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Mysticism and Its Curative Powers for Emotionally Impaired Athletes

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La Salle University

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La Salle University
School of Arts and Sciences
Graduate Program In Theology and Ministry

Dissertation

Mysticism and Its Curative Powers for Emotionally Impaired Athletes

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

2018

Mysticism and Its Curative Powers for Emotionally Impaired Athletes

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This is dedicated to Jesus Christ, my everything; my wife, Darice, and my kids, Dylan, Dru, and Denver, who haven't wavered in love or earnest support as I have embarked on numerous quests to interpret God in ways that are intelligible and accessible to all humankind. To my mother, who never gave up on me and, at times worked menial jobs to supplement an expensive parochial education during my early years, which in her mind, would vouchsafe my success. To Uncle Charles, RIP, who made me believe I was bigger than life and that I could do anything! To grandmother, Bassebia Thompson Logan (deceased), who not only was a living epistle, but one of the most intelligent, uneducated people I have ever known. Thank you for showing me Jesus, and teaching me how to negotiate the vagaries of life. To my pastor, the inimitable Bishop Sherman Scott Howard (deceased), I am because you were . . . Finally, to my father, who never failed to exhibit a tireless work ethic, which I have applied incessantly to the care of my undertakings in the parish and community at large

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Abstract

The National Football League (NFL) has been encumbered with a plethora of brain injury cases due to the incidence of on-field acute linear impact, ostensibly sustained by its participants. According to medical examiner, Dr. Bennett Omalu, these occurrences have spawned the onset of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease, which may be the catalyst to discursive tendencies that are redolent to the occupation of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, aggression, and reclusion. Since the majority of professional football players originate from socially violent contexts, such as Miami, Los Angeles, Detroit, Dallas, and Houston, however, it is conceivable that the incivilities perpetrated by these athletes may be attributable to more than CTE. Perhaps, recurrent exposure to such grievous conditions and/or forms of social disaffection clarifies the cognitive volatility extant today and additionally, the protuberances of illicit violence. It is believed, nonetheless, that the mystical themes resonant in the prose of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, which seemingly are consonant with the French School of Spirituality, provide some gratuity to these psychological exigencies. Thus, this research aims to explore how mystical themes commendable to the French School, Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman, may ameliorate, or abate altogether, behavioral tendencies redolent to the onset of PTSD in professional football players.

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Perhaps, it is a difficult task to conjoin Spirituality and Psychology when both phenomena have been interpreted historically as conflicting genera of social science. Nonetheless, they are confluent inasmuch as the psyche is the spirit or soul of a human. Further, as we will see in the succeeding chapters, the psyche is the realm that inheres the Holy; that makes the coalescence of God, the very essence of spirituality, and humanity, feasible. This is called “consummation” in mystical vernacular, which serves to constitute a plenum that is achieved when man and God interface. This amalgamation between extremes may solve some perplexing questions that have plagued medical professionals and social scientists around the erratic behaviors of some professional football players whose brains have been compromised physically and/or socially.

There is an overwhelming sentiment that the perpetration of violent behaviors and mental encumbrances by professional football players are attributable to the occupation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). This is moderately plausible due to the veritable, but insular, empirical research yielded by medical examiner and CTE expert, Dr. Bennett Omalu. Social factors, such as rape, domestic violence, killings, disaffections and other heinous brutalities many of these athletes have been exposed to begs consideration. Without serious attention to such social elements, the behavioral tendencies redolent to the onset of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in professional football players are but the vestiges of CTE. Further, the corpus of mental health research remains bound to the conservative deductions of the past, and certainly, the

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incidences of flagrant behaviors perpetrated by many professional football players are but delimited from being explored from a socio-behavioral, scientific perspective.

Nonetheless, Christian mystics, such as Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, not only give expression to convictive spiritualities and mystical themes that have doubtless illumined the issues constitutive to their respective historical contexts and spiritual temperaments, but also may provide antidotal sapience to these behavioral tendencies found in some professional football players. In Eckhart's schema, the *birth of the Christ in the soul* and the mystical ways of *abandonment* and *abnegation* appear to be plausible redresses to misconduct; In McCall's schema, conversely, the contemplative path through the method of *adoration* seems to be a more efficacious means to mollifying the inconstancies redolent to the onset of psychological disorders akin to PTSD; finally, for Thurman, the way of *abandonment* intimates not only to be a pivotal subtext beneath his prose, but a seminal means to achieving homeostasis for these athletes suffering the angsts of emotional instability. Such contributions, as suggested, do not converge on method; however, they do interface on the axis of intent. The intent for Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman, by way of abnegation, adoration and abandonment, lies in a coalescing of the human spirit and the (inner life of the) Trinity, which actuates a disclosure of the godhead and ultimately, healing for the human spirit. Perhaps, professional football players who have committed crimes and/or other civil offenses can find rest from their inner turmoils by following some of the mystical paths

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that lead to spiritual consummation, such as those noted above that undergird Eckhart's, McCall's, and Thurman's mystical theologies.

Again, this hypothetical does not serve to ameliorate or omit the seriousness to which Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy should be considered; however, its attendance may not be the only qualifying reason for so many behavioral problems among some of the players. As noted, these problems may be systemic to early childhood and/or adolescent socialization; adult disaffection, and/or exposure to heinous crimes without any psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and/or spiritual intervention. Without such intentional conscientiousness, the breadth of extant research remains insular; an amalgamation of complex medical deductions that do not observe or discern the plausibility of sociological effects.

Conceivably, there is a mysticism of healing, however, which expands the study of the human mind and thus, juxtaposes the realms of psychology and spirituality in ways that are advantageous to the relationship of both genera and antidotal to an array of behavioral malfeasances. This juxtaposition of psychology and spirituality is no new coalescence of extremes, nonetheless. The great progenitors of the Christian faith, such as Ignatius of Polycarp, and Antony the *monachos*, found ways to *assent* to an immanent God before Eckhart, McCall, or Thurman ever attempted to interpret the human-Divine binary.¹ The abstraction of turning *inward* toward God for the result of consummation or

¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 134.

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theoria was actuated during both the darkest of times for our forebears and/or times of extreme jubilation. Seemingly, times of obscurity, however, fostered the most meaningful expression(s) of that consummation.

While facing martyrdom, Saint Ignatius in an act of impedance towards his supporters who sought to emancipate him from the sentence of death insisted:

... so that I may not be only be called a Christian, but also behave as such ... my love is crucified ... I no longer savor corruptible food ... but wish to fast the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ ... and his blood I wish to drink which is an immortal drink ... When I suffer, I shall be free in Jesus Christ, and with him shall rise again in freedom ... I am God's wheat, to be ground by the teeth of beasts, so that I may be offered as pure bread of Christ.²

To drink the blood of God and to become “God’s wheat” is metaphorical symbolism for Ignatius’ unequivocal surrender under the looming specter of death. His resoluteness to attain *theoria* entails more than simple earnestness, but a decision from the left frontal and temporal lobes of the (human) brain. When we speak of the *spiritual*, it is a reference to God’s Spirit, principally; His essence interfused with the totality of human essence. In this sense, a melding with the decision(s) that proceed from the moral judgment region of Ignatius’s brain, thus effectuating a human-Divine juxtaposition that ultimately yields peace within the human spirit. Much like the peace amid the foreboding

² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church To the Dawn of The Reformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 53.

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that “[one] may be offered as pure bread of Christ,” a resolve Ignatius so poignantly quips to his supporters.

The same can be said of Antony whose experiences in the desert prove that spiritual consummation, the juxtaposition of the human spirit and the godhead, can be antidotal. Antony does not tender the exact language of Ignatius amid his own mystical vicissitudes; however, his resoluteness is impregnable. It demonstrates that asceticism (*askesis*), a decision to abstain from material gratification, may effectuate spiritual consummation and peace within the human spirit. Drawing from the salient contributions of the Apostle Paul, Antony proffers in response to his trials, “When I am weak, then I am powerful” [2 Corinthians 12:10 (New Standard Revised Version)].

These words do not resound outside of an impressionable experience that ultimately changed Antony’s life, however. After hearing the gospel message of voluntary poverty and thus, experiencing a *conversion*, Antony, who had been a young peasant of relative affluence, sought out an old ascetic in an adjacent village to tutor him in a life nestled within the disciplines of extreme austerity.³ Consequently, he retreated to the desert to achieve mastery over himself, specifically demons within and without whose powers were tempting to the mind. This was indeed a *decision* likened to

³ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 134.

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Ignatius's ambition to attain ultimate *theoria* thru martyrdom, an unequivocal *resolve* that an abandonment of self actuates the highest spiritual attainment.

By subjecting himself to a cave once infested with insects and reptiles, he divested his natural inclinations from the dependencies of lavishness and sustenance. Only twice within a year's time did Antony receive bread to eat. Those who cared for his well being were not permitted to encroach his solitude but surveyed the perimeter of his domain instead, thus reporting accounts of riotous sounds, piercing wails, fighting and tumults.⁴ "Get out of our domain! What business have you in the desert? You cannot hold out against our persecution."⁵ A series of bold and sinister entreaties from what has been assumed to be demons waging intimidating imprecations against Antony's insistence, which further impelled his earnestness for consummation instead of rousing any form of retreat. Amid various offensives waged by demonic forces, Antony received visions from God that revealed the weaknesses of the demons he was fighting, and as a result, he was empowered and strengthened to persevere, notwithstanding. Again and again, Antony's friends expected him to die from the demonic affronts but instead heard him from the perimeter of his abode singing, "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered; and let them that hate him flee from before his face. As smoke vanishes, so let

⁴ Bernard McGinn, "Antony's Withdrawal into the Desert and Twenty Years in the Fort (Chapters 11-14)," in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 53.

⁵ Ibid.

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them vanish away; as wax melts before the fire, so let the sinners perish before the face of God” [Psalm 67:2 (New Standard Revised Version)].

Indeed, Antony’s decision for a life of asceticism is psychological, and God’s conciliation of that decision through visions is a testament to the spiritual annexation that consummates the mystical experience. The binary of the human mind and God’s mediation brought Antony forth from the fort as one enshrined into the sacred mysteries filled with the Spirit of God without any visible evidence of emaciation. The mystical experiences amid the opaqueness of tribulation purified his spirit and caused those who came in contact with him after the period of reclusion to be cured of many bodily infirmities, thus qualifying the results of spiritual consummation as transformative. Not only is Antony ultimately healed from his temptations, but also those who hear him, healed of their diseases.

From both testimonies, Ignatius’ and Antony’s, mystical experience seems to turn on the axes of the three subtle but prominent themes that are attributable to Meister Eckhart’s, Oswald McCall’s and Howard Thurman’s mystical theologies: abandonment, adoration and abnegation. These mystical themes will prove to be the bases for enlightenment and healing and, moreover, a beacon for some professional football players who now are the embodiment of their own early childhood degeneracy and/or social truculence. As prefaced earlier, this consideration does not discredit the value of

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all the research on CTE; these social factors just expand scientific empiricism, conjoins psychology and spirituality and finally, diversifies research, which may make behavioral tendencies evocative to the onset of a disorder akin to PTSD all the more discernible.

Today, those who suffer from the tendencies of illicit misconduct are sometimes prescribed Fluoxetine (Prozac), Sertraline (Zoloft), and Paroxetine (Paxil) to prevent continuance and exacerbation. Countless war veterans and victims of abuse have not only used such invasive measures to curb acute stress, but also spiritual measures, such as contemplative prayer and silence. However, there is no existing empirical research that substantiates the efficacy of these mystical praxes on professional football players, specifically, who have suffered psychological and/or brain trauma. Perhaps, the ways of abnegation, adoration and abandonment, which are but a few conduits that actuate the mystical experience, are the bases for effective contemplative prayer and silence that leads to homeostasis. Once divine consummation is achieved through these means, the matrix for illumination and healing for the human spirit becomes accessible. For the innumerable football players who have suffered sociological exigencies, or whose brains have been compromised by acute linear force, mystical encounter (by way of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment) may be antidotal with systematic praxes. Further, through these means, socio-behavioralist and medical professionals may be provided an intimation into new, innovative research that is less pharmacological in scope.

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Plan

Seemingly, there have been some lines of demarcation drawn between Psychology and Spirituality when, indeed, they are inextricably woven together. Thus, Chapter One will limn those associations and discuss the factors that have contributed to their partisanship. In addition, a description for mysticism will be provided, which takes into account the contributions of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall and Howard Thurman, who provide mysticisms of healing that possibly serve to ameliorate behavioral tendencies redolent to the onset of PTSD in professional football players whose brains and emotions have been compromised socially and/or anatomically. These mysticisms, spiritual absorptions essentially, will be described as psychological phenomena as well, illustrating the indissoluble annexation of Spirituality and Psychology, which effectuates positive change and emulates the *perichoretic*⁶ abstraction.

Finally, in efforts to authenticate the tenability of mysticism as a curative phenomenon, a historical record of its positive effects will be delineated, further demonstrating the binary of Psychology and Spirituality to be indivisible and, undoubtedly, transformative.

⁶ Cf. Van A. Harvey gives a detailed description of perichoresis in (*A Handbook of Theological Terms: Their Meaning and Background Exposed In Over 300 Articles* [New York: Simon Schuster, 1964], 181). *Perichoresis*, an abstraction and systematization of the interdependence and interconnectivity the eternal godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - shares, which typifies the quintessence of love and altruism.

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Chapter Two will provide a detailed biographical sketch of Pierre de Berulle (founder of the French School of Spirituality), Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Washington Thurman in a manner that further elucidates the Psychology and Spirituality binary. In addition, this Chapter will underscore the mystical theologies of these paramount thinkers in ways that divulge their proclivities towards the abstractions of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment, respectively; three typologies given salience by French School scholar, William M. Thompson, who adroitly makes the ontology of the French School of Spirituality intelligible and telling - even for the novice in mystical matters.

In closing, Chapter Two will make inferences and explications into how the abstractions of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment may be curative, pursuant to the prose of our featured mystical theologians. Such witness informs the abstractions to be axiological to the healing each one of them experiences and seminal to the development of the premise that mystical praxes, in the form of contemplative prayer, silence and meditation, may be transformative to professional football players who bear certain behavioral tendencies.

Chapter Three will delve the binary of pain and mysticism, specifically the inextricable confluence of the two extremes. Something consequential is revealed when they conjoin: For Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, that *something* is mystical. Yet, it resounds a subtle timbre of pragmatism to be considered,

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which suggests that mystical revelation should spawn some resistance to fallacious constructs that inhibit psychological and social harmony.

Chapter Four will underscore the ramifications of acute linear force sustained as a result of on-field participation by NFL players. In so doing, a detailed description of the neurological and psychological effects of concussions will inform the impedance acute linear force poses on these athletes in question, namely, the onset of CTE and, consequently, the incessancy of violent behaviors. Inasmuch as these behaviors are redolent to the onset of certain mental disorders like PTSD, sociological factors of a nefarious and seditious nature will be summoned for consideration as well. In addition, the mystical praxes of contemplation, centering prayer and silence will be proffered as an antidote to the malfeasances of professional football players, as has been the case with non-football players who have experienced emotional trauma but have since embraced the interior quest and, thus, were maximally or minimally cured of certain behavioral tendencies.

Chapter Five will summarize the themes, the musings of the featured mystical theologians, the binary of Psychology and Spirituality, and the onset CTE and its effects. Overall, the prevailing question in this Chapter will be: How might the themes of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment, as appropriated through the mystical theologies of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, at least ameliorate certain behavioral tendencies in professional football players, which are suggestive to the onset of social disaffection and CTE?

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To rejoin this salient question, Chapter Six will provide an elucidation of Thomas Keating's scholarship, *The Human Condition*, and will serve to insinuate that mystical praxes may, at least, ameliorate behavioral tendencies of professional football players who've sustained disaffection, and concussive histories as a result of football participation. Accordingly, the results may provide medical professionals, as well as socio-behavioral specialists an underpinning for the establishment of a new model for mollifying behaviors that are maniacal and sometimes fatal.

Scope

The quiddities of Psychology and Spirituality have proven too vast and complex to codify and/or delimit. Therefore, the contributions of Dr. Bennett Omalu surrounding the attendance of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in professional football players will not be devalued by the insights posed in this study. The research will utilize empirical studies that validate his claims alongside interpretations of early forms of mysticism propounded by mystical theologians/historians like Bernard McGinn, who give a historical account of our progenitors of the Faith who incessantly demonstrate the efficaciousness of mystical praxes.

Further, I will utilize the mystical themes of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment, three of five mystical classifications used to describe the interior life given

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notoriety by French School scholar, William M. Thompson. These themes are interwoven throughout the musings of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, testifying implicitly to the antidotal capabilities intrinsic to their existence. They are resonant; however, do not distort the piercing vibrations of other themes that undergird the ontologies of our featured mystical theologians that are present as well. Thus, while attention will be given exclusively to the mystical themes of abnegation, adoration, and abandonment, it is noteworthy that there exists other mystical themes just as worthy of citation as these that will be underscored in the ensuing study. The three given attention, for me, were the most striking and accessible to the research, however.

As far as our featured mystical theologians are concerned, the *beneficence* that each inhaled and so richly blessed the ages with is not exhaustive and, moreover, does not represent the corpus of spiritual or scientific investigation. Their insights seem to provide an indispensable hermeneutic on the efficaciousness of the interior life and, how that life may effectuate some estimable change in the behaviors of professional football players whose brains and emotions have been compromised by on-field participation, and/or abject socialization at an early age. Thus, abnegation and abandonment will be discussed in the context of Meister Eckhart's insights; adoration, in light of Oswald McCall's insights; and abandonment in light of Howard Thurman's deft revelations.

Additionally, Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall and Howard Thurman, collectively, provide resources that are compelling with respect to codifying a mysticism of healing for professional football players:

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1. Their testimonies are representations of God's perpetual involvement in the affairs of humanity.
2. They proffer a hermeneutic of God's residence in the human soul, and an explication of how that occupation elicits change.
3. They inform humanity's quest to interpret an Immanent Reality who desires to be *found* in ways that stimulate and empower.
4. They all illustrate how suffering actuates and inward turning, which impels abandonment.
5. They all provide salient mystical contributions that may lead to the amelioration or the abatement of symptoms constitutive to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

For the sake of thoroughness and cogency, an array of primary and secondary sources will be utilized to validate claims on mysticism, CTE, behavioral tendencies redolent to the onset of PTSD, and the veritableness of mystical praxes on professional football players. In addition, some method will be utilized to explicate a conceptualization of an abstract Reality, the godhead, in ways that are intelligible and demonstrates God's will to be in fellowship with humanity for its unequivocal betterment. (Again, the bibliography will not be exhaustive, but will provide enough scholarship to consider the overarching premise that mystical praxes, such as contemplation, silence, and meditation, may be antidotal to overly concussed brains and imperiled emotions).

As a mysticism of healing is located in this dissertation, references to "professional football players" includes those who are active and non-active, i.e., retired

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or veteran, demonstrating behavioral tendencies redolent to the onset of PTSD. An all-encompassing approach here lays the foundation for this research to ascertain the effects of behavioral tendencies on participating athletes and those inactive players who no longer expose themselves to acute linear force on a perpetual basis. Further, it provides an underpinning from whence researchers may authenticate mystical praxes as somewhat curative.

Aim

My goal in this research is to demonstrate the antidotal powers of Christian mysticism and praxes on professional football players whose brains and emotions have been medically and psychologically negotiated and in so doing, pay homage to the contributions of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman, who all conscientiously sought *theoria*⁷ (Bunnin and Yu 2004, Blackwell Reference *Online*) and to interpret the human-Divine binary in most intelligible and provocative ways. From their witnesses, a canvass that foments a theology of hope burgeons to confirm, as well, that Spirituality and Psychology are confluent.

Authenticating a mysticism of healing for professional football players whose *brains* have been evaluated from a medical standpoint, but never sociologically, expands the alternatives of brain/psychological/spiritual research, which is currently limited in

⁷ Greek for “contemplation,” which corresponds to the Latin word, *contemplatio*, meaning “to look;” “to see;” “to gaze upon.”

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scope. My aim is to append the corpus of research in this regard, propounding a plausible hypothesis to be considered as veritable and compulsory.

. . . that God may be found by man and, man found by God!⁸ And, as a result of that finding, be healed of any emotional pang or anxiety.

⁸ Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and the Social Witness* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1954), 39.

Chapter One: Mysticism, Psychological and Spiritual Binary

Psychology and spirituality are inextricable. As evident in how each morphs through music, politics, and other social genres, a juxtaposition of psychology and spirituality proves that its tentacles are vast and its coalescence dense. Its glaring excrescence even peers through science, though often the slightest semblance of confluence with ethereal reality has been rebuffed by many scientific researchers in the past. Part of science's justification for exclusion has been rooted in its tendency to elucidate abstruse concepts within the contexts of ever-burgeoning technological advances. Such is a daunting task with respect to the sometimes elusive realities of the Mysterious, or amid new ontologies, such as those surrounding the cosmos that held sway much of the seventeenth century.

Specifically, Nicholas Copernicus and his impervious conjectures on an elliptical rather than orbital trajectory of the planets reveals the type of intellection that alludes to some penchant towards random evolution as opposed to divine creation, which might have contributed to the obstinate resistance that was teeming within spiritual circles. The temperament of the Catholic church in the seventeenth century proved those concerns to be indubitable in ways that compelled the prevailing religious sentiment towards a *personal* spirituality.

Pierre de Berulle, the founder of the French School of Spirituality who will be given more thorough attention in Chapter Two, espoused a conception of the historical Jesus that would be efficacious to embodying Jesus's personhood. Further, he employed themes throughout his prose, which seemingly conjoin the psychology/spirituality

intellection. Themes like *abnegation*, *adoration* and *abandonment*, to name few, foster, for Berulle, the means to divine consummation. In lieu of a dogmatic or systematized religion that characterized some of the religious tenor of the seventeenth century, Berulle's contributions would compel a personal experience with the personhood of Jesus, as prefaced above. Jesus *sent* seemed to be the locus of his ontology, along with delineating the Incarnate *Word*, Jesus and, expounding how that *Word*, precisely, might be revealed through the cosmos, specifically, human agency. The revelation of the Word through the human constituent of God's creation, indeed, subsumes the psychology-and-spirituality amalgam.

Both schools, Psychology nor Spirituality, have been less than modest in amplifying their own saliences, or guiltless in debasing, whether intentional or unintentional, the invaluable characteristics the other inheres. Individually, they have seemingly failed to acknowledge the import of the other, or the reality that while they are distinct, they are coalescent. Thus, Psychology comprises a spiritual dimension and Spirituality, a psychological one. There seemingly exists an inextricable interdependence that's inherent, not fostered, which means that it would take more effort to disqualify their nexus than to simply embrace the efficaciousness of their association. David Fontana posits in *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* that "science cannot prove that [spirituality] does not exist, but under certain circumstances it is able to provide us with

insights into the odds for and against such existence.”⁹ For science to make Spirituality more discernible, it must understand, in this case, the complexity of Spirituality. Science cannot be disjoined from Spirituality nor Spirituality from science to be perfectly sustainable within human existence. Such a notion absolves scientific matters from the culpability of proof.

Inasmuch as Spirituality is undergirded by the principle of faith in something, *knowing*, a constituent of that faith does not always require justification. Scientific matters often beseech an empirical response for the purpose of validation; however, sheer *knowing* sometimes relieves that burden of proving, as science is a *spiritual* phenomenon. “I don't *believe* but I do *know*,” Carl Jung posits, ‘of a power of a very personal nature and an irresistible influence. I call it God,’”¹⁰ Jung continues.

Aside from the innovative cogitations and research on the human brain, namely, the introverted and extroverted personality, Jung believed that the real answers to the human psyche were located in symbols entwined through religious, mythological and magical programs. For him, these symbols were the best possible means for deducing the Indiscernible, which he intimates as God. The annexation of Psychology and Spirituality woven throughout Jung’s suppositions is necessary to grasp the scope of his trajectory and, in general, intimate the solidity of this symbiotic binary, which is constitutive to life.

⁹ David Fontana, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 2.

¹⁰ Carl Jung, *C.G. Jung Letters Volume 2, 1951-1961*, ed. Gerhard Adler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 274.

In his research, symbols connote the inexplicable, a decryption of the abstract details of social science that are otherwise unintelligible. Further, they are the means for what will have to be simply *known*, rather than what will be *believed*.

The Psychology/Spirituality binary is reminiscent to the abstraction of *perichoresis*,¹¹ a Greek theological term meaning *rotation*, which describes the interpenetration of the godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So distinct is each Person of the divine body, yet so committed is one to the other's functionality ever so unreservedly and altruistically.¹² They move, according to this intellection, as a union, perfectly juxtaposed in an inextricable *dance* so as to typify the quintessence of love and affinity, and to effectuate an unremitting dynamism throughout the cosmos and human existence. For this to happen effectively, humanity, must embrace the import of its own psyche and spirituality. In so doing, humanity lives betwixt a fortuitous, immersive dynamism of the godhead whereby the binary of Psychology and Spirituality comes to the fore and, thus, is likely more perceptible with all of its complexities.

In this binary, Psychology and Spirituality are conjoined but do not lose their distinctiveness, as is the case in the perichoresis intellection. Psychology is a science

¹¹ With respect to Latin influence on the corpus of theology and the church's history, the synonymic term in English derived from the Latin is, *circumincession* (Armstrong 2004).

¹² Harvey, *Theological Terms*, 181.

that studies how people think, perceive, feel, and act.¹³ It comprises primarily eight branches: clinical, cognitive, developmental, evolutionary, forensic, social, and the two that are most pertinent to this research, health and neuropsychology. Health psychology deals with how biology, behavior and environment induces homeostasis or illness.¹⁴ Conversely, neuropsychology informs how brain structure and function may affect psychological processes and behaviors.¹⁵ These two branches provide a plausible underpinning to the elucidation of Psychology's annexation to the phenomenon of Spirituality and, doubtless, how professional football players who've been concussed or socially deprived may one day be cured.

One of the widely accepted descriptions of spirituality was tendered by the European Association of Palliative Care (EAPC), which states that "spirituality is a dynamic dimension of human life that relates to the way persons (individual and community) experience, express, and/or seek meaning, purpose, transcendence, and the way they connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, to the significant and/or the

¹³ Owen Davies, *Psychology Uncovered* (Richmond: Crimson Business Ltd., 2009), 1.

¹⁴ Davies, *Psychology Uncovered*, 3-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

sacred.”¹⁶ Ostensibly, it is the *substance* of what is perceived, felt, or acted upon based on interpersonal, cosmological and divine relationships.

Psuche is the English transliteration of a Greek derivative meaning *soul*, from whence the word *psychology* stems and from whence the active verb *psucho*, “to breathe,” comes. *Pneuma*, conversely, means *wind* from whence the word, *spirit*, comes.¹⁷ Hence, Psychology involves the animation or dynamism of something while spirituality encompasses the actual *substance* being animated. According to Judeo-Christian philosophy, these realities make Psychology and Spirituality unequivocally interdependent.¹⁸ There can be no breathing without something to be breathed; no thinking without something to be contemplated; and no feeling without something to be felt. In correlation to Christological ideology, the active *psucho* is analogous to God’s dynamic relationship with humanity and the cosmos, and synonymic to the Divine enfleshment in Jesus. That enfleshment, however, would be nil without the Father’s impressions peering through the historical Jesus’ very essence. Thus, the *pneuma*, the love, the grace, the virtue, the righteousness, the healing power, the *substance* that

¹⁶ Christina M. Puchalski, Robert Vitillo, and Sharon K. Hull, “Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care: Reaching National and International Consensus,” *J Palliat Med* 17, no. 6 [2014]: 642.

¹⁷ Jonathan Martin and Rob George, “What Is the Point of Spirituality,” *Palliative Medicine* 30, no. 4 [2016]: 325.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

unequivocally qualifies Jesus' life and kinship to the Father, is consummated by way of the *psucho's* dynamism.

1.1 Mysticism and Healing, A Historical Witness

The interdependence that constitutes the binary of Psychology and Spirituality is reminiscent of the same nexus that characterized the sentiments of some mystics during the formative years of the Church; namely, the Cappadocian Fathers who were pivotal to the development of trinitarian theology, pedagogical on the divine nature of God in Christ, and pointedly ascetic in efforts to typify what they assumed to be the characteristics of the historical Jesus.

Borne from utter disdain with the *defacement* of Christianity as initiated by Emperor Constantine, a group of desert dwellers, an aggregation of Christians who retreated to rural environs of Egypt to exemplify their faith in most simple and austere terms, homogenized by contemplation and experience an immanent God who transcended the ostentatious resplendence the imperial Church had assumed. Among those dwellers were Basil The Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Noteworthy were women, affectionately revered as Desert Mothers who, too, sought divine consummation by ascetic means.

Basil The Great from Cappadocia or what is known today as central Turkey, organized monasteries, which focused on personal devotion and care for the needy. As a result of his mystical prose and monastic leanings, many ascetics eventually populated

his native land, Cappadocia,¹⁹ specifically, to entwine themselves to the monastic life, which included Basil's spiritual mentorship. Part of Basil's penchant for monasticism was that it undergirded a theology which constituted the equality of the third person of the trinity. Moreover, a unity of the divine essence (*ousia*) without the negation of individualities (*hupo-staseis*) that represent any one person of the Trinity.²⁰ *Perichoresis* would be the appropriate delimitation here of Basil's theological inclinations, which also comprised a declaration on salvation that the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit were compulsory to such a mystical experience.

Accused of espousing a monolithic theology, Basil's mystical proclivities towards divine unity, indeed, embodied a *homoiousian* ideal.²¹ This abstraction informs the Father and Son to be of *similar* substance in lieu of the *same* substance, which was given the designation, *homoousian*. Basil's hermeneutic is mined by a conceptualization that the Father is not *unbegotten*, as his nemesis, Eunomius, would purport. Instead, God is simply, *Father* as explicated in scripture. Consequently, He is distinct to the Son, Jesus, but *similar* in essence as he begets the Son by way of the divine conception. Basil's mystical intellection surrounding *homoiousios* correlates the Psychology/

¹⁹ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 169.

²⁰ David L. Balas, "Basil of Caesarea," in *Encyclopedia Of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2005), 798.

²¹ Mark Delcogliano, "The Influence of Athanasius and the Homoiousians on Basil of Caesarea's Decentralization of Unbegotten," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19, no. 2 [2011]: 199.

Spirituality binary. Especially in his theological assessments on baptism, as recorded in Matthew 28:19, is this insight veritable.

Basil believes that baptism, the submersion of the human body in water, is a *sealant* to an impregnable unification with the Father and Son. In this event, the soul of humanity, the *psuche*, psychology, or active *breathing* constituent, consciously covets unification with the divine life. These acute respirings suffuses the *pneuma*, the *wind* or spirit and causes the baptismal event. The binary, doubtless, entails the coveting, which is the psychological element that longs to be one with the Father and Son through the modality of baptism and, conversely, the *wind*, which represents the spiritual nexus of anthropomorphism that actualizes the faith needed to consummate and yield meaning to the baptismal event. In essence, without the coalescence of Psychology and Spirituality, *breathing* and *wind*, humanity doesn't acquiesce to the praxes of baptism; neither does it interpret the depth of its meaning or experience its breadth.

For Gregory of Nyssa,²² baptism was the hallmark of the Church, which indeed, for him, distinguished its character from the cultic practices of Judaism and

²² The younger brother of Basil The Great, who was a Trinitarian theologian steeped in Origen theology and Neoplatonism. "Nyssa," denotes the small province in Cappadocia Secunda to which he served as See of the Church until his deposition and banishment in 376. (Cf. Encyclopedia Britannica online, s.vv. "Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Byzantine Philosopher and Theologian," "Gregorius Nyssenus," "Hardy, Edward R.," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Gregory-of-Nyssa> [accessed October 13, 2016]).

paganism.²³ Ontologically, the praxis of baptism comprised an inward cleansing, a lifting of the human spirit to an eternal contemplation, and an annexation of the Spirit to the cosmological realms.²⁴ So, the active pursuit of the *psuche* to stimulate all of the elements²⁵ of human essence, the *pneuma*, provides the perfect *matrix* for the annexation of the Spirit who desires to be one with humanity, in this case, one with humanity through the modality of baptism. The baptismal event in Gregory of Nyssa's schema similarly binds Psychology and Spirituality, as is the case in Basil's mystical theology on baptism. A small nuance in Gregory of Nyssa's mysticism, however, makes his hermeneutic on baptism especially more compelling.

Gregory submits John 3:5 as one of the principal texts in qualifying his claims on baptism. Jesus says, according to this scripture, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" [John 3:5 (New Revised Standard Version)]. While this water will foment spiritual consummation, in Gregory of Nyssa's mystical construct, its dynamism will impel dissenting questions from opponents to which he retorts plausibly that water coalesces the physical and the invisible;²⁶ the soul and the Spirit; the psychological, and all that represents the spiritual.

²³ Everett Ferguson, "Preaching at Epiphany: Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom on Baptism and the Church," *Church History* 66, no. 1 [March 1997]: 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ The constituents that make up the human spirit, whether corrupt or righteous.

²⁶ Ferguson, *Preaching At Epiphany*, 4.

Further, in the baptismal celebration, God blesses humanity and water and in so doing, qualifies the spiritual constituent. This consummation generates a *change*, Gregory continues, which further serves to underscore the spirituality that is entwined in the mysticism of baptism. *On The Baptism of Christ*, Gregory implores his listeners to “show [him] after the mystical grace [baptism], the change in [their] ways, and make known by the purity of [their] manner of life the difference of [their] change of character for the better.”²⁷ Herein lies the nuance that distinguishes Gregory from Basil. Gregory explicitly informs baptism to be mollifying and, if his postulations are tenable, the binary of Psychology and Spirituality is, thus, unequivocally life changing. Gregory of Nazianzus explicates baptism to be “enlightening,”²⁸ transformative, evoking a change moreover, akin to Gregory of Nyssa’s mysticism. Further, a “seal”²⁹ or protective garrison, comparatively, which would ultimately symbolize Christ’s redemptive work,³⁰ and a quintessential embodiment of purification as that work is acquiesced. Gregory’s intellection impels listeners to assent to baptism in an effort to be transformed. The willful acquiescence to baptism is indeed psychological, while the contemplation and the nexus of change that is concomitant to the praxis of baptism are both spiritual.

²⁷ Ferguson, *Church History*, 7.

²⁸ Nancy Elizabeth Johnson, *Living Death: Baptism and the Christian Life in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa* (University of Notre Dame: ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, 2008), 161.

²⁹ Johnson, *Living Death*, 196.

³⁰ Johnson, *Living Death*, 161.

A coalescence of the physical and the spiritual, the concrete and abstract, through the praxis of baptism underscores a mysticism worthy of consideration. One that ultimately brings humanity into union with the Divine and, thus, educes a revelation, transformation and, if needed, an emotional healing. Baptism is but the context that the Cappadocians utilize to explicate and systematize, in mystical terms, the anthropological and divine binary. Other religious praxes comparable to baptism may also reveal the efficaciousness of such coalescences as well. Even so, the crux of the matter informs the human-Divine binary to be unequivocally transforming, a life-changing essential.

In the mid fifteen hundreds, an enigmatic theologian emerged whose contemplations and writings would, as well, typify the harmonious juxtaposition of Psychology and Spirituality. While baptism did not serve as the overarching context through which she would espouse her musings, her contributions were yet provocative and poignant.

Teresa of Avila began the interior life, one characterized by meditation and prayer, by happenstance, ostensibly. Known to be an obstinate derelict who was obsessed with mischief and fallacious temptations, particularly surrounding boys, she was not likely to be such an unwonted mystic. Her musings recorded clairvoyances of meditative love, rather than meditative thinking. While mysticism, indeed, involves the mind, Teresa

cautioned that the mind's natural utility to actively *think* undermines the mystical experience of gratuitous love. That love, for her, was a means of *chastisement*, a mystical modality towards absolute obedience to God's will.³¹ Less thinking, which, in some senses, constitutes psychological suppression, provides the matrix for that *chastising* love. It is not completely clear as to what Teresa's quip may have meant; however, it is surmised that she makes an inference that correction, or in her own words, *chastisement* is the upshot to divine enrapture. Moreover, that absolute love subverts all evil impulses that defy absolute conformity to God's will.

In Teresa's mystical schema, the *psychology* of the mystical experience is the *mindfulness* of God's love.³² Furthermore, the obsolescence of human thinking outside of divine consciousness. The spirituality of the experience, conversely, encompasses the Holy Spirit's participation with humanity so as to actuate a divine consummation. This binary should elicit good actions instead of mere mystical sensations in Teresa's estimation; a transformed life, moreover, that impels a fortuitous resistance to insidious compulsions.³³ Twentieth-century mystic Dorothee Soelle purports in *Mysticism and Resistance*, that the mystical experience, which is indeed a spiritual one, should foster a spiritual transformation or change. Within the context of her own socio-political

³¹ Saint Teresa of Avila, "Saints," Saint Teresa of Avila, <http://www.catholic.org> [accessed November 20, 2016].

³² Mindfulness, in this context, denotes human consciousness/awareness of Divine presence.

³³ Ibid.

sensibilities, she deems this transformation *resistance*. She contends in her appraisal, as seemingly does Teresa intimate in her musings, that there is no spiritual experience without God's love, which incidentally undermines the *institutions* of evil and ultimately, necessitates action. Teresa suggests this [resistance] to be antidotal.

Earlier there was some discussion on *perichoresis*, the interpenetration of the godhead, Father (God), Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit, without the dissolution of any one essence in particular. Each person of the godhead, thus, participating harmoniously in the life of the other without giving up its distinctiveness or affecting another's particularity, is what such a mystical abstraction reveals. As suggested in the aforementioned, *perichoresis* is the embodiment of the psychological/spiritual binary, a concept that has been given much attention in this chapter. It has implicitly disclosed [mysticism] to be what twentieth-century mystic Howard Thurman would pose, "The finding of man by God and, the finding of God by man,"³⁴ an intellection that too entails the psychological and spiritual dimensions. Further, an anthropomorphic/Divine collaboration whose juxtaposition, ontologically, depicts a confluent *dance* between extremes. As Oswald McCall would adjure, a *dance* that involves a synchronized coalescence of God's rescission *en se* and, conversely, humanity's evolution. Medieval pastor and mystic Hockheim (Meister) Von Eckhart would opine this dance to embody an anthropomorphic abandonment whereby humanity yields the self so as to actuate God's full occupation of

³⁴ Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 39.

the *grunt* (of the human soul), which is an adulterated place that only God (in Christ) resides. In this schema, Christ is born in the soul of humanity by way of a psychological abdication as well as a divine incarnation; precisely, by way of a harmonious juxtaposition of the psychological and spiritual. Harmony and juxtaposition between human and divine extremes is an evocative reality to the rhythmical union of the trinity in what has been conceptualized above as, *perichoresis*. This ancient interpretation of the godhead encapsulates what Howard Thurman purported in *The Creative Encounter* surrounding the mystical experience, that it is unequivocally, God's finding of man and, conversely, man's finding of God.

As a result of this *finding*, particularly in Eckhart's schema, not only does an efficacious change to the human soul take place, but also a change to the very corporeal existence becomes a reality. Thus, Eckhart's mysticism propounds a humanity that can actually *become* God as it willfully abdicates the self. Conversely, for Thurman, it is the consummation of the *inner witness* of religious experience that authenticates that change. And, for McCall, it is humanity's discernment of God's *limitation* and, thus, obeisance to that *limitation* which qualifies change.

Summary 1.1

It is evident that social scientists and religious professionals have underscored the distinctions associative to their respective disciplines; however, they have failed, collectively, to identify points of convergence that could have served to stymie

interdisciplinary contentions that have existed for aeons. Namely, the intersection of Psychology and Spirituality. Through mystical testimonies of the distant past, all the way to the twentieth century, the binary of Psychology and Spirituality has proven to be consequential and interdependent. Hence, there can be no discussion or consideration of Psychology without inference or explication of its dependent counterpart, Spirituality or vice versa. Acknowledgment of such a juxtaposition within the context of mysticism, “the finding of God by man; and, the finding of man by God,” fosters change. Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman extrapolate this notion in most poignant and genteel terms. Ultimately, they inform that mysticism, which involves a coalescence between psychology and spirituality, actuates a transmogrification of the human spirit. It is believed that the upshot of this *inward* mollification of the spirit is positive behavioral change.

Chapter Two: Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman

Indeed, “the finding of God by man and the finding of man by God” finds its truest expression by mystical praxes which, Pierre de Berulle and the French School of Spirituality systematizes. Namely, *adherence*, *annihilation* and *apostolic duty* typifies the depth of Berulle’s mystical intuition but are just apart of the corpus of intellection that informs his overall agenda. Mystical conceptions, such as *abnegation*, *adoration*, and *abandonment*, which are reverberating themes throughout Berulle’s prose, illustrate how God *finds* man and conversely, man *finds* God. Accordingly, these themes, while implicit, seem to underpin and elucidate the complexities that are consonant to the mystical theologies of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman. They make the abstraction of God and His interaction with humanity more conceivable. Finally, they further legitimize the mystical binary and underscore, by way of this juxtaposition, that divine consummation can be antidotal.

While Berulle and the French School of Spirituality emerges from a sense of spiritual sentimentalism during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the spirit of those musings can actually be traced back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Meister Eckhart contemplated the assimilation of God and humanity. To wit lies the reason *abnegation* is utilized in retrospect here in this scholarship to delineate the complexities of the binary.

Before delving into the role of abnegation in Eckhartan theology, however, it is necessary to provide some historical context which gives plausibility to Eckhart’s mysticism. The details of Eckhart’s early life, ostensibly, were as elusive to scholars

over time as his eventual mystical contributions. From the work that has been accumulated, it appears that Eckhart was born of knightly stock in Hockheim, Germany around 1260.³⁵ Inasmuch as historical records inform these beginnings, Eckhart was presumably trained to be a warrior or was at least shown by demonstration the particulars of knightly life by his forebears.³⁶

The emergence of feudalism, which existed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, spawned the advent of knighthood in Europe.³⁷ In this system, all land in the king's realm belonged to him and, thus, was expendable. Twenty-five percent of the land was earmarked for personal use; other parts were distributed to the church at the discretion of the king; and, the remaining was leased with strict stipulations.³⁸ Those who leased land from the king, wealthy men called *barons*, could not procure land without having shown absolute allegiance to the king, as barons had complete autonomy of the leased land once secured.³⁹ Knights, who were distinguished in the aforementioned as warriors, were parceled out land by the king and, in exchange,

³⁵ Maurice O'C Walshe, ed. and trans., *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*, (New York: The Crossland Publishing Company, 2009), 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tea Gudek Snajdar, "Medieval Wall: Art, History, and Culture of the Middle Ages," <http://www.medievalwall.com> [accessed October 13, 2014].

³⁸ History On The Net, "Medieval Life - Feudalism," <http://www.historyonthenet.com> [accessed October 13, 2014].

³⁹ *Ibid.*

provided protection over the king's realm from all incursive trespasses.⁴⁰ These knights collected taxes from the serfs and were exempt from some of the feudal tributes. It is, perhaps, this confluence of austerity and truculence (innate to knighthood) that elucidates the root of Eckhart's mysticism to be brazen but grounded in love.

Around 1275, Eckhart joined the Dominican priory in Erfurt, Germany, and was soon be revered by his comrades as a burgeoning talent.⁴¹ He began taking part in disputations in 1293 and subsequently, released his earliest works, *Collations*, or *Talks of Instruction*, in 1298.⁴² While in Paris, Eckhart achieved a Master of Theology, which entailed an oral exegesis on *Sentences* by Peter Lombard.⁴³ It was Eckhart's competence and perspicacious acuity on Lombard's arguments that gained him instant notoriety as the *Meister*.⁴⁴ Moreover, this undertaking distinguished Eckhart among his comrades and, thus, eventually led to his election as the first provincial of Saxony in 1303; the vicar-general of Bohemia in 1308, where he composed what would become the highly

⁴⁰ Snajdar, *Medieval Wall*, [accessed October 13, 2014].

⁴¹ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

controversial, *The Book of Divine Comfort* and in 1314, an undertaking to oversee a convent in Strassburg.⁴⁵ It is here, in Strassburg, that Eckhart's mystical curiosities were bred, perhaps, as the environ was teeming with religious engagement and mystical ideas.⁴⁶ From there, his now acclaimed obloquy led him to the Stadium Generale at Cologne to assume the post once held by the eminent, Albert the Great. Though this post would be a distinct honor for Eckhart, it impelled some contentions that eventually led to Eckhart's disrepute until the nineteenth century.

The archbishop of Cologne, Heinrich von Virneburg, was an avid dissenter of mysticism, a phenomenon he had associated with the heretical and semi-heretical sects of the period.⁴⁷ Virneburg accused Eckhart of espousing heresies to the common people.⁴⁸ Much of what Virneburg characterized as heretical renderings was Eckhart's theology interspersed with mystical substance, such as, "Even he who blasphemes against God, praises God."⁴⁹ And, "Whoever reviles anyone with abuse, he praises God through this very abuse, and the more he abuses and the worse he sins, the more he praises God."⁵⁰ For Virneburg and his *supporters*, these conjectures defy essential Christian orthodoxy,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 26.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

making Eckhart a danger to the doctrine of God and its accompanying Christology. Eckhart, however, did not intend to defy or repudiate Orthodoxy; in fact, he provided a refutation to his accusers defending himself. On February 13, 1327, he made a declaration in the Dominican church that his theology was not heretical, and that many of his assertions were downright misunderstood.⁵¹ Eckhart's work evoked much scrutiny as it illustrated a schismatic proffering of biblical texts and theological concepts that described a hermeneutical praxis consonant to the scholastic and Medieval method: one that was *literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical*.⁵² This schema permitted sermonic liberties that would allow the preacher to depart far from the literal meaning of any biblical text, “a privilege of which Eckhart made the fullest use, sometimes even to the extent of reading into the text words which were not there at all!”⁵³ These liberties typified Eckhart’s mysticism, which centered around what Maurice O’C Walshe proffers, “the poverty of the spirit,” “the birth of Christ in the soul,” and love.⁵⁴ These themes, however, were more than simply the underpinnings of profound sermons, treatises, and musings; they were derived from a wellspring of medieval conditions.

⁵¹ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 10.

⁵² O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 26.

Times were challenging on some accounts; thus, what had once characterized the Medieval period was rapidly fleeting.⁵⁵ The growth of big cities in Europe were creating socioeconomic dynamics that were problematic.⁵⁶ Specifically, France, England, and Norman Sicily brought new forms of bureaucracy that affected judicial and those financial matters intimated above.⁵⁷ Urbanization, which spawned the growth of trade and commerce, changed the European gift economy, a form of *capitalism*, which was connate to the early Medieval period. Now, the late Medieval period would foster an economy that would constitute a profit-based, money and banking-oriented ideology.

These effects would evoke religious responses that were adaptable to the new milieu. What had been dominated by the religious life of Benedictine monasticism had progressively become a mere fragment of its past.⁵⁸ This ascetic life was amenable to rural settings and a feudal system that embodied medieval customs during an earlier period of de-urbanization.⁵⁹ Because of the turn towards urbanization in the late Medieval period, as prefaced above, religious praxis would have to adapt to the changes associative to that trajectory. Whereas scholasticism, “a scientifically organized and academically professional mode of seeking the understanding of faith (*intellectus*

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

fedei)” emerged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it burgeoned in the thirteenth century while monastic theology (the achievement of spiritual purity via withdrawal from the material world) waned.⁶⁰ Such is conceivable in light of the changes urbanization and the economy had engendered. Intellectual theology sprouted in the urban centers where even monks founded houses to teach the reigning form of theology.⁶¹ No longer was spiritual purity achievable by monasticism as it were, but it was now discernible by way of juxtaposing faith and reason in a manner that was bereft of extreme reclusive measures.

“To live as Christ and the apostles lived,”⁶² was the spirituality accorded to the late Medieval period. Discerning and living out the meaning of this *vita apostolica* became the foundation of religious life for monks, priests and lay people, initially.⁶³ This temperament was lauded by bishops and popes of the Church; however, it was approached with an investigative bent before official approbation or objection.⁶⁴ The tinge of skepticism over the movement, here and, as connoted in Constitution 13 of Lateran IV, would be an omen to the chasm eventually drawn between the Church’s

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 5.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

control of religious orders and the primacy of the *vita apostolica*.⁶⁵ The tension would be, perhaps, the obvious conduit to the change in character the *vita apostolica* would sustain.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a variation to the *vita apostolica* movement emerged out of reading the gospels. Part of living out its true meaning would now, by the sentiments of some of its proponents, comprise the enterprise of preaching and evangelizing.⁶⁶ Thus, the stress of the interior life that was accordant to monasticism in the early Medieval period would now traverse to an outward expression in the evangelization of the world. Mendicant religious orders, such as the Dominicans, the one to whom Meister Eckhart belonged, and the Franciscans presented themselves as viable vanguards to this new torrent.⁶⁷ No doubt, pastoral renewal, however, which was a response to the polemical advances of Peter Valdez of Lyon mainly in the twelfth century, became a significant cog in religious praxis along with the administration of the eucharist and penance and the discipline of devotionism.⁶⁸ Constitution 21, specifically of Lateran IV, delimited the yearly administration of the sacraments in addition to a number of other decrees pursuant to pastoral renewal.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 6.

⁶⁷ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 10.

⁶⁸ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 7.

⁶⁹ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 9.

The proliferation of preaching distinct to this season of renewal substantiated the presence of Christ's body and blood (*transubstantiation*)⁷⁰ to be existent in the host. Much of this was a reaction to Donatism, which condemned the administration of the sacraments by *unworthy priests*; and Cathar dualism, which spurned the import of anything material altogether.⁷¹ Solidarity with the humanity of Christ and the accessibility to an immanent God through His Son began to burgeon, as prefaced, and, the vehicle for its eventual manifestation would be the germination of a pastoral renewal movement parallel to the brimming religious environment.

In addition, the preaching of penance for sins and the practice of confession became universal where they had been mostly exiguous observances. Prior to this upsurge of pastoral renewal, the administration of the sacraments were part of a corrupt system of indulgences.⁷² Despite, most believed that the praxis retained moral and spiritual qualities too important to be eclipsed by the corruption that had characterized the sacramental discipline many revered.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 10.

⁷² O'C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 11. Indulgences comprised the remission of temporal punishment by God for offenses committed, whereby merit is given by the priest through the sacraments. Merit has been stored in *The Treasury of the Church* and appropriated by the sacrifice of Christ, the good works of the Virgin Mary and the saints (Christian Apologetics and Research Center, www.carm.org).

⁷³ Ibid.

Devotionalism emerged from the excrescence of pastoral renewal, as prefaced above, which according to Richard Kieckhefer, “was the most significant development in late medieval Christianity.”⁷⁴ This form of piety would place particular emphasis on Christ’s passion and the Virgin Mary, which would ultimately lead to some changes in the perception of how the mystical experience is consummated. And, how the accretions connate to personal experience with the Divine were gaining momentum. That intensity engendered what Bernard McGinn calls “democratization and secularization,”⁷⁵ sort of an *egalitarian* ontology towards direct consciousness of the Divine without the mediation of traditional, religious cloister communities. Here, any Christian, not just those elite monastics, could enjoy direct consciousness of God’s presence without reclusion.⁷⁶ Not only could any Christian enwrap this consciousness, but it could be done anywhere, at any time.⁷⁷

Though some still espoused the monastic life during Meister Eckhart’s time, his writings served as polemical mysticism to those traditional conceptions. Below is an excerpt from a sermon delivered on I John 4:9:

Truly, when people think that they are acquiring more of God

⁷⁴ Richard Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,” in *Christian Spirituality II*, ed. Jill Riat (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 75.

⁷⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism - 1200-1350* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

in inwardness, in devotion, in sweetness and in various approaches than they do by the fireside or in the stable, you are acting just as if you took God and muffled his head up in a cloak and pushed him under a bench. Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden.⁷⁸

Eckhart, here, in what was characterized as *vernacular theology* liberates God from the entrapments accordant to monasticism, which had necessitated and personified an inward seeking and praxis. Further, he repudiates the world's incontinence by implicating God's presence "by the fireside or in the stable"⁷⁹ to be inconsequential. He captures the spirit of the *vita apostolica* concordant to the thirteenth century here, a temperament that morphed into the evangelization of the world instead of mere withdrawal, austerity, and communal sectarianism.⁸⁰ Leaving no one with an excuse, Eckhart's entreaty is for the common person, again, to embrace God anywhere at any time without restraints.

This same tenor, espousing the themes of democratization and secularization, would find expression in other sermons:

But I say yet more (do not be afraid for this joy is close to you and in you): there is not one of you who is so cross-grained, so feeble in understanding or so remote but he may find this joy within himself, in truth, as it is, with joy and understanding, before you leave this church today, indeed before I have finished preaching; he can find this as truly within him, live it and possess it, as that God

⁷⁸ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ In the early Middle Ages, the *vita apostolica* was based on the biblical witness of the Acts of the Apostles where all shared in common goods and prayed continually in a community.

is God and I am a man.⁸¹

Eckhart divests his listeners of the *means* to God, which would have been controversial speech amid the pastoral renewal movement that championed the administration of the sacraments in the late Medieval period. By exclaiming, “That is God and I am man,” he implicitly contradicts the distinction accordant to clerics and thus nullifies the control that the Church hierarchy would want to maintain at this time. Eckhart encourages his congregants to find “joy” amid the political anarchy systemic to the Roman Interregnum that was filled with rapacity and opulence for the governmental officialdom.⁸² In so doing, he elicits “joy” and hope from his *disciples* who know all too well the sentiments of an embattled papacy who’d endured conflicts with the French crown and the eventual mortifying death of Boniface VIII; and, particularly in the fourteenth century, who were aware of the vagaries of the popes who resided at Avignon (France), the abode of the French king, making it possible for the papacy to be a subterfuge for the ideologies of the Crown when necessary.⁸³

2.1 Abandonment, Abnegation and Eckhart

During such times of infamy, heretical sects emerged out of the spiritual discontentment that loomed. Popes and bishops placed regions under interdicts whereby

⁸¹ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 14.

⁸² O’C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

the distribution of the sacraments were intervened.⁸⁴ Inasmuch as these consolations were supplanted, common people turned to alternative spiritualities to pacify their deepest longings.⁸⁵ They assimilated with sects, such as the Beghards and the Brethren of the Free Spirit.⁸⁶ The Beghards espoused that anyone who achieved perfection in this life were absolved from (committing) sin and thus, unequivocally inculpable.⁸⁷ The Brethren of the Free Spirit, a mystical sect from whom the Beghards descended, believed in the immanence of God and union with Christ in this life, however, without the institutional church or the need for religious experience within the church's defined protocol.⁸⁸ Eckhart was accused of aligning with this ethos although he incessantly rejected such associations. Despite Eckhart's disposition, his beliefs were consistent with most of the cults like the Free Spirits that maintained God's presence in the human soul and the need for humanity to work out their salvation. This emphasis on God's presence enveloping humanity's corporeality prevailed against the backdrop of a socio-religious context that feared the end of the world. As alluded to earlier, the Church's inability, as it were, to explain to Christians and/or console them in what was to be an apocalypse, other cults distant from the Church and mystical ideas, provided the necessary solace and/or

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Works*, 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 6th edition, "Beghards," <http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/society/beghards.html>, [accessed October 13, 2014].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

elucidation sought. Accordingly, themes consistent to the *birth of Christ in the soul* were existent in Eckhart's sermons and treatises. He shares the sentiments of some of the cults who were deemed heretical stating, "Do not be afraid, for this joy is close to you and in you" to affirm God's preeminence and care for His people amid the supposed *impending* destruction of the cosmos. Eckhart further empowers his listeners with an antidotal message laced with salvific imagery as well, explaining that Christ's indwelling of the human soul was indeed mitigating despite the preclusions of apocalyptic ruin. To comprehend the breadth of Eckhart's theme, the *birth of Christ in the soul*, a treatment of his theology and mysticism as it relates to the trinity, is necessary.

First, God is One or "pure unity and pure being."⁸⁹ In the Trinity, God the Father is Knowledge; The Son, Jesus, is Life; and the Holy Spirit, is Love.⁹⁰ This triunity constitutes God as *Unum*, absolutely One, without distinction.⁹¹ God is not a person, accordingly, but complete unity, *unum non unus*.⁹² In this oneness, "God does not know because He is, but rather "is because He knows."⁹³ This affirmation by Eckhart proceeds from a series of questions encompassing whether being and knowledge in God are

⁸⁹ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 18.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

identical.⁹⁴ However, later in Eckhart's theology, *Being* ostensibly becomes the important underpinning to his suppositions. Within this Being is knowledge, life, and love and, hence, everything created by this Being is begotten as a result. So, in essence, Eckhart's trinitarian doctrine is grounded in the unity of the godhead. Humans (creatures) gain their being from the godhead and thus, apart from that *godness*, have no being.⁹⁵ Essentially then, humanity can become God in like manner that God assumes human nature and, thus, becomes man in Christ.⁹⁶ There are some conditions, however, which are seminal to engendering such realities: the processes of detachment and self-abandonment, two themes that reverberated underneath the mystical musings distinct to the era.

Detachment and *self-abandonment* for Eckhart are, essentially, synonymous.

They constitute a letting go or abandoning of all things in order to assent to the divine life. It's for the soul's perpetual evolution, and Christ's birth *within*. He posits:

To be receptive to the highest truth, and to live therein, a man must be without before and after, untrammelled by all his acts or by any images he ever perceived, empty and free, receiving the divine gift in the eternal Now.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 19.

⁹⁷ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 68.

Eckhart's mysticism implores humanity to an emptiness; a self-abandonment that only takes place through the soul's detachment from things, present or in the past other than God. It is those present and past things that the soul has knowledge of, other than God, that impedes God's unequivocal envelopment of the soul. When the "[soul] is thus free of obstructions (that is attachment and ignorance), then it glistens with beauty, shining out bright and fair above the whole of God's creation, and through all God's creation, so that none can equal its brilliance but the uncreated God alone."⁹⁸ At this apex does Jesus reveal himself in the soul of humanity thus revealing the "Father's authority in the spirit in an equal, immeasurable power."⁹⁹ When the soul receives this power, there is no undertaking God has created in time that is insurmountable.¹⁰⁰ Such is the case when Eckhart says that "[God] stands mightily there as if with divine power, in face of which all things are puny and futile."¹⁰¹ This is the kind of theological method that fosters much scrutiny for Eckhart but reveals how, for him, humanity can become like God.

Eckhart's mysticism is reflective to some of the prevailing sentiments of the day, such as the anxieties towards the impending mortality of all humans. People were wondering what would come of their actual physical existence. Further, they were

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

pondering the extent to which sin could disjoin them from the envelopment of God's *life*. This, perhaps, is the reason Eckhart's notions are seemingly consistent with those of the Beghards and the Brethren of the Free Spirit, specifically as it relates to sin. The anthropomorphic ethos of the Beghards and Brethren surrounding sin posited that humanity is inherently sanitized of moral depravity and thus, as prefaced earlier, inculpable of what sin ultimately yields. Such sanctitude constitutes the soul's readiness for divine envelopment, an incarnation that comprises a perpetual birth of Jesus (within) by way of an abandonment of images and all attachments, both past and present, that are capable of impeding the soul's trek "back into her primal [Source]." ¹⁰² For the times in which Eckhart wrote, this is comforting news for distressed Christians. To believe that Christ lives within the human soul to its own degree, self abdication exonerates the soul of eschatological anxieties and the inherent albatrosses of sin. Such an indirect form of *letting go* (of images and conceptions) foments the soul's perpetuity.

Letting go affords knowledge, and to be devoid of this knowledge is to constitute the soul's attachment to images and other creation. Through Christ's envelopment of the soul by way of the soul's unequivocal divestment, a way is made for Wisdom. "When this Wisdom is united with the soul [Eckhart says] all doubt, all error, and all darkness are entirely removed; she is set in a bright pure light which is God Himself, as the prophet

¹⁰² Ibid.

says, ‘Lord in Thy Light shall we know the light (Psalms 36:9).’¹⁰³ Such imagery reveals this incarnation, an exemplar of Psychology and Spirituality, conjoining to actuate anthropomorphic and cosmological changes.

The *birth of Christ in the soul* is not only profound imagery here but an event that melds the soul of humanity and the godhead. It links what had been known to be a transcendent God to the human soul, and in so doing, forms a *unum*; ontologically, a *perichoretic coalescence* whereby no distinct or apparent particularities consonant to God or the human soul are maintained. It is conceivable that this juxtaposition in the *ground* of the soul, accordant to Eckhart’s mystical theology, attenuates the fears systemic to the social uncertainties and rapid changes of late medieval times. While *abandonment* is the way to consummation or Christ’s birth in the soul, the actual birth itself embodies Pierre de Berulle’s mystical theology of *abnegation* which tenders: “Jesus will live in us as he dwelt in Mary’s womb and in her heart, only to the degree that we joyfully *disappropriate* ourselves and become God’s servants.”¹⁰⁴ This *disappropriation* constitutes the abandonment or detachment that indeed precedes abnegation, which is necessary for the unequivocal consummation of the mystical experience.

There were a plethora of mystical motifs emblematic of Berulle’s ethos, which characterized the immanence and personhood of Jesus. Namely, among many, comprised

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Susan A. Muto, “Preface,” in *The Classics of Western Spirituality: Berulle and The French School, Selected Writings* ed. by William M. Thompson (New York: Paulest Press, 1989), xvi.

a trinitarian ontology, which espoused a *Jesus sent* notion; a Christocentric focus on the *Incarinate Word*; a *Lived Reality* theme that informs experience with Jesus to be more important than a conceptualization of his corporeal or ethereal realities. And, a *Jesus servitude* theme, which is exemplary of Jesus' humanity and all other anthropomorphic existence throughout human history. All of these themes, as prefaced above, were symbolic of Berulle's theological penchant towards divine immanence and personal experience. They, along with other themes, typify the nexus between Psychology and Spirituality, which makes religious experience even more intelligible and human-Divine propinquity perpetually inextricable. *Abnegation*, one of those many themes Berulle underscores in his mysticism, seems to limn in more telling terms how God desires to live in humanity and reveal Himself in ways that might foster measurable change and revelation. This identification, while some three-hundred years after the death of Eckhart, best describes in simplistic terms Christ's birth in the [human] soul. Hence, lies the reason for Eckhart's association in this chapter to abnegation as well, not just abandonment/ detachment alone. As in Berulle's schema, an experience with the personhood of Jesus was essential for the consummation of spiritual enlightenment, as was the *birth of Christ in the soul* of humanity paramount to Eckhart's mysticism, and the spiritual enlightenment of his congregants and others who would adhere to his claims. These schematic similarities, indeed, confirm a confluence in mystical intellection as it relates to Jesus' *life* in the soul but, more importantly, the conceptions mine a subtext that

suggests both theologians to be in favor of change and revelation that is consequential to Jesus' envelopment.

Change and revelation are variables that make abandonment and abnegation even more meaningful. Without these denouements, mysticism, by way of both abandonment and abnegation, is but an exercise of conscious detachment and levitation that fosters euphoric feelings towards Jesus' impact on the human soul. To avoid such futility, change and revelation must emanate, as was the eventual upshot of the primal contemplatives, even those who left an indelible mark on Eckhart's mysticism.

2.1.1 *Change and Revelation: The Deification of Humanity*

Eckhart's mysticism finds its roots in Neoplatonism, limned in the *Enneads* by Plotinus that "all things emanate from the One, the return to which can be achieved by the contemplative path of [abandonment] from all compounded things and a turning to pure simplicity."¹⁰⁵ This ethos, which was suffused in Christian prose by Dionysius the Areopagite, became prominent by Hugo of St. Victor and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, two other precursors to Eckhart's eventual musings. Thus, when Eckhart compels his congregation to *find* God through *unknowing* and *detachment*, the timbres of Clairvaux's mysticism ring resoundingly. It is through these modalities that Clairvaux announces

¹⁰⁵ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 3.

God to be found through an intentional turning away from the world; a place of illusions and conjectures.¹⁰⁶ Eckhart would take these ancient postulations, along with the mystical seeds found in the *St. Trudperters Hohelied* (of Germany) and underscore a mysticism that fosters a turning of the soul *inward* to find God.¹⁰⁷

Unlike Eastern mysticism, whereby the soul contemplates the Divine by way of this outward journey, Western mystics like Eckhart would proffer an inverse trajectory of the soul so as to emblemize, ontologically, a divine consummation. For the West, ultimate contemplation could be achieved by finding God (through inward turning) in the soul of humanity, specifically, the *ground*, *castle*, or *spark* of the soul as shown above in Eckhart's schema; again, a place unscathed by images, illusions and/or conjectures of the outside world, which is unequivocally reserved for God's occupation, and achieved by way of what Eckhart affirms as *letting go*, or as noted earlier, *detachment*.

Some of the earliest Eastern mystics, specifically Plato, enshrines this notion that the souls of humanity contemplated the "eternal truths and realities"¹⁰⁸ prior to being joined to a body and then, ultimately, birth. Consequent to what Plato describes here as a painful experience, the soul forgets its vision of the Real it once contemplated, and as a

¹⁰⁶ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

result, meanders in a disoriented manner a world of conjectures and illusions.¹⁰⁹ Hence, a return to *theoria*, would be a difficult trek, one replete with troublesome but revealing vacillations as Plato so eloquently explains in the allegory of the cave below:

Imagine men living in a ... cavernous chamber underground with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave. Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can only see what is in front of them, because the chains will not let them turn their heads. At some distance higher up is the light of a fire burning behind ... Now consider what would happen if their release from chains and the healing of their unwisdom should come about in this way. Suppose one of them was set free and forced suddenly to stand up, turn his head, and walk with eyes lifted to the light; all these movements would be painful ... and if he were forced to look at the fire-light itself, would not his eyes ache, so that he would try to escape and turn back to the things which he could see distinctly, convinced that they really were clear than these other really were clearer than these other objects now being shown to him? He would need then to grow accustomed before he could see things in the upper world ... the ascent to see the things in the upper world you may take as standing for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible ... in the world of knowledge the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential form of Goodness.¹¹⁰

Plato's description here of the *prisoners'* path back to *theoria* is indeed wearisome, laden with painful peregrinations. Noteworthy among the plethora of reverberating motifs existent in Plato's poignant descriptions here is abandonment/detachment; detachment

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Louth, *The Origins*, 4-5.

from the restraints of the cave's boundaries, and the chains bound to the necks and legs of the prisoners; detachment from the shadows and illusions of what was conceived as Real; and, finally, detachment from the pain experienced by the prisoners whose eyes gaze the radiance that peers from the Sublime. It is, thus, through this abandonment of the soul's phases of bondage in the cavernous chamber that the soul is able to achieve contemplation, an enrapture into the divine life, which for the soul that has been enslaved since childhood, is a new birth or a change.

This same motif, as prefaced above, is interwoven throughout Eckhart's sermons, which shows his homage to the contributions of his forebears, but more importantly, characterizes the soul's *inward* journey to *theoria*. Without it, the creature, in Eckhart's estimation, has no union with God most of all; but, moreover, has no *supreme virtue* on which the constituents of faith, love and humility subsist.¹¹¹ This *supreme virtue* constitutes the highest quality or condition of the soul. In fact, in *Sermon 80*, Eckhart states, "All our perfection and all our [blessedness] depends upon our [abandonment] passing beyond all creatureliness, all being and getting into the ground that is groundless."¹¹² Thus, the soul must be boundless, unequivocally free from the illusions that attempt to impede God's unequivocal and ineffable privilege. This state of the soul

¹¹¹ The Eckhart Society, "Meister Eckhart and Prayer - Talk 2: Being Detached," The Eckhart Society, <http://www.eckhartsociety.org/resources/meister-eckhart-and-prayer-talk-2-being-detached.html> [accessed July 2, 2015].

¹¹² Meister Eckhart, "Sermon Eighty," in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, ed. and trans., Maurice O'C Walshe (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 400.

fosters God's *godness*; His uninhibited flow into the soul, which illuminates and changes humankind, ultimately. It constitutes that "God loves nothing but Himself and what is like Himself, in so far as he finds Himself in [humanity] and [humanity] in Him."¹¹³ Thus, by way of detaching, humanity not only frees itself from inhibitive powers, but becomes like God. Eckhart qualifies this by proffering, "God is bound to give Himself to a detached heart."¹¹⁴ He further explains that when a heart is unequivocally detached, "the spirit stands as immovable in all the assaults, joy or sorrow, honor, disgrace or shame, as a mountain of lead stands immovable against a small wind. This immovable detachment brings about in man the greatest similarity with God."¹¹⁵ Such abandonment and transmogrification typifies quintessential *change* from the corporeal to the ethereal. This kind of morphing that transpires in the *ground* encapsulates the mystical ontology Plato and Bernard Clairvaux pose before Eckhart.

Essentially, abandonment engenders abnegation, a change, thus, fostering a perpetual divine envelopment, which is reminiscent to a mother's periods of multiple pregnancies. Upon each pregnancy a mother has sustained, the womb has to be cleared

¹¹³ Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 238.

¹¹⁴ The Eckhart Society, *Meister Eckhart*, [accessed July 2, 2015].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and distilled and the uterus must be regenerated to make the potential of succeeding impregnations probable. Otherwise, there can be no new pregnancy or birth to follow. In Eckhartan mysticism, a new birth takes place in the *womb* of humanity, not once, but perpetually as humanity incessantly turns inward towards the *ground* (where God resides) and willfully detaches. The soul must be absolutely devoid for the uninhibited actuation of the new birth to take place perpetually. Thus, the soul's traverse inwardly, the void, and detachment altogether fosters a quintessential phenomenon: what Eckhart tenders as the *birth of Christ in the soul*, or what has been noted above as, *abnegation*.

It is plausible that Eckhart's musings on the *birth of Christ in the soul* (or abnegation) specifically, derive from the attempts of the Church Fathers at the Council of Nicea 325, and Council of Chalcedon 451, respectively, to systematize the godhead and clarify how they cohere ontologically. Leading up to Nicea, Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria and Arius, a local presbyter, debated vehemently over how the Word (Logos), Jesus, was co-eternal with God.¹¹⁶ Alexander proffered that Jesus, in fact, was existent eternally with the Father; however, Arius retorted that Alexander's surmising was erroneous.¹¹⁷ For Arius, Jesus was not co-eternal, (but the first of all creatures). To ascent to this ideology, in Arius's estimation, intimated belief in two gods, and thus, threatened traditional monotheistic orthodoxy. Conversely, to accept the notion that the

¹¹⁶ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 184.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Word was created dismisses the reality of the divine nature the Word inherently possesses, according to Alexander.¹¹⁸ Further, to exclude the divine nature would nullify Christian worship altogether and indirectly suggest that Christians had been worshipping a creature.¹¹⁹ In time, for those who would take up the Alexandrian ethos, such as Athanasius, affirmations surrounding salvation would support their claims for Jesus' divine nature, which tendered that "Christ [had] achieved our salvation because in him God entered human history and opened the way for [humanity's] return to him."¹²⁰ This authenticated that Jesus, the Word, is, in fact, Divine. Much to Arius's consternation, this rationale was flawed; for the proponents of Alexander protested that salvation was achieved through Christ's obedience to God, not because God through Christ entered into human history. Without this obedience, Arian supporters continued, Christ's redemptive work would have been futile.¹²¹ To settle this dispute, Emperor Constantine called together approximately three hundred bishops from the Greek-speaking East, as well as some from the West. At Nicea, in 325 CE, the summoned delegation would convene the First Ecumenical Council to elucidate the nature of God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, and the mysteries congenial to their union. Further, the Council would be brought

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 185.

¹²¹ Ibid.

together to systematize and explain how salvation is achieved in light of the mystical confluence within the godhead.

Chalcedon 451 would further illumine the schisms reverberant at Nicea and amend them, in some respects, but what draws a nexus between the two councils and Eckhart's mysticism are the intimations around the incarnation. The Nicene Creed proffered that Christ was "light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human."¹²² For the Creed of Chalcedon, Jesus was "begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead . . . and for us and our salvation born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood."¹²³ So, in both creeds, it is suggested that God envelopes humanity (the Virgin Mary) to ultimately become humanity, just as Eckhart contends in his intellection of the *birth of Christ in the soul*. What the Creeds do not confess, however, is the Virgin Mary's detachment from the fear (of the unknown) that is associated with the divine conception as attested to in scripture. It is her detachment from this fear that engenders the *birth* of Christ in her *soul*. Eckhart seemingly considers these factors as he muses how humanity comes to *know* God by way of change, no doubt, and this *unknowing*, which Mary undergoes as God envelopes her.

¹²² Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 189.

¹²³ Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church, "Creed of Chalcedon," Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church, <http://reformedspokane.org.html> [accessed July 2, 2015].

Through the modality of abandonment (or detachment), God in Christ is revealed to Mary, which fosters an abnegation, a change or a *birth* in her soul. Moreover, an *unknowing*, ironically, perpetuates more revelation.

Unknowing constitutes a complete emptying or shedding that is fomented through detachment. From this act of *unknowing*, a moment of divine realization takes place in the purest part of a human's soul (the *ground*) whereby it becomes aware of its divine potentiality, and thus, a perpetual, transformative birth of Christ in the soul ensues.¹²⁴ By grace does humanity *achieve* all of this, according to Eckhart, not of works or effort. Unknowing, transformation, and revelation is sustained, however, as the human soul fastens intently on God's initiation.

In this new birth where the soul is one with God, God *knows* humanity, and thus, "the Son is born in [humanity] . . . and [is] born again in the Son."¹²⁵ Essentially, humanity becomes the one Son and takes on this deification as is done in the *Incarnation*. In this historical event, Mary is deified as a result of her acquiescence to God's initiative to *impregnate* her, and thus, she receives veneration, specifically from the Catholic church, in prayers, scriptures and other observances that intimate her divinity. Moreover, she's affirmed to have been favored by God as a result of the Virginal Conception and

¹²⁴ Kim Nataraja, "Birth of Christ in the Soul," The School of Meditation: The World Community for Christian Meditation, <http://www.theschoolofmeditation.org/content/letter-42-birth-christ-soul.html> [accessed July 4, 2015].

¹²⁵ Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 240.

seemingly given preeminent status among all women. As a result, her carnality is ennobled and through this coronation, all of human existence is discursively crowned. Jesus's earthly existence would ultimately accomplish this for all humanity, but Mary's conformity to God's will cannot be refuted. Her act of abandonment causes a change, a metamorphic elevation from anthropomorphic existence to divine anthropomorphic existence. Here, at the divine anthropomorphic level, Mary is favored and once Jesus is born, is proven to have *known* God and is thus empowered to impel the fullness of Jesus' earthly ministry.¹²⁶

Hence, Eckhart's *birth of Christ in the soul* is analogous to the Holy Mother's Virginal Conception. Significant motifs, *detachment* and *unknowing* or rather, abandonment and shedding, found throughout Eckhart's sermons, seem to inform that the Incarnation deifies humanity.¹²⁷ That deification constitutes another kind of change. For Mary, the Holy Mother, the Incarnation takes place in her womb by way of her

¹²⁶ Such is the case at Cana when the wedding that Jesus has been summons to has no more wine. Mary, without hesitation, tells Jesus, "They have no wine;" and, then turns to the servants of the wedding feast, as if she knows he will perform a miracle, and says, "Do what he says." Mary's confidence suggests that her abandonment and submission to the indigence of abnegation, were enabling. Ostensibly, these modalities actuated some prophetic powers, which, too, characterized her *change* in status and confirms what "the birth of Christ in the soul" is capable of doing: Yielding revelation.

¹²⁷ "Unknowing" is a form of desquamation; a cleaning of the conscious soul whereby preconceived sensibilities are abandoned for the sake of Divine possession.

detachment from the fear of the unknown.¹²⁸ For Eckhart, the Incarnation event ensues in the ground of the soul upon the soul's detachment from illusions (the act of *unknowing*) and so does revelation, an illumination by the soul of its own divine potentiality. This divine awareness fosters an enrapture of a divine binary, which morphs into one amalgam; one unified whole, indistinct; and a change, one salient point that will be given more attention later.

To make the nexus of change in Eckhart's mysticism even more intelligible, more needs to be said of his Christology. Essentially, Eckhart's Christology rotates on the Prologue of St. John's gospel in verse eleven of chapter one which says, "[Jesus] came unto his own" [(John 1:11 (King James Version))]. He cogitates from a close reading of the text that the divine Word has a *universal* nexus, and hence, bears a ligation to human nature and all of its accompanying limitations.¹²⁹ Such an interpretation leads Eckhart to another illation taken from verse twelve of the same chapter which states, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" [(John 1:12 [King James Version))]. From this reading, he opines that the purpose of the Incarnation is that "man may become by the grace of adoption what the Son is by nature."¹³⁰ In other

¹²⁸ Mary, the mother of Jesus, is enjoined not to "fear," suggesting some trepidation with the unfamiliarity of the Incarnation event and/or the angel, which summons her to God's prerogative. This, indeed, constitutes "the fear of the unknown."

¹²⁹ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 116.

¹³⁰ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought*, 117.

words, that “God [may become] man that man might become God.”¹³¹ Further, Eckhart retorts (during his trials at Cologne and Avignon), “Don’t think that there is one Son by which Christ is God’s Son and another by which we are named and are sons; but is the same and is he himself, who is Christ, born as Son in a natural way, and we, who are sons of God analogically - by being joined to him as heir, we are coheirs.”¹³² Hence, by way of the Incarnation, he intimates that the Son takes on human nature and human nature, sonship, which constitutes a melding of sorts into the same essence that ultimately becomes one unified change. Such a coalescence of extremes gives credence to two notable views that clarify the Divine/human nexus connate to Jesus’ and Eckhart’s musings on transmogrification even more.

High Christology, which places particular emphasis on Jesus as God’s Son, accents inherent divineness and its profound dynamism(s) throughout the life of the historical Jesus. Conversely, *Low Christology*, which places emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus’ humanity and how that distinction reveals Jesus as God’s Son and brings all of humanity into propinquity with the Father. *Low Christology* typifies, however, Eckhart’s overall theological penchant which seeks to portray God as immanent with humanity and further, how that sheer immanence transmogrifies into the very embodiment of the Word.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

As confirmation to the latter, Eckhart said, “It would be of little value for me that the *Word was made flesh* for man in Christ as a person (*supposito*) distinct from me, unless he was also made flesh for me personally so that I too might be God’s son.”¹³³

The mere reality that this *Low Christology* peers through Eckhart’s mysticism, in spite of the undeniable irradiance of Jesus’ divine nature, suggests that the anthropomorphic constituents of the Incarnation are salient and consequential. Also, in many respects, it raises the station of anthropomorphism, deifying human attributes, ostensibly.

Further, it suggests the divine nature to be dependent upon the human *repository* in efforts to actuate an *active enfleshment*.¹³⁴ Without this *enfleshment*, which involves the constituent of the Virgin Mary’s corporeality in the Incarnation event, divinity can not be understood in its entirety or made accessible to humanity. This is precisely the intimation Eckhart would make on Christology, and its relationship to the mystical subtext he posed to undermine the imprudences of the Church.

Therefore, *Low Christology* is the prevailing Christological view that represents his predilections. Further, it is essential for understanding the conception of the *birth of the Christ in the soul*. While abandonment and abnegation are prominent ontologies

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *Active enfleshment* informs the historical Jesus’ fulfillment of the Father’s will and his participation in the affairs of the created order and sentiments concomitant to that participation.

resounding over the corpus of his abstractions, the *birth of Christ in the soul* illustrates how the binary of Eternity and corporeality coalesce to foster change anthropomorphically. And, how Mary, the vessel of the divine enfleshment, embodies that change, ultimately becoming the Mother of *Light*.¹³⁵ Born in her is the Life, which was and is the [Revelation] of God, who further would be the exemplar of all anthropomorphic existence. She would receive a revelation of who she is because of this conception, but she would have also conceived of Jesus' import as evidenced at Cana when Jesus is summoned by her to change water into wine.

The gospels do not inform the source from whence Mary derives her premonition of Jesus' metaphysical capabilities. Nonetheless, the revelation she receives compels her to enjoin Jesus' powers, which would *resist* or change the natural state of affairs, ultimately bringing placidity to an otherwise awkward setting. The key here is, *revelation*, not so much the source from whence such perspicacity is ascertained, but that *revelation* impels more changes: the water is turned into wine and, Jesus, is thus revered by those who witness and hear of this miracle. Such qualifies the significance of revelation. Without it, however, mere change is inconsequential, and life is bereft of an essential component that serves to foster social and environmental transformation. Hence, change and revelation are two inextricable phenomena that do not exist

¹³⁵ Light, comes from John 1 testimony which states, "In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

independent of each other. Throughout Eckhart's mysticism, as illustrated in Plato's allegory of cave, the juxtaposition of change and revelation leads to something consequential and substantive.

Appealing to the *human* sensibilities, the Light in the anterior of the cave impels the prisoners' upward trek towards what is an iridescent Reality. This Reality is the *Light* or *Truth*. The sojourn of the prisoners towards that Light/Truth symbolizes a liberation from the reprise of illusory and conjecture, false images and realities, which served to obscure the *truest* revelation. The voluntary trek upwards constituted a form of obstinate rejection of sustained confinement in what contemporary theologian and mystic, Dorothee Soelle, deemed *resistance*, in her scholarship, *Mysticism and Resistance*. For Eckhart, a revelation of the religious bent is sufficient justification of the forms of resistance, abandonment and abnegation, which he would promote and accentuate in his prose and sermons. By way of a complete disclosure of the pernicious decorum impelled by the religious Right, Eckhart, under the guise of mystical obscurity, proffers an array of mystical ideologies and enigmatic precepts to challenge the prevailing religious and social ethos, and to further accent the human constituent betwixt a tripartite whole.

2.1.2 Purity, Indistinction and Gelassenheit

The aforementioned has given attention to the ontological themes of abandonment and abnegation, which are interwoven throughout Eckhart's mystical theology. They are contextualized as *detachment* and *unknowing* for the sake of theorizing and fostering,

much to Eckhart's intellection, a *birth of Christ in the soul*. Nonetheless, there are two other motifs that seem to drive the corpus of his agenda to free his *congregants* from the prevailing religious sentiments and yet illustrate how the binary of corporeality and eternity produces change and revelation, and deifies the human constituent, ultimately.

The soul that has experienced abandonment and the birth of Christ has been illuminated. Further, it has been completely distilled of earthly ballast, as prefaced above.¹³⁶ *Purity*, which constitutes this complete evacuation of the *grunt*, is not achieved by way of the human soul merely, but God's envelopment, as well. The human soul abandons, making way for the *abnegation* to ensue. However, inasmuch as human existence is innately impure, *God en se*, who is, conversely, unequivocally pure, actuates this distillation of the preferred dwelling place (in the soul), called the *grunt*. So, in essence, God makes the soul pure. Thus, the place He resides, the *grunt* or the *ground*, becomes pure.

In Eckhart's schema, The *unum* that is formed as a result of *Purity's* coalescence with *impurity* serves to *deify* the *human* constituent of human existence. Moreover, it validates those powers that are consonant to the incidence of change.

First, change deifies humanity by way of the actual Divine-human nexus (i.e., God implanting his *essence*, Jesus, in the womb of corporeality, and thus, ultimately

¹³⁶ Gorge K. Hasselhoff, "Purity of Thought in Meister Eckhart," *Zeitschrift Fur Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 65, no. 4 [2013], under "Journals," <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/15700739-99000082.html> [accessed July 6, 2015].

becoming man). When the human soul willfully abandons itself for the sake of that divine envelopment, however, change takes place at the anthropomorphic, psychological level whereby the human soul discovers its divine potentialities by way of revelation, which would otherwise be indiscernible. Change, then, occurs *before* and *as* abnegation materializes.

At the psychological level, however, humanity makes a decision to recede its autonomy. As with the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave, such a decision reveals a quest for something exceptional. That *exception* is the *Truth* in Plato's allegory; however, in Eckhart's schema, that Truth is *Purity*. As prefaced in the aforementioned, when the human soul is enveloped by the Divine what had been impure is suddenly transmogrified into that absolute Purity.

Eckhart's use of *purity* within the contexts of abandonment and abnegation, no doubt raises the station of human existence. Someone like Mary, Jesus' mother, abandons her own will, thus making room for what is noted historically as, *The Virginal Conception*. Her own abandonment in this unprecedented event intimates a quest for purity; however, the actual gestation of Jesus in Mary's womb consummates such purity.

Hence, Jesus is born, comes into his *own* (revelation), walks as the embodiment of God in the earth, and seemingly, lives a fulfilling, pure life, one acquiescent to his (eternal) father's will. Through this entire series of events, the human constituent is exalted. Mary is no longer an inconsequential human but the blessed, exalted *mother of God*. She abandons herself, *changes* moreover, thus making way for another change: the

abnegation that will ultimately consummate all the changes she has sustained. Further, by way of her *changes*, God who is Spirit, ultimately *becomes* man. Through that *unum*, the world is given signs of how change is inevitable as a result of the Divine-human nexus, and efficacious, as evidenced by the historical Jesus' salient, earthly encounters.

Indeed, the corpus of Eckhart's mysticism juxtaposes God and humanity. And, Jesus' ministry is a testament to that juxtaposition of extremes, which Eckhart posits as [indistinguishable] in operation. God is man, and man, God, to the degree that the amalgamation of extremes become essentially indistinct. Here, one pure essence (of God) exists as an upshot to Christ's birth in the human soul.

Abnegation qualifies this *indistinction* whereby God and humanity meld to become inextricably and unequivocally Divine. Theologian and scholar, James M. Clark, correlates the coalescence of God and humanity to a sun's rays shining through a mirror.¹³⁷ He suggests that the reflection of the sun's light shines in the mirror, and sends light back to the sun. Continuing his hypothetical, he submits that both, mirror and sun, remain distinct,¹³⁸ however. In more pointed terms, he informs of Eckhart's mysticism that God's *godness* infuses the [human] soul and the [human] soul, thus, reflects such charism back to the Source. As prefaced in his conjecture surrounding the particularities of mirror and sun, Clarke's hermeneutic goes on to inform that the soul and God remain

¹³⁷ James M. Clark, *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction To the Study of His Works With an Anthology of His Sermons* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 86.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

distinct. While his deduction is plausible, it proves inconsistent with Eckhart's schema, at least initially.

Clarke's assessment undermines the saliency of the Incarnation, which for Eckhart, transmogrifies humanity into divine essence. Further, his musings leave a bit of skepticism as to whether God yields the totality of *His godness* accordant to the Incarnation event altogether. For the divine and human constituents to remain distinct despite unmitigated mystical coherence, it would misappropriate Eckhart's percipience of the *birth of Christ in the [human] soul*, a point to which Clark would eventually cede.

He would wrest his initial thoughts, positing that "the union of God and the soul is compared with the action of fire on fuel [instead]. The fire has to heat the wood and make it similar to itself before it can kindle it, thus drawing the wood into itself. All dissimilarity must disappear before the wood can be turned into fire.¹³⁹ In the same way, we must lose all dissimilarity with God before we can be taken up into His presence."¹⁴⁰ "To lose all dissimilarity," essentially, is to become *like* or ultimately indistinct, a diametrical turn from Clarke's original hermeneutic for reasons that remain unclear. What is important, however, is that Clarke's retraction infers in poignant detail how the *willful* human soul is *consumed* by the envelopment of God, and thus, becomes essentially God. Further, that God's tenancy is so seminal that the human soul melds His

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Life and then becomes that Life by forfeiting all the characteristics that would foster dissimilarity.

Clarke's new rationale that one indistinct *unum* morphs as result of a human/Divine coalescence now aligns with Eckhart's original conceptualization. Abnegation, which comprises this metamorphosis, does not happen for the mere sake of happening, however. It happens, as explicitly stated above, for change. So, as change happens at the psychological level when the human soul abandons its own will and the human soul *becomes God*, change, as an actual embodiment, lives and inspires. Howard Thurman, one of the highlighted forebears, describes this change as the "outwardness of religion," which is the personification of an outward conviction that should affect people and social constructs that are virulent to the advancement of life. In Eckhart's estimation, this change epitomizes an apotheosis of transubstantiation, a metamorphic transmogrification inwardly that engenders an outward expression of an *indistinguishable unum* fit to transform the cosmos, what the historical Jesus typifies throughout the gospel narratives.

Earlier there were references made to "letting go," "emptying," and "detachment" within the context of the human soul's peregrination towards consummation. In addition to what has been already posited, *gelassenheit*, a term given credence by German philosopher Martin Heidegger in the twentieth century, meaning "releasement" or

“enlightenment,” helps clarify in more poignant detail the complexities of the soul’s evanescence.¹⁴¹ Moreover, Heidegger utilizes such characterization to delimit Eckhart’s abstraction on the poverty of the spirit, which is a component for divine consummation in Eckhart’s schema.

The poverty of the spirit is a condition of emptiness. This emptiness constitutes absolute negation in the human soul whereby the soul doesn’t will anything, not even the will of God. Hence, to will the will of God is to be desirous and replete with willful ambitions:

If a man is to become poor in his will, he must want and desire as little as he wanted and desired when he did not exist. And in this way a man is poor who wants nothing ... So long as a man has this as his will, that he wants to fulfill God's dearest will, he has not the poverty about which we want to talk.¹⁴²

“Poverty” is what Eckhart connotes as emptiness here. Such an [impoverished] state of the soul requires complete evanescence. Moreover, an absence of illusions, images, and preconceptions; a condition analogous to the state of the psyche prior to human birth. In this state, “[Humanity] must want and desire as little as he wanted and desired when he did not exist.” This notion of “*un-willing*” is a peculiar intellection. While it is

¹⁴¹ David Paulsen and Jason Scoffield, “Discourse on Thinking and The Concept of Releasement,” *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, [October 25, 2013], under “College of Humanities,” <http://www.jurbyu.edu.html> [accessed March 20, 2017].

¹⁴² Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 52,” in *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 225.

comprehensible that humanity conceives its own pre-corporeal modus according to Socrates, it is suggested that the human soul is unequivocally devoid prior to birth as proposed in Eckhart's mysticism. For the sake of conciliation, perhaps the soul wills initially, but then *un-wills* in efforts to distill its capacity of preconceptions derived at the level of pre-embodiment. The modus of an *un-willed* soul constitutes the metaphysical psyche of an impoverished spirit.

Herein lies the essence of *gelassanheit*, an unequivocal negation of the human soul, which is not only a precondition for abandonment and abnegation, but also a conduit to mystical coalescence. To specify or designate a *place* to which God works as it relates to His active *willing* is to indirectly endorse distinction (between God and humanity), a mystical characterization Eckhart rebuffs. As noted in the aforementioned, there are no distinctions when God and humanity coalesce, just *God*. If there were *places*, much to Eckhart's aversion, there would exist desires impelled by images and illusions and preconceived notions of God. *Gelassanheit*, however, is the precondition, and the means to the human soul's entwinement with the godhead, not a designated area.

Earlier, Eckhart would call the place to which God infuses his nature with humanity, the *grunt* or ground, which ostensibly makes these observations on *gelassanheit* more obscure. For clarification, the *grunt* is the "releasement/enlightenment" or *gelassanheit* in which God's activity ensues. It is absolute negation, the state of nothingness, moreover, which best characterizes the human soul's condition amid mystical abstraction. This nothingness constitutes mystical poverty, which

ultimately qualifies the divine birth and the transmogrification of the *unum* in Eckhart's estimation.

Thus, the poverty of the spirit, according to Eckhart, is the axis on which the abstractions of abandonment and abnegation turn. It buttresses Luke 9:23, which, as prefaced above, explicitly underpins the discipline of self denial as the catalyst to blessed emptiness. In Eckhart's own words, "Everything depends on [denial]. Take a look at yourself, and wherever you find yourself, deny yourself. That is best of all."¹⁴³ Hence, the soul's unequivocal abdication of such things as conjecture, illusions, and desire consummates *gelanssanheit*. Eckhart, in controversial terms, goes on to explicate that, "One should be so poor [in spirit, that is, in will] that he should not be or have any place in which God could work. When one clings to place, he clings to distinction. Therefore I pray God that he may make me free of *God*, for my real being is above God if we take *God* to be the beginning of created things."¹⁴⁴

If God makes us free of *God*, God is not the figment of fanciful imaginations, which serve to accommodate the human psyche's homeostasis or contentment. He is, then, free to be absolutely God within humanity and the human soul, which ultimately transmogrifies carnality into ethereality, the will of *God*. This is what Eckhart's

¹⁴³ Hereditary: Resources and Reflections and Hermits and Solitude, "Gelassenheit (releasement) in Meister Eckhart," House of Solitude, <http://www.hermitary.com.html> (accessed March 29, 2017).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

theological agenda undergirds in the face of a socio-political and religious bent, which is seemingly mechanical in scope.

To be *poor* in spirit is to be completely vulnerable, as intimated above. Such is a willing state of utter oblivion and understanding of the human soul that it must *un-know* in order to achieve emptiness:

For a man to possess this poverty he must live so that he is unaware that he does not live for himself, or for truth, or for God. He must be so lacking in all knowledge that he neither knows nor recognizes nor feels that God lives in him ... It is in this manner, I declare, that a man should be so acquitted and free that he neither knows nor realizes that God is at work in him: in that way can a man possess poverty.¹⁴⁵

Living to be unaware and unequivocally empty emblemizes Eckhart's mystical theology as it relates to the human soul's condition. However, his conjectures contravene the prevailing mores, which promulgate the acquisition of knowledge. Much of this temperament is attributable to Thomas Aquinas and the spirit of intellectualism, which sought to codify the nature of God and humanity in a systematic, pedagogical pattern.

Merging Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine, Aquinas believed that a confluence of rational thinking and the study of nature were a means of apprehending truths about God. Thus, intellectualism and reason were salient for Aquinas, but, prominent, moreover, to the medieval age in which Eckhart lived and would ultimately

¹⁴⁵ Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 421.

pose his mystical refutations. *Unknowing*, in the face of a culture brimming with intellectualism, was a stark contradiction. For Eckhart, this unknowing, or as he would suggest, *poverty*, encapsulates *gelassenheit*, meaning to be released or enlightened. How ironic is it that mystical consummation, which is enlightening, is achieved by way of poverty, an absolute negation. Such is unfathomable, but it undergirds the corpus of Eckhart's mysticism and is suggestive to the confluences of psychology and spirituality; anthropomorphism and divinity; emptiness and God. It shows how the conflation of extremes, by way of abandonment and abnegation, *deifies* the human constituent and elucidates the path for the true outwardness of religion to be realized.

2.2 Adoration and McCall

Authentic outwardness was accordant to inward consummation, according to pastor and mystic, Oswald McCall. An immigrant from Australia in the early 19th century, pointedly chided the excrescences of Christianity, which he believed hindered an inward relationship with God. By way of adroitly entwining the theme of adoration throughout his reflections, McCall repudiates the Church's submission to the spirit of *externalism* that subtly affixed its tentacles to Her personification.

Not much is given with respect to Oswald McCall's life. What is known, however, is that McCall was a Methodist pastor of fifteen years, soldier, and educator

before leaving Australia for America in 1921.¹⁴⁶ With a craving for the pastorate, in January, 1922, he accepted an appointment over the First Congregational Church of Berkeley in California. This would prove to be pivotal in light of the angst his young parishioners would have towards clerics during this time.¹⁴⁷ McCall's charisma, perspicacity, enthusiasm and strict adherence to the scriptures soon magnetized what had been an incredulous crowd.

Inasmuch as McCall's intellectual ability was uniquely notable, his preaching and writing not only garnered the respect of the Church, but the Academy. The University of California, Stanford, and Pomona College, all recognized his genius. Pacific School of Religion, however, went a step further in that recognition and conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity on McCall in May of 1924.¹⁴⁸ This would not be an arbitrary bestowal, as McCall's *adorations*, rebuffed externalism and cryptically undergirded the notion of God's immanence with humanity and the cosmos, as confirmed by Pacific's conferral.

¹⁴⁶ John Wright Buckham, "Introduction" in *Cardinals of the Faith: Brief Studies for a Time of Groping*, Oswald W.S. McCall (New York/Cincinnati: The Abingdon Press, 1924), 9.

¹⁴⁷ Robert H. Ruby. *John Slocum and the Indian River Shaker Church* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 152. Apparently, the Shaker movement, a charismatic Christian group characterized by intermittent "shaking," private revelations and visions, made its way into Northern California. The Shakers, who were - by and large - Native American, repudiated whites who used the Bible, they called "an old antiquated book."

¹⁴⁸ Buckham, *Cardinals of the Faith*, 10.

On the surface, the corpus of McCall's prose appears to bolster the transcendence of God, eclipsing other salencies that would obtrude their way through the opaqueness of God's primacy. While McCall's method is misleading, his idiosyncratic style illumines the nimbleness with which he interprets God's relationship with humanity. It would ultimately beckon his listeners to adore the preeminence of God and through that adoration, come to know Him most intimately.

Such is carefully revealed in McCall's *The Hand of God*, a series of mystical thoughts compiled while observing Auguste Rodin's sculpture, "The Hand of God." In these frenetic musings, McCall uses the appendages of the Hand, the fingers and thumb as metaphors for God's involvement with creation as transcendent and immanent Reality. His allusion to God's distinction as transcendent and immanent Truth is not fortuitous, but indeed, deliberate. Such an intimation, in McCall's estimation, qualifies God's pre-eminence, and, thus, the justification for all of God's creation to adore Him. In other works, such as *The God's of Men*, *Cardinals of Faith*, *Stringing of the Bow*, *Christ's Shining Way*, and *In Such a Night as This*, McCall interweaves subtleties of the *adoration* motif to foster a reverence for the Sacred and to accent the human/Divine coalescence:

Thou profoundest cosmic silent secret is it here Thy
veil aside is drawn, to at least *one feature*, and that
one the best? Is Thy nature spoken here, in Christ,
the World's Beloved when it loves its Best? art
Thou here manifest as mushrooms manifest the
energy of soil, and roses are the utterance of genus?
They do not tell us what the genus is; they only show

us it can make a rose.¹⁴⁹

While attempting to interpret the meaning of calamitous periods that often pervade human history, McCall describes God *en se* through forms of nature. The subtleties by which McCall reveals God's essence serves to illumine His robustness, illustrating how the almightiness of God manifests through, seemingly, insignificant forms, such as cosmic silence and nature, including mushrooms, soil and roses. Even during periods of unfathomable suffering, do McCall's musings reveal God's unobtrusive sway in the earth.

More of the *adoration* ideal accompanies McCall's penchant towards what he denotes as the *religion of Jesus*, an authentic *Christianity* the Church, much to his consternation, has abrogated; depicting instead an unavailing canvass of *human inventions* without much substance or value. In his own words, "Christendom for many sad centuries obscured the religion of Jesus with ecclesiastical systems and systems of doctrines that have carried the original emphasis far away from the internal realm where he placed it."¹⁵⁰ A reclamation of this "original emphasis" and the salience that made nascent Christianity substantive, is both vital and praiseworthy to the authenticity, authority, and integrity of the Church's endurance in McCall's approximation. Thus, *real* Christianity is an outward expression of an inward grace, and is a perpetual conjoining of Spirit and anthropomorphic constituency so as to engender excrescences of social

¹⁴⁹ Oswald W.S. McCall, *In Such A Night As This: A Book of Poetic Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 201.

¹⁵⁰ Oswald W.S. McCall, *The Gods of Men* (New York/London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934), 26.

activism and adoration. When *real* Christianity is subverted, however, a substitute, which McCall refers to as the *heresy of externalism*, emerges and, thus, will affix its virulent potential to the corpus of Orthodoxy.

One thousand years preceding Jesus, a peculiar religious impulse emerged out of Asia. The people there began to move away from their polytheistic leanings and, thus, explored the prospect of one unifying Principle to whom the other gods of their forebears would genuflect.¹⁵¹ These accretions were most prominent, specifically, in India, Egypt, Persia, and Chaldea, but not to the extent that it burgeoned in Greece.¹⁵² There, it would bear fruit that would ultimately prove to be advantageous to the origins of western Christianity.

Plato, an iconic Greek philosopher, wrote so extensively and with such provocative cogency on the One, he was noted to have been *Christian before Christ*.¹⁵³ Further, in the New Testament scriptures, Greek influence was so replete that the English transliteration of the *Word* in the gospel of John, for instance, became *Logos*, the Greek appellation for Jesus, meaning *intelligence* or *ideal*.¹⁵⁴ As was exemplified in scripture, so would Greek influence find its way into the early Christian thought of the progenitors of the faith for generations following the canonization of the New Testament.

¹⁵¹ McCall, *The Gods of Men*, 28.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ McCall, *The God's of Men*, 29.

When the early Christians set out to preach their message throughout the Roman Empire, they were perceived to have been atheists because the God to whom they referenced was not visible.¹⁵⁵ In response, Christians appealed to the authority of some classical philosophers of whom Roman pagans admired, such as Plato, in efforts to authenticate their claims that a supreme being existed above the cosmos.¹⁵⁶ This tendency proved to be effective but dangerous as well. While it melded the intelligentsia and the marginalized, faith and classical philosophy, it also bolstered a hermeneutic of God that came from the classical philosophers instead of the prophets and other biblical writers.¹⁵⁷ “Since those philosophers conceived of perfection as immutable, impassable, and fixed, many Christians came to the conclusion that such was the God of scripture.”¹⁵⁸ Eventually, it provided no hope for the life of the church which was to subsist on a faith that made it possible for humans to have a relationship with God. To resolve this quagmire, theologians, such as Justin, Clement, and Origen, would tender their positions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 182.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

By developing a doctrine of the Logos, the polemicists argued that although the Father, God, is “immutable, impassable and fixed,” He is also immanent, capable of direct relationship with humanity and the cosmos.¹⁶⁰ As Justin would purport when God spoke to Moses, the Logos of God spoke to him, which represents the divine characteristic that facilitates intimacy between God and humanity.¹⁶¹ Further, Origen would posit that between God, who is inherently immutable and, the world, which is mutable, exists the Word or Logos of God.¹⁶² This conjecture spawned what has been noted in church history as the Arian versus Athanasius controversy, which would be the impetus, as noted before, to the development of the Nicene Creed of 325.¹⁶³ Much of the Creed illumines the interpenetration of the godhead, providing some inference to God’s relationship to the corpus of His creation, an ontology Greek philosophers were attempting to codify. Hence, God’s entry into human history, the subtext that mines the gist of the the Creed, confirms Greek underpinnings to be consequential.

It is the Latin church’s influence to whom McCall ascribes the heresy of externalism, the accretion of the *finished work* and *plan of salvation* ideologies, which popularizes *external* symbolisms of Christian belief in lieu *internal* substantiations of that same belief. Amid much emphasis on the cross of Christ, incarnation theology and its

¹⁶⁰ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 183.

¹⁶¹ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 184.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

bent on God's immanence, pales significantly. Hence, McCall purports, "In view of all this, one is bound to regard Christendom as being in large measure not a flowering of the original stock of Christ, but a graft in to it."¹⁶⁴ An alternative to original Greek underpinnings would the seemingly impregnable Latin church provide to the corpus of institutional Christianity. Consequently, in McCall's estimation, Christians increasingly bartered personal piety, which fosters human/Divine coalescence, for adherences to ritual and dogma, and the astonishment with institution and all of its inconsequences.

McCall's method approximates God and humanity in highly stylized mystical prose, which wrests all semblances of externalism. Ironically, such as the case in *The Hand of God*, McCall utilizes a sculpture, a *human invention*, to repeal the vestiges that affected the salience of human/Divine relationship:

... I stood astonished. It was the Thumb, I saw the Thumb!
 How is it this had escaped me? With the rest, yet aloof,
 there it lifted itself up, distinctive, president. "Thou Thumb!"
 I began, amazed, "Thumb upreared," dominant, Thumb of the
 moulder, Thumb of the potter, controlling, what purpose art
 thou at, thou Thumb of the Hand of God?¹⁶⁵

While the thumb is an appendage of a created *Hand*, it represents dominance, strength, power, control, and distinction. Its portrayal typifies Auguste Rodin's creative imagination, which delineates God's approximation to humanity in McCall's estimation. The sculpture appears to underscore God's transcendence, but words and phrases that

¹⁶⁴ McCall, *The Gods of Men*, 35.

¹⁶⁵ McCall, *The Hand of God*, 33.

characterize God's immanence, such as "president" and "Thumb of the potter" suggest that God is participatory in the affairs of humanity and the cosmos. This, indeed, is praiseworthy. It symbolizes, ostensibly, an adoration to God that foments a deeper intimacy between humanity and divinity, as demonstrated in a succeeding passage of the same musing:

But have pity, more gently, O Thou, whoever Thou
art, for I can feel, I can feel!¹⁶⁶

McCall's words are poignant, disclosing a strong sentimentalism that can be found throughout his prose in efforts to impel all who will listen to an intimate relationship with God. By way of adoration do such sentimental expressions confirm that intimacy. McCall extols the pre-eminence of God then, with a terse and emotive bent, entreats God as if he is one with Him. Adoration, seemingly, is a conduit to human/Divine coalescence and coalescence, a matrix for intimacy and the melding of one *unum*.

While discussion of the *unum* is explicit to Meister Eckhart's mysticism, McCall's mystical tendencies toward adoration are consonant to the importance of human/Divine coalescence in light of the social exigencies suffusing the times. Precisely, the Great Depression, which was characterized by pandemic unemployment rates, declining social morale, economic insolvency, and inordinate inflation rates in real estate, was the undeniable backdrop that would impel McCall's sentiments. His mysticism does not explicitly posit a *unum* ideal; however, he does implicitly advocate human/Divine

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

intimacy, which he believes actuates the practice of *true* Christianity in the face of social realities that are dominant.

McCall would refer to the designation of *true Christianity* as the *religion of Jesus* ideal. While he was not necessarily the forebear of such an intuitive characterization, the musings concomitant to the concept are yet noteworthy. They illustrate that God is transcendent but has made Himself accessible to humankind, so much to extent that He desires for humanity to be a living embodiment of Himself. Several places in scripture characterize this *living embodiment* in most compelling terms, but Matthew 5:3-11, exemplifies for those like McCall, that which really affirms *true* Christianity.

A bedrock for Mohandas (Mahatma) K. Gandhi's socio-political interests, Matthew 5:3-11 becomes McCall's foundation for belying the superficiality that has infected the fabric of authentic Christianity:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:3-11 [New Standard Revised Version]).

In these verses, Jesus enunciates in eloquent and most poignant terms certain imperatives, which idealizes a socio-religious decorum those like McCall would espouse to be the *religion of Jesus*. Its subtext, though woven with seemingly quid pro quo textures, compels all who will heed to the disciplines of humility, discernment, patience, love and, most of all, intimacy with God. Without such coalescence with the Sacred, how might fallible humans come to embody characteristics like patience and humility, two of the four prominent themes Jesus intimates in this profound soliloquy.

According to McCall, the aforementioned typifies ideal Christianity: a quintessential juxtaposition of consciousness and praxis that embodies the disciplines of humility, discernment, patience, and love, which are products of the human/Divine coalescence. This decorum undercuts the virulence of what McCall tenders as *externalism*, a euphemism he opines to castigate heresy, superficiality, and other destructive subterfuges to *meaningful* Christianity.

Thus, his prose simply emblemizes an internal resolve. They are excrescences of deference he retains for God's preeminence in language that extols and adores and, doubtless, reveals an earnestness for authenticity:

Long is Thine arm, O God, not to be fled from even
in the uttermost parts of the sea, and Thy vigilance
how unsleeping! Terrible is Thy light when it seeks
a man. Verily in a house of glass am I, and my secret
and hidden changers arena transparency. All closed
doors dost Thou set open, all curtains dost Thou
withdraw, and, as if they were spoken on the very
housetops, the whispers of a man in his closet are

heard of Thee, every one. Though they be directed not to Thee but hushed lest Thou shouldest hear, yet is nothing hidden, nothing covered, nothing unknown. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me! Surely it is the fool that saith in his heart that he hath escaped Thee.¹⁶⁷

The sincerity resonating throughout McCall's mysticism is a harbinger for the authenticity that is essential for the human/Divine binary. In language that recapitulates the sovereignty of God, McCall intimates God's perspicacity to be impregnable and inescapable. Such a trajectory goes on to inform McCall's relationship with God to be coalescent; otherwise, there could be no vivid description of God's primacy as limned here in the text. Speaking of God in this tenor, adores His very existence!

2.3 Abandonment and Thurman

In similar manner does Howard Washington Thurman adore the preeminence of God in his mystical prose but never without the reverberation of the *abandonment* motif peering through seamlessly, a reality that will be lifted up shortly. In *The Growing Edge*, this *adoration* theme especially emerges from the pages of Thurman's musings. As he ponders the vagaries of life betwixt the juxtaposition of dark nights and bright stars, he discovers in front of him a "vast order, some limitless and boundless structure to rationality ... some comprehensive pattern somewhere, sometime."¹⁶⁸ Such an intuitive conceptualization does Thurman cohere, which ultimately impels him to the unequivocal

¹⁶⁷ McCall, *The Hand of God*, 31.

¹⁶⁸ Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 59.

resolve that his glimpse of nature's unbounded enormity is simply, "very God."¹⁶⁹

Despite the texture of simplicity that Thurman utilizes here, there is a salient subtext underneath the designation, "very God," that informs Greek mysticism.

As referenced earlier, Greek mystical theologian and philosopher, Plato, enshrined the ideology of his mentor, Socrates, that the soul (of humanity) contemplated "eternal truths and realities - Forms and Ideas"¹⁷⁰ - before its annexation to corporeal existence, causing pain and, thus, the soul to forget. The euphoria of the soul, pre-embodiment namely, constitutes a state of perfect vision of Truth and Beauty, however. Because of this embodiment, the soul fortuitously inures itself to the confines of illusory, conjecture, and change.¹⁷¹ Imprisoned, it must now traverse (out and upward) the exigencies of its new enigmatic state to, once again, accede the eternal Truth it once enjoyed, which is a quintessential state of the soul that ultimately affirms God to be wholly, preeminent and "very God." A consummation of this progressive accession, however, necessitates an acquiescence to this mystical abstraction referenced earlier as *abandonment*, one of the themes emergent from Cardinal de Berulle's French School of Spirituality, which elucidates much of Howard Thurman's mystical theology.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Louth, *The Origins*, 1.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Noted as an agile scholar with perspicacious ability to nuance the complexities of human existence, Thurman dedicated himself mostly to finding God from the tiniest morsel of organismic existence, to the most notable geological phenomena likened to the expansiveness of Mount Everest. In all matter of creation, Thurman would find impressions of God's essence so intricately woven. Such a strong impetus would undergird Thurman's social ethic surrounding the civil equality of all people. Thus, in works like *Jesus and the Disinherited* and *The Creative Encounter*, hatred and racial prejudice are scorned as virulent institutions against the advancement of social solidarity and calm. Where injustice and disseverance exist, God, most assuredly, cannot be found as often noted in Thurman's musings. Accordingly, Thurman tenders love, a concomitant of abandonment, as an antidote to what he characterizes as the *hounds of hell*. A personification of that love neutralizes abject sectarianism but also serves to revile and censure the Fundamentalist underpinnings connate to his upbringing. Hence, the gestation of an interdependent community that embodies the love of God suffuses Thurman's mind, specifically amid the events around the death of his father, Saul.

Unlike his son, Saul subscribed to the agnostic leanings of Robert Ingersoll.¹⁷² Therefore, he did not attend church on Sundays as avidly as his immediate family, but instead, he chose to spend his time delving the philosophical vagaries of humanism and

¹⁷² Walter Earl Fluker, "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker, Kai Jackson Issa, Quinton H. Dixie, Peter Einsenstadt, Catherine Tumber, Alton B. Pollard III, and Luther E. Smith, Jr. (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), xxxiii.

free thought.¹⁷³ As peculiar as the inextricable juxtaposition of Orthodoxy and non-traditional Christianity would be in the Thurman home, so would the sudden death of Saul, which, ironically, happens on the same porch Saul intermittently would subsume Ingersoll's method.

After a day's work, Saul stumbles while on his porch, finally landing between the threshold of the front door and step that precedes the entrance of his home. The family and Saul were oblivious to the reality that he'd been suffering from pneumonia. Consequently, due to complications consonant to the onset of the disease, Saul dies five days later.¹⁷⁴ Though incomprehensible in large measure, Saul's death would reshape young Howard's life forever, particularly his interpretation of Christianity.

Saul's overall insouciance towards religion spawned the pastor of young Thurman's mother, grandmother, and siblings to deny him the dignity of a last rites liturgy. After some stern prodding by Thurman's grandmother (who was known for her obstinacy), however, the pastor relented somewhat, approving the liturgy to be held at the church but insisting the family find another eulogist. The pastor believed Saul had died

¹⁷³ Humanism is an philosophical discipline that emphasizes the value of human agency; science over supernatural revelation to explain natural phenomena. Free thought is a philosophical ethic, which subscribes to logic, reason, and empiricism.

¹⁷⁴ Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 5.

“outside of Christ,”¹⁷⁵ a sinner, thus, annulling his civil and religious privileges to a honorable eulogy and subsequent burial. Hence, the family found Reverend Sam Cromartie, a traveling evangelist, whose sermon would raise dissenting sentiments within young Howard much too consequential to elude. His sermon would not only prove to be insensitive, but also obtrusively judgmental, laced with slandering words consistent with Saul’s alleged degeneracy the church pastor had opined. With extreme resentment, young Howard recounts: “I listened with wonderment, then anger, and finally mounting rage as Sam Cromartie preached my father into hell.”¹⁷⁶

This experience causes Howard Thurman to ultimately re-evaluate true religious experience, and, thus, find a hermeneutic for Christianity accordant to the teachings of the *real* Jesus in the New Testament. The insolence shown by the pastor and Cromartie towards Saul obscures the love ethic, which the historical Jesus, the person to whom the appellation of *Christianity* is accorded, exemplifies throughout the gospels. In Thurman’s estimation, Christianity ought to be an excrescence of that effectual love; hence, the embers of recalcitrance began to smolder in his mind, compelling Thurman to affirm that he’d have nothing to do with the Church ever again. As suggested above, he

¹⁷⁵ Fluker, *The Papers*, xxxv.

¹⁷⁶ Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 6.

would set out on a journey to find the *real* Jesus and a *real* love that empowers all humankind to live unselfishly and interdependently:

[Community] is the very stuff upon which the soul of man feeds; for it is the door through which he enters into the Holy of Holies where God dwells. For behold the dwelling place of God is in the hearts of men! This is the tug of God that pulls each of us to Him. The most direct response is through the human heart: my own heart and the hearts of my fellows.¹⁷⁷

The coalescence of people is sustenance for the soul in Thurman's mystical schema. Such qualifies the presence of God to be existent. Gandhi extols this ethos, which he gleans in part from the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 in light of the civil unrests distinctive to his environs. Inasmuch as Gandhi's contributions are antecedent to those of McCall's and Thurman's, it is plausible to accord his work as seminal to the religion of Jesus ethic. While he was not Christian, Gandhi gives Thurman something theological to muse; particularly, whether the features consonant to the *facade* of Christianity are consonant to that beloved community that sees all of its fellows and constituents as, unequivocally, the children of God. Moreover, he compels Thurman to answer the menacing question: does the embodiment of Christianity cohere seamlessly with the resounding subtexts that pervade and underpin the imperative of Matthew 5?

¹⁷⁷ Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 122.

While Thurman ruminates, an encounter with an Indian scholar in the midst of touring India, Burma, and Ceylon seemingly compounds the pejorative sensibilities towards Christianity that have been surfacing and thus, suffusing his thoughts. After a series of lectures on the juxtaposition of Christianity and the African American, as if coronated with telepathic abilities, the Indian scholar queries:

I had not planned to ask you this, but after listening to your lecture I am convinced that you are an intelligent man. What are you doing here? Your forebears were taken from the west coast of Africa as slaves, by Christians. They were sold in America, a Christian country, to Christians. They were held in slavery for some two hundred years by Christians¹⁷⁸... Since that time you have been brutalized, lynched, burned, and denied most civil rights by Christians, and Christianity is unable to have any effect upon your terrible plight ... I think that an intelligent young Negro such as yourself, here in our country on behalf of a Christian enterprise, is a traitor to all of the darker peoples of the earth. How can you account for yourself being in this unfortunate and humiliating position?¹⁷⁹

A profound observation but not one lacking serious attention by Thurman in the past. In a terse yet explicative manner, Thurman doesn't defend the *facade* of Christianity or revile its excrescence. He tenders a moral ethic, nonetheless, which is, in his estimation, more inclusive, sensical, and accessible to all humanity:

¹⁷⁸ Thurman, *Meditations*, 113.

¹⁷⁹ Thurman, *Meditations*, 114.

It is far from my purpose to symbolize anyone or anything. I think the religion of Jesus in its true genius offers me a promising way to work through the conflicts of a disordered world. I make a careful distinction between Christianity and the religion of Jesus. My judgment about slavery and racial prejudice relative to Christianity is far more devastating than yours could ever be. From my investigation and study, the religion of Jesus projected a creative solution to the pressing problem of survival for the minority of which He was part in the Greco-Roman world. When Christianity became an imperial and world religion, it marched under banners other than that of the teacher and the prophet of Galilee. Finally, the minority in my country that is concerned about and dedicated to experiencing that spirit that was in Jesus Christ is on the side of freedom, liberty, and justice for all people, black, white, red, yellow, saint, sinner, rich or poor.¹⁸⁰

The religion of Jesus, for Thurman, is a viable antidote to the imperialism existent in Christianity. It binds God Incarnate to His creation, thereby, making eternal salvation a process by which humanity discovers itself and the nature of God.

As result of God's coalescence with humanity and, thereby, humanity's coalescence with God, humanity is forgiven of sins but also awakened to its intrinsic virulence. Concomitant to this illumination ensues humanity's awareness of the love of God.¹⁸¹ Such an *awakening* is not timeless, however. Rather, it is a time-consuming *process*, which ultimately melds the elements of psychology, spirituality, theology, eternity, temporality and carnality, consummating the salvific evolution. Essentially, in this process, humanity finds a means to integrate the Christ-centered ethic practically.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Fluker, *The Papers*, 177.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Such as there are degrees to which this integration happens, Thurman posits there are degrees of salvation, which he defines as “a process by which Christ possesses the life of man.”¹⁸³ Humanity is then *becoming* saved in Thurman’s theological schema (in lieu of ever possessing that salvation completely on earth). Hence, the degree to which Christ possesses the life of humanity is contingent upon the degree to which humanity abdicates that life. That abdication or *abandonment* is subject to the will of the human soul, which is subject to time. This abstraction gives explication to Thurman’s strong rebuff surrounding the amalgamation, and in many respects, synonymy of the salvation and human perfection constructs of Fundamentalism. Therefore, it is plausible that Thurman believed that his father, Saul, as all humans, are intrinsically imperfect, yet ever evolving, ever *becoming* saved. If this is true, the antinomy waged by Thurman against the insularities of his Fundamentalist forebears are intelligible protests against what can be conceived as an onerously injudicious ethos, which makes God inaccessible to those who are far less conservative in their religious sentiment and approach.

Hence, Thurman’s soteriological ideology is more liberal than his Fundamentalist substructure, and arguably, Christian orthodoxy. This tenor of liberality fosters Thurman’s agenda to interpret human existence in ways that venerate the human constituent and serve to approximate God and man perpetually. The coalescence between

¹⁸³ Ibid.

God and man that Thurman intends to foster is analogous to *perichoresis*, an ancient trinitarian ontology, which is a quintessential typification of the abandonment dynamism.

An intervening of extremes is no new concept. Some of the early church fathers coined the Greek term, *perichoresis*, to describe their relationship: hence, “a mutual interpenetration of the Persons of the godhead, so that although each person is distinct in relation to the other, nevertheless, each participates fully in the Being of the others. The Being of the godhead is thus one and indivisible.”¹⁸⁴ There is no theological explication of the trinity in Thurman’s prose; however, there are inferences which suggest his familiarity and deference to at least the concept of coalescing extremes. The ontological amalgamation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is relatable to the relationship he advocates for American mores replete with sectarianism and other forms of socially-divisive institutions. Thurman would believe that all humanity should emulate this ontological dynamic of the trinity, interpenetrating and negotiating the vagaries of life interdependently without forfeiting individualism. By way of this *perichoretic dance*, people should come to know each other and subsequently understand the idiosyncrasies of the other that make individuality itself unique. A conscious understanding of the other person, Thurman contends, protects the soul from the contamination of racial bigotry and distills the universe of those xenophobic seeds awaiting insemination. A world that embodies such a state of being constitutes a matrix whereby the constituents of love,

¹⁸⁴ Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, 181.

learning, evolution, and growing become possible. Where these abound, unequivocal abandonment exists, except there is no abdication of distinctiveness, however.

Individuality is permeable to the extent that it is not compromised, becoming something it was not engendered to be. It lovingly negotiates other individualities in efforts to foster individual and societal efficacy. The confluence of people is a common theme in Thurman's mysticism, perhaps advocating a spirituality of humanism¹⁸⁵ that informs how faith is horizontal (inter-personal) as much as it is vertical (between God and humanity):

When I have lost harmony with another, my whole life is thrown out of tune. God tends to be remote and far away when a desert and sea appear between me and another. I draw closer to God as I draw closer to my fellows. The great incentive remains alert; I cannot be at peace without God, and I cannot be truly aware of God if I am not at peace with my fellows. For the sake of my unity with God, I keep working on my relations with my fellows. This is ever the insistence of all ethical religions.¹⁸⁶

Thurman, here, makes interdependence as sacred as humanity's direct relationship with God contending, "[Humanity] cannot be at peace without God, and [it] cannot be truly aware of God if [it] is not at peace with [its] fellows." Such insight is a progressive form of mystical theology considering the times, which were characterized by humanity's quest to preserve the transcendence of God more than His immanence. Thurman's perspicaciousness calls Christians to a higher consciousness, a reinterpretation of the

¹⁸⁵ Humanism, in this context, denotes a deifying quality of the corporeal constituent, rather than an inference to its classical meaning.

¹⁸⁶ Howard Thurman, *Meditations*, 121.

historical Jesus that glorifies the human constituent, not distinctly His divineness.

Through the personhood of Jesus, God approximates creation, Thurman implicates, thus appending the sufferings and vagaries that are incidental to life itself. Such an assumption by God melds humanity and divinity, thereby constituting a *perichoretic dance* held in tension by the bond of love.

This notion of Thurman *deifying* the human element is underscored more in the following excerpt:

The religious experience as I have known it seems to swing wide the door, not merely into Life but into lives ... through the years it has driven me more and more to seek to make as a normal part of my relations with men the experiencing of them as human beings. When this happens, love has essential materials with which to work. And contrary to the general religious teaching, men would not need to stretch themselves out of shape in order to love. On the contrary, a man comes into possession of himself more completely when he is free to love another.¹⁸⁷

A spirituality of humanness then, entails more than the sacredness existent through the intervening of people. It is *religious* experience for Thurman, the efficacious element that transmogrifies lives by way of the love constituent that is woven throughout its composition, that love helps people understand themselves and others more clearly. *Understanding* is the conditional word here. It is the lens through which humanity is enabled to perceive the other as its fellow, instead of its antithesis. Such empathy is primed to deflect the debris of racism, bigotry, and hate, the menacing compulsions that

¹⁸⁷ Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 111.

lurk to infiltrate the human soul. Further, it fosters the *perichoretic ideal*, that inextricable phenomenon of mystical unity:

My testimony is that life is against all dualism. Life is One. Therefore, a way of life that is worth living must be a way worthy of life itself. Nothing less than that can abide. Always against the fragments and shatters and against all things that separate and divide within and without, life labors to meld together into a single harmony.¹⁸⁸

The oneness that reverberates in this excerpt accentuates the sentiments of a man deeply affected by social and religious sectarianism, intimating that the religious underpinning which characterized much of his nascency was pernicious in scope. With succinctness and acuity, Thurman rejects social division, suggesting implicitly that humankind exemplify the perichoretic exemplar instead so as to stimulate social wholeness. Wholeness symbolizes harmony between disparities, most importantly, the very meaning of life and its unequivocal consummation.

Not only does Thurman's *deification* of the human constituent emblemize the religion of Jesus' ethic and the gestalt of the religious experience intellection, but it implies ever so subtly how the intervening qualities of willful abandonment are efficacious to the human spirit. Abdication from those pejorative sensibilities (surrounding the Church), which tormented Thurman during his formative years,

¹⁸⁸ Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 269.

constitutes that unequivocal abandonment needed for *theoria*¹⁸⁹ and thus, the human spirit for divine consummation. More importantly, the abstraction of abandonment proves to be paramount to actuating the mystical encounter with the Divine, which enables the human spirit to construe those who've caused internal maladies as assuredly, the children of God. It is this *dying to self*, which elucidates Thurman's mystical theology more pointedly. The human spirit is liberated because of this willful resignation, and the liberator, consequently, finds his/her earthly purpose. Thurman realizes this while serving as interim chaplain for a hospital in Rochester, New York.

Feeling inept to perform the last rites of a dying patient, Thurman would wrest his own insecurities. Resultantly, a mystical *interdependence* would morph: a juxtaposition of feebleness and strength, sickness and health, patient and cleric, which for Thurman served to confirm that circumstantial nor social particularities can alone bifurcate the authenticity of human accord. In fact, drawing conclusions pursuant to circumstantial and social variances are systemic manifestations to a virulent consciousness, which further perpetuates biased and divisive ideologies. It is a learned insularity, in Thurman's schema, that confirms the absence of *inwardness*, a mystical intellection Thurman develops to qualify that distinction is but an ontology that obscures anthropomorphic value all humans inherently possess. The excrescence of a consummated inwardness,

¹⁸⁹ Greek word for "contemplation," meaning to look, or to see intellectually, according to Andrew Louth. Presumably, this abstraction is the means to mystical consummation.

however, breeds what he deems an “outwardness of [religious experience],” which causes solidarity and healing to others. It is this quality of divine consummation that impels Thurman to coalesce the angsts of the dying rather than deflect. In this act of confluence, he becomes a participant in the patient’s transition instead of an aloof bystander indifferent to that specter of the human experience each being must face. Thurman, by way of his own internal abandonment, chooses to *understand* the unequivocal human experience, which is never devoid of death. Furthermore, he impels himself to *understand* that disappointment is intrinsic to living as the discipline of forgiving is constitutive to loving, which are lessons to be gleaned from the fanaticisms of his pastor and Reverend Cromartie who both scorned his father Saul for acquiescing to the tenets of Agnosticism. This kind of *understanding* clarifies the essence of Thurman’s mystical theology on the “outwardness of [religious experience]” to be progressive, a mental metamorphosis that ultimately becomes a living expression of the religion of Jesus’ ethic; an ethic that emblemizes complete abandonment and hence serves to placate the disquiet imminent mortality brings to the dying and the caretaker. It is in this moment that Thurman ascertains his calling to render the *real* Jesus to humanity, and thus, he learns something unequivocal and incontrovertible about life: that death is its interminable companion, which must be embraced as much as the euphoria of living. Without such an understanding, life is brutal, and humanity is incapable of conjoining its fellows in the inevitability of death. Most of all, Thurman learns that humankind, despite its contradictions and inherent dissimilarities, is inextricably homogenous. While this

revelation is profound in scope, it begs some elucidation considering Thurman's other views on equivalence.

Inasmuch as he undergirds *likeness* on what can be delimited as an anthropomorphic level, on a divine stratum, conversely, he opposes the very semblance of it. Thurman's ideology, which informs his mystical theology, fosters an ethos of solidarity between ethnicities and social classes. Thus, his prose surrounding the coalescence of people simply confirms his bent that all are the children of God and, on that level, share no distinction. As he would suggest in *Meditations of the Heart*, "[humans] are one," a corollary taken from Plotinus, an ancient Greek mystic who posited: "If we are in unity with the Spirit, we are in unity with each other, and so we are all one."¹⁹⁰ Hence, humans are one metaphysically, as they are one with the Spirit. This amalgamation with the Spirit does not transmogrify the distinctiveness of the corporeal constituent whatsoever in Thurman's ontology;¹⁹¹ which is a diametrical deviation from Meister Eckhart's intimations that the human constituent can lose its identity (indistinction), hence, becoming God, as it coalesces the divine life. Such a claim that man becomes God, in Thurman's schema, undermines the salience of corporeal existence. In his own words, "In the [abandonment] to God in the religious experience there is no loss of being but rather an irradiation of self that makes it come alive with 'Godness' and

¹⁹⁰ Thurman, *Meditations*, 120.

¹⁹¹ Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 75.

in various ways.”¹⁹² Thus, it is the axis of corporeal existence on which interdependence, love and respect between fellows oscillates; and, moreover, unity with the Spirit burgeons without the loss of human uniqueness.

It is noteworthy that while *abandonment* is the preferred designation for Thurman’s mystical theology, with respect to the ancient contributions to Spirituality and Cardinal de Berulle, he embeds the word *surrender* in his prose, alternatively, to describe the mystical abdication that fosters divine consummation with God, particularly in *The Creative Encounter*. Ostensibly, this is more than just a contemporary appellation; it is a description resonating with religious and social symbolism.

As Thurman would suggest, surrendering to God gives life a purpose that extends beyond private interests and personal risks. It causes a “release of energies that are resident in that to which the surrender is made.”¹⁹³ As prefaced earlier, when surrender is made to God, the human spirit *comes alive* [from the dynamism projected onto the surrenderer]. Conversely, when the surrender is made to such narcissistic ideologies as racism, the malignant energies of those sensibilities are projected onto the surrenderer. Hence, the surrenderer can become afraid and demeaning, projecting a neurosis onto society that further perpetuates sectarianism. This, precisely, explains the perpetuity of racism and hate, Thurman contends. But, again, surrender to God prepares the human

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 73.

spirit for God's *godness*, a release of energies that enlightens the surrenderer and, thus, causes he/she to actuate indubitable change.

2.4 Summary

Perhaps juxtaposing the mysticisms of Meister Eckhart, Oswald McCall, and Howard Thurman is a bit idiosyncratic, considering the different times and contexts in which they all wrote, but certainly not an implausible combination, however. As shown, their confluence is rooted in an undeniable quest for an authentic and immanent God. Melding the phenomena of spirituality and psychology, all of them laud, in their own ways, the interior life as an efficacious praxis to fostering *outwardness*, which is what Thurman deems an expression of inward consummation. Such outwardness can be a pivotal excrescence onto the environment that cultivates, empowers, and appropriates the facility of healing within people and amongst groups afflicted with biased impulses and/or other social exigencies. Further, it embodies the religion of Jesus ethic that both McCall and Thurman undergird so ardently in their mystical prose.

Woven in this morality is an imperative for the human spirit's surrender or unequivocal abandonment. This *readying* of the human spirit, as Thurman would proffer, makes way for the *abnegation*, Christ's residence within the human soul. Meister Eckhart's mystical sentiments inform such a residence as the *grunt*, where the *birth of Christ in the soul* ensues perpetually, but not without *gelassenheit*. This German derivative, which means "releasement" or "enlightenment," characterizes the desired state

of the soul or precondition necessary for the mystical phenomena of abandonment and abnegation to ensue.

Gelassenheit, as noted, denotes unequivocal negation. As referenced in the aforementioned, releasement (or enlightenment) is not a place, but a condition to wit desires and illusions are nonexistent. A human soul filled with desires and illusions is one filled with preconceptions. Thus, an evanescent state of soul, which Eckhart deems as the *poverty of the spirit*, is compulsory to ultimately actuating the mystical consummation between God and the human spirit.

While McCall undergirds abandonment to be essential to an encounter with God, particularly in his polemical diatribes against the Church's *defacement*, an emphasis on *adoration* seems to be indispensable in actuating a mystical consummation.¹⁹⁴ In language that is worshipful, McCall extols the almightiness of God, but without equivocation conveys a restlessness with how that prevenience sometimes renders adversity. Notwithstanding, this is to be adored in McCall's schema, as such almightiness approximates humanity and thus, shows God's immanence with His creation. The interfacing of God and humanity by way of conscious adoration denotes a mystical encounter, which serves to avert the *heresy of externalism*, an incursion of vanity within the Church McCall vehemently rebuffs as an inessential veneer to its real meaning.

¹⁹⁴ A facade of inward spirituality as depicted in the opulence of the Church's architectural design, and the parishioner's piety to ritualistic praxis and symbolisms.

Another name for this interface is *inwardness*, fostered by the abandonment of the self, Thurman posits, which impels a *release of energies* from the object to which the abandonment or surrender is made. As a result, mystical consummation is fomented and the human spirit is healed. This healing will serve as the mystical upshot that undergirds the *outwardness* of an abandoned self, whereby the human spirit is enabled to advantageously transmogrify social maladies such as racism and religious insularity.

Theologian and mystic Dorothy Soelle calls these excrescences [mystical] resistances, an exemplar of the religion of Jesus ethic, and moral embodiment to which McCall and Thurman both uphold as an outward expression of the inward consummation. For Eckhart, it is the *birth of Christ in the soul* that engenders such resistances, which are living embodiments of divine action that facilitates change. Any change to society or people ensues because of the perpetuity of this incarnation, which happens in the human spirit, causing human essence to morph, and ultimately, become God in Eckhart's schema.

Hence, the "finding of God by man; and the finding of man by God," a vivid description of temporal and eternal coalescence made known by Howard Thurman, is quintessential mysticism that each of our forebears typify in their quests to define and undergird the efficacies of the human-Divine binary. Quite adroitly, they intimate subtly that psychological breakthroughs, as well as social harmony, may be imminent inasmuch as psychologists, theologians, and medical scientists conjoin efforts to explore the antidotal possibilities inherent in mystical encounters. Without a collaboration of sorts,

psychology, spirituality, and medicine may remain isolated disclosures, and the contributions of our mystical forebears, such as Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman, will be circumscribed to the conventional hermeneutics that have characterized their testimonies thus far.

Chapter Three: Pain and Mysticism

While our forebears do not share the same epoch, the genius of their mystical theologies emerge from the same substructure. Before they delve the abstractions of *interior* profundity, each of them experience a series of cataclysmic events, which serve as catalysts for the psychological pains they respectively assume. Whether intentional or by fortuitous means Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman all provide a hermeneutic of those inner loathings, which are consequential to perilous circumstances in mystical prose that ultimately reveal the facility of healing to be constitutive to the binary of God and man. Thus, pain and suffering actuates the Divine-human coalescence, and resultantly, the nascence for psychological healing is made possible. These qualities, constitutive to the confluence of divinity and humanity, are, indeed, what our forebears undergird implicitly to be transformative.

What they bear is that pain and suffering fosters an earnest yearning for answers, and thus, the pining groans of the human spirit for solace are but its inquests, and further, the harbingers of the Holy Spirit's gratuity of grace. By way of these modalities, the human spirit decides its trajectory: either it will merely loathe its sustained perplexities, and hence, do nothing or, as Howard Thurman proposes in *The Creative Encounter*, it will surrender. Such a disposition of susceptibility relieves the human spirit of the foreboding and distressing woes of cogitation. This *releasement*, which Thurman calls, *surrender*, is what really illumines Eckhart's genius despite the *abnegation* nuance, which suffuses much of his mystical theology. From this arbor, he not only discovers something of God

and self, but he also provides his admirers a plethora of mystical resources that testify of how pain may engender deep contemplations.

For instance, the *birth of Christ in the soul* emerges from an ostensible discontentment with the paradoxical lifestyles of the papacy, which during the late Medieval period, ironically conjoined the prevailing sentiment of the *vita apostolica*. Such was a noble disposition within European mores “to live as Christ lived;”¹⁹⁵ however, for Eckhart, it wasn’t at all much of a consequential or transformative ideal. An extended Interregnum, in addition to protracted bans on the administration of the sacraments levied by the Roman See and other complicit practices that proved Rome’s subservience to the unscrupulous political impulses of the French crown,¹⁹⁶ were but a few exigencies that contravened the integrity of the *vita apostolica*. Hence, it wasn’t sufficient to simply live *as* Christ lived, but because of these tenuous times in the Church, to *be* Christ was more acceptable in Eckhart’s estimation. Such was keen rationale borne from the pangs of discontentment with trivial (religious) praxes and nefarious behaviors as noted.

To underscore Eckhart’s schema more pointedly, the spirit of humanity experiences a transmogrification when Christ is born in the soul, thus, *becoming* God, not

¹⁹⁵ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 5.

¹⁹⁶ O’C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 6.

merely a facsimile of God as prefaced in the preceding chapter. The intimation in Eckhart's prose suggests that a perpetual incarnation of sorts causes the human spirit to actually *be* what it otherwise can only *try* to be by simply living *as* Christ lived. To live *as* Christ lived does not denote spiritual envelopment (by God) of the human spirit. Instead, it connotes the assumption of a learned behavior, which does not necessarily prove a change of disposition in Eckhart's intellection. An unchanged heart disaffected to the impregnation of the Spirit would be the root of the corruption that characterized much of the Church's decorum at this time. For this peering discernment are Eckhart's sentiments castigated as virulent musings of blasphemous anathema deserving nothing less than strident repudiation. Thus, in the Bull of John XXII, March 27, 1329, Eckhart's mystical claims, which ultimately challenged the gestalt of Christianity, were renounced as heretical. Some of those claims espoused:

1. Even he who blasphemes against God praises God.
2. We are fully transformed and converted into God; in the same way that the sacrament, which is symbolized with the bread, is converted into the body of Christ. Therefore, I am converted into Him so that He converts me into His being as one, not as *like*. By the Living God, it is true that there is no difference.
3. The Father begets me as His Son and as the same Son. Whatever God performs is one: therefore, He begets me as His Son without any distinction.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ O'C Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 26-27.

The aforementioned cites but three of essentially 108 theological statements made by Eckhart that were reviled as utter blasphemy. They clarify both the deftness and tenable nature of his mystical wisdom, however. Noteworthy is the pedantic terseness in tone that seemingly informs the pain from which he muses, and the root of audaciousness from whence he retorts the prevailing religious temperament.. Such attestations, along with abstractions accordant to the *birth of Christ in the soul*, serve to transcend the plights of pain and banality:

I am often asked if a man can reach the point where he is no longer hindered by time, multiplicity, or matter. Assuredly! Once this birth has occurred, no creatures can hinder you; instead, they will direct you to God and this birth.¹⁹⁸

Here it is inferred that pain has the potential to lead humanity to uninhibited surrender and, then, to the divine birth within the human spirit, which ultimately yields [healing]. Phenomena, such as time and matter, are no longer pernicious specters upon the divine birth, but conduits to mystical revelation. Thus, pain makes way for the divine birth to take place, which begets an experience that elicits mystical reflection or some form of resistance towards the provenance of the original pain. Eckhart's prose and eventual defense before polemical interlocutors were, hence, his forms of mystical reflection and resistance.

¹⁹⁸ Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, 59.

One of Eckhart's major disputants was Heinrich von Virneburg, archbishop of Cologne, who ardently spurned any semblance of mysticism. He condemned Eckhart's intellection as a mere bevy of heretical postulations, much akin to the unorthodox ideologies of The Brethren of the Free Spirit and Beghards, which entwined the ontology of free thinking. The Brethren undergirded an ethos that renounced institutional religion altogether, and any religious experience brimming with mystical protuberances within its boundaries. Those accordant to such unorthodox religious cultism would find consummation in the fortuitous quest of mystical union with the eternal godhead by private and [contemplative] means. Inasmuch adherents would explore the boundless reaches of mystical experience without the primacy or rigidity sometimes concomitant institutionalism, which is the same freedom utilized by the Beghards, a scion to the Brethren, who believed in unequivocal human perfection and amnesty from the perils of sin. So, it is conceivable how this foray of free thinking was annexed to Eckhart's mystical theology, the *birth of Christ in the soul*, and utilized to contravene his attempts to innocuously make God accessible to all people. This insistence to divest the religious body from the prevalence of monastic elitism¹⁹⁹ and aristocratic dominance traversed from the pervading sentiment amongst the populace that God is, unequivocally, transcendent. Thus, Eckhart would want to espouse for the common person, particularly,

¹⁹⁹ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 13.

(and even the genteel) that God is immanent to those who would *find* Him inwardly; as he, Eckhart, would have to *find* Him amid the vagaries imposed on the European religious culture by ecclesial leadership whose sensibilities were imbued with arrogance, corruption, and privilege. The accrual of pain resultant to the pervading religious sentiment would not only impel Eckhart's own mystical experience, but also constrain him to enjoin his *congregants* to claim their own religious independence:

Truly, when people think that they are acquiring more of God in inwardness, in devotion, in sweetness and in various approaches than they do by the fireside or in the stable, you are acting just as if you took God and muffled his head up in a cloak and pushed him under a bench. Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden.²⁰⁰

Such were Eckhart's comments here in reference to monastic elitism, whose ethos encompassed ascent to the eternal godhead by turning inwardly. Much to Eckhart's consternation, a perceptive of God in this manner delimits His capacity and, moreover, stifles the uninhibited character that spiritual acquiescence adheres. It restricts spiritual ascent to a *means* or specific *path* and, in so doing, it fortuitously obstructs mystical consummation. Eckhart rebuffs this notion, however.

While he speaks earlier in terms of the *birth of the Christ in the soul* and turning inward, it is in the context of the populace looking outward, primarily through human and other physical agencies that unites them to God. Eckhart is not contradicting himself

²⁰⁰ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 14.

in the excerpt, he is just simply dismembering any philosophical constructs that systematize a *means* to God. In the excerpt, that *means* to God comprised a retreat to the rural environs to practice monasticism and inward consummation of the human spirit. For Eckhart, a proclivity towards monastic *means*, or any other *means*, constitutes a modus of absolute senselessness.

How painful was it for Eckhart to contemplate the facades of Christianity, which had grown so pervasive that his own internal angst would ultimately engender a mystical revelation that conjoined an undercurrent of the age which could not be ignored:

But I say yet more (do not be afraid for this joy is close to you and in you): there is not one of you who is so cross-grained, so feeble in understanding or so remote but he may find this joy within himself, in truth, as it is, with joy and understanding, before you leave this church today, indeed before I have finished preaching; he can find this as truly within him, live it and possess it, as that God is God and I am a man.²⁰¹

Again, with an insistence on religious independence, Eckhart enjoins his parishioners to “find ... joy within ...” As if he once did not enjoy the pleasures brought by *religious annexation*, Eckhart implores his listeners to independent faith, an absolute awareness of their divine worth, which comes from within (the human spirit). While mystical theologian Bernard McGinn calls the spirit of this new accretion to which Eckhart writes, “democratization and secularization,” Eckhart would simply want his listeners to consent to the notion that they could access the eternal God anywhere and at any time. Such

²⁰¹ Ibid.

boldness to succinctly declare polemical musings amid tenuous times would only emanate from a man whose pains were so deep and compassion for the common populace so far-reaching that silence would have merely contributed to the sustained perils and the exacerbation of the existing pain.

Howard Thurman's prose, some five-hundred years later, would jibe with Eckhart's disposition. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman calls for sectarianism and its pundits to redress the impasses that racial prejudice imposes on America in most eloquent and mystical form. In *Disciplines of the Spirit*, he enjoins human life to commitment, prayer, growth, suffering and reconciliation to contravene the specters of hate, impulsion, fear, and tentativeness at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. And, in *The Growing Edge*, he urges humanity towards a more pervious and vulnerable posture in efforts to assuage social discordance on the heels of one of America's landmark cases, *Brown vs. Board of Education* (to end school segregation), thus, fostering an environment of interracial harmony. From these testimonies, we learn that the mystical wisdom entwined throughout Thurman's scholarship to be much too deft to consign as just a myriad of banal allusions. They must be indexed as seminal reflections emergent from the annals of religious experience, which were driven by the pangs of social discontentment:

A man cannot love his enemy until he is able to restore his enemy to good standing in the human family... he must recognize him as a child of God, as a member of the family of God ... when [he] loves his enemy, [he]

comes closest to the perfection which is God. When [he] does this, [he] resists the temptation to act as a member of the human race with special privileges.²⁰²

Such wisdom rings from a man reared under the heavy and painful burdens of interracial prejudice and intra-cultural dissonance. It shows an unassailable resolve that God's love is embodied and perfected by way of coalescence, an ebb and flow of inter-relational solidarity. Thurman doesn't assume this revelation, however, without religious experience, which is first born from agony and discontentment.

As prefaced earlier, Thurman's discontentment began upon the death of his father, Saul Thurman, who was insensitively maligned for not subscribing to the tenets of orthodox Christianity. Young Howard would yet suffer the pangs consonant to such contempt and the root of it, Fundamentalist insularity, which he implicitly castigated as an illusion to *real* Christianity throughout his reflections. Consequently, the *religion of Jesus*, an embodiment of the historical Jesus as witnessed in Matthew 5, became his newfound refrain:

The ideal that is fundamental to the Jesus idea, as we have defined it, is a vision of all men as children of God and the church as a social institution formally entrusted with this idea in our society cannot withhold it from any man because of status, class, of any social definition whatsoever ...²⁰³

"A vision for all men as children of God" connotes the internal conflict that Thurman has with the Fundamentalist penchant of Rev. Sam Cromartie who openly censured Saul

²⁰² Thurman, *The Growing Edge*, 19-20.

²⁰³ Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 146.

Thurman's religious orientation. It is the principal ethic, in Howard Thurman's estimation, upon which the religion of Jesus ideal turns, subverting the slightest semblance of sectarianism and/or racial discord. Further, it anesthetizes the pain that comes with schism, but also intimates how pain may be transcended by what Thurman deems, a salvific *process*.

The religion of Jesus was not an impetuous construction of mystical fantasy, but a quintessential exemplar conceived of over time. Thus, Thurman's *conversion*, marked by a turbulent childhood and troublesome moments in his adult life, were all contributive to the evolution of his spirituality and his ultimate interpretation of eternal salvation. He envisioned a spirituality steeped in the proximal relationship of humanity to God, which is processional and ever evolving. For Thurman, humanity is never saved, but instead, *becoming* saved. If this is true, it is conceivable how Thurman rejects the painful ideologies of his forebears, and ultimately derives a more placid ontology that is sympathetic to his father's religious leanings; one that regards Saul Thurman's approximation to God to be progressive and unceasing - even if his soteriological interpretation was deluded altogether. In such a schema, humanity is given the space to change and evolve without the threat of eternal commination and/or forbiddance. Thus, altruism instead, which is the underlying theme of the religion of Jesus ethic in Matthew 5, is given sway over the insularities of Fundamentalism. In Saul Thurman's case, a less

exclusive construal of eternal salvation by his eulogist would undergird Howard Thurman's proposed ontology. Without it, humanity is susceptible to the painful illusions of Fundamentalism and/or the ideological encumbrances of other cults that do not liberate the soul.

Pain can be constructive, however, preserving an inherent potentiality to engender a mystical encounter with God. Indeed, Thurman's assertions on *process* prove such to be veritable.

While taking a diversion, Thurman enlists the wisdom of a horticulturalist who draws attention to a distinctive plant, called the Daphne, which, ironically, was not growing in what would have been conceived as a conducive environment for sprouting. The botanist informs Thurman that the Daphne plant was too comfortably situated. (The soil to which it was suffused and other supplemental conditions created by the horticulturalist were much too rich and impregnable for the plant).²⁰⁴ He continued that the plant tends to morph into woods and leaves where it does not have to struggle. Poor soil causes the Daphne plant to conserve its energy resources so that it will produce blossoms, which, in turn, will generate seeds that guarantee the plant's replication and longevity.²⁰⁵ As with the Daphne plant, the power of struggle can be enshrined to the

²⁰⁴ Howard Thurman, *For The Inward Journey: The Writings of Howard Thurman Selected by Anne Spencer Thurman* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1984), 65.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

mystical binary between God and man; that the human spirit grows and evolves through predicaments that are painful and arduous:

Life devoid of challenge (too much protection) scatters energy, dissipates the resources, works against singleness of mind, without which there can be no real fulfillment.²⁰⁶

This is more than an axiom; it is, moreover, a moral ethic Thurman would ascertain while attending a youth meeting in Roanoke, Virginia. There, an Islamic man from West Africa offered a testimony, which not only disquieted Thurman, but also caused him to reflect introspectively on the propriety and relevance of the Christian church. Further, it would inform the Church to be woefully impassable in Thurman's estimation, which only magnified his inner loathings.

The man visited a *white* Christian church to be told upon entering that the church of "his [kind]" was in another part of town. Troubled by the belligerence of the usher, the man pleaded his case to Thurman: "It was to this church that I was directed . . . I [went] and find you are members of the same denomination as that other church . . . Allah laughs aloud in his Moslem heaven when he beholds the Christian spectacle of the Christian church white and the Christian church colored."²⁰⁷ These were most poignant sentiments from a man whose pain entwined that of Thurman's revulsion towards the

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 143.

Church. From Thurman's pain, we make reference to an excerpt cited earlier from *Meditations of the Heart*, which is germane to this context:

[Community] is the very stuff upon which the soul of man feeds; for it is the door through which he enters into the Holy of Holies where God dwells. For behold the dwelling place of God is in the hearts of men! This is the tug of God that pulls each of us to Him. The most direct response is through the human heart: my own heart and the hearts of my fellows.²⁰⁸

Again, at the arbor of Thurman's pain ensues a mystical ethic, which not only emblemizes the essence of the religion of Jesus morality, but withstands all forms of sectarianism. Noteworthy is the mystical revelation that "God is in the hearts of men," which Thurman informs to be the "dwelling place" If this is veritable, humanity's direct response to God, as noted, is through the human heart. The evanescence of a divinely-occupied heart should be impassable to social ignominies, such as hate and racism, and hence, primed for the confluence of socially diverse mores and ethnicities.

Such concord was paramount to Oswald McCall's theological agenda, as the religion of Jesus ethic bears its impressions therein and bleeds thematically throughout his reflections. What appears to be principally adduced in McCall's writings are citations of divine grandeur and pre-eminence, presumably to delimit the particularity of divine

²⁰⁸ Thurman, *Meditations*, 122.

transcendence and to necessitate a hermeneutical piety that had dissipated from the Church's religious consciousness. Hence, he muses mystically, and at times, theologially on the aberrations of the Church that drove Her to the excrescence of a blasphemous facade. It was one of the bases for his pain: "Christendom for many sad centuries obscured the religion of Jesus with ecclesiastical systems and systems of doctrines that have carried the original emphasis far away from the internal realm where he placed it."²⁰⁹ One of the nemeses that McCall alludes to here, as prefaced earlier, is the influence of the Latin Church's *finished work* and *plan of salvation* ideologies, which vitiated the saliency of Incarnation theology, an ontology that endorsed God's residence in the human heart. He intimates that the Latin ideology subconsciously causes a change in perspective surrounding God's contiguity. Specifically, a mere conception that God is found beyond rather than within. Calling this ideology a *heresy of externalism*, McCall eloquently conveys his grievance(s) with the seeds of its manifestation, so uninhibitedly woven throughout the excrescence of idolatrous worship, *sacred* relics, opulent cathedrals, and liturgical expression. Such consternation would he cryptically allege by way of mystical prose in which he *adores* the juxtaposition of a pre-eminent, yet immanent God:

The seasons come and go, the wheeling years
roll into centuries, the centuries into ages, and
every generation stands afresh before the Hand

²⁰⁹ McCall, *The God's of Men*, 26.

to ask the meaning of this Power that holds,
upholds, and never speaks, and never loosens
hold, enclosing all.²¹⁰

It is painful for McCall to muse how a God who is so proximal is relegated to One so distant. His method of underscoring God's almightiness in the above excerpt is intended to conjoin the divine and anthropomorphic extremes; to substantiate God's almightiness through the modality of coalescence. Hence, God is almighty, but one of the ways that almightiness is appraised and qualified is by way of its relationship with humanity.

Relationship is made possible by way of the unequivocal approximation of God to man and, man to God. According to McCall, that proximity of extremes gels in the human heart; not by way of transcendent phenomena. A spiritual trajectory that is transcendental in scope leads humanity to worship what McCall deems, a *substitute*, rather than Yahweh. Precisely, a surrogate or, pseudo object of worship, is what underpins the nature of the Latin church's polity, which is at the root of McCall's dismay. His heart kindles with impatience, consequently, revealing a mystical wisdom which otherwise could not have been attained unless the *pain of parody* existed:

Master, Master, Spirit of Light, help me to be
honest at least with Thee, if with no one else,
at least with Thee! Not unto Thee shall
subterfuge and pretense be rendered, not of
the speech, not of the mind. Least of all of
the mind: tricks, dissembling, duplicities,
sophistries, are fatal there. No coverings up,

²¹⁰ McCall, *The Hand of God*, 1.

no insincerities. Keep me in my thinking from offering, even in the name of piety, false incense to a true God.²¹¹

The authenticity that resonates here derives from the sentiment of pain, which is pain consequent to the Church's pretense and imperviousness. In stark contrast to the prevailing disposition engendered by way of Latin influence, McCall asks God to safeguard him from those consonant acts of duplicity, which would further serve to separate God and man.

McCall's entreaty would not be the only plea for repose. In 1922, he would assume the pastorate for the First Congregational Church in Northern California, where many of the parishioners were skeptical of his post due to the influx of alternative spiritualities amid northern California mores. *Shakers*, as they were referred to, brought spiritual sensibilities to the area that utterly disquieted McCall's congregation.

Convulsive tremblings, private visions and revelations, and the repudiation of Whites who utilized what they deemed to be an old antiquated book in the Bible were all justifiable reasons to spurn McCall's teachings and repel his leadership.²¹² The sense was that McCall would infuse those maniacal features of Shaker ideology into the framework of the church's decorum. After much indirect prodding, specifically a consistency in sound teachings, impressive keenness, and an unequivocal resolve, McCall earned their

²¹¹ McCall, *The Hand of God*, 32.

²¹² Ruby, *John Slocum*, 152.

trust. The journey towards that confidence was painful, nonetheless. Perhaps these words which were used earlier to describe McCall's knack for idiosyncratic prose not only intimates in brief the extent of that pain, but are also used this time to convey how pain may foster mystical revelation:

After this, suddenly I stood astonished. It was the Thumb, I saw the Thumb! How is it this had escaped me? With the rest, yet aloof, there it lifted itself up, distinctive, president.²¹³

McCall looks upon the work of Auguste Rodin, "The Hand of God," and marvels at the imposing details of which He likens to the essentiality of God. The Thumb is that part of the bust to which he makes a metaphorical allusion to God's almightiness. In fact, the "T" in *Thumb* (of the Hand) is capitalized to demarcate its prominence among the other appendages of the Hand. It's more like God than the other fingers: strong, powerful, resistant, and flexible. It intimates that while McCall is under the emotional duress of proving his viability to an estranged congregation, it is the *Thumb*, which *enfolds* him, notwithstanding.

Such intuition proves the unique facility of pain to engender revelation. Without that pain, McCall doesn't deduce the saliency of the Hand. Moreover, the Thumb is given no significance in the overall description of Rodin's work. The residence of pain is consequential, priming the human spirit for the effluence of revelation. Further, it

²¹³ Ruby, *John Slocum*, 33.

ultimately serves to enjoin a spiritual consciousness which rebuffs sociological constructs that injudiciously disposes human existence.

While much of the context of this research entails the lives and mystical theologies of Eckhart, Thurman, and McCall, others to which Thurman and McCall have derived their abstractions, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Rufus Jones, have been the repositories of pain as well, rendering mystical elucidations that have commuted personal anxieties and social constructs.

His birth name was, Mohandas; however, because of his austere piety, admirers endeared him as their Mahatma, The Great Soul. Not because of any perceived invincibility he inherited, but because of his peaceful resolve in the face of social injustices perpetrated against Indians in South Africa and his homeland, India, did they revere him. These civil injustices were not the only impediments the Mahatma would endure to prove his discipline and serenity, however. He would also contend with the constant suppression of lascivious passions, and the ever-looming impressions that compelled him to embrace the vow of Brahmacharya.

While serving in South Africa as a lawyer, an indentured Indian servant, Balasundaram, entered his office brutally beaten, bleeding from the mouth with two front teeth broken, and clothes that had been obviously tattered as a result of the fray he'd sustained.²¹⁴ Gandhi learns that Balasundaram's assailant is his European owner and,

²¹⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi, An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With The Truth* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1993), 155.

hence, adjudicates fiercely through the legal system for Balasundaram's immediate release from his owner's possession. The request is granted but not without humiliation. Whenever a male Indian visited a European in South Africa, he had to remove his turban out of respect for the institutional primacy that held sway. Therefore, the expectation for Gandhi, despite his nobility, would be the same in court as well as any other place. This, along with the fact that Balasundaram was beaten as if he were insignificant matter, causes Gandhi much internal unrest and, thus, compels him to proffer, "It has always been a mystery to me that men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow-beings."²¹⁵

This would be only one incident of pain that leaves an indelible impress on Gandhi's spirit, however. Upon returning home to India after a long stint in Natal, Gandhi was compelled to return to face the civil exigencies so pervasive in South Africa. His arrival at the port in Durban, India by ship would prove to be an omen to the succeeding developments that served to shape his ethos. There, the port authorities not only detained the ship and its occupants, but quarantined them for twenty-three days claiming there had been a plague at the ship's previous port, which warranted such an inoculation.²¹⁶ This was a plausible but bogus justification considering the temperament of the native South Africans and Europeans towards the Indians. The South Africans were denying Gandhi and the fellow passengers disembarkation because it was believed that

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Gandhi, *Gandhi, An Autobiography*, 189.

Gandhi had indulged in the debasement of Natal whites while in India.²¹⁷ Others believed that the shipload of Indians were disembarking to settle in Natal and that Gandhi was the culprit of such a movement.²¹⁸ All of these reasons could have been valid had the culture not mined a subtext of racism and classism that characterized Natal's culture previously. Gandhi and his shipmates refused to relent or retreat the intimidation met them at the dock, however. They were eventually permitted into Natal, albeit not without serious resistance and to the extent of the Mahatma's physical debility.

There, Gandhi was attacked with rocks, brickbats, and rotten eggs; he was beaten unmercifully until given refuge by the wife of the police superintendent who could not bear to witness the violent outcry. In lieu of vehemently dissenting these acts of insolence, Gandhi said, "They are sure to quiet down when they realize their mistake . . . I have trust in their sense of fairness."²¹⁹ From whence do these words derive in the face of injustice and violence? Could the pain of his upbringing, which was replete with internal battles between lasciviousness and acquiescence to the holiness of God, be the basis of his sobriety? Or, rather, could the constant struggle for the civil rights of Indians living in South Africa prior to his disembarkation in Natal be a plausible justification for his strength in the face of extreme adversity? Whatever the reason, it is clear that pain and

²¹⁷ Gandhi, *Gandhi, An Autobiography*, 190.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Gandhi, *Gandhi, An Autobiography*, 192.

suffering is constructive to the maturation of the human spirit, specifically Gandhi's, proving that distress contains an unusual facility to spawn a mysticism that draws an inextricable nexus between God and all of humanity. Gandhi so eloquently makes this point in *The Way of God*:

It is clear to me as the daylight that life and death are but phases of the same thing, the reverse and obverse of the same coin. In fact, tribulation and death seem to me to present a phase far richer than happiness or life. What is life worth without trials and tribulations, which are the salt of life? . . . I want you all to treasure death and suffering more than life, and to appreciate their cleansing and purifying character.²²⁰

His acquaintance with death here is so palpable that one may be lead to believe that he has died a physical death before. However, Gandhi is not speaking of a physical death per se as much as he is alluding to a decrescence of carnal elements through the agencies of trial and tribulation. For him, the intrusion of these struggles are invaluable phases of life that serve to distill and enrich the human spirit, which he learns while contending with the European oppressors and his own impulses of lasciviousness. Without the phases of struggle, as Howard Thurman would contend, the human spirit never learns to conserve its resources; discover its underlying virtues; fight for its convictions, whatever the travail; or, simply trust in God's sufficiency. Finally, there

²²⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, "Soul," in *The Way To God: Selected Writings From Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. M.S. Deshpande (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2009), 15.

would be no basis from whence the world now marvels the ethos and mystical insights that have made the Mahatma so cosmic.

What makes him compelling is the impregnable honesty to which he recounts experiences with Truth. These revelations are painful but impel Gandhi to assent to a life of absolute continence. To quell the carnal passions, which cause him so much pain, he takes the vow of Brahmacharya to necessitate the sobriety he needs to live uninhibitedly spiritual.

Bramacharya is an ancient Vedic principle, thereunto, an adherent assents to sexual abstinence.²²¹ In Gandhi's case, this form of abnegation constituted a discipline of extreme austerity inasmuch as he was betrothed when such conjugal privilege was ceded. To live with the lamentations of his conjugal follies, along with the pain ensuing his father's death, made his vow of chastity all the more adaptable.

Customarily, Hindu women were subservient to their husbands. Thus, Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, was no different in that she embodied the inculcation of compliance to her husband's leadership throughout the marriage. Gandhi had an epiphany, however, that the devotion she exhibited towards his entitlement was equivalent to that of a bondslave in lieu of a *help meet*, which he deemed a [legitimate] *wife*.²²² The *help meet* in Gandhi's new stance was an equal partner in the betrothal, which shared the ebbs and

²²¹ Richard Attenborough, "Glossary," in *The Words of Gandhi*, ed. Richard Attenborough (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 96.

²²² Gandhi, *Gandhi, An Autobiography*, 25.

flows of all that life would bring them. But, this revelation was not apprehended without incidences of distress, which were bred by a friend whose lustful passions were overhearing. Not only did this friend participate in perverted sex, but also took Gandhi to brothels, which served to sow seeds that would ultimately chafe the purity of his spirit. The Mahatma collected himself, notwithstanding, proffering an ethos from the internal wars that plagued him as he sought the Truth:

Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness.²²³

It is by way of the pain Gandhi endures that he experiences the peace that is consonant to Bramacharya. That peace is what he contends to be the basis for the human mind's stability. The mind, in this state, is unobstructed as it assents to the Truth, and thus, is no longer contentious with those lustful passions that afflict the spirit. Gandhi goes on to say in a series of climactic statements as he moves towards the Truth,

To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women.²²⁴

The wife is not the husband's bonds slave, but his companion and his help-mate and equal partner in all his joys and sorrows - as free as the husband to choose her own path.²²⁵

²²³ Mahatma Gandhi, "Daily Life," in *The Words of Gandhi*, ed. Richard Attenborough (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 13.

²²⁴ Gandhi, *The Words of Gandhi*, 11.

²²⁵ Ibid.

You will guard your wife's honour and be not her master, but her true friend. You will hold her body and soul as sacred as I trust she will hold your body and your soul. To that end you will have to live a life of prayerful toil, and simplicity and self-restraint. Let not either of you regard another as the object of his or her lust.²²⁶

These are not simple philosophical statements, but truths borne from suffering that are woven in a fabric of mystical spirituality. Gandhi's insistence on respect, honor, solidarity, and partnership within the context of marriage, are themes that not only pervade his prose, but also govern his life and philanthropic work. They are suggestive to a spirituality of hope and tolerance that would lead no human to perpetrate violence against another living organism. Thus, pain and suffering, ostensibly, are the essential phenomena that produce an unusual lucidity in Gandhi. So consequential is the agency of pain, that it may enjoin humanity to muse the impasses of life as essential sacred moments to the development of the human spirit.

This was evident in the life of Rufus Jones whose mystical insights testify to the sanctity and essentiality of pain and suffering as well. Noted as a philosopher and mystic, his brooding drew a nexus between the cosmos and humanity. That interrelatedness between the two extremes Jones' ties is indicative to his bent on unity, specifically the ever-envirning Spirit of God negotiating humanity and life's vicissitudes. In fact, it is the context Jones contends, which shapes the inner life of the

²²⁶ Ibid.

mystic (or human spirit) and provides the necessary underpinning for our prayers and contemplations. While that environment may represent mass corruption, it is the world with whom humanity is acquainted; and, that world was created by God with whom the mystic (human spirit) cannot know wholly apart from His creation. “Our spirits are trained to know Him, to appreciate Him, by the mediation of historical revelation. A person’s spiritual life is always dwarfed when cut apart from history. Mysticism is empty unless it is enriched by outward and historical revelation.”²²⁷

This ethos is not borne in a vacuum, but emerges from the deepest pangs of loss, specifically his wife’s demise in 1899 from tuberculosis, and his son, in 1903, from diphtheria.²²⁸ In 1914, another tragedy assailed his life, which sent Jones into a severe depression whereby the theological contributions nor mystical insights given to the world by his hand could bring the solace he needed to amend his emotional state.

God’s love is revealed in new and refreshing ways, notwithstanding, which causes Jones to muse the *holiness* of God in 1899. In his writings on the “Postponed Heaven,” Jones rebuffs all semblances of eschatological inference that are interwoven at the expense of the existential. Jones’s emphasis would be on the Kingdom of God *now* and *within* the human spirit in lieu of the ideal expectation schema that the Kingdom of God

²²⁷ Claus Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948): Life and Bibliography of an American Scholar, Writer, and Social Activist* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 33.

²²⁸ Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 5.

is in the *future* and *without* and that all will be consummated when Christians are conjoined to God *en se* in heaven. His emphasis on the *now* and *within* schema impels the human spirit towards loving the holiness of God, which is loving to “live in the will of God”²²⁹ in his estimation, instead of emblemizing the standard of sin that characterizes the world’s condition. Jones calls this a *low*²³⁰ Christian standard or rather, an *easy creed*²³¹ when humanity postpones its present joy for the joy that awaits them in eternity. Such radicalism is borne from the devastations of his son’s untimely death, and his wife’s demise of tuberculosis. He conveys implicitly in his writings that the ever-environing Spirit of God participates in the affairs of humanity, and thus, offers the Kingdom to those on earth who dare open their hearts to receive it even when that openness is the canvas upon which pain and suffering inseminates its purpose. Through his wife’s and son’s deaths, Jones learns of the love of God, which does not absolve humanity from the impediments of sin or human decay. Conversely, its power demonstrates that absolute joy can be obtained through the pain of loss when the Kingdom of Heaven is perceived to be inward. It is Jones’s interpretation of this *inward* Kingdom that impels him to write that God’s love and holiness can never be negotiated for what he deems an *easy creed* [religion], which, alas, accedes the *precepts* of moral

²²⁹ Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 22.

²³⁰ Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 21.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

and cosmological decay as inevitable standard, and looks myopically to an eschatological hope:

It is simply a condition of the heart in to which Christ brings his disciples, where...God's will is chosen, so far as it is known, above everything else.²³²

“Everything else” constitutes pain and the consequence(s) borne of its very presence.

But, when the will of God is chosen and acceded heaven is realized and the pain that would have otherwise immobilized its victim is anesthetized, thus, enabling the human spirit to advance. Jones goes on to provide further mystical testimony of his renewal by suggesting that pain and suffering reveals the *unknown God*:

Now, the transcendent thing about Christianity is this, that for those who are willing to see, it establishes the reality of God and makes his kingdom one of the surest facts in the world. God is no longer an unknown God. We are not left blindly to guess about Him and His will and nature...we have seen the light ... The curtain is forever pulled back from the mercy-seat, and we know the reality of the love of God ... the kingdom of God is no longer a dream of poets or a vision of seers ... the kingdom is established.²³³

Hence, without the seemingly attenuating trouble to assail us, the transcending power of God is otherwise unknown. Christianity is lighted upon half-heartedly, and life is believable by what is seen rather than what is unseen. No matrix for faith to evolve is created nor the love of God *within* accessed. Pain and suffering, however, affords humanity this lucidity to identify the *transcendence* of Christianity Jones notes, which

²³² Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 22.

²³³ Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 25.

reveals God's nature as an inward presence; the Kingdom of Heaven resides in the human spirit, ever fomenting pain in efforts to disclose more of His love and distinctiveness to those amenable to His initiation.

As with his wife's and son's deaths, Jones would find his bout with severe depression in 1903 to be the crucible out of which more mystical genius would emerge. Amid the torment of mental exhaustion, he finds that God needs humanity as much as humanity needs God.²³⁴ He deems it a mutually organic relationship, much of an interdependence wherein God imposes experiences onto humanity and reveals Himself as personal, social and spiritual in nature²³⁵; and, through those experiences, conversely, causing humanity to pine more disclosure of His intents and character. This conception is a subtle allusion to the Incarnation dynamism between God the Father, and Jesus, the Son, which indeed wasn't a facile amalgamation. But, it was a necessary conjunction so as to meld Spirit and carnality; eternity and time; God and humanity. And, it was the result of utter depravity, which God grievously loathes:

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and the at every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. the Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So, the Lord said, I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created...for I regret I have made them [Genesis 6:5-7a. (New Living Translation Bible)].

²³⁴ Bernet, *Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*, 27.

²³⁵ Ibid.

God is grievous over humanity's penchant for sin. Thus, He thinks of destroying human creation until he considers Noah who finds *favor* with Him. Consequently, God spares humanity until the full disclosure of Himself through Jesus, the Christ. The pain reverberant in the aforementioned text, however, is what engenders this melding of humanity and divinity and elicits the following mystical interpretation:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given [John 1:14, 16. (New Living Translation Bible)].

So, Jesus, the Word, becomes the remedy for God's pain and a woefully depraved world, and that pain is the basis for John's reflections here. In like fashion, Rufus Jones' depression over aging and hopelessness become the matrix for a mystical wisdom that reveals God to be personal and One who needs humanity, even when it is in its deepest despair, to disclose what is otherwise inconceivable. Jones discovers that:

There is a divine Person as the Ultimate reality of the universe, [and] He will reveal Himself . . . He will put His Life into manifold manifestations and . . . He will find joy in 'working all things up to the better.'²³⁶

God's life is full of disclosures and manifestations humanity can assume as experiences.

The purpose(s) of these experiences when seemingly destructive are not to despoil humanity, but lead it into growth and something better. Gandhi and Jones both convey an

²³⁶ Ibid.

ethic that is consistent with some of those who admired their testimonies like Howard Thurman and Oswald McCall, who navigated their pangs and mused, sometimes fortuitously, how that pain illuminates the human spirit. What is gleaned from their testimonies is that their mysticisms were unsolicited and seemingly visceral. They simply emerge without plan or method, which intimates God to be the catalyst in pain and suffering in efforts to create space for the interpretation of Himself in mystical form.

Summary 3.1

Our forebears, Meister Eckhart, Howard Thurman, and Oswald McCall, mused contemplatively the expanse of the transcendental. None of which got there without the encumbrances of acute burdens, however; ones that seep into the deepest crevices of the soul, creating a sore which, at times, become an exacerbation for them rather than a *trampoline*. An impassable resolve to abnegate, abandon, and adore, however, are the impulses that transmogrify the exigencies of pain into mystical revelation. For Eckhart, specifically, it is the complicit forays of the Church's leadership and the French crown which disdains him markedly. So intense are the wounds, a mystical intellection is born, called the *birth of Christ in the soul*. While such perspicacity garners extreme ridicule from the religious elite, leading to Eckhart's eventual excommunication, it fosters a new and favorable ontology that refreshes the prevailing sentiment among religious mores. In part, it liberates the Church to experience its own private bliss with the Holy, which more

traditional ideologies rebel by way of its practices to mediate the Sacred through people, symbols, and relics.

Religious piety as exemplified through symbol worship, subterfuges, and other *evolutions* of Christianity, is exactly what pained Oswald McCall to the extent that he codified such praxes as the *heresy of externalism*. Notwithstanding, his implicit rebuttal to Christianity's facade engendered a mystical adoration intended to provoke the same intimate relationship with God that Eckhart sought for the European populace he pastored. His method was efficacious particularly amongst those who sought to avert the fanaticisms of Fundamentalism, which impeded authentic intimacy with God.

Howard Thurman's pain stemmed from childhood. The belligerence and insularity of church leaders who contemptuously rebuffed his father led to the disclosure of mystical prose, which not only freed Thurman to pursue the religion of Jesus, but also liberated all peoples to see themselves as children of God. Moreover, his attempt to interface the religion of Jesus ethic and the more traditional excrescences of Christianity called Christian living into question; specifically, those divergences that contravene its purest form, such as hatred and racism.

All of them were in pain except the pain sustained was less debilitating than it was formative to their spiritual developments and sensibilities. Because the pain was processed through such modalities as abnegation, adoration and abandonment, it elicited a set of eclectic musings, which evoked much more than sentimental euphoria for Eckhart, McCall and Thurman. The contemplative space elicited forms of resistance and

produced a set of mystical writings to challenge the confinement of Fundamentalism, our traditional underpinnings, Orthodoxy and those menacing thoughts that incessantly revile the sanctity of pain

For McCall and Thurman, specifically, life's unanticipated pangs were not some new phenomena incidental to living. Even those to whom they seemingly regarded and the world revered, Mahatma Gandhi and Rufus Jones, proved that pain can be sustained even it is when unbidden. Moreover, pain can be mysteriously elucidating, evocative, and consequential.

Chapter Four: The NFL and the *Casualties* of Concussion

The features of Christian mysticism are broad and because of that expanse, downright elusive at times. So abstruse is its character, mystical theologians, such as the ones highlighted in the study, do not exhaust its breadth but only impinge what can be deemed a mere contextual insularity of the interior life. Then, experience alone is the arbor on which mysticism turns and is thus deified as intrinsically authoritative. Such was the testimony of one psychologist who utilized mystical praxis to ameliorate the maniacal impulses of an emotionally-disturbed patient, an example to which we will return to later in the study. This experience and its positive outcomes served to further substantiate the reliability of interior contemplation, and is but one of many examples of how mystical praxis may be antidotal. It innately negotiates an element of change within its complex that is capable of facilitating the amelioration of a neuroses, such as those encumbered by football players whose emotions have been undermined by incidences of acute linear force and/or sociological impediments. There is no empirical research to qualify the efficaciousness of mystical praxes on football players currently; however, the behavioral tendencies that are redolent to an emotionally-traumatized brain, such as was the case of the neurotic patient above are commensurate: indices such as inconstancy, anxiousness, reflexive/involuntary movement, and agitation, are all consistent.

It is noteworthy to inform that these characteristics are only proportionate to the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Hence, they do not validate the actual onset of the disease. A brief acknowledgement is warranted here, however, in that a correlation of these traits to incidences of brain trauma may provide a seminal perspective to

research already assessed by Dr. Bennett Omalu, who posits that the malfeasant behaviors are but ancillaries to acute linear force. Since the behaviors are correlative to those actually suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, perhaps some mitigation is achievable by way of mystical contemplation. Without relegating the saliency of medical research, which has proffered the degeneration of brain tissue (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy) to be the single reason for the excrescent behaviors, it is plausible that spiritual temperance and/or mindfulness may at least weaken emotional distress. Before plumbing the possible effects of mystical contemplation on professional football players whose brains have been traumatized by the incidence(s) of acute linear force, however, a look at the prevalence of concussions in the National Football League (NFL) and its outgrowths are necessary.

In data compiled from 2016, the NFL reported 271 concussions amassed from practices and regular-season games, a 31.6 percent increase from statistical data yielded in 2014.²³⁷ Strikingly, incidences of head trauma in regular season games alone increased 58.2 percent in 2016, from 115 to 182, the highest it had been in four years.²³⁸ The question that pervades the curiosity of investigators, however, surrounds the considerable increase in those concussed during the regular season: are the numbers up because of an increase in incidences or because the NFL is paying closer attention to

²³⁷ Jason M. Breslow, "What the NFL's New Concussion Numbers Don't Answer," *Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org.html> (accessed October 19, 2017).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

what has become seemingly endemic? If it were the latter, then perhaps there are more *casualties* of concussions than included in the reported data. Whatever the case, concussions have become systemic to those exposed to acute linear force, namely, professional football players who participate in practices and regular-season games.

When concussions are sustained, the human brain is traumatized anatomically and psychologically, compromising the sustainability of the cerebrospinal fluid and meninges. The brain is shaken violently against the cranium, a corral that secures its suspension within the anatomical enclosure. Consequently, dizziness, blurred vision, headaches, imbalance and even emotional inhibitions such as, anxiety, anger, and irruptive behaviors may eventuate. The most heinous residual of such an injury could be fatal.

December 2012, Jovan Belcher, Linebacker for the Kansas City Chiefs, shot and killed his girlfriend and himself after a night of altercation. The Chiefs indicated there was no “long history of sustained concussions”²³⁹ that would have impelled his actions; however, after Jovan’s brain was examined by pathologists postmortem, it was concluded that signs of damage were obvious and “fully consistent with the pathological presentation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).”²⁴⁰ An excrescence to

²³⁹ Sean Gregory, “Are NFL Head Injuries Causing Domestic Violence,” TIME, <http://time.com/> (accessed October 19, 2017).

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

traumatized brains that have sustained on-field acute linear force is CTE, which is a disintegration of brain tissue, as prefaced above. Such trauma has also shown a prevalence for eliciting forms of intemperance and other emotional debilities, as was the case with Jovan Belcher.

Therefore, it is plausible to liken concussions and CTE, as they are seemingly inextricable phenomena. However, what is more intriguing is that concussions which may morph into CTE have far-reaching anatomical effects; namely, an exhibition of pernicious behaviors which may ultimately threaten the security of society. Dr. Bennett Omalu surmised this reality when he discovered the disease in 2002, and hence, embarked on medical and ethnographic research that would yield salient data, causing the NFL to ultimately re-evaluate the methods it had safeguarded for more than seventy-five years.

4.1 Omalu's Research

Dr. Bennett Omalu is a medical examiner from Nigeria, West Africa, who provided revolutionary research in 2005 upon conducting an autopsy on former Pittsburgh Steelers' center, Mike Webster, whose neurological images revealed extensive brain injury. Omalu subsequently diagnosed the brain injury as CTE. As stated, CTE is the progressive degeneration of brain tissue, specifically, the eventual disintegration of

the frontal and temporal cortices.²⁴¹ As Omalu would commend, such grave atrophy is capable of inducing some variances in normal behavioral patterns, such as mood swings, poor judgment, memory loss and impaired speech, to name a few.²⁴² These behavioral patterns have been well-founded; however, a medical explication of the actual neurological incursion bears some attention given the type of aggression that has characterized its attendance.

The human brain carries ubiquitous proteins called Tau, which are responsible for stabilizing the brain's microtubules.²⁴³ These tubular structures transport cells and are responsible for overall axonal morphology and cellular physiology. An integral confluence of this neuronically juxtaposition of extremes provides the means for signals to be carried throughout the Central Nervous System (CNS). When the human brain is injured, however, Tau proteins lose their ability to bind to the microtubules, ultimately causing inefficiency and dysfunction to the overall neuronically process.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Boston University CTE Center, "What is CTE?" BU CTE Center, <http://www.bu.edu/cte/about/what-is-cte/html> (accessed March 29, 2016).

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ananya Mandal, "What Are Tau Proteins?" News: Medical Life Sciences, <http://news-medical.net> (accessed October 27, 2017).

²⁴⁴ Mark Sundman, P. Murali Doraiswamy, and Rajendra A. Morey, "Neuroimaging Assessment of Early and Late Neurobiological Sequelae of Traumatic Brain Injury: Implications for CTE," *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, [September 2015], under "Neurodegeneration," <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2015.00334> (accessed October 27, 2017).

Essentially, Tau has six isoforms which are generated from a single gene. Each of these isoforms are integrated by the presence of either a three or four C-terminal microtubule (3R or 4R), which facilitates binding.²⁴⁵ In a healthy brain, there is an equal distribution of 3R and 4R Tau and a homeostasis in phosphorylation and structural integrity.²⁴⁶ Perturbation (or compromise), however, causes the formation of coagulated Tau clusters to emit slowly throughout the CNS which ultimately leads to neurological degeneration. When Tau is coagulated, microtubule binding ceases and insoluble neurofibrillary tangles form in the cell bodies. Ostensibly, this inefficiency in production engenders the occurrence of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, what we've come to know as CTE.²⁴⁷

While the aforementioned is a sufficiently probable elucidation, it is noteworthy that CTE is only detectable postmortem currently. Thus, much of the research today has been ascertained from analyses conducted on cadavers. An even more plausible deduction can be yielded upon the advent of more recent technological indices, nonetheless, which are currently being developed to measure levels of Tau in the CNS antemortem.

Suffice it to say, however, that a coagulation of Tau proteins ultimately fosters a degeneration of brain tissues. Cumulative pathophysiological damage leads to an

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

amelioration of attention, concentration, and memory. More progressive forms of degeneration externalize through mood swings, depression, disorientation, dizziness, headaches, impaired judgment, and even dementia. And, the most astringent forms may educe Parkinson's disease, vertigo, and an eventual impaired gait.²⁴⁸ Whatever the manifestation, brain injury can be catastrophic medically and socially.

Between 2005 and 2007, Dr. Omalu and his colleague, Dr. Robert Cantu, conducted post-mortem research on the brains of former NFL football players Andre Waters and Terry Long (in addition to Mike Webster) and found emaciated tissue in both samples, which explained the abject behavioral tendencies each subject exhibited prior to their respective demises. Cognitive impairment and psychiatric impulses such as paranoia, panic attacks, and severe depression not only characterized their conditions but also further proved for Omalu (and Cantu) that the ramifications of brain trauma can be extensively cataclysmic.²⁴⁹ Perhaps a seemingly ceaseless downward spiral is what led to the eventual aponic act of suicide to which each subject resorted. But, an incessant disparagement of acute linear force by Omalu would fortuitously enthrall him in a contentious battle with NFL officials over the governing policy for lessening the perpetuation of concussions altogether.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Joseph M. Hanna and Daniel Kain, "The NFL's Shaky Concussion Policy Exposes the League to Potential Liability Headaches," *The Entertainment and Sports Lawyer* 28, no. 3 [Fall 2010]: 9.

To claim that the NFL retained a viable concussion policy prior to Dr. Omalu's findings would be an untenable assertion. The existing standard was not only porous and conveniently complicit, but those responsible for its employment were negligent in undergirding the least bit of integrity that it enjoined.

The NFL Concussion Committee had consisted of Drs. Ira Casson, Elliott Pellman and David Viano who, ironically, were not board certified in neuropathological medicine or research. In fact, Dr. Pellman, the Committee Chair, was a board certified rheumatologist.²⁵⁰ This reality was but a subtext to the general sentiment surrounding concussions that had been infesting the inclinations of NFL policy makers for more than a decade before Dr. Omalu released his research. The pervading belief, borne ostensibly from an impure and collusive psychosis of the NFL elite, suggested that there were no measurable indices to validate the severity of head-to-head collisions. The NFL elite concluded that . . . devoid, in their estimation, was extant scientific and medical research, which would elucidate or imply the neurological dangers systemic to participation in professional football. Hence, an *unobtrusive* facsimile of legitimacy in Casson, Pellman, and Viano, all of whom were indoctrinated to the underlying complicity smoldering beneath the facade of the beloved Shield, would be assembled to conveniently and

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

repeatedly contravene claims of potential neurological compromise as a result of acute head-to-head contact.²⁵¹

Until Omalu's rebuke, acute linear force to the head was relegated to mere contact incidental to the game of football which had no exigent or fatal implications. Afterwards, however, NFL pundits in 2009 were forced to take seriously Omalu's findings by: disbanding all research conducted by the NFL Concussion Committee as unreliable data; donating one million dollars to the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, an independent research group; replacing Drs. Casson, Pellman, and Viano with credentialed neurologists, Dr. H. Hunt Batjer (Chairman, Neurological Surgery, Northwestern Memorial Hospital) and Dr. Richard G. Ellenbogen (Chief, Neurological Surgery, Harborview Medical Center); and finally, enjoining each NFL team to make available a local independent physician to examine players and to determine their readiness to return to play upon sustaining a concussion. Such changes were spawned by the new emerging consensus among the NFL officialdom that acute linear force to the head leads to long-term brain injury and cognitive impairment.²⁵²

²⁵¹ A colloquialism to identify or denote the National Football League or its trademark emblem.

²⁵² Ibid.

4.2 Consonances of Omalu's Research: Recent Studies and Findings

While Dr. Bennett Omalu's convictions proved to be significantly influential on improving the NFL's sentiment on brain trauma over the course of a seven-year span, Dr. Ann McKee, a renowned neuropathologist, had been ardently researching the perils of systemic brain trauma for decades prior. Her research encompassed the examination of brain tissue from former football, soccer, hockey, and ex-war veterans who'd sustained traumatizing detonations.²⁵³ Like Omalu, such horrible realities consonant to the onset of CTE had impelled an insatiable quest within McKee to provide scientific research that would ultimately ameliorate its impact on those of whom the disease had victimized, specifically athletes.

Dr. McKee was reared in an environment enriched with football tradition and passion. Both her father and siblings were not only avid professional football fans, especially of the Green Bay Packers, but accomplished football players themselves. Indeed, McKee's sudden consternation towards the sport she endeared so much makes Dr. Omalu's assessments on the inherent risks concomitant to its participation all the more compelling. "I can't say I love football anymore . . . I'll tell you the reason I stopped. It was September of [2016]. We got the brain of this kid, 13 years old. He was playing football and he just had this massive traumatic brain injury. He had the kind of injury you would have if you got into a motorcycle accident. If a truck hit you. They've

²⁵³ Stan Grossfeld, "Meet Ann McKee, The Doctor at the Leading Edge of CTE Research," *Boston Globe*, July 28, 2017.

got these helmets and these pads ... [which makes them] look larger than life, but the brain is fragile ... you get hit the wrong way and it can end your life. And I thought, I just can't do this anymore. I just can't."²⁵⁴ Unequivocally objective with a tinge of unbiased rhetoric, McKee submits medical research which corroborates Omalu's neuropathological empiricism ultimately and opines the precariousness inherent to football participation as indicated above.

McKee, along with a team of scientists, performed clinical assessments on 202 cadaver brains who were formerly exposed to on-field, acute linear force. Of the 202 brains examined, 177 of them were diagnosed with CTE.²⁵⁵ Out of 111 brains of former NFL players, 110 were diagnosed with CTE.²⁵⁶ Those brain samples that showed a pathology consistent with the onset of CTE revealed neurofibrillary tangles and perivascular lesions in the cerebral cortex and thalamus. A more extensive distribution of neurofibrillary tangles and damage to the cortical regions of the brain constituted the onset of severe CTE. Isolated perivascular lesions found in the sulcal area of the cerebral

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Jesse Mez, Daniel H. Daneshvar, Patrick T. Kiernan, Bobak Abdolmohammadi, Victor E. Alvarez, Bertrand R. Huber, Michael L. Alosco, Todd M. Solomon, Christopher J. Nowinski, Lisa McHale, Kerry A. Cormier, Caroline A. Kubilus, Brett M. Martin, Lauren Murphy, Christine M. Baugh, Phillip H. Montenegro, Christine E. Chaisson, Yorghos Tripodis, Neil W. Kowall, Jennifer Weuve, Michael D. McClean, Robert C. Cantu, Lee E. Goldstein, Douglas I. Katz, Robert A. Stern, Thor D. Stein, and Ann C. McKee, "Clinicopathological Evaluation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Players of American Football," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 318, no. 4 [July 2017]: 360.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

cortex, conversely, suggested only a mild infestation. Whatever the extent of the disease's residence, whether mild or severe, a general neurophysiological analysis of these affected brains revealed a degeneration of tissue, as was the case with Terry Long and Mike Webster, two former professional football players whose brains were analyzed by Dr. Bennett Omalu.

Some other features in McKee's study that were ancillary to the condition of brain tissue degeneration involved mood swings, indecent behaviors, and cognitive dissonance as purported by representatives of the deceased who were interviewed by researchers on McKee's team prior to examining the brain samples. Such protuberances were concomitant: impulsivity, depression, apathy, anxiety, explosivity and inattention, which are all tendencies that are intrinsic to the onset of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The results of the tests revealed that a high proportion of the cadaver brains sampled had neuropathological evidence of CTE, suggesting that participation in American football may increase the propensity of traumatic brain injury and/or contribute to the onset of CTE. Dr. Omalu's suppositions again threatened the *sanctity* and preservation of the sport of football as far as NFL officials were concerned.

In a case study conducted in 2016 to assess the short and long-term behavioral and pathological effects on brain injuries sustained by a sample group of rodents, Omalu's assertions were again corroborated. Three mild brain injuries were sustained in a controlled environment five days apart. Resultantly, an increase in Tau phosphorylation was crystallized in both the acute and chronic phases of injury and thus, changes in

axonal pathology and neuroinflammation ensued.²⁵⁷ These histological changes were concomitant with trends towards anxiety, deficits in depth perception and inhibitions in locomotion in the observed rodents.²⁵⁸ Such cognitive impairments serve to further corroborate the hypotheses of Omalu's (and Dr. McKee's) research.

With respect to the behavioral maladies that are associative to brain injury, transient changes were observed in the rodents, which are redolent to the human tendencies of those Omalu assessed. For instance, depression and anxiety, two possible responses to human brain injury, were not observed distinctly, but serve to at least connote the extent to which the behaviors of the sampled rodents changed overtly as a consequence to acute trauma.

Thus, injury to the brain leads to short-term pathological effects, such as phosphorylation, inflammation, axonal injury, long-term pathological effects and inhibited synaptic transmissions and locomotion. Some of the short-term behavioral corollaries may include mood swings evinced as depression and anxiety and, long-term behavioral protuberances that are more violent in nature. These short-term and long-term behavioral maladies, while presumably the result of a pathology systemic to brain trauma sustained by the rodents in the aforementioned study and professional football players

²⁵⁷ Kelly M. McAteer, Francis Corrigan, Emma Thornton, Jade Renee Turner, and Robert Vink, "Short and Long Term Behavioral and Pathological Changes in a Novel Rodent Model of Repetitive Mild Traumatic Brain Injury," *PLoS One* 11, no. 8 [August 2016]: e0160220.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

who have been the victims of acute linear force, indeed coincide with some of the markers consonant to the onset of PTSD. The rodents were traumatized, and as a result, Dr. Omalu's pathological and behavioral assessments are given more credence.

However, were there salient components of the study that remain unmentioned? Were the rodents traumatized socially prior to the study? Were the rodents fully domesticated so as to ameliorate incidental anxiety? Was the research environment discomforting to the rodents causing a predisposition to the malady of fear prior to the induction of trauma? Are the behavioral changes in the rodents redolent to the indices consistent with PTSD? It is not possible, presumably, to construe the psychology of a rodent, neither is such a model noted in this study; however, such questions bear the sincerest consideration before designating CTE as the sole pathological underpinning to the behavioral changes shown in the sampled rodents and those documented by Dr. Omalu and other researchers.

Possibly, there are other underlying factors, which serve to supplement, not undermine, the corpus of pathological research rendered by experts like Omalu. Former players, such as Mike Webster, Andre Waters, and Jovan Belcher, were not only victims of acute linear force, but were also, perhaps, mere immolations of environment. If so, maybe the NFL would be apt to, in addition to its once-dissenting disposition towards a pathological nexus, contravene such implications that are sociological in nature, too. Or, maybe its officialdom would concur with both the pathological and sociological dangers concomitant to the game of football and thus would embark on a course to impede the inevitable manifestations. It's difficult to surmise, but based on the rebuttals of its

leadership in response to pathological tendencies constitutive to concussive collisions 15 years ago, it is plausible that such polemical positions that characterized its disposition then would, doubtless, represent the same dissent towards sociological factors just as noteworthy.

Nonetheless, critical realities of this magnitude cannot be ignored. And, inasmuch as they cannot be eluded, certain behavioral maladies that are seemingly consonant with both the onset of pathological and sociological exigencies have to be appraised from a PTSD viewpoint in conjunction with the potential residence of CTE.

4.3 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy

Part of the cognitive decline, as prefaced above, entails an eventual transmogrification of neurological declension that morphs into more overt manifestations, and at times, behaviors that are licentious in nature. Behaviors such as inattention, anger, impulsive mood swings and violent outbursts all characterize neurological compromise and may denote the onset of CTE, particularly if subjects have been exposed to participatory head trauma. However, the same behavioral tendencies that are redolent to football players who have sustained head trauma are equivalent, ostensibly, to the documented symptoms of people who have suffered the onset of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Could it be possible that some football players may suffer from PTSD in lieu of CTE? If not, or if some are suffering from an amalgamation of the two, could the

incorporation of a mystical praxis such as centering prayer ameliorate at least behavioral tendencies?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the persistent or recurrent imaging of traumatic events that induces psychological anxieties. Factors such as war, gender, natural disaster, social unrest, as well as one's debasement or approximate death experience, can all contribute to the development of PTSD. Essentially, such factors formed the bases for psychiatrists and psychologists alike to have developed a rubric that authenticates the onset of the disorder. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* tenders these measurements as *diagnostic criteria* for PTSD:²⁵⁹

1. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) ways.
2. Presence of one (or more) intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred.
3. Persistent avoidance stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred.
4. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred.
5. Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred.
6. Duration of the disturbance is more than one month.
7. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
8. The disturbance is not attributable to the psychological effects of a substance (e.g., medication, alcohol or another medical condition).

²⁵⁹ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5th Edition, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington, DC/London, England: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 271.

In one case study, a few of these criteria were evident in its victims. After being repeatedly raped by Catholic priests in South America, a group of nuns began to show signs of PTSD.²⁶⁰ Drastic changes in disposition, accompanied by periods of silence and reclusion, became the new and menacing incursive traits to the nuns' personality index.²⁶¹ The diagnostic rubric confirms their symptoms to have been consonant with the onset of PTSD.

This harrowing disease is not merely a psychological reaction to a devastating experience, but its attendance is induced by an intricate neurophysiological system that has been compromised by incursive signals. Specifically, the brain is made up of neurons, a network of neural pathways as well as neurotransmitters, which are nerve cells that transmit information from one cell to another.²⁶² This signaling process is not seamless, however. The continuous exchange of information between the billions of neurons and neurotransmitters, which comprises a plethora of chemical reactions, make the neurophysiological network most susceptible to irruptions.²⁶³ The complexity of

²⁶⁰ Gloria Dura-Vila, Gerard Leavey, and Roland Littlewood, "Integration of Sexual Trauma in a Religious Narrative: Transformation, Resolution and Growth Among Contemplative Nuns," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 1 [February 2013]: 31.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Sethanne Howard and Mark W. Crandell, "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: What Happens in the Brain?" *Washington Academy of Sciences Journal* 93, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 8.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

the neurological system along with the intrusions of disease, mood, drugs, and genetics,²⁶⁴ is an amalgamation that affects normal neurophysiological processes.

The hypothalamus in the brain is the seat of integration whereby information from the neurotransmitters and neurons are interpreted and then disseminated throughout the body to various systems, one of which is the endocrine system.²⁶⁵ The pituitary gland, an infinitesimal structure of the endocrine system, secretes a hormone called *cortisol*, which regulates blood pressure, cardiovascular function, carbohydrates, proteins, and fats for energy.²⁶⁶ The volume of cortisol released in the body is always consonant to the stress the body sustains.²⁶⁷ Thus, high levels of stress will induce the diffusion of high levels of cortisol, and low levels of stress will actuate, accordingly, low levels of cortisol.

Prolonged stress converts to a state of traumatic anxiety which, in turn, releases high levels of cortisol throughout the body. When this happens, the amygdala, an appendage of the brain where memory, decision-making, and emotions subsist, loses its functionality to maintain homeostasis. In lieu of efficiently decoding copious amounts of data simultaneously as is indigenous to its function, prolonged anxiety represses the amygdala complex altogether. In this state, the brain maintains this excessive vigilance, which is an inordinate sensitivity to a supposed impending danger. This distress fosters

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Howard and Crandell, *Washington Academy*, 10.

an array of psychological impediments; namely, memory loss, concentration deficiencies, dissociative disorders and symptoms constitutive PTSD. An incessantly traumatic state that morphs into the onset of PTSD cannot recalibrate without cathartic intervention, normally. One of the therapeutic measures utilized in the past to ameliorate the incidence of PTSD has been pharmacological; precisely, by way of the consumption of Zoloft,²⁶⁸ Paxil,²⁶⁹ and Prazosin.²⁷⁰ While these prescriptions treat anxiety and depression they also serve to counterbalance sleep deprivation, concentration impediments and other symptoms that are concomitant to PTSD.

Aside from pharmacological intervention, psychotherapeutic antidotes have been utilized to ameliorate PTSD as well, such as, cognitive therapy, exposure therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR):²⁷¹ cognitive therapy helps patients identify cognitive patterns, specifically negative ones, that hinder normal mental processes; exposure therapy helps patients safely confront the fear(s) that cause(s) so much disquiet by actually simulating the harrowing event; and, EMDR, which combines exposure therapy and guided eye movement to help the patient process the traumatic

²⁶⁸ Mayo Clinic, Diseases and Conditions: “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/basics/treatment/con-20022540.html> (accessed March 19, 2016).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

event in ways that rehabilitate rather than impair human efficiency. Mental health professionals have utilized these techniques independently or in conjunction with other antidotal agencies so as to foster optimal results for patients who have sustained the perils of PTSD. However, some have turned to spirituality, namely, meditative practices as a plausible panacea.

4.3.1 Mindfulness: A Panacea or Farse

Piotr Rajski, a psychologist from Alberta, Canada, records a counseling session in which a patient in mania adheres to a meditative technique that ultimately foments the homeostasis and placidity the patient so desperately needs.²⁷² The technique refocused the patient's attention to the inner self, a mindfulness of stimuli, breathing patterns, and the environment, specifically. And, thus, what had been an eruptive environment became the conduit from whence spiritual practices such as meditation, silence, and mindfulness would possibly be authenticated as a tenable antidote to PTSD. From the employment of these spiritual practices, Dr. Rajski incorporates a practice of *mindfulness* and, hence, surmises a bit further that by incorporating the practice, other patients would locate the presence and centrality of God within themselves and, in so doing, ameliorate the intemperances causing so much disharmony internally.

²⁷² Piotr Rajski, "Finding God in the Silence: Contemplative Prayer and Therapy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 42, no. 3 [Fall 2003]: 181.

Finding God is suggestive. It informs humanity's predilection towards God, and God's tendency for inward fellowship with His creation. As a result of this binary *finding*, God is indeed discernible and humanity nostalgically pursuant to the peace it once sustained. Such realities explains the quieting of Rajski's patient once given the methods of meditation and silence. *Divine mindfulness*,²⁷³ as it should be referred to, calls the patient into a space of his spiritual self to simply *be*: to *let go* of perceived consciousness and to be unequivocally vulnerable to God. Twentieth century mystic Evelyn Underhill calls what has been deemed here as mindfulness, *purgation*,²⁷⁴ whereby the contemplative detaches from the world of illusory and pain in substitution for what is Real. And, through meditation, he/she transcends what is an *imprisonment*, much akin to the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave, to achieve a divine consummation inwardly. As noted, the patient's acquiescence affords this *mindfulness*, which, in turn, yields for him a homeostatic state that arguably would not have been achieved otherwise. Citing Rajski's antidotal treatment of the patient as divine mindfulness, which has its roots in early Buddhism, warrants some further explication.

Essentially, Buddhism is a religious path to spiritual liberation for the human spirit whereby the Master "acts consciously while going and while coming, while looking forward and while looking backward, while bending his limbs and while stretching them

²⁷³ Mindfulness is described in operational terms; distinct from its original denotation, which encompasses a mental projection onto the present moment while calmly accepting one's thoughts and feelings.

²⁷⁴ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (n.p.: Renaissance Classics, 2012), 124.

... while remaining silent ... and, at some point, [sitting] down, [folding] his legs, [holding] his body erect, and [thus applying] mindfulness.”²⁷⁵ This state of mindfulness is the precursor to *dhyana* (trance), which precedes ultimate enlightenment or *nirvana*. The intent, ostensibly, entails the transcendence of the self with no (discernible) divine intermediary to mediate the trek towards consummation or divine unity. The Master is the initiator; however, there is no focus inwardly on an actual means or conduit to that unity. Therefore, *mindfulness*, as associated with Buddhist ethics, is diametrically distinct from its intimation in Rajski’s clinical quest.

The patient that eventually *wrests* his mania does it by means of enfolding inwardly towards God (who resides within him). No doubt, the focus is the Sacred, not self or a means of transcending the self. This type of deliberate turning constitutes divine mindfulness. In Christian mystical praxis, mindfulness constitutes an upward assent or inward turning towards God, specifically through the conciliation of Jesus, the Christ.

In a case study conducted by Dr. Judith Sigmund in “Spirituality and Trauma: The Role of Clergy in the Treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” clinical assessments on three groups of PTSD patients were done. All of them were somewhat introspective in nature, encouraging the patients subconsciously to draw on those intrinsic spiritual resources that could effectuate healing. Resultantly, in one of the cohorts, the sentiment of anger was completely mitigated, and the empathies of forgiveness and

²⁷⁵ Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: MacMillan Reference, 2003), 540.

solidarity embodied.²⁷⁶ This consummation of divine mindfulness can be given credence for the placation ultimately realized by the patients, which, confirms for Dr. Sigmund that introspective turning yields more meaningful interpersonal relationships and foments purposeful fellowship with God. Lastly, it impels the patients to elude their natural inclinations to predominate all matters of life.²⁷⁷

Unlike the Eastern interpretation of mindfulness, Western mores inform mindfulness to be a consciousness of the present: a praxis of non-judgment and intentionality, without reliving the past or anticipating the future.²⁷⁸ While this indeed is a gradation to the operating definition of divine mindfulness, it is noteworthy in that it comprises the discipline of mental concentration called meditation. There is no inward turning towards God as is the case in Christian metaphysics; there is a pause, however, in this simple exercise of mindfulness to ruminate breathing pattern and the present moment.

Recently, veterinarians who have a high propensity for suicide, some seven times the general population and an inordinate occurrence of anxiety and depression,²⁷⁹ incorporated some techniques associated with this simple form of mindfulness so as to

²⁷⁶ Judith Sigmund, "Spirituality and Trauma: The Role of Clergy in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Religion and Health* 42, no. 3 (2003): 222.

²⁷⁷ Sigmund, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 226.

²⁷⁸ Steven Noonan, "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction," *The Canadian Veterinary Journal* 55, no. 2 (February 2014): 134.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

ameliorate such a baneful predilection. Their inclinations were confirmed, yielding positive results that mindfulness is an indispensable antidote to psychological distress.²⁸⁰

Further, in a recent newspaper article, 16-year-old Kirsten White lauds the benefits of mindful exercises as a mechanism which has the capacity to stem the sentiments of her own anger and frustration.²⁸¹ Again, there is no inward turning; however, intentional focus on the present, she contends, helped to empty the mind of outside influences, judgments and stressors that lead to feelings of malaise and subjugation.²⁸²

“It’s no panacea,”²⁸³ according to Dr. Carl Fulwiler, Medical Director and Associate Research Director for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts, but it is a starting point towards assuaging the impositions of life that afflict the mind. It provides, moreover, the tools for responding to life’s occurrences in more efficient and innocuous ways. At its most fundamental level, mindfulness proves to be beneficial to those who have suffered and are suffering the perils of mental anguish. Hence, an inward turning, may lead to even more groundbreaking discoveries into the nexus of spirituality and medicine. Moreover, it may

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Meredith Cohn, “Mindfulness Exercises from Sheppard Pratt Help Troubled Teens Cope with Life,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 8, 2016.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

stem the horrible realities pervasive today among some professional football players who have not yet learned to quell their internal turbulences for a consummation that fosters and sustains continence.

Such methods of spirituality do not intend to undermine the saliency of Dr. Omalu's most assertive and veritable positions on brain injury. His premises, along with the corroborations of other prominent researchers on CTE, such as Drs. Ann McKee and Robert Stern, simply elucidate the validity of CTE's harrowing effects on the human brain. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that there are times the social excrescences of the disease are confluent with the manifestations of PTSD. Since it is impossible to confirm if a living football player has CTE at this time, perhaps the protuberances are social in nature as much as they are pathological. And, if they are, maybe a spiritual praxis like centering prayer can be antidotal, at least at the level of ameliorating behavioral maladies. Later, the concept of Divine mindfulness will be explored a bit further - its underpinnings and cathartic possibilities.

4.3.2 Some Realities Concomitant to the NFL

However, in an unofficial 2013 census taken on the demographics of the National Football League (NFL) by Best Tickets, an online ticket distribution and data collecting venue, the cities of New Orleans, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles produce the

highest population of professional football players.²⁸⁴ (Some of the other cities represented in the demographic study include: Detroit, 15 players; San Diego, 16 players; Pittsburgh, 16 players; Chicago, 16 players; and Atlanta, 16 players).²⁸⁵ The predominant ethnicity is African-American, which represents 66.72 percent of the NFL's on-field participation sample.²⁸⁶ Of this percentage, many of the African-American players hail from the ten cities cited in the aforementioned. These cities, unfortunately, have also been the loci of violent crimes between the formative years 1990-2008, in which many of the players referenced in this sample were reared.²⁸⁷ Hence, murders, rapes and other incidences of violence that characterize the ignominy prevalent in these cities were just part of the *normal* proceedings of life for these men.

²⁸⁴ Best Tickets, "The Unofficial 2013 NFL Player Census," bestticketsblog, entry posted September 23, 2013, http://www.besttickets.com/blog/unofficial-2013-nfl-census/html_ (accessed March 25, 2016). Best Tickets is a reputable, online ticket distribution venue and data collecting resource center. All data collected on the NFL's demographics were conducted by ethnographic methods and consultation. It is, thus, *unofficial data*, as it is not authenticated by the NFL. It's unofficial status does not negate the authenticity of the method used to collect and provide data.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Formative years constitutes those African-American males born in 1990; and, who were reared in calamitous environments of murder, rape, and other violent crimes until the age of 18 (when they, presumably, went to college).

In the city of New Orleans, during the years 1990-2008, there were a total of 129,980 violent crimes that African-American players from that city could have been directly exposed to between the ages of 0-18 years.²⁸⁸ In Dallas, violent crimes amassed an average of 80,213.10 over an eighteen year period; in Houston, an average of 85,168.6; in Miami, an average of 107,761.5; and in Los Angeles, an average of 65,156.3.²⁸⁹ Indeed, these are perplexing but suggestive statistics considering, as prefaced above, that many of the African-American players from New Orleans, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles could have been exposed to violent crimes before entering the NFL. Exposure to such crimes as rape, murder, and physical brutality create memories which may lead to the onset of a psychological crises such as PTSD. In the mid-1980's, roughly twelve years after Vietnam, 33 percent of the war veterans²⁹⁰ with PTSD reported intimate partner violence. These were men who were exposed to *legalized* killings and mutilations in the vilest of forms while at war such as some of the African-American NFL players reared between 1990-2008. It is plausible then that reports of domestic violence and social disturbances, perpetrated by some of these

²⁸⁸ City of New Orleans, "Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)," Historical Crime Data 1990-2004, <http://www.nola.gov/nopd/crime-data/crime-stats/html> (accessed March 28, 2016).

²⁸⁹ City-Data.com, "Crime Rates in Los Angeles By Year," City-Data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Los-Angeles-California.html> (accessed March 28, 2016).

²⁹⁰ US Department of Veterans Affairs, "Research Findings on PTSD and Violence," US Department of Veterans Affairs, http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/co-occurring/research_on_ptsd_and_violence.asp html (accessed March 28, 2016).

players, are the unfortunate results of the disease's occupancy. Perhaps, the prevalence of ignominy among some of the League's players suggests there to be a relationship between violence and PTSD, specifically with respect to the aforementioned data presented on domestic violence as perpetrated by 33 percent of the Vietnam war veterans (with PTSD) in the mid-80's.

4.3.3 Other Sociological Considerations

As noted earlier in this study, Jovan Belcher, former professional football player and Kansas City Chiefs linebacker, committed suicide as a result of what was determined, antemortem, as CTE. Prior to taking his own life, however, Jovan and his companion, Kasandra Perkins, had been involved in a brazenly violent and protracted exchange which eventually turned fatal. With a bent of irrationality, impulsivity, and ostensible derangement, Belcher censured objections to his own self destruction and then shot himself in the parking lot of Arrowhead Stadium in front of Kansas City Chiefs' personnel. The events surrounding Belcher's demise elicited an array of opinions from football fans and mental health professionals as many suspected that he suffered from the onset of CTE. However, it is noteworthy that an amalgamation of events leading up to his eventual demise might have been just as culpable as any supposed neurological compromise.

All indications summarize Belcher's personality as gregarious and compassionate towards others, which was proven often by his philanthropic work for the protection and

advancement of women. Reared by an industrious single mother under humble circumstances, Belcher was estranged to his biological father.²⁹¹ These realities bore no significant impress upon his fidelity, whereby, those who knew him testify of an unassailable passion for success. This success, however, was steeped in a looming discontentment that may have ultimately contributed to his demise.

While in college at the University of Maine, he was undersized for his position; nonetheless, he excelled ultimately becoming a prominent linebacker. So glaring was his ardor for the sport of football that he drew attention from the Kansas City Chiefs, eventually earning himself a position on the limited fifty-three man roster.²⁹² He had now reached his ultimate goal to play professional football, but was that goal conceived through an obscure lens or false self? Was the manifestation of that goal an offspring to the mere spores of illusion? Was the internal drive testified to by friends of Belcher the consequence of some juvenile privation? No one is certain, but what is for sure is that Belcher earnestly sought acceptance and validation from team coaches and officials from the initial time he made the team's roster in 2009 until 2012. What is for sure is that his own trepidation, caused by the pressures of being in the NFL, impelled an incessant

²⁹¹ Jeff Pearlman, "A Year After Jovan Belcher's Final Act, Friends Offer Clues To Tragic Downfall," *Bleacher Report*, www.bleacherreport.com.html (accessed December 15, 2017).

²⁹² *Ibid.*

drinking problem that lasted until his death. What is for sure is that he and his girlfriend, Kasandra Perkins, argued persistently over matters directly related to his own insecurity. What is for sure is that the once disaffected and focused man had become engrossed in a fallacious life of partying, debauchery, women, and frivolous spending. What is for sure is that he had grown weary of the perfidious and overt critiques hurled at him by his position coach,²⁹³ which served to attenuate his tenacity and overall athletic prowess. What is for sure is that Belcher played a game that had demonstrated a propinquity for brain injury among those who participated. And, finally, what is for sure is that he killed his girlfriend and himself on December 1, 2012. Why? Was it the residue of CTE? Or, was it a combination of CTE and the tendencies evocative to the onset of PTSD?

On September 30, 2014, neuropathologists confirmed that Jovan Belcher showed signs consistent with a pathology for CTE;²⁹⁴ however, this disease specifically entails the eventual degeneration of brain tissue, a neurophysiological phenomenon, as noted above. Such medical confirmation should not be circumvented, but Belcher's social circumstances, likened to those professional football players reared in violent milieus, must be given sincere assessment. Not only was Belcher the victim of acute linear force on the field of play but was also perhaps the martyr of his own contextual misfortunes and ambition. The obsessions, impulsivity, and intermittent incidences of frustration and rage all recapitulate symptoms that are consistent with CTE and PTSD. Thus, could

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

Belcher's mania also have been the result of a latent discontentment at the subconscious level, which, doubtless, affected his emotional homeostasis as an adult?

This, too, is uncertain, but all indications suggest there to be a plethora of underlying issues on a sociological level that could have contributed to the destructive behavioral patterns, which left an indelible blemish on his legacy. These circumstances are analogous to the dark cloud that hovers over the legacy of NFL great Dave Duerson who died of a self-inflicted wound to the chest. Although a pathology consistent with the residence of CTE²⁹⁵ confirms that Duerson's erratic behaviors were possibly systemic to a neurophysiological compromise, there were seminal sociological features in his life worth noting.

He obsessed over the specter of failure. Some 25 years ago, when the Chicago Bears terminated Duerson's contract for reasons that remain ambivalent today, not only did he abdicate his entire financial solvency, but his self-esteem as well. According to reports from family members, he became intermittently depressed, reclusive, crass, irritated, and abusive to his wife. Such emotional duress was compounded when a Chicago-based Chevrolet dealership with whom Duerson was contracted rescinded their sponsorship obligation due to the decision the Chicago Bears made to release him.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Alan Schwarz, "Duerson's Brain Trauma Diagnosed," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2011.

²⁹⁶ Gus Garcia-Roberts, "Dave Duerson's Secret Life and Tragic End," *Miami New Times*, April 28, 2011.

Along with these distressing realities, Duerson was subconsciously reminded of an opprobrious epithet his former coach, the late Buddy Ryan, recurrently attributed to him: “You’re a smart nigger.”²⁹⁷ This appeared to make a seminal impress on Duerson, likened to an aching abscess that forebodes long after extraction.

Duerson's childhood was stable, generally. However, his physical stature paled in comparison to that of his peers. As a result, he grew up having to protect himself against more physically imposing children. He played sandlot football against larger kids and, found ways to navigate life as an infinitesimal microcosm of a big world. Such was his physical makeup ostensibly stunted that his father sought medical assistance to disprove premonitions that young Duerson was diminutive as a result of a genetic composition.²⁹⁸

Again, all of these factors in conjunction with the repeated on-field head trauma led to that fateful day on February 17, 2011, when Duerson carefully laid out personal documents, his deceased father’s military commendations, the American flag, and degrees he had attained from the Universities of Notre Dame and Harvard, respectively.²⁹⁹ Between these *things*, Duerson lodged himself (in the bed), and shot a bullet through his own chest. Perhaps, these *things* were emblems of proud moments to commemorate in Duerson’s own mind. The nostalgia each of those relics afforded, however, were obviously unable to foment the happiness he so desperately pursued, and

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

the demons of rejection, discontentment, and insecurity he so desperately sought to exorcise.

Before Duerson committed suicide, he left a note compelling those who'd find his body to donate his brains to the NFL for research. Medical experts determined that Dave Duerson's postmortem brain anatomy was consistent with a pathology for CTE.³⁰⁰ Thus, his premonitions as intimated in the suicide note were confirmed. Nonetheless, were there undiagnosed sociological factors, which may also explain the maniacal behaviors? Could Duerson have been suffering from PTSD as a result of the pressures connate to a NFL player? Did factors, such as Duerson's childhood physical stature or his coach's bigoted attribution contribute to his demise? The plausibility of these queries beckons a thorough analysis of what constitutes the efficient, psychological stasis of the human brain and, conversely, the impasses that contravene its overall emotional balance. Further, these queries enjoin the nascency of an ethic, one that heals the human spirit. Inasmuch as the behavioral maladies excrement to CTE and emotional stress (redolent to PTSD) are confluent, it is presumed that stress will wane and the symptoms of CTE will ameliorate when distressed professional football players incorporate such an ethic that has proven to mollify the emotional states of those victimized by the loathsome quiddities of life.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

Summary 4.4

Dr. Bennett Omalu provided revolutionary research in 2002 after conducting an autopsy on former Pittsburgh Steelers center, Mike Webster, whose neurological images revealed extensive brain injury that Dr. Omalu ultimately diagnosed as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE. His findings, however, elicited an array of polemical banter from NFL pundits whose intent was to preserve the integrity of a sport that had been the indirect culprit of an anatomical and emotional compromise. Nonetheless, it ultimately diffused a duplicitous protocol, the NFL's concussion policy, which was once utilized to sustain on-field participation, and a praetorian form of capitalism.

Researchers like Ann McKee and Robert Stern, who had been studying the complexities of CTE years before Omalu's public stance, not only corroborated his attestations, but also have provided new and emerging insights. Thus, scientific methods are currently being devised that would locate coagulates of Tau proteins and neurofibrillary tangles in efforts to diagnose a pathology consistent with the residence of CTE, antemortem, specifically. Such groundbreaking discoveries will inform medical research; however, it will not elucidate ostensible socio-behavioral quandaries that may underlie the behavioral maladies consonant to the residence of CTE and/or symptoms redolent to the occupation of PTSD.

Many professional football players come from crime-ridden cities, such as New Orleans, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles and may have witnessed sinister crimes like murder, rape, and other forms of physical abuse between zero and eighteen

years. It is plausible that such violent experiences embed themselves deeply into the psyche, as attested to by Vietnam veterans, and, thus, become manifestations that objectify and sometimes harm others in irreversible ways if not imbued with cathartic intervention.

While Jevon Belcher nor Dave Duerson hail from the baleful cities noted above, their very sad endings are still indelible testaments to the latter. Neurophysiological assessments, postmortem, proved the onset of CTE, however, did not reveal the social disaffections that may have also been culpable for the nefarious behaviors or fatalities to which both men precipitated. Medical nor social scientists may ever be able to locate an emotional compromise anatomically; however, a manifestation of atypical behaviors, as was the case with Belcher and Duerson, may recede with the incorporation of a regimented spiritual praxis.

Chapter Five: The Remedy of Contemplation, Centering and Silence

It is well documented that the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the Christian faith retreated to the agrarian territories of Egypt to elude Constantine's *irruption* of Christianity. An ascetic and inward reverence of the Divine constituted the spiritual trajectory they all sought to adhere. A more plausible recapitulation of their austerity may be characterized as the praxis of *contemplation* (meditative prayer), a derivative from the Greek word *theoria* ("theory" and "theatre"),³⁰¹ which means to "gaze," "look at," or to "be aware" of divine presence.³⁰² The English form of the aforementioned comes from the Latin word *contemplatio*, which also has been assumed as more common vernacular to delimit various forms of prayer that provide the matrix for revealing both the divine and idiosyncratic complexities inherent to human existence.

"Contemplation" and *theoria* are Neoplatonic attributions that were adopted by Christianity: precisely, the Greek Fathers of the Church who purported such forms of vigilance as "loving [elements or perception]," (The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa, s.v. "Brill, Leiden") specifically. They sought to coalesce the intellectual nexus indigenous to the vigilance entwined about Neoplatonism and the experiential knowledge

³⁰¹ Andrew Louth, "Theology of the *Philokalia*" in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West*, eds. John Behr, Andrew Louth, Dimitri E. Conomos and Kallistos Ware (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 358.

³⁰² William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (New York: Fordham United Press), 24.

of love (*da'ath*).³⁰³ Inasmuch, the whole of humanity here is involved, not merely the mind.³⁰⁴ And, such was the impetus for the scriptures to be assessed rather, from a spiritual arbor than just an intellectual sensibility (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, s.v. “Contemplation, Contemplative Life”).

Thus, *mental prayer*, as it was ascribed, came to be a sacred form as well as a distinct method of prayer for the first Christian centuries, primarily.³⁰⁵ Regarded as *pure faith* and an intimate experience of God’s presence, it encompassed three levels of conscious praxis: *meditatio* or “meditation,” which employs the praxis of reflection on the *lectio divina*, a “divine reading” of the sacred text; *oratio*, or “affective prayer,” a spontaneous (movement of the will or) response to the *lectio divina*; and, *contemplatio*, an unequivocal state of rest in the presence of God.³⁰⁶ They were not stratified levels per se, but confluent modalities utilized indiscriminately so as to achieve divine consummation.

However, the emergence of systematization would soon threaten the stability of this amalgamation that had once proven sublime for some of the early Christians. In the

³⁰³ An English transliteration of a Hebraic word, which informs contemplation to be more than an intellectual praxis or *gnosis*; it is a Divine coalescence of knowledge and love, attributed by Gregory The Great as the knowledge of God impregnated with love.

³⁰⁴ Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc), 19.

³⁰⁵ Approximately the sixth-fifteenth centuries, so roughly until the 1400’s.

³⁰⁶ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20.

twelfth century, a growing sentiment towards the analyses of concepts, ideas, ideologies, ontology, and genera began to popularize and hold sway.³⁰⁷ Further, an explication of the cosmos and theological matters in a systematic way became the means of legitimizing speculations. Thomas Aquinas, one of the more notable theological philosophers of those times, attempted to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy and the ideologies of Christianity.³⁰⁸ This was all borne from Aquinas' premonitions that there existed reason in God to be systematized in ways that would make the Christian faith intelligible.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Black Death and the Hundred Years' War, respectively, would eventually ravage European communities, and theological dilemmas such as the Great Schism and nominalism would further weaken the populace's regimen of morality and spiritual devotion.³⁰⁹ Out of such decadence emerged a sensibility towards renewal, which spawned the advent of the *Devotio Moderna*,³¹⁰ a

³⁰⁷ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 21.

³⁰⁸ Peter Blair, "Reason and Faith: The Thought of Thomas Aquinas," *The Dartmouth Apologia: A Journal of Christian Thought at Dartmouth College* 4, no. 1 [Fall 2009]: 33, <http://www.dartmouthapologia.org/articles/show/125.html> [accessed January 5, 2018].

³⁰⁹ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 21.

³¹⁰ a polemical praxis in response to external and ritualistic forms of piety such as speculative theology and institutional religion. This movement within the Roman Catholic church emphasized meditation, *Devotio Moderna*, "modern devotion," from the end of the 14th century to the 16th century.

special form of prayer that evoked self discipline [*Encyclopedia Britannica online*, s.v. “Devotio moderna,” <http://www.britannica.com/topic/devotio-moderna> (accessed January 8, 2017)]. Despite those efforts, however, the gestation of systematization that had emerged in the twelfth century would wax stronger as time moved forward towards a new epoch - the sixteenth century which would conceive the Protestant Reformation. Its rate of accession proved so robust that the contemplative exercise, as it were, would no longer sustain its unpretentious innocence or simple efficaciousness.

The Reformation was underway, and prayer became stratified and regimented. The three levels of mental prayer were no longer amoebic, different methods in one single act of prayer, but three distinct prayers enfolded with their own purposes. Consequently, such compartmentalization fostered the misnomer that contemplation, the place of divine rest, was virtually unachievable and thus reserved for a select few.³¹¹ If the once organic excrescence of prayer, which was always a progressive phenomenon towards contemplation, did not fit into one of the categories as discursive, affective, or contemplative, it was discouraged altogether.³¹² Again, while the intent may have been to reform schismatic doctrines and curtail overall malaise, systematization had some effects that indeed proved ponderous.

³¹¹ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 21.

³¹² Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 22.

Nonetheless, proponents of the organic genera of contemplative prayer like St. Ignatius of Loyola would seek to preserve its nascent liberalities by commending a nostalgic prose. In addition, a resurgence of mystical teachings attributable to John of the Cross and Abbe Saudreau (in *The Degrees of the Spiritual life*) began to flourish in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in conjunction with methods of meditation similar to the contemplative experiences of antiquity.³¹³ Indeed, a passable praxis of contemplation to include anyone who seeks, devoid of compartmentalizations or ideologies that supported the insularity of a *select few*, was becoming more attractive and has increasingly continued to pique the interests of many people and cultures. These accretions have seemingly effaced the polarities that have not only compartmentalized Christian prayer, but also an inter-religious synergy. Eastern religions such as Buddhism have consigned some of their clandestine ideologies surrounding the contemplative path to Christian repositories, which has made the segue of inter-religious exchange more amicable and the contemplative path to consummation more accessible.³¹⁴

Twenty-first century mystic and Trappist monk, Thomas Keating, underscores this notion of openness, which is a spirituality that makes all who are desirous of the Holy's attendance, possible. Without regard to station or social rank, Keating provides an underpinning for the contemplative life that foments intimacy with God, and that

³¹³ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 26.

³¹⁴ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 28.

necessitates the deconstruction of the false self. In his compelling work, *The Human Condition*, Keating works from the premise that humanity asks two poignant questions: Who may it be? And, where, in relation to the cosmos and the eternal, is it situated? It is a juxtaposition of these questions which undergirds his analyses of humanity's overall dilemma. But, more importantly, these inquiries may be compulsory to finding a theology of hope or antidote to ameliorating the incidence of violence perpetrated by professional football players who may have been traumatized socially.

Keating's ideology presupposes that humanity is lost, somewhat meandering a perpetual labyrinth in attempts to find happiness. Betwixt the looming question, "Where am I?"³¹⁵ And the anxiety that adjoins the ever-absorbing curiosity, humanity reaches tirelessly beyond itself to envelop the joys of the fleeting peace it so desperately suspires. Such efforts, however, may elicit manifestations from a false self in lieu of the authentic self, which may ultimately prove injurious.

Referenced earlier in this work was Plato's allegory of the cave from *The Republic* which implicitly underscores how the false self impels false perception and illusive behavior. Behind the prison bars in the cave, the human spirit perceives shadows and illusions but not the truth itself. Of course, this is a devastating state of duplicity until attenuated by the Light, the Truth, which serves to reveal the authentic self. Inasmuch as the Light is what humanity acquiesces despite its exposure to illusions and

³¹⁵ Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (New York/New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), 7.

fallacies, Plato's allegory suggests that humanity's true source of happiness may be found in this Light. Perhaps, this Light, which is also referred to as the Truth, is Plato's alliteration to what Westerners may delimit as God.

With respect to the subtext which intimates humanity's subconscious and earnest quest for the Truth, Keating's assessments on the human condition are plausible. Humanity does meander life against the backdrop of the question, "Where am I?" Whether it's navigating illusions or the actual truth, humanity must discern how such factors may obstruct its overall perception and how that occlusion has engendered a false self which resultantly and fortuitously explores life without a Center (God). Sometimes those explorations inhibit progress, as was the case in the allegory, keeping humanity in a cavernous prison perceiving illusions and shadows instead of the Truth. On the other hand, those explorations are capable of turning volatile, in many instances destructively violent through the eventual manifestations of physical and mental abuse.

According to Keating, such exhibitions of the false self is the consequence of godlessness. Moreover, that humanity is not experiencing the presence of God.³¹⁶ He likens the notion of godlessness to a Sufi tale, which purports the quests of a Sufi master to find the lost key to his house, only to find nothing after hours of searching. As the day grows hotter, however, one of his disciples exclaims, "Master, have you any idea where you might have lost the key?"³¹⁷ While they all are rummaging through the blades of

³¹⁶ Keating, *The Human Condition*, 9.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

grass outside, the Master exclaims, “I lost it in the house.” The more intelligent disciple inquires as to why they are searching outside and the Master replies, “There is more light here.”

While this story is poignant, Keating utilizes this tale to affirm humanity’s illusion which is its incessant quest to find what it needs in the wrong places. As long as it looks with no Center or discernment, it searches listlessly through the false self. It looks in areas where it thinks more light exists when, in fact, it doesn’t. Its perception is woefully deluded as a result of there being no experience with the presence of God.

In Hebrew lore, the Genesis story parallels the tale of the Sufi. Because of sin, humanity sustains a separation from God and, thus, is asked, “Where are you?” Adam and Eve are hiding with fig leaves about the anterior and posterior extremities, lamenting the loss of intimacy with God they once enjoyed in paradise,³¹⁸ according to Keating. This is an example of being inhibited as a result of the false self listening to the snake who entreated it to eat of the Tree of Knowledge and Evil. The explorations thereof lead both man and woman into hiding.

In both, the Sufi and Hebrew narratives, the protagonists were in the wrong places trying to find the source that would yield happiness and resolve. If the Sufi had just gone where he lost the key, which was *inside* the house, so much wasted time would have been averted. Moreover, his happiness would have been restored sooner. Further, Adam

³¹⁸ Keating, *The Human Condition*, 8.

and Eve need not hide, but come to full exposure upon their profligacy. It is there where the false self is disabled, and intimacy with God is renewed.

Finding the Center, or going *inside* the house to find what is lost, is the *key* to the authentic self. There, the God within who is entreated will reveal what is fleeting, lost, and illusive, which are all factors capable of undermining truth. When consummate intimacy is achieved as a result of this revelation, humanity no longer meanders life asking, “Where am I?” He or she stands in the perpetual presence of God, unequivocally fulfilled and happy, exclaiming, “Here am I.”

The latter acknowledgement not only demarcates divine consummation, the preferred approximation to God, but also presupposes that humanity is aware of its own identity. As Keating would contend, such impinges upon the second prevailing question surrounding the human condition: “Who am I?”

Essentially, there are three binary emotional needs all humans must have cultivated as they develop: security and survival, affection and esteem, and power and control.³¹⁹ An obsolescence of proper cultivation increases the propensity for emotional maladies such as depression, anxiety, and frustration. While there is no research, ostensibly, to validate the palpability of emotional inoculation, it is plausible to affirm that all humans are encumbered by one or more of these emotional maladies over the course of their lifetimes. When this happens, it simply means that the programs for

³¹⁹ Keating, *The Human Condition*, 29.

happiness have been compromised at the level of one or more of the emotional needs.

How, then, does the human spirit eliminate such perturbations deeply embedded? With respect to some professional football players, dormant anxieties of sorts may disembody virulent behaviors, such as domestic violence, rape, and fighting. These excrescences are emanations (from a false self), not lineaments of the true self. A conceivable way to distill the human spirit of negative impressions, notwithstanding, is through the modality of centering prayer and silence, a contemporary alliteration for the ancient designation, *contemplative prayer*.

Father Keating proffers that centering prayer provides the aspirant the space for God to exonerate the human spirit from those embedded fallacies and discordances that have devastating potential. Moreover, it is an invitation to absolute peace with the true self, not some facade or facsimile of the true self borne from rancor and infamy.

Simply, one must be silent and, in so doing, allow thoughts from the subconscious to pass through the conscious level of the psyche without circumscription or judgement. These thoughts may cause discomfort; however, like an ebb and flow, they must vacillate until absolute evacuation from the conscious is achieved. During the process, Keating proffers that a sacred word, like “Jesus,” is chosen for the conscious level of the psyche to be intentional and for the aspirant to ultimately achieve divine consummation. This is what constitutes the praxis as, *centering prayer*. The sacred word is the center, which is used to recalibrate the conscious to contemplate the Divine as the Divine is extirpating the *weeds* from the unconscious level of the psyche. While this is happening, the

aspirant is moving closer to the authentic self; when it happens, the aspirant has thus become authentic, full of God, and unequivocally conscious of who it is.

As intimated, the centering discipline is a plausible recourse of respite for the Christian. However, a logical deduction construes its contours to be palpable for those who do not subscribe to Christian doctrine. If the seeker can conceive the essence of his/her corporeal existence through the initiation of the Creator that lives within, perhaps the centering praxis will prove advantageous as it has been for others.

5.1 Summary

Today, Spirituality bears the impress of the ancient sages who sojourned the expanse of mystical life, which encompassed various forms of contemplative prayer. While the vagaries of culture may have changed its protuberance intermittently, the essentiality of mediating the Divine through psychological means has endured.

Mystics like Father Thomas Keating genuflect the endurance that forms of mystical prayer have sustained throughout the ages. A credit to its sustainability however is shown by Keating's testament to centering prayer, a contemporary appellation and accent to the contemplative repose the ancients endeared. Inasmuch as such active vigilance annexes the Divine purportedly and actuates a sense of mental quiescence, contemplative and centering prayer, and silence, are disciplines professional football players who have sustained disaffection and/or were diagnosed with a pathology consistent to the onset of CTE may incorporate to mitigate further occurrences that are

systemic to each malady. Perhaps, Father Keating's schema surrounding the "sacred word" within the centering prayer exercise serves to illumine the seeker to his true self, not just serve to abate the behaviors that are constitutive to emotional disharmony.

Chapter Six: Conclusion - A Theology of Hope

Earlier in this research, three forebears of paramount importance were underscored in light of their contributions to Christian spirituality, specifically, mystical theology. Meister Eckhart, Howard Thurman, and Oswald McCall delved the mysteries of the interior life in ways that have proven advantageous to those who believe that their musings were more than banal propositions, political propaganda, or futile intellection. Their prose were infused with seminal themes and a temperament of resistance and invitation. Resistance to their respective social constructs, and an invitation to those who would read their mysteries to experience an immanent and personable God who is desirous of fellowship with His creation. To Eckhart, this could be achieved through *abandonment* and *abnegation*; to McCall, by way of *adoration*; and, Thurman, *abandonment*. These modalities to mystical consummation were not specified by Eckhart, McCall, or Thurman as an obviate means to divine rest, per se. Instead, they were classifications William M. Thompson formulated to describe the salient features of the French School of Spirituality. This research, in turn, surmised such designations to be attributable to Eckhart's, McCall's, and Thurman's mystical theologies, and possibly helpful to ameliorating the emotional exigences among some professional football players who have been exposed to violent or destabilizing social constructs.

In Eckhart's musings, *abandonment* is a theme which emanates resoundingly from the prose. Tendering an intellection called the *birth of Christ in the soul*, he would challenge congregants to a mystical abdication in efforts to experience a spiritual transmogrification, which, in his schema, ultimately morphs human corporeality into ethereal essence, God. Eckhart sublimates human existence thereby, but, more importantly, he provides an underpinning upon which the method for centering prayer can be elucidated.

In order for the human spirit to encompass *the birth of Christ in the soul* or a spiritual incarnation whereby it circumscribes the consummation and purity of God's essence, it must *release* or become *enlightened*, which is called *gelassenheit*, to the essentiality of abandonment. Such is likened to the enlightenment of the prisoners in Plato's allegory who ultimately abandon the prison in efforts to traverse upward towards the Light of *theoria*. Ontologically, (Christian) *grace*, the unmerited injunction of God to provide homeostasis to human existence, ostensibly, would be most analogous to this intellection of *gelassenheit*. Without it, humanity may never comprehend the extent of its depravity or necessitate the praxis of centering prayer in efforts to ultimately ascertain its authentic self.

Centering prayer is the method of abandonment, which fosters the *birth of Christ in the soul*. It is the conduit to evanescence, which is Eckhart's *poverty of the spirit*, a state of absolute vulnerability that permits deeply embedded thoughts of the subconscious to unreservedly pass the conscious level of the human psyche. If the conscious level

somehow becomes impermeable during the centering exercise, resultant to an impressive thought, a sacred word is briefly contemplated in order to recalibrate the conscious repose. This state of abandonment has no conception of God in Eckhart's schema, as such conceptions could only divulge an illusion of the Truth. An abandoned spirit, however, doesn't conceive or presuppose, but it simply exists, ultimately becoming aware through its vulnerability that abdication has fomented a divine occupation. (In Eckhart's methodology, *awareness* is binary: humanity becomes aware, but so does God, which constitutes a consummation of intertwining, fellowship, and indistinction between extremes - both human and divine). In the centering prayer exercise, this kind of awareness is essential to consummation, defined as a state of unequivocal rest and peace. It fosters a regeneration of the spirit, ostensibly, which Eckhart would affirm to be the *birth of Christ in the soul*. Perhaps, the novelty the human spirit now enjoys in this new state of inaction is most analogous to Eckhart's intellection on the assimilation of extremes, which he deems to be *indistinction*. Here, man has become one *unum* or *God*.

While his mystical theology here contravenes conventional ideologies of the fourteenth century and most religious mores of today, it is complementary to the development of a mystical scheme which may serve to bring hope to professional football players who may be the victims of social crises. By way of abandonment, professional football players who have exhibited acute behaviors may permit their subconscious psyches an unfettering quiescence: an extrication, moreover, of images and experiences that may have spawned ill-fated behaviors. Further, they may achieve an emancipation

from the false self, which is the basis from whence subconscious pain is interpreted and, presumably, manifested as dissonant conduct at the conscious level of the human psyche. Once these releases have been achieved *abnegation*, which is [Christ's birth in the soul], ensues. Whereas abandonment during the centering praxis is the modality through which consummation is ultimately achieved, abnegation constitutes the actual reincarnation or change in the human spirit.

This transmogrification is the excrescence of God's envelopment. It is God's unequivocal capacitation of the human spirit during the centering process, which yields blissful serenity. Here, the human spirit, according to Father Keating, is no longer bombarded with subconscious clutter. Instead, it is in a state of divine enclosure. This isn't a state of anthropomorphic decimation in the sense that human temporality no longer exists whatsoever, but it is a state of unbridled susceptibility. Such repose affords the professional football player an experience of change in sentiments, impulses, and proclivities. It serves to disassemble the false self, which bears the negative impressions that impel illicit outbursts and a plethora of other horrid obscenities that have characterized the behaviors of some.

Such ontological methodology would jibe with Howard Thurman's intimations in general. However, there are a few nuances to his assessments on abandonment, which recapitulate his ideologies in ways that contravene Eckhart and Keating.

Namely, Thurman believed that Christ's possession of the human spirit is linear, processional, and progressive. Thus, *time* in Thurman's estimation, is the principal

component which *allows* an eventual possession of the human spirit that is accordant to its willingness to abdicate. *Allowance* parallels the abandonment that Eckhart summons his parishioners to acquiesce. However, despite the corollaries, Thurman's accent on human value seems to provide a gradation that is noteworthy to his incarnation theology and the practice of centering prayer.

While Thurman believes that Christ possesses the human spirit, he doesn't believe such possession decimates human essence altogether. Of course, this ontology contravenes Eckhart's assessments. Human essence is so entwined by divine enclosure that it wholly, distinctly, and essentially, becomes God in Eckhart's schema. A forfeiture of human constituents, nonetheless, would denote a loss of creation and creativity, two of God's notable enactments. Therefore, abandonment constitutes humanity's willful abdication, not dissolution, of the self in efforts to foster a divine envelopment according to Thurman.

This is a plausible conception in light of Keating's methodology on centering prayer. Ostensibly, mystical abandonment undergirds an abatement of self in lieu of a banishment of self. In this regard, abatement intimates that a decision has been made at the conscious level to abdicate its innate function during the centering exercise, which would indeed value human existence as indispensable. So significant is the all-encompassing extent of human corporeality, that its very binary existence impels God's envelopment. Without its existence, there could be no illusions, no false self, no indwelling or conscious-level decision to abandon anything whatsoever for the sake of

divine residence. When humanity becomes aware of God's residence during centering, it somehow becomes aware of its own significance. Thus, an unequivocal annihilation of the human self would undermine the purposes of God's creative initiative.

This is critical to professional football players who have been exposed to eviscerating contexts, which may serve to incite the devaluation of one's efficacy. When an athlete of such debasement becomes aware of his own significance by way of divine residence, he may be healed emotionally at the subconscious level. Father Keating would suggest that under such a state of mystical consummation, the true self emerges from the obscurities of trauma, which ultimately spawns a life of uninhibited peace and awareness.

Such does not constitute a life devoid of trouble, as shown by the many vicissitudes mystical theologian Oswald McCall assuaged, but one filled with praise and adoration, notwithstanding. McCall utilizes adoration of the cosmos and other forms of the created order to esteem the Holy and to abhor the facades of Christianity. While terse and polemical in style, his agenda is poignantly evocative and telling of those in religious power, as it were, who had supplanted the sanctity of Christian piety. If entwined with the centering praxis, such praise, as is the case with abandonment, may prove advantageous to football players sustaining the asperities of psychological distress.

Within the mystical abstractions of abandonment and abnegation, adoration is viscerally present. A conscious and mindful praise of divine primacy is enjoined while the centering process is engaged in actuating consummation, however. This

authenticates mystical adoration; albeit, the centering exercise is often imbued with *dark nights of the soul*, a mystical intellection made prominent by St. John of the Cross. These are moments whereby the obscurities, the loathsome images from the subconscious psyche peer randomly through the conscious level of humanity, causing much angst and unrest. The sacred word that is interposed within the centering exercise, however, serves to thwart the distractions enjoined by the heinous memories of the subconscious.

Noteworthy is that the sacred word does not inhibit the ebb and flow of thoughts, which uninhibitedly passes through the conscious psyche. (Such inhibition would impede the extrication needed for the human spirit's overall liberation from the false self). However, inhibition to distractions, specifically, serves to reacquaint the mystic to his Center and, ultimately back to the euphoric and tranquil repose. Analogous to Oswald McCall's polemical prose on the *heresy of externalism*, the sacred word is the adoration; that praise which serves to subvert the odious distractions that encumber the human spirit.

The New Testament records a reminiscent narrative depicting a tempestuous storm of which the disciples, while traveling by boat with Jesus, become frantic at what was supposedly an impending threat to their survival. With much angst, the disciples implore Jesus to amend the conditions with expeditious urgency. Jesus, in turn, responds to their entreaty, but what is compelling and concordant to the praxis of centering prayer, is Jesus' actual injunction: "Peace (be still)!" He says, with an emphatic yet suggestive tenor. Considering the context which elicits such a directive, the sacred word, "Peace" redresses, conceivably, what was an unsettling situation for the disciples. Likened to the

mystic who employs the centering praxis, Jesus interposes this word to remove the foreboding, ultimately.

In the New Testament account, the diversion encompassed that attenuating specter of fear over the disciples that something tragic was imminent. “Peace” stilled the turbulence of the sea; however, it did not quell the augury. Thus, as much as Jesus’ interjection was directed towards the environmental elements, it was an entreaty to the disciples’ attendance to the pre-scheduled plan. His intent for them was to travel to the other side of the sea, and if by chance ineluctable circumstances arose, that the robust surges of wind be accorded to pass uninhibitedly as those *tempests* of the subconscious psyche, without constraint, fear or judgment.

Once the sea becalms, however, the narrative surrounding the disciples informs them to be astonished, gratified by their own acquiescence to the fleeting peace they so desperately desired. The celebration that ensues from the disciples and the efficaciousness of that calming declarative, “Peace,” correlates the kind of results such (sacred) words may produce in centering.

An interposition of sorts may prove to be antidotal for football players who delve in mystical praxis. Especially while loathsome images obtrude the conscious psyche, players may enjoy that *praise* word to abate the ever-looming presence of fear, which is the same kind of fear that overburdens the disciples in the episode above. A consistent centering regimen that utilizes adoration, however, may abjure anxiety but may also serve

to mitigate those combustible moments many football players have traduced to utter shame.

Whether those vile behaviors from many professional football players are the excrescences of neurological or emotional encumbrances, the consequences, such as shame, fear, anxiety, paranoia, victimization, and a host of other physical and emotional injuries, seem to be analogous: specifically, the onset of CTE and the tendencies redolent to PTSD, both elicit behavioral manifestations that are seemingly confluent. Inasmuch, an intercession of centering prayer may stem those manifestations, as has been the case with Vietnam veterans and other traumatized groups.

While CTE and PTSD have distinct pathologies, it is intriguing that the behavioral patterns each elicits is correlational. The interposition of a centering praxis, which melds mystical abandonment, abnegation, and adoration may foster not only a divine consummation but also an inner peace that contravenes those incidences of blasphemous outrage. Just maybe a theology of hope which germinates originally out of the ancient cloisters of devout men and women who sought the unsearchable mysteries of the Divine is being summoned for redefining. Moreover, a more inclusive model that now poignantly and unselfishly pays homage to new and emerging assessments, such as Father Keating's, is being implored for praxis: one that endorses the sacred word, which is potent enough to bring focus to the One who ultimately reveals the authentic self, and is capable of yielding everlasting peace and accord; one that melds, unreservedly, the

phenomena of Psychology and Spirituality; and one that proffers mysticism as a possible remedy for athletes who are emotionally impaired.

Such recommendations seem simple but will require much empirical research and clinical scrutiny to yield a more plausible conclusion. Medical professionals, clinical psychologists, and mystics must find ways to amalgamate their respective fields of interest to ameliorate the destructive incidences that have characterized the tendencies and fatalities of so many football players. At this juncture, it is not essential to debate which disease, CTE or PTSD, our beloved football community sustains at the hands of on-field participation and/or licentious socialization. Or, to further castigate the sport of football and/or devalue an athlete's exposure to the virulent tendencies of an ill-fated society. Since the behavioral manifestations of CTE and PTSD are ostensibly confluent, medical professionals, clinical psychologists, and mystics should conduct ethnographic research that regards three samples: first, a population of professional football players who have been concussed; second, a population of football players who have not been concussed but have been purportedly exposed to forms of social infamy; and, third, a population of professional football players who have been purportedly concussed, as well as purportedly exposed to forms of social volatility. Exposure to centering prayer exercises, which entails silence and meditation on all samples, may yield more conclusive evidence on the positive effects of mystical praxis that have been inferred above.

Inference should not be undervalued, however. The aforementioned arguments, which undergird the powers of mysticism to allay emotional impairment among said athletes, lays a plausible and indispensable groundwork on which more research may ensue. It intimates a hopeful future on which the coalescence of Psychology, Spirituality, and Medicine may work interdependently to bring some of our professional football players to absolute placidity.

The word *coalescence* is suggestive within the overall gestalt of this study. Not only does it delimit togetherness, but it also infers the presence of love. It embodies humanity's assimilation with the Divine during mystical consummation, and it also denotes what it means to actually conjoin the Divine. In a poignant ending to Father Keating's research on the human condition, there is a description of *coalescence*, which indeed, summarizes the mystical phenomena of abandonment, abnegation, and adoration.

Keating tells of a man who is hospitalized and dying of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). He fears the specter of his own mortality, wrestling anxiously with whether he will be summoned to eternal Hell or Heaven. However, in efforts to assuage the overwhelming angst, the attending nurse begins to massage his frail body by request until he abruptly exclaims, "You'll never know what you just did for me. I have experienced unconditional love."³²⁰ He peacefully goes to sleep, and then, one-hour later, he dies.

³²⁰ Keating, *The Human Condition*, 45.

While it is easy to bewail the ending of this moving story, the details therein are much too conspicuous to be inconscient. The dying man abandons those menacing thoughts of immortal judgement that are irrupting his peace. However, what is more notable is that the abstraction of mystical abandonment alone serves as a segue to mystical abnegation, the very reincarnation of himself. Without it, the man doesn't summon the "Sacred Word," the nurse who tends to him, in efforts to assuage the specter of death that hovers ever so dismally. The "Sacred Word" foments that quintessential peace for the dying man, but moreover, *She* undergirds the overall transmogrification of the man with a kind of *dynamic* love. It is so intoxicating that it causes him to finally *adore* the present, an eternal consummation and *coalescence* between man and God, which fear almost negated.

Today, our football players do not have to cede to fear or the impulses of the false self. They also do not have to wonder if their outbursts are the results of a pathology that is consistent with the onset of CTE. Perhaps, the insemination of mystical praxis will serve to stem the excrescences of both diseases, which have proven to be confluent. Just as in the case of our forebears, Eckhart, McCall, and Thurman, mysticism thwarts the foreboding sensibilities prevalent in each of their respective situations. Logically, such could be the curative power to ameliorating the redolence of stress and/or CTE altogether. It impinges upon a theology of hope; one that illumines professional football players to their true selves, which is inhabited by the Creator.

If it does, some of our football players may owe a debt of gratitude to the incidences of painful experience. Not only does it prove efficacious to the mystical experiences of abandonment, abnegation and adoration, in this regard all that encompasses centering prayer, but it also reveals something otherwise beclouded. It evinces pain to be an adumbration of God's presence, a modus to unfurling the authentic self, as well as the godhead. And lastly, it is the nexus between the juxtaposition of extremes, Psychology and Spirituality, that has proven to be inextricably coalescent, and reliable to enciphering the complexities of humankind and its relationship to God.

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