https://harveycp.com/?hfiles=christian-biography-of-george-d-watson>.

⁵ See Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017).

The Altar

A key event on the journey of the Pentecostal Christian is the altar experience. It is of such importance that Wolfgang Vondey developed an entire systematic Pentecostal theology within the framework of the altar experience and practice in the Pentecostal tradition.⁶ For most Pentecostals, the altar exists as the spiritual place of sacrifice and surrender before God, typically standing as the symbol of conversion. While typically the geographical location referred to as “the altar” within the sanctuary of a Pentecostal church is at the front, the altar is understood to be spiritual in nature and impartial to geographical location. A Pentecostal may have an altar experience *anywhere* and at any given point in time since it is chiefly a *spiritual* experience.

What is this altar experience? Very much in line with Watson’s assertions as previously mentioned, Pentecostals see two major factors which come together at such an event: a *yielding* to Christ in an encounter with His Spirit, and a *transformation* into the likeness of Christ through an encounter with His Spirit.⁷ In yielding to God at the altar, Pentecostals find both salvation after repentance as well as empowerment for Christian life through baptism in the Holy Spirit. For the British healing evangelist Smith Wigglesworth, submission to the Spirit was key to unleashing one’s true potential as a follower of Jesus. He writes, “Who is the man that will take the place of Paul, and yield and yield and yield, until God so possesses him in such a way that from his body virtue shall flow to the sick and suffering?”⁸

⁶ See Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017). Since Vondey understands Pentecostalism as a tradition which seeks to not necessarily understand and believe but to *do*, his purpose behind his theological framework is to emulate this distinction between Pentecostalism and most other traditions. Pentecostalism finds its theology intertwined with the experience of Pentecost and the action of worship and prayer. It is participatory in nature and identity; one cannot truly be Pentecostal without doing as one who encounters Christ’s Spirit would do.

⁷ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 84-5. In accordance with the Five-Fold Gospel, Vondey asserts that for Pentecostals, Spirit Baptism is chiefly an encounter with Jesus Christ, as He is the savior, sanctifier, and Spirit-baptizer of those whose hearts are on the altar.

⁸ Smith Wigglesworth, *Smith Wigglesworth: The Complete Collection of His Life Teachings*, ed. Roberts Liardon (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1996), 22.

This sort of language among Pentecostals and Charismatics is either considered taboo or it is a reference to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Kenneth Archer describes this baptism in similar terms, writing that Spirit baptism is "...a moment when one is possessed by the Spirit..."⁹

Wigglesworth, however, was not necessarily referring to Spirit baptism. While his teaching can certainly apply to those seeking Spirit baptism, in this specific sermon, he was speaking on the step of humble yielding to the will of God before the breakthrough of Christian service and purpose can be fully achieved.¹⁰ This breakthrough is not only one which empowers and equips for the good work, as these roles are separately assigned to Spirit baptism in the life of the Christian,¹¹ but it brings clarity and completion to the believer, which then, in turn, empowers and equips a person for the good work.

We can now connect this Pentecostal discussion of the altar experience to the inward dwelling place within the soul. While the concept of meeting with God in the secret place of the soul is not widely preached or openly discussed in Pentecostal circles,¹² there is a similar theology both taught and practiced on a large scale: tarrying. The Pentecostal "waiting on God" at the altar is a prime image to portray how a Pentecostal understands sanctification.¹³ The events which take place spiritually as one tarryes within the Pentecostal tradition are extraordinary. Pulling from the biblical account of Jesus' disciples obeying His command to tarry in Jerusalem

⁹ Kenneth J. Archer, *The Gospel Revisited: Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Worship and Witness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 59. Such language can be easily misunderstood and associated with pagan belief and practice, as the term "possess" in Pentecostal and other Christian circles is most often associated with extreme demonic oppression. Pentecostals will employ vocabulary such as "indwelling" or "filling" in connection to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the event of Spirit baptism.

¹⁰ Smith Wigglesworth, *Smith Wigglesworth*, 20-5.

¹¹ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 239. Vondey specifies that Spirit baptism for Pentecostals is understood to be a separate event from the regeneration of salvation and, for most, separate from the sanctification of the Christian journey.

¹² This is not to say that such conversations do not take place or that it happens behind-the-scenes, but it does note the lack of academic work as well as sermon emphasis to encourage readers and listeners to seek contemplative time with the Lord.

¹³ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 60-64.

until the gift from the Father had been sent (Luke 24:49), Pentecostals also tarry on the Lord at the altar in expectation of His work in their hearts and lives.

This Pentecostal practice certainly crosses theological paths with that of *θέωσις* (the means by which one takes on the nature of God through repentance, time spent in His presence, and a yielding to His will). Similarly, the altar is the place of repentance, submission, and tarrying with the Lord so that he might come and touch those who earnestly wait. Vondey articulates this experience in terms which almost directly describe *θέωσις*: “Those who ‘practice sanctification’ seek to participate actively in the divine presence... in the expectation that God would impart this holiness through the Holy Spirit to the life of the believer”.¹⁴ As Pentecostals wait on the Lord in anticipation of a divine encounter, the expectation is that the sanctifying process of *θέωσις* can take place,¹⁵ though such a word will not be found or heard in Pentecostal groups. Modern terms like it, however, such as the practical application of “soaking prayer” are becoming more common among the most charismatic of Pentecostal congregations.¹⁶ This newer form of prayer is really not new at all, but instead it is a Post-modern Pentecostal implementation of the ancient practice of the contemplative tradition. Even its objectives are one and the same, for those who pray thus are seeking to be filled with the fire of God’s love and surrounded by His loving embrace.¹⁷ Richard Foster claims that the two most commonly coined words for describing the life of the contemplative tradition are fire and love; “Purging, purifying fire. Enveloping, comforting love”.¹⁸ It is the coming together of the divine’s loving embrace and the

¹⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 62.

¹⁵ This is a general framework for understanding the altar experience in the Pentecostal tradition. The exceptions to the rule are likely to be countless, as each person approaching the sacred space of meeting with God comes with different factors at play. In general, however, the culture of the Pentecostal altar call is one of experiencing change and a fresh anointing through a present encounter with God. This change is always a change in the direction of becoming more like Christ.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 64.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 65.

¹⁸ Richard J. Foster *Streams of Living Water*, 49.

lovingly surrendered human heart which initiates the sanctification of the soul through the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit.

Even without the direct application of soaking prayer, the Pentecostal understanding of such a union with God remains the same, and it is widely taught and practiced. Furthermore, Pentecostals are also in agreement on the nature of the aspect of time in relation to *θέωσις*. Since sanctification is not immediate, it is then carried out over the course of the life of a Christian. The presence of God sanctifies us in any stage of life, for "...we are a pilgrim people in a dynamic relationship with God".¹⁹ This provides all the more reason why Pentecostals seek after the presence of God at any given time, allowing the newness of their repaired relationship with Him to invade and impact the rest of their lives. Eastern Orthodoxy seeks this same daily encounter, longing for "...the ever-new, personal and direct experience of the Holy Spirit *in the present*, here and now".²⁰

Pentecostals will often turn to the biblical scriptures for part of this daily encounter, as well, taking into serious consideration the communal understanding that the Bible is the infallible word of God. Zachary Tackett notes the Pentecostal value for the scriptures and its connection with their own participation in the story of God and humanity. As the people live a daily recitation of the scriptures, "...Gospel emerges anew out of the narrative of Scripture into contemporary life".²¹ In the same way that Pentecostals live out the story of the gospel through the traditional narration of scripture, Eastern Orthodox Christians seek to actively participate in the life of the Holy Trinity through practicing the presence and love of God.

¹⁹ Kenneth J. Archer, *The Gospel Revisited*, 59.

²⁰ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 8.

²¹ Zachary M. Tackett, "As People of the Gospel: Pentecostals' Use of Scripture and the Nature of Gospel," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 29, no. 1 (February 17, 2020): 16–34.

The purposes behind θέωσις and Pentecostal sanctification, however, do slightly differ. While the objective of both processes is to both draw the believer into the embrace of the divine love and to transform the believer into the likeness of Christ, the Great Commission found in Matthew is at the core of Pentecostal doctrine on salvation, holiness, and Spirit baptism. For Pentecostals, the chief mission of the Church is to preach the gospel to the world for two purposes: bringing the lost souls to truth in Jesus Christ (Just as Christ was sent from God, we are sent out to the lost world as His ambassadors (John 20:21) to every nation in the power of the Spirit²²) and speeding up the day when Christ will return as a fulfillment of prophecy (Jesus proclaimed that the gospel message would be preached in all nations before the end (Matthew 24:14)). This missiological emphasis flows directly out of the initial revivals which took place during the 20th Century at the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. As the urgency of ushering lost souls into the Kingdom of Heaven arose for the purpose of bringing about Christ's return in fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, the movement spread to not only all of America, but it touched all of the world.²³ The core theological viewpoint of Pentecostal missions is fixated on the Church's objective to partner with the *missio dei*, the "mission of God" to fulfill His promise to bless the nations through the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ.²⁴

While Eastern Orthodoxy would completely agree that it is the role of the Church to fulfill the call of *missio dei*, they might see the means of doing so quite differently. They, too, are convinced that the Church exists to reach out to the dark world and draw others to Christ. Rather than the Church being called *out* into the world, as if the Church is not already present in it,

²² John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2000), 74-5.

²³ See Gastón Espinosa, *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2014), 70-72. Espinosa asserts that it was not solely the revivals surrounding Azusa Street which resulted in the complete missionary reach of Pentecostalism, but he does take seriously the great deal of influence which the Azusa Street Revival had on the global missional impact of Pentecostalism.

²⁴ John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit*, 20.

members of Eastern Orthodoxy are far more likely to suggest that the Church is meant to *be* a light *in* the world, or scripturally speaking, the Church “...is the light of the world” in the words of Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 5:14). While not opposing the notion of leaving one’s homeland or area of familiarity, a heavier emphasis for Eastern Orthodoxy is placed on the culmination of one’s own sense of the divine Light that they might be a light of God to those around them where they already live. For Kallistos Ware, this Light is translated to the world of darkness as love, for those who bear the likeness of the divine Trinity must love one another.²⁵ To live the life of God in the world is to be a light of love to your neighbor wherever you are.

This divine Light of the secret place of the soul correlates with some of the Pietistic movements, particularly with Quakerism. The movement bears a special theology passed all the way down from its founder, George Fox. Developing a concept of the “inner light”, Fox believed that the “light of men” referred to in John 1:4 would lead all who choose to follow it into truth.²⁶ Even today, many Quakers assert that this inner light is our experiential connection to God which no created being can intercept. This light is the Spirit of God who is love, and it calls for us to follow through inward unctions. This Spirit is believed to be the same Spirit who has walked alongside the people of God since the creation of the world, and He remains with us by residing deep within.²⁷ While there may not be many explicit connections between George Fox’s understanding of the inner light and any missional emphasis, the implications for witness as a light in the world remain a vital part of the Quaker faith.

Regardless of the difference in approach to the mission dei, both Pentecostalism and Eastern Orthodoxy do see the same end result: a Christian standing as a bright light in a world of

²⁵ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 38-39.

²⁶ Roberts Liardon, *God's Generals II: The Roaring Reformers* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2003), 353-4.

²⁷ Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202-3.

darkness. For Pentecostals, this is vocalized as becoming a new creation *in Christ*. For Orthodoxy, it is the *participation in union with God*. Pentecostals would identify with Orthodoxy's theological concept, despite their lack of similar verbiage. Likewise, Orthodoxy would agree with the notion of becoming a new creation through the Holy Spirit's transformative presence, though they associate this change less with God's power and more with God's nature.

As previously stated, it is agreed upon that the journey of the Christian faith involves a radical transformation, one which could only be carried out by the power and influence of the divine, namely the Holy Spirit. It is also agreed that this transformation is one which happens in that secret place with God. Pentecostals will typically refer to this change as a transformed *heart*. Dallas Willard addresses this,²⁸ writing that the aim of Jesus' ministry on earth was never to create a new set of religious beliefs or standards, but to transform the people's character into who each person is called by God to be. The type of change which Jesus brings is "...a revolution of *character*, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another".²⁹ With this concept laid as his groundwork, Willard maps out what he believes is a picture of the human "self", made up of each component of the human being: soul, relationships, body, mind (thoughts and feelings), and spirit (heart/will).³⁰ Willard sees each of these components as levels of depth within the self, beginning with the soul containing the entire person and flowing in that order to the deepest part, the spirit, which contains the human heart and will.³¹

²⁸ To be clear, Willard does not identify as Pentecostal or Orthodox, but his message of Christian transformation is mystical in nature. He writes with practicality in mind for his readers, while his theology maintains the mystical element of transformation through the Spirit, which deeply resonates with both Pentecostalism and Orthodoxy.

²⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 10th Anniversary (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 15.

³⁰ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 38.

³¹ See Appendix I

It is remarkable to find that this model is extremely similar to Edith Stein's description of the soul referenced earlier. Perhaps the fundamental difference between the two is the role of what Stein calls the "inmost region" and what Willard calls the "heart". For Willard, the primary effect of the Holy Spirit on the heart is to cause a complete transformation of character leading to a change of habit and life. Stein would agree that the inmost region is the place of transformation for the individual, though it could be said that she takes the model one step further. Instead of conveying the person as a series of categories to be mapped out and dug through from an outside perspective, she sees the journey of the will as one sojourned throughout the mire of the soul, in which is only darkness unless one is led by the divine Light to the secret place.³² There, it is the *union* with God which brings about a transformation of the character through the nature of God overtaking the nature of sin. The conversation of transformation as the effect of God on humanity could continue to bounce back and forth between the correlation with God's power and the correlation with God's nature. Nonetheless, two thoughts can be agreed upon: balance will likely resolve this tension, and that from this dialogue, we can draw out a necessary mark of the Christian: transformation.

To finally bring together the viewpoints of this discussion between Pentecostalism and Eastern Orthodoxy, we can attempt to piece together an Eastern-Pentecostal-mystic understanding of what exactly a Christian is.³³ We can now make three assertions, that a Christian is:

³² Edith Stein, *Essential Writings*, 146.

³³ Of course, this is the result of a study involving a limited Christian influence. Naturally, if you choose to involve more denominational influences, the resulting research may produce a broader viewpoint. However, the claimed marks of the identity of a Christian in this study are already quite broad and might be applicable to most, if not all, sects of Christianity.

1. An individual who is on the Way towards and with Christ by following after the divine Light, which is found both in the person of Jesus Christ and within the secret place of the soul.
2. One who has found the union of a healed relationship with God through humble repentance and a yielding to the Holy Spirit.
3. A traveler who is being transformed into the likeness of Christ as they journey on the Way.

This structure of understanding the identity of a Christian can be accepted by more than just Pentecostalism or Eastern Orthodoxy. We now come to the culminating practical application of this theological and philosophical conversation, the point at which our understanding of the Way touches each Christian denomination and begins to craft bridges between them. We will now discuss the means by which the Way of Christ can be both unified and diverse.

Ecumenism on the Way

Vladimir Lossky on the nature of the Church writes, “The Church is an image of the Holy Trinity”.³⁴ Lossky unpacks this statement with two words: unity and multiplicity. He contends that the Church’s true catholicity (universal nature) is made present through the Church’s adherence to its bond of unity in love and peace *while also bearing a multiplicity of persons*. As an individual believer is completely the Church through the indwelling of God in that vessel, that believer is also only a single member of the vast multi-faced Church of Jesus Christ. For Lossky, not only does this capture the harmony between the unitedness of the Church and its multiplicity, but it displays for us the same communal identity found within the Holy Trinity.³⁵

³⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 176.

³⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*, 176.

Perhaps another major factor may be included in the catholicity of the Church and in the community of God: diversity. Just as the Church and Trinity are in themselves eternally unified and both bear multiple figures, they each also carry the weight of the beauty of diversity. Daniela Augustine describes the Church as God's reflection among humanity of the Trinitarian communal diversity and freedom.³⁶ As each person of the Godhead is revealed, God is shown in different ways, and no single member of the body of Christ is like another, yet they all bear the same image of Christ. This diversity is *good*, and it leads us to glorify the Creator all the more. It can also lead us, however, to turn our backs on brothers and sisters in the family of God. Differences can cause division, as the past has certainly shown to be true for the Church. Some of these divisions were mentioned in the opening of this study, though we cannot here explore the vast histories and theologies concerning ecumenism in a full sense. We will, however, acknowledge the connections between our newly determined understanding of the Christian on the Way and how we might address some of those divisions.

To begin, we can propose that this new paradigm is not trying to develop a specific branch of theological thought, but instead it reaches to all Christian denominations through its Christological focus. Besides the language of mysticism, most denominations might find it difficult to reject defining a Christian as one seeking after Christ's truth towards union with God and becoming like Christ. It could be noted that this model is confined to the interior of the individual and, therefore, cannot fully grasp the love which a true Christian has for the world. They might quote James in saying that "...faith without works is useless" (James 2:20). They would fail to see, however, that a Godly spirituality based in the foundations of the soul does not remain hidden, but it compels the human heart to reach out in Christlike fashion, both in love and

³⁶ Daniela C. Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Toward a Spirit-Inspired Vision of Social Transformation* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 18.

in sacrifice. In fact, it is that very transformation of the heart which leads people to pursue union of love instead of division by hate and discrimination, both with God and with others, yet this is not the result we see today within the Church.

In an interview with Christianity Today Magazine, Bishop Kallistos Ware made a few statements from his experience which quite appropriately address the divisiveness between Church communities and denominations. In reference to his initial entrance into the Eastern Orthodox faith from another Christian tradition, he said, "...I went from the light I received in Anglicanism to a greater light, but I did not renounce or reject the light given to me in my previous church".³⁷ He went on to explain that he encourages people to not seek out the errors of a tradition of faith, but to instead find its meaning and truth. "...I would want people to affirm the fullness rather than to renounce error. That puts the emphasis in the wrong place". Perhaps the absolute best way words can speak against the division of denominational splits is in Ware's response to people leaving churches in search of the true faith: "...Conversion is to Christ, not from one Christian community to another".³⁸ What Ware notes here is the need for churches to seek growth for the kingdom of God rather than a larger amount of attendees on a Sunday morning, or at the very least for them to approve of folks transferring between denominations without scrutinizing those individuals.

Should the body of Christ look to the paradigm proposed here in this study, or something like it, for the purpose of framing an understanding of the Christian identity through the lens of humility, perhaps the scrutiny given to those who switch between denominations might diminish. As sojourners on the Way, we might see it fit to hold each other accountable to remaining on the

³⁷ Christianity Today, "Archbishop Kallistos Interview - Christianity Today Magazine," May 10, 2011, video, 5:16, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOC5MaCNqeY&ab_channel=ChristianityToday.

³⁸ Christianity Today, "Archbishop Kallistos Interview".

path of following Christ's truth, but we must not allow ourselves to ascribe anything to that path beyond what Jesus' teachings have shown us. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit will not reveal more to us as issues arise that we can find no scriptural answer for, but it does mean we should not consider petty matters as worthy of crafting the image of the identity of a Christian.

The assumed ideology behind this study is one which values the core teachings of Christ above all else, particular in determining how a believer should live. While other beginning assumptions can be helpful in some ways, it is only if you begin with the teachings of Christ that you are led to the fullest revelation of God's truth. It is for this very reason that the paradigm presented begins with a following of the divine Light, for it is Christ and the Spirit of Christ who leads us into all truth (John 16:13). If the Church universal can receive this teaching, then we might see a shift in the Christian atmosphere on the global stage.

CONCLUSION:

ON TO THE WAY

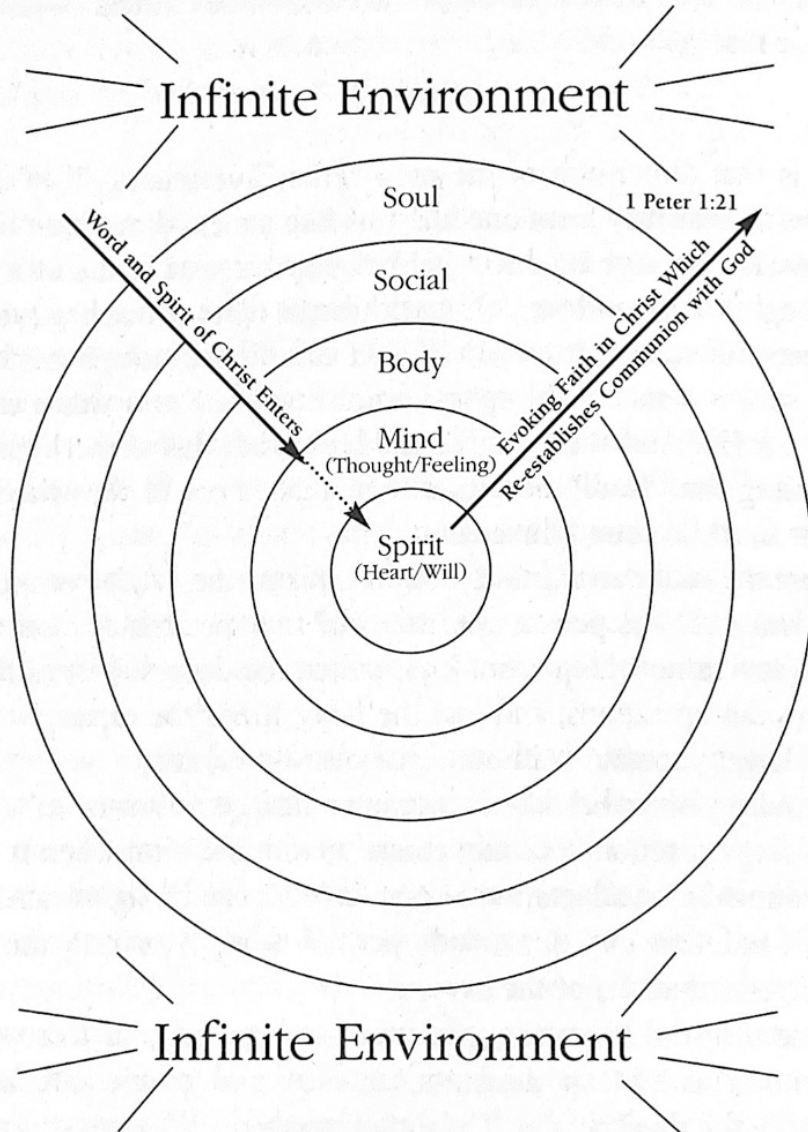
“Come after Me...” (Matthew 4:19). This call cries out to us from the One seeking communion with our hearts. To be a Christian is to make the decision to answer that call, to follow Christ wherever He leads. It isn't a decision made in blind faith, but instead, it is informed by personal relationship with the almighty YHWH who draws us to Himself through love and sacrifice. Following Jesus is not so simple as keeping all of the commandments of scripture or doing the right tasks at the right times. Instead, it is a continual answering to the beckoning call of, “Follow Me” that leads us down the winding path of the Way.

We have now seen where that path takes us, down to the very depths of our soul and into the secret place with God. We now recognize what the divine Light seeks to accomplish: to be united with us once again and forevermore. We understand what that union does, for the nature of God is the truest nature of fire we can ever experience, as it consumes our wickedness and clothes us in holy flames. Finally, we realize that the Way is the means by which we can truly recognize a fellow sister or brother in Christ. As we journey on the road with Christ, we know our fellow travelers by their movement and by their character. If they are headed in the direction of Christ, we know who they follow. If they are warm with the love of God, we know the One with whom they commune. If they shine with the light of Christ dominating the darkness in them, we know they are being changed, for the direction, condition, and nature of one's soul will continue to reveal who they follow on the Way.

APPENDIX I

THE WHOLE PICTURE

NOW, WITH ALL OF this said, it will be useful for our purposes to depict the entire human self by the following diagram:



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