

The Necessity of Christian Mysticism:

Beyond the Symbols and into the Sacred

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Chapter 1

Transcendence

It takes courage to allow God through faith to transform you into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. Not the courage of the secular humanist or the humanistic Christian who places faith in their personal ability, but the courage of the authentic Christian who is willing to break from the crowd and experience the tremendous transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Through our faith God opens up the dark recesses of our everyday awareness, calms the storms of personal turmoil, and enriches the Christian's experience of the Holy Spirit. The change that God wants us to realize is not only concerned with the letter of his word but the existential experience of his word. God wants to remake the individual in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. We often talk about being transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ but few ever achieve a profound and spiritual inward transformation. A transformation that consumes the self as we know it, creates a condition of inward emptiness, and fills this emptiness with the Holy presence of Jesus Christ. According to Romans 8: 6-10, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can

be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, is so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." God is not dead as Nietzsche so enthusiastically insisted. God is a living presence for those who have the courage to heed his call. God knows your heart and will recognize the sincere plea for transformation. If God so wills, he will move the depths of your soul, stir the deep recesses of the spiritual self, and begin a change that inevitably must occur when God calls a Christian to service. This change is not only concerned with confession, repentance, and lifestyle, but a call for renewal and inward transformation.

Repentance requires us to let go of the petty ego tyrant so God may renew us with his presence. According to Soren Kierkegaard "decision is the awakening to the eternal. Cowardice involves not making a decision, to stand back in pride, trusting in our own strength, to collect with other like minded, to refuse to be an individual. Cowardice requires of us to delay to tomorrow, to put off until a better time. Decision is concerned with the everyday, the practical, making a choice between God and the world. The love of God is hatred to the world, the love of the world is hatred towards God. The highest we are able to will is when we are convinced that we are capable of nothing, nothing at all without God." Kierkegaard also explains that "Wherever God is, there he is always creating, not in quiet abandonment and

passive contemplation but becoming, changing, dynamic process." To be pure in heart is to will one thing, the eternal union with the divine.

Jesus calls on us to let go of our self-affirming beliefs and be filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit through the grace of God. The world has replaced God with the god of self-centeredness, has dethroned God and placed self in the throne room of the personal ego. A.W. Tozer writes, "Breaking this truth into fragments for our better understanding, it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it 'life' and 'self,' or as we would say, the self-life. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words 'gain' and 'profit' suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything. To repudiate it and give up all for Christ's sake is to lose nothing at last, but to preserve everything unto life eternal. And possibly also a hint is given here as to the only effective way to destroy this foe: it is by the Cross: 'Let him take up his cross and follow me.' The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the Kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. They are 'poor in spirit.' They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem; that is what the word 'poor' as

Christ used it actually means. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of things. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. `Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

The ego will never be able to discover God through its individual efforts. The ego by its very nature excludes God by placing its trust in the power of self-efforts, personal pride, self-esteem and self-confidence. The egoist experiences great pride in their individual efforts towards holiness, on being humble, on being chosen by God, on their understanding of scripture and their ability to preach or teach the word of God. The personal ego acts as a filter through which we experience the word of God as an object, rather than a living experience. When we repent of pride and truly accept Jesus Christ as our personal savior an amazing transformation begins. The Holy Spirit directs our lives from within, becomes present to the conscious mind, draws us into his holy presence, and redirects our will towards his strength, courage, love and hope. Our false pride and petty efforts are replaced with true courage and strength of will. We develop integrity of spirit which can only be found in the heart of God's love for us. True courage is found when we let go of our individual efforts and become one with God's will through the power of the Holy Spirit. The

more we self-reflect on our personal holiness, our kindness and personal righteousness, the more we slip into feelings of pride and self-delusion. The ego wants to be in charge and take credit for spiritual development.

The ego bound individual wants to be independent minded in a humanistic way through courageous self-affirmation. The ego always wants to see itself as somehow special, unique, or independent. So the humanist generates elaborate theories about being independent, courageous, and self-actualizing and believe by virtue of this belief they have escaped the herd mentality of conformism. Yet, we delude ourselves when we believe that by changing our feelings of self-worth and gain self-confidence that we have somehow escaped the conformism of the crowd. Those who attempt this type of self-actualization are perhaps more enslaved in the untruth of conformism than those who simply act in an almost instinctual manner without any real effort at breaking out of the mold. The humanistic act of self-affirmation brings us deeper into the illusion of ego as self. We become strongly rooted in the will of self, the belief that we can make it on our own, that we are the man behind the curtain, that God is our little helper or perhaps non-existent. Oh how we love to maintain this illusion of control and independence. We are filled with pride when we

tell others we are Christians, that they must repent, or when the atheist announces that God is dead.

When our will is turned towards God in faith and purity of heart the supernatural power of God stimulates our will and directs us towards spiritual integrity. In Galatians 2:20, Paul explains, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." To be crucified with Christ takes considerable courage. This courage requires us to abandon our old life and follow him, to experience feelings of betrayal and separation, to experience that painful and triumphant march to the cross, the death of the "me-self," and the resurrection of spiritual consciousness.

Those who work to please God are like the good son who stayed with his Father in obedience to the customs of the time. Who becomes angry when the sinful brother returns and is accepted by the father with great love and forgiveness. The obedient son follows the rules and customs of obedience but finds that his father's love for him is the same as his disobedient brother. Through our efforts at righteousness we think that God should love us more than our disobedient and willful brothers who return to God with many sins and fail to adhere to our strict observance of a moral code of conduct. We look around at our

churches, our community, our pastors, friends and family in righteous indignation at their inability to be righteous like us. The prodigal son who returned repentant and humbled had much to be forgiven, and as a result was empty of pride and unable to condemn others. He was open and appreciative of his father's forgiveness and allowed this love to pour over him like the oil of the sinful women on Jesus. Through this emptiness of pride and the abandonment of manipulative efforts at winning God, the Christian becomes humbled and filled with the healing love of God. It is only through recognition of our dependency on God, our inability to be righteous enough, and a deep and contrite spirit of abandonment of self that we will begin to feel the love of God arise in our souls. This love heals us, sweeps over us, intoxicates us, consumes us, and is a constant and growing presence in the heart of our being.

Many may believe that transcendence is a pantheistic state of consciousness; much like Spinoza, who said that, "Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived. God is the indwelling, and not the transient cause of all things." Or the Hindu Brahman, or the Buddhist when they describe transcending the ego or illusion of self as ego. The Buddhist belief includes a transcendent consciousness but not in the same way as the Christian mystics. The Buddhist recognizes that the ego as self is composed exclusively of our

interpretive and assumptive awareness. As the seeker over time unravels this illusion they become enlightened and experience a sudden awareness which causes an altered state of consciousness. This enlightenment is a state of experiential transcendence that recognizes the illusory nature of the ego as self and the subjectivity of consciousness. Unfortunately many followers of the Buddhist religion do not recognize the existence of a soul or God and experience this transcendent existence from a state of self as non-self awareness. The Buddhist in essence has made a god of the non-ego state. They have replaced the ego as a personal god with the pantheistic god of the transcendent non-self. The ego as self is transcended to experience the greater transcendent-self as nothingness. This is an actual negation of self to create an expansive and transcendent emptiness.

The Christian transcends the ego as self to experience the soul which is absorbed in the heart of God's love. According to Thomas Merton, "Our discovery of God is, in a way, God's discovery of us. We cannot go to heaven to find Him because we have no way of knowing where heaven is or what it is. He comes down from heaven and finds us. He looks at us from the depths of His own infinite actuality, which is everywhere, and His seeing us gives us a new being and a new mind in which we also discover Him. We only know Him in so far as we are

known by Him, and our contemplation of Him is a participation in His contemplation of Himself. We become contemplatives when God discovers Himself in us. At that moment the point of our contact with Him opens out and we pass through the center of our own nothingness and enter into infinite reality, where we awaken as our true self.”

When attempting to develop a pragmatic approach towards the development of mental and spiritual health we need to begin by defining the self and establishing what constitutes spiritual health. On the most obvious level the empirical self as William James defines the self, consists of all that we have experienced in our lifetime. This includes our family history, our culture, our race, demographics, religious experiences, our beliefs and interpretations related to these experiences, our friends, personal appearance, personal history and any repressed thoughts and subconscious forces related to these experiences. The self can be further considered by defining it in terms of five dimensions of self expression. These include the:

The material dimension;

The social dimension;

The cognitive dimension;

The spiritual dimension; and

The transcendent dimension

The material, social, and cognitive dimensions make up our everyday experience of ego awareness. The spiritual dimension includes our spiritual and ascetic experience as well as subconscious and collective unconscious forces. The transcendent dimension is a state of being in God rather than in the ego. In the transcendent dimension the ego is seen as object while the self is grounded in inwardness through a subjective experience of God. Just the opposite of what we experience when conscious awareness is centered in the ego. When our identity is centered in the ego we experience God as an object out there or in there but not as subjectivity and a living transcendent experience. True spiritual and mental health involves increased mastery over and awareness of these individual dimensions, an understanding of the role of faith, will, and the Holy Spirit in the transcendent process, and courage to let go of our dependence on self-efforts. The transcendent dimension involves an experiential awareness of our inner being. This soul or inner being is of a divine nature and immortal. Through the inner being we experience a subjective relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The soul associates with and is influenced by incorporeal spirits such as angels

and dark spirits. The soul supports the life of the individual on earth and will live beyond the experience of the death of the physical form.

Chapter 2

Material Dimensions

William James defined the self as the empirical self or the “me” of personality. The empirical self according to James is divided into three components: The material self, which includes our bodies, our physical appearance, and that which we identify as being part of our personal identity. The social self, which consisted of the roles we played in our lives as we interacted in our social environment, and the spiritual self, which consisted of our will and moral responsibility. The empirical self is how we are known by others, the “I” which is above the empirical self is the knower of the personality. According to James, the empirical life of self is divided, as below, into

	Material.	Social.	Spiritual.
Self-Seeking.	Bodily Appetites and Instincts Love of Adornment, Foppery, Acquisitiveness, Constructiveness Love of Home, etc.	Desire to please, be noticed, admired, etc. Sociability, Emulation, Envy, Love, Pursuit of Honor, Ambition, etc.	Intellectual, Moral and Religious Aspiration, Conscientiousness
Self-Estimation	Personal Vanity, Modesty, etc. Pride of Wealth, Fear of Poverty	Social and Family Pride, Vainglory, Snobbery, Humility, Shame, etc.	Sense of Moral or Mental Superiority, Purity, etc. Sense of Inferiority or of Guilt

William James explains that, "The body is the innermost part of the material self in each of us and certain parts of the body seem more intimately ours than the rest. Our immediate family is a part of ourselves. Our father and mother, our wife and babes, are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. When they die, a part of our very selves is gone. If they do anything wrong, it is our shame. If they are insulted, our anger flashes forth as readily as if we stood in their place. Our home comes next. Its scenes are part of our life; its aspects awaken the tenderest feelings of affection; and we do not easily forgive the stranger who, in visiting it, finds fault with its arrangements or treats it with contempt. All these different things are the objects of instinctive preferences coupled with the most important practical interests of life.

We all have a blind impulse to watch over our body, to deck it with clothing of an ornamental sort, to cherish parents, wife and babes, and to find for ourselves a home of our own which we may live in and 'improve.' An equally instinctive impulse drives us to collect property; and the collections thus made become, with different degrees of intimacy, parts of our empirical selves. The parts of our wealth most intimately ours are those which are saturated with our labor." Most of us can identify with James' definition of self and find in our lives deep attachments to our personal identity.

At the most basic level, the material dimension is oriented towards survival needs. The material dimension is not inherently evil or sinful and is a useful means by which the body seeks self-preservation. Each of us should maintain a healthy ability to meet our material needs. The problem rests in our inability to balance our acquisition of basic goods and services with the transcendent needs of the Christian experience. Because of our anxieties, the influence of other hierarchical needs, and our individual interpretations of how to meet these needs, the individual may develop an obsessive desire to satisfy the fulfillment of material goods and services. Because of our greed and excessive desire for personal and material gain we often lose sight of our Christian virtues related to modesty, charity, and social responsibility. We become one dimensional in our desire to

please self and work exclusively to meet personal materialistic and narcissistic desires. John Tauler writes, "Then came a fire, and God was not in the fire. Fire is a thing which can never say "Enough;" and it represents the heart of a man who is never satisfied, either with his goods or with the gifts of God; but is always burning to increase without measure those things which are neither divine nor pure; desiring to receive comfort or other temporal things, and to find love and pleasure in them. All this is a sign that the Spirit of God is not there. I mean also all those people who make light of and belittle all the gifts of God, as though God had never done them any good, and who say: "Why did God make me? Since I am so empty and barren of all that is good;."

Throughout history there has been a desire to address these problems with failed social policies such as totalitarianism, socialism, scientific humanism and communism. Karl Marx in his Communist Manifesto outlined the social ills of a capitalistic society which allows and encourages the ownership of property. Marx however failed to take into account the need for individuals to exercise free-will in the desire for freedom of self-expression. We can see even today in our society the tendency for social, political and religious groups to dominate the social expression of free-will. Their intentions are usually designed to correct the wrongs as they see them in the

relatively free society they live in. The problem with this is that force and power always create a suppression of free-will which tends to boil beneath the surface like a pressure cooker. Democratic principles are in theory designed to balance personal individual rights with the needs of a society, respecting minority rights as well as the will of the majority. With this freedom of expression comes increased need for individual responsibility. Those who judge democracies in a critical way look upon the social corruption and personal hedonism of these democratic societies as evidence of a need to take control of the society for the good of the people. The tendency towards corruption and sin is related to the fallen state of the human being. The individual ego is concerned with self-preservation, individual happiness, security, continuance, as well as esteem by self and others. Even the most altruistic inclined social humanist is motivated by a need to fulfill personal agendas related to the social good. Our "personal I" is upheld by our thoughts and beliefs and influence the direction of our lives. The ego, under the best of circumstances is removed from the experience by the filtering that goes through the separated self. Because of our social conditioning, alienation from God and dependence on science to make decisions we find ourselves unable to act in consistently Christian ways. Many people express their personality in almost an instinctual and unconscious manner. They are

heavily influenced by humanistic and materialistic forces, and rely exclusively on culturally produced individual expressions of free-will. Unlike the socially responsive humanist they are responsive only to social and market forces and instinctual desires for self-preservation.

Our development of desires and interpretations of desirability arise from our cultural and adopted values. In the United States and in most western countries we are offered the "ideal" lifestyle of the rich and famous. From movies, magazines, television and advertisements we are taught to envy the most attractive, the richest, the most exciting lifestyles, the physical body, enjoy casual sex, have the most fun, and achieve success as the world defines success. This constant bombardment of worldly ideals has a powerful influence on our culture, the decisions we make, the lessons and values we teach our children, our self-esteem needs, and our interpretation of success.

Alternative calls for modesty, humbleness, and simplicity seem all but lost in the chorus of voices that preach the message of excess. Although Christians may often preach these ideals, they too are often draped in the excesses of an extravagant lifestyle. We adorn the physical with the finest clothing we can afford, have the biggest cars, oversized houses, and are surrounded with the fulfillment of our ego desires. Although it is not impossible, it becomes increasingly difficult to see beyond the veils of external extravagance to hear the quiet

voice of God within. Because of the need to let go of our attachment to this material ideal many Christians simply lose heart and fall quietly into the material world. They become one of a multitude of casualties, faithfully attending church on Sundays, listening to the carefully worded inoffensive sermons, and free falling gently and comfortably into the material dimension. We are distantly comfortable in the word of God without actually experiencing the word of God. In other words we hear the word of God without being moved by its power. Other than going to church on Sunday and our professions of faith, it is difficult to distinguish the difference between this Christian and the kindly Humanist or Atheist.

In the United States there is a thriving industry in weight control, exercise, plastic-surgery, cosmetics, spas, health foods, fashion, shampoos and hair styles. From early childhood we view endless commercials related to the perfect body, the most gorgeous appearance, the best skin, the most beautiful hair and necessarily fall short of this commercial ideal. Our body image influences the direction of our lives, the choices we make, our self-image and self-esteem. For example, if we are overweight we may be self-critical or self-accepting based on how we interpret what it means to be overweight. If we are accepting of our physical imperfections then we may be able to maintain a positive self-image related to being

overweight. If we are embarrassed by this extra weight and shame ourselves at every opportunity then we will become emotionally damaged by our weight problem and subsequent negative body image. This negative or positive body image results in degrees of self-acceptance or self-rejection in adulthood. If our body closely matches our perceived ideal then many of us are temporarily satisfied and feel a boost in our self-esteem. As the body changes over time anxiety sets in, depending on our beliefs about this change, which prompts many to make frantic attempts to regain their ideal.

If our body is completely disproportionate to our expected ideal then we will often become sad and depressed. This is a common occurrence in pre-teens and teenagers as the child struggles to reconcile their imposed ideal with the inevitable reality of physical imperfection. The adolescent is repeatedly bombarded in the media with messages related to the importance of their physical appearance. The “cutest” girls and the most “handsome” boys often become the most popular in school, receive the best jobs, and are offered the most opportunities by adults. Other values such as the value of spiritual sincerity, musical ability, friendliness, and intelligence are rated lower in desirability. Over time our repressed shame concerning perceived inadequacies create subconscious forces which effect self-perception

and self-esteem. Carl Jung referred to these as the shadows of personality.

There is a chronic anxiety that occurs when we look towards the external world to boost our self-esteem and make us feel good about ourselves. This anxiety derives from our feelings of emptiness, fears of non-being and anonymity, and lack of meaning and purpose. Our societal values are negotiable, and there is no particular "Truth" we can find absolute. Most of us want to be noticed, to be something other than who we are, to become self-actualized in the humanistic sense. Jesus addresses this desire to fulfill personal needs in Matthew 24-26, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

This societal angst of consumerism is encouraged and fueled by corporations and world leaders driven by profit and power and the economic pressures of the market place. Many of us never, or only superficially, question the true validity of these forces, and accept without question the values inherent in consumerism, self-promotion, self-esteem, and financial security. We have become intoxicated with self-promotion, accumulation of wealth, our physical appearance,

bigger cars, houses, television, and churches. We overtly or secretly accept the secular view that those who are famous, rich, physically beautiful, successful, are somehow superior to the rest of us who are only "mediocre." Yet, we do not see our "idols" as being any happier than the average person. We keep chasing the illusion that if we had a little more money, were a little more attractive or had a better job we would finally achieve happiness. So we go to our churches and give to the offering plate in hopes that we will get back some extra money on our investment to God, go to appease God because of our feelings of guilt, make investments in our bank account of eternal life, to be seen by others in the community, defeat loneliness and to meet people, or go out of habit and obligation because we fear God. We may be motivated in part by our love for God, but for many of us this is rarely the only motive.

Our churches have become in many cases absorbed in the consumerism of our material lives. Pastors wonder why their church sermon is seen as dull or unproductive by their parishioners. These sermons may at times be entertaining and sometimes inspiring but the average Sunday sermon does not draw the church members into that subjective experience of union with God. The pastor has failed to take that leap of faith into the abandonment of self and self-will. They approach the word of God as an objective guide towards holiness.

When they preach they speak of God as though he were out there, in heaven, removed from our everyday experience. For example when the pastor preaches of being strong and joyful through suffering they speak of it as though it is an intellectual effort of will and belief. Yet while we are suffering we wonder why we are so resentful and angry with God for putting us through this pain and suffering and then humiliating us by making us happy about it. There are many people who are subconsciously knotted up by their inability to express pain and anguish because their pastor or guru told them they are to be happy about their suffering.

In truth the ego is rarely ever happy about suffering. The healthy ego wants to be happy, have things go as planned, be confident, financially secure, look good and be accepted. We don't want to suffer and we are particularly not happy about it when it happens. When the pastor tells us to be happy about suffering we respectfully nod in agreement and go back to our reluctant suffering or our quiet satisfaction at not having to suffer today. What the pastor fails to understand is that suffering has the effect of breaking down the routine and mundane defenses of the ego, and in this temporary breaking away of the ego God is able to emerge through the Holy Spirit in a more profound way. Through this emergence the light of

God's love and compassion arise, and thus an experience of joy even in suffering.

Our spiritual nature united with God is pure joy and happiness even in the midst of suffering and despair. God uses suffering to bring us close to him. When the ego withers under the pressure of suffering and despair God comforts us through the power of the Holy Spirit, touches our being with his peace, and helps us experience his holy love. We have a difficult time feeling God's presence within. We are surrounded by the trappings of the materialist dimension; and those we look to for guidance and relief are often caught in its net as well.

Parents have a significant influence on these cultural values and make a considerable difference in how the developing identity is affected within the spiritual maturation of the child. The parents model for the child a relative importance of the material world. If the parent teaches the child the values of modesty, humbleness and love for God and demonstrates unconditional positive acceptance for the child then the child will internalize similar values and beliefs. If the child learns to accept their body style and current imperfections then they will develop improved self-esteem and independence. If they continue to strive for that "perfect" body and see the failure to achieve this ideal as "awful" or "devastating," then their self-esteem and independence will suffer as well. Often it is suggested that the child has a low self-

esteem and therefore attempts to compensate by achieving the ideal body. It may also be true that the child has a low self-esteem as a result of attempting to achieve the perfect body. As adolescents mature into adulthood those who have an ability to be flexible with their expectations adapt to the inevitable deterioration of the physical appearance in adulthood.

There are countless adults in our society trapped within a purely materialistic dimension and have significant personal and emotional problems as a result. I am not however suggesting that we should ignore our physical appearance or ask our young children to discount their real emotional and sometimes confused reactions to their physical appearance. We read in Corinthians 6: 19-20 "Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." It is of great benefit to our children and to adults to be physically active, exercise, participate in sports, to be physically healthy. We experience increased mental alertness when we are physically active, increased mobility, we are stronger, healthier, and just simply feel better. However, we all need to understand and accept our inherent physical imperfections and place these in perspective as to their relative importance. Any

activities such as sports or exercise can be used as a meditation and devotion to God.

Because of an exaggerated attachment to the physical self people undergo plastic surgery, breast enlargements, suffer from anorexia and bulimia, obtain hair transplants, and purchase exercise equipment they rarely use. They are unable to move beyond the adolescent need to be physically perfect. They are pursuing that losing battle of chasing their self-esteem through their physical appearance. There are others that hold values related to the material self but have resigned themselves to being hopelessly imperfect. They feel ugly, disfigured, gross, and pathetic and manage to tell themselves how unappealing they are at every opportunity. They have given up on pursuing the perfect body yet hold on to the old belief system concerning its relative importance. This constant self-defeating mantra may lead to serious anxiety and depression resulting in social isolation as well as suicidal thoughts and tendencies. If the material self dominates they will be increasingly unhappy with age. We may also see those who go to the opposite extreme and attempt to deliberately wear poor looking clothes to show others how pious and humble they are. This too is a futile attempt at being humble to impress God or others. The self-seeking ego is always behind any

attempt at the manipulation of our physical appearance to boost self-esteem and gain the favor or repulsion of others.

There are some people so obsessed with obtaining physical and sexual gratification that they have developed chronic, destructive, and compulsive deviant behaviors. They strive to fulfill personal and sexual needs no matter who it may hurt. Their principle concern is related to meeting narcissistic desires for control, power, and personal gratification. They are willing to permanently damage their daughters, their neighbors, wives, girlfriends, strangers and husbands to meet basic materialistic needs. Practically everyone to some degree is driven to fulfill instinctual, cultural and biological drives. Most of us however have developed an ability to control and channel these drives in socially acceptable ways.

Some individuals notice tendencies towards deviant behavior but control these impulses because of a fear of getting caught, because of religious and social constraints, or perhaps because of compassion and empathy they feel towards others. Our moral, social and religious constraints keep our deviant and materialistic impulses under control. Those who are dominated by their deviant thoughts have either failed to develop higher order checks and balances or their desire for personal gratification overwhelms their personal control. They may fear getting caught, yet their compulsive sexual tendencies dominate

any ability to empathize with another person. The person dominated by their material appetites may be driven to murderous rage, rape, incest, robbery, incessant posing for or consuming pornographic images, pedophilia, greed, infidelity, alcoholism, or drugs. They have a poorly developed ability to function at higher dimensions; and the most dangerous and dysfunctional of these have no desire to control these impulses. Those dominated by this lower nature may very well be highly intelligent, however they lack the ability or desire to function at a moral or spiritual level.

There are few of us so disciplined that we never find ourselves guilty of falling into sinful behaviors. These breakdowns are often incongruent with our Christian and social norms of acceptable behavior, which prompts feelings of remorse, repentance, and guilt. Chronic feelings of guilt and remorse may result in depression, obsessive compulsive problems, psychotic symptoms, separation from social contacts, self-loathing, anger, suicidal thoughts and/or gestures. Guilt can have a paralyzing effect on the personality, resulting in a poor ability to accomplish goals or realize individual potential. Guilt may temporarily serve a useful purpose which acts as a barometer to let us know when our behavior does not meet our personal and moral standards. We experience a guilty conscious when our learned cultural and social expectations are triggered. Powerful sub-conscious,

conscious and spiritual forces are moving us to act in a different manner.

The most deviant among us have shut off this warning device and continue to fulfill materialistically derived pleasures regardless of social expectations. Those who express chronically deviant behavior usually have little if any feelings of remorse which enables them to continue to repeatedly gratify these damaging behaviors with ever greater severity. Others have circular controls, which allow breakthrough behavior but at a different rate and severity and still others are so controlled that they experience considerable feelings of anxiety and potentially psychotic symptoms as a result. Chronic guilt will not make us a moral person, and can be a form of pride and self-indulgent narcissism. When we are chronically guilty we continue to pull our attention, energy and resources towards our own internal processes rather than have them focused outwardly in service to God and others.

It is important at this point to make a distinction between moral development and spiritual development. Moral development as described by Kohlberg may be understood and realized by the materialist. The materialist may be immoral yet understand the morality of social norms and decisions. Spiritual development can never be realized while the behavior is of a material nature. Authentic

spiritual development does not occur as a result of knowledge of rules and principles and can not be realized by simply knowing the bible or words related to a religion. For example, in Kohlberg's highest level of moral development the individual's judgments are based on fundamental ethical principles, such as making a moral judgment to steal in order to save someone's life. The materialist may fully understand these moral principles but will choose to exhibit immoral behavior. Authentic spiritual development is not about being a moral person or making ethical or immoral choices. Morality occurs as a result of spiritual development, not as evidence of spiritual development. There are many Christians and non-Christians who are quite moral and exemplary in their behavior, but have an infantile experiential understanding of spiritual maturity.

Those who function exclusively in the material dimension act to satisfy the instinctual needs of the body and the personal needs of the ego, without any real consideration of how this behavior may affect those around them. They may kill others because they want to, have sexual relations with children or unwilling adults, or steal from someone simply because they want what they have. Their entire motivation is concerned with gratification of personal desires and needs. Their developed personality views the world only from a one dimensional point of view. They are dominated without reservation by

their selfish interests and have little to no desire to meet the needs of others for any spiritual or altruistic reasons. They do not experience any real Christian sentiments such as love, charity, forgiveness, hope, or faith. All of their motivations concerning others are tainted with meeting personal desires. They are ego bound and have no ability to experience God in any mature way. This type of person may be bank presidents, social workers, preachers, teachers, and others. It is not always readily apparent to the outside observer that someone has no semblance of spirituality. An atheist may function at higher levels of spiritual development than confessed Christians if they are caring, concerned for the welfare of others, and demonstrate Christian charity. Our Christian charity is at least as important as our professions of faith. If we profess to be a Christian yet continue to function exclusively in an ego bound and selfish manner, our professions are in vain.

There are many sincere Christians who discover that they compulsively act in a sinful and separated manner throughout their Christian walk. They may be socially sensitive to others' needs most of the time and then without any clear understanding of why, they find that they act with hatred, greed, lust, or vengeance. They then become depressed, remorseful, and confused about their repeated failures. This cycle of control and loss of control is often very

disturbing to this group and may result in feelings of depression and anger directed towards self.

Sigmund Freud explained this loss of control by suggesting that we all have instinctual and unacceptable ID tendencies which are controlled by socially derived internalized controls of the Superego. The Ego is the balancing force that regulates societal demands and the instinctual drives of the ID. He interprets his psychology in purely psychological terms with no consideration given for supernatural or spiritual interpretations. Freud would suggest that the Christian's recurrent deviancy is a result of repressed sexual and biological forces seeking conscious expression. For example, the Christian may have strong sexual impulses of a deviant nature which clash with their Christian values. Because these impulses are totally unacceptable to them they suppress related thoughts and impulses which arise in dreams, headaches, stress, high blood pressure, and hyper religiosity. Through their inadequate coping skills they are able to temporarily stop the thoughts and desires which plague their dreams and feared fantasies. Over time however the pressure builds and breaks through their defenses usually in a controlled manner. They usually manage to stop the full expression of their deviancy but will see breakthrough related behaviors such as viewing pornographic images, masturbation, and/or fantasizing about the feared deviancy. This temporarily

relieves the pressure but sets up the cycle again. This cycle continues until the Christian finds a way through grace to truly break the deviant cycle.

It sometimes surprises us that priest and ministers will be caught expressing deviant behavior. However, given that people sometimes gravitate towards the ministry because of their fear of suppressed deviancy, it is not too surprising. Friedrich Nietzsche believed that because of our Christian morality we stifle emotional and intellectual growth. He concluded that breakthrough sexual deviancy in Christians is caused by our Christian virtue rather than controlled by this virtue. Just like modern humanistic thought, Nietzsche believed in the individual's need to express their own individuality in order to reach their full potential. Nietzsche maintains that the repression of instinctual and/or creative tendencies because of adherence to a rigid set of moral guidelines results in depression, anxiety and alienation from our full potential. Nietzsche referred to this need for creative self-expression as the will to power. The will to power is concerned with finding the courage to be an individual in creative self-affirmation.

The behaviorist would suggest that deviant behavior in Christians, and all behavior to some degree is the result of cognitive and environmental factors. B.F. Skinner suggests that if any operant response leads to reinforcement, the probability of that response

occurring again increases. We may wonder how deviant behavior could possibly be reinforcing to anyone particularly a professed Christian. Skinner explains that what acts as a reinforcement for one person will not necessarily work in the same way with someone else. Also the consequences for this deviant behavior has been for the most part reinforcing rather than aversive. When the breakthrough behavior occurs the person is reinforced temporarily by the positive consequences they experience at the time. They may then experience powerful aversive feelings of guilt or fear associated with personal values and religious beliefs or perhaps concerns about being arrested or both. This guilt acts as an aversive stimuli for a while, however, as their fear and guilt subside their aversion to the behavior weakens and they repeat the cycle again. The reason the cycle continues is because they have acquired religious values and social controls which keep them from the full expression of their deviant tendencies. Those who do not have these internal, social, and cognitive controls will be more likely to fully express their deviant tendencies. The treatment of these problems according to the behaviorist would concern increasing the aversive stimuli and minimize any reinforcement for the targeted behavior. They would also provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors. There would of course be no discussion of spiritual cures such as faith in God, prayer, or reliance on supernatural interventions.

There is another behaviorist theory proposed by Albert Bandura which explains behavior in terms of observational learning. Bandura explains that observational learning or modeling is how we develop expectations about consequences and reinforcements of specific behaviors. In other words we learn from seeing the consequences and reinforcements of others behavior. In the United States we have seen a growth in sexual deviancy and a decline in moral and social values. According to this theory we can account for a reduction of church attendance through the increased availability of internet child and adult pornography. Through inadvertent or purposeful internet activity our children and adults see others model pleasure responses from deviant activity. Combined with an all out attack on Christianity in the United States and the humanist belief in individual interpretation of morality, we see a significant growth in deviant behavior in our society. This is why it is extremely important for parents and others to model authentic Christian behavior. Alcoholic's anonymous works in part under this model. Part of the change model requires the alcoholic participant to hear the confessions of those who have changed, obtain a sponsor, and look to the elders in the group for support, and guidance.

In the transcendent Christian view deviant impulses represent both psychological processes as described above and evidence of a

fallen state into sin and separation from God. The guidelines set out by biblical teachings act as a moral compass for the Christian to be guided by. The Christian understands that the fallen state of existence has become the foundation of our natural instincts which are to be understood through prayer and church attendance, the teachings of the bible, direction of will, faith, and repentance. There are many Christians who have adopted a humanistic Christianity which adheres to both the Nietzsche "will to power" and the Christian ideal of humble obedience to God. They believe in self-esteem, self-confidence, self-interests, self-will, personal interpretation, while trying to reconcile this with emptiness, humbleness, holiness, selflessness. Many seem to easily make this transition, ignoring the irrationality of their arguments.

The transcendent Christian adheres to Kierkegaard's view of courage which is concerned with the will to break from slavish mimicking of tradition and become truly and profoundly filled with the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Nietzsche believed in the Aristotelian view of rationalistic thought, which placed reason through investigation of the natural world as the way to self knowledge. The transcendent Christian believes that through our faith in Jesus Christ an understanding of God, self, and the natural world will occur. Aligning with Christian tradition the transcendent Christian believes

that knowledge of God does not occur through the intellect or through heroic and individual efforts but as a gift of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The transcendent Christian will view most deviant breakthrough behavior as a combination of social and psychological forces as well evidence of a sinful fallen state attempting to realize its natural tendencies for expression. Behind this deviant behavior are spiritual and psychological forces which attempt to block the self's realization of its true nature. The Christian is engaged in a spiritual battle which is unconsciously realized by the ego. When the Christian engages in holy adherence to Christian ideals and principles they are assaulted by destructive forces and former habits which attempt to keep the Christian bound to their separated nature. In their sincere attempts at holiness the Christian experiences resistance and a battle for the heart and mind of the Christian. As the soul matures in their Christian walk they become more Christ-like, humbled and empty because of these battles, and stronger in Christ because of their increased alignment with the power of the Holy Spirit. Battles of a spiritual nature are a significant and essential part of the Christian experience. As God draws us towards his light the forces of sin and separation draw us in the opposite direction.

Often the atheist, humanist or "enlightened" Christian scoffs at the Christian who believes in dark forces battling with the forces of light and holiness. They may see this as a regression to a medieval superstition of "bad" spirits and demons. In fact much superstition and ignorance abounded in the dark ages when the mentally ill were burned at the stake as witches, or had holes bored in their heads to release evil spirits. It is popular today to see the bible exclusively as either an outdated book filled with ancient superstitions, or a spiritual book of metaphor. Demonic forces are seen exclusively as moral lapses related to personal failure, or a puritanical obsession with control. Many Christians will confess a belief in heavenly angels, but do not believe in dark forces that work outside of our conscious awareness. These subconscious forces are not simply ID impulses of a biological nature as described by Freud, or a collective unconscious related to inherited cultural and social traits as described by Jung, but real spiritual forces influencing the behavior of the fallen soul.

There is a collective spiritual unconscious that works within the souls of human beings. These forces are the thoughts/actions of the separated soul, the influences of God on the soul, and the collective experience of human beings. We are all connected by a collective unconscious. We see evidence of this when we hear about a mother sensing the death of a child at the exact time of the child's death, or

when we have intuitions or premonitions about events that later manifest in reality. What we think and how we act becomes the collective unconscious of the human experience. Negative forces as well as positive forces are battling for the souls of beings on earth. These thoughts are then manifest by humans in the physical world in many places simultaneously. This is where the power of prayer will echo towards the heavens and into the collective unconscious of believers and non-believers. Jesus explains in Luke 20-21, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." And in Matthew 13: 19, "When any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side." And finally in Matthew 15: 17-20, "Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever enter in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man."

In our society we mock the "devil made me do it" mentality and dismiss this as ridiculous ranting of the unenlightened. And it is true

that personal responsibility for behavior can be dismissed in our zeal to blame the devil, evil spirits, or social ills for our behavior. It is important however, to consider sin as having a real negative consequence on behavior, which is often ignored because of the anticipated negative reaction of others. We have to consider this as one factor of many influencing behavior. It is intellectually dishonest for a Christian to dismiss the possibility of sin and separation from God as the source of psychological problems and deviant behavior.

As the Christian continues on their Christian walk God gives them the tools to defeat the power of sin which enables them to become more Christ-like in their daily walk. This occurs through our will towards faith and adherence to moral guidelines, rather than solely through an intellectual ability to reason and improve coping skills. If we sincerely repent of our sins, become grounded in our Christian beliefs, then if it is God's will, we shall change in a profound way. We can see the effects of this change when God appeared before Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul was not superficially changed but was profoundly changed. He explains in Romans 6:5 that, "If we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection." When the Spirit of Jesus Christ enters the Christian they exhibit an identifiable likeness to him. Just as Saul becomes Paul, the Christian will also be changed in the

image and likeness of Jesus Christ. In this grounding and resurrection in Christ we die to self, become united with God in love and experience a spiritual awakening.

The separated life is concerned with self-fulfillment, the Christian life calls on us to serve God with purity of heart. Purity of heart is concerned with the will towards God; the materialist is concerned with self-will and the fulfillment of personal desires. The ego by its very nature is concerned with self-preservation and independence. We cannot maintain our identification with the ego as self and serve God with all our heart, our minds, and our strength. In this complete immersion in the will of God the ego loses its identification as the center of self. The center of awareness is established in union with God, the ego as a separate and isolated entity is no longer present. As Thomas Merton explains, "When humility delivers a man from attachment to his own works and his own reputation, he discovers that perfect joy is possible only when we have completely forgotten ourselves. And it is only when we pay no more attention to our own deeds and our own reputation and our own excellence what we are at last completely free to serve God in perfection for his own sake alone."

Chapter 3

Social Dimensions

With the development of our social dimension the need to belong and conform to cultural and social norms occurs. This is why the family and early childhood experiences are critically important to the healthy development of the growing child. Through our families, our relationships with peers, teachers, church members, coaches and neighbors the child develops a social self. When a child grows up in a loving and nurturing environment they begin to believe that the world is predictable, safe, and dependable. When the family breaks down through abuse, divorce, single parent families, neglect and indifference, the development of the social dimension becomes threatened. The development of our social dimension is also determined in part by temperamental differences such as introversion/extroversion, sensory/intuitive, feeling/thinking, and perceiving/judging. The social dimension is a reflection of all the experiences a child encounters when growing up. If the child grew up in a Christian family attending church regularly then that child will

generally be heavily influenced towards Christian norms and values. If the child grew up in an atheist family with secular humanist values they will be influenced in that direction. Their social dimension will reflect these early childhood influences. If within the Christian family the child experiences hypocrisy and abuse then their social dimension will reflect this reality.

If a parent models for their child traditional norms of behavior the child will largely adopt these traditional social norms and values. As the child enters their teenage years the social norms of their peers becomes increasingly important. If the child has adopted the values of their parents then they will often choose peers that reflect the values and norms of the family. If the child is attempting to reject the family then they may choose friends that reflect the rejection of those values. As the child matures their social behavior continues to reflect early influences but becomes increasingly changed because of their growing cognitive abilities.

These various routes towards individuation create considerable anxiety for the maturing child. According to Rollo May the manner in which the child handles social anxiety determines their orientation towards social relations. Fromm explains, "This dialectical nature of freedom can be seen in the genesis of the individual child as well as in the phylogenesis of character structure in a culture like that of

Western man since the renaissance. The child begins life bound to parents by "primary ties." His growth involves an increasing freedom from dependence on parents—the process called individuation. But individuation brings with it threats, potential or actual; it involves a progressive breaking of the original unity of the primary ties; the child becomes aware of being a separate entity, of being alone." According to Erich Fromm the manner in which the child controls these symptoms of anxiety create orientations towards their social interactions. These include the Receptive Orientation which involves being positively responsive to our social environment as opposed to the negative aspect which involves being without an opinion, or characterless. The Exploitive Orientation which involves being self-confident as opposed to the negative trait of arrogance. The Hoarding Orientation which involves being practical as opposed to the negative orientation of being unimaginative. And finally, the Marketing Orientation which involves being open-minded as opposed to being unprincipled.

The problem with Fromm's theory concerning anxiety is that his definition of positive values reflects values inherent in a humanistic belief system. When we hear that anxiety creates within us a tendency towards being positively responsive or absent of an opinion, we might simply agree that this is a reasonable statement. However,

the complication arises in our definition of "positively responsive." In the humanist view being positively responsive means to be open to opportunities for independence, self-esteem, assertiveness, receptive to new ideas and people. To be without an opinion involves accepting what has been told us, taught us by our family, church, society, without question. The theory suggests that our ability to handle social and personal anxiety creates in us an orientation towards social relations. I would agree that in part because of our social anxiety we may cling to our cultural and family beliefs and values without truly questioning their rightness, or wrongness. We may accept commonly held beliefs because not to accept them leads to rejection, financial insecurity, and isolation by our support network. Some people never question these beliefs because it is too hard, have set and rigid opinions, are intellectually lazy, or see no reason to look beyond what is commonly understood to be truth.

The atheist or humanist maintain that they are receptive to new ideas, and stand back with pity or contempt towards the Christians who believe in a God or hold to a set of Christian values and standards. Yet they too hold to an intellectual paralysis through their dull and mindless religion called humanistic thought. They have fallen into the safe belief that God is dead, that they are far superior in their pragmatism than the religious minded in their faith and that they know

who they are and are self-assured and confident in their beliefs. Those who hold to the scientific, to the materialistic, are not adventurers in their courageous trek away from the status quo as they would have us believe, but in fact lack the courage to step away from the known. It is easy to believe in what we can prove, can see, can know to be true. It is difficult to move beyond the known into the realm of faith in God, in the word of Christ, in areas that the world would see as ridiculous. True courage involves moving forward in spite of our fear and anxiety, to risk being a fool, insanity, inferior, alienated from the status quo. It means going beyond the commonly held understanding of faith in self, in ego, in self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efforts, the preacher, the church, the country, our past, our sincerity and personal efforts, saying the "right" words. Faith involves a tolerance of anxiety, a suspension of our own efforts, a journey to the cross with Christ and a resurrection into a new and spiritual existence.

Most will not be able to tolerate the angst of dying to self. Because of our anxiety we hesitate, compromise, become a humanist Christian. The humanist Christian is easier for the society to tolerate than the transcendent Christian. The transcendent Christian is required to become unattached to all they think they are and know and humbly follow Christ. Those who are rich in ego attachment will

not be able to pick up their cross and follow Christ. They want to appease their anxiety by following the ranks of the humanist Christian. Their anxiety, intellectually progressive thinking, and self-esteem cause them to stay focused on the known, to join the humanist in condemning the Christians who walk in faith in God, to maintain the status quo. Through faith we experience transformation, union with God, and Holy Communion.

When Fromm talks about the marketing orientation he discusses the healthy individual who is open-minded as opposed to being unprincipled. What does it mean to be open-minded? I do not think that the average humanist would be open-minded to a transcendent experience with God. To experience God through Christ is not an intellectual exercise but a spiritual exercise. It requires us to be not only open-minded but open-hearted as well. If we are looking towards our ability to reason out our religious beliefs we will never come to know Christ in other than an intellectual or superficial way. To know God is a journey of the heart rather than a journey of the head. This journey into the vast unknown requires considerable courage and is filled with the angst of the unknown. The humanist wants to judge the Christian through its world view which they assume is the real world. To be open-minded is to be reasonable, thoughtful, socially conscious, and socially enlightened. To be open-minded is understood by the

humanist to have left behind the childhood fantasies of a God who will save us. The humanist cannot help but see their world through their narrowed prism, which is all they currently know. If we only believe in ourselves, in what we know, in our own efforts, then those who talk about a world beyond the shadows of this world are seen as foolish. They cling desperately to their shadows and believe this is all there is to reality. They have succumbed to their personal anxiety and are unable to move beyond this limited world view.

It is true however that the average person is pulled between the values inherent in a capitalistic society and the values inherent in religious ideologies. Christianity teaches us in Romans 8:6-10, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit of life because of righteousness." The capitalistic society promotes and encourages personal ambition, the development of capital, accumulation of wealth as a motivating factor, and amassing personal and political power. These capitalistic "ideals" often drive the individual towards the pursuit

of self-interest at the expense of others in order to stay competitive and profitable. The Christian experiences anxiety in this balance between the greater good and an inherent drive towards self-preservation and independence. The secular humanist experiences a similar need to balance out their social sensitivity with a need towards self-interest. However, the secular humanist has no problem with promoting their own self-interest in the context of the common good. The transcendent Christian serves the greater good within the context of a capitalist system as well, but the motivations are concerned with service to God, rather than service to personal values or selfish interests.

Fromm makes the distinction between the productive and non-productive character. The productive individual according to Fromm, and is generally representative of the humanist point of view, "covers mental, emotional, and sensory responses to others, to oneself, and to things. Productiveness is man's ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him. If we say he must use his powers we imply that he must be free and not dependent on someone who controls his powers. We imply, furthermore, that he is guided by reason, since he can make use of his own powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for.

Productiveness means that he experiences himself as the embodiment

of his powers and as the "actor"; that he feels himself one with his powers and at the same time that they are not masked and alienated from him."

We are being highly non-productive according to Fromm by refusing to nurture the powerful ego with all of its creative and individual potential. Non-productivity defined by Fromm "is the reaction to anxiety, whether acute or chronic, conscious or unconscious, which is frequently at the root of the frantic preoccupations of men today. Different from anxiety-motivated activity, often blended with it, is the type of activity based on submission to or dependence on an authority. The authority may be feared, admired, or "loved"—usually all three are mixed—but the cause of the activity is the command of the authority, both in a formal way and with regard to its contents. The person is active because the authority wants him to be, and he does what the authority wants him to do. This kind of activity is found in the authoritarian character. To him activity means to act in the name of something higher than his own self. He can act in the name of God, the past, or duty, but not in the name of himself." To the secular humanist the submission to the authority of God is the highest form of self-abandonment. It represents a loss of something that is uniquely coveted, which is freedom of creative and independent expression of the self.

The humanist philosophers are truly unable to appreciate the Christian character. They see adherence to a set of Christian beliefs as an abandonment of freedom and independence. They look at the totalitarian regimes, cults, the Christians who go through the motions of Christianity, to be representative of those who gladly walk through the world without ever really questioning their beliefs. They paint every Christian with the same broad brush. They see themselves as the productive ones, intellectually superior, and free of false ideologies or cultural traps. The Christian often experiences considerable anxiety when their Christian values intersect and conflict with the worldly values of self-interest, self-promotion and personal power. The secular humanist view this as an unnecessary burden related to an antiquated and false moral dilemma.

To reduce behavioral orientations simply to anxiety reactions is of course an oversimplification of determinants of behavior. Yet, how we react to anxiety can create specific tendencies towards our social relations. These tendencies and anxiety reactions are in part determined by family relations, temperamental factors, as well as social and cultural norms and expectations. Social anxiety may also be determined by factors such as faith, family support, family values, and religious involvement. Erich Fromm and humanist in general have a complete misunderstanding of the Christian beliefs concerning selfish

behavior and self-love. According to Fromm "Modern culture is pervaded by a taboo on selfishness. We are taught that to be selfish is sinful and that to love others is virtuous. To be sure, this doctrine is in flagrant contradiction to the practice of modern society, which holds the doctrine that the most powerful and legitimate drive in man is selfishness, and that by following this imperative drive the individual makes his best contribution to the common good. But the doctrine which declares selfishness to be the arch evil and love for others to be the greatest virtue is still powerful. Selfishness is used here almost synonymously with self-love. The alternative is to love others, which is a virtue, or to love oneself, which is a sin."

This is typical criticism leveled towards the Christian concerning love of self as opposed to love for God. If the assertion that the Christian belief requires and promotes self-loathing is true it would only be true for those who do not understand the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus commands us to love others as ourselves. The Transcendent Christian views the humanist view of self-love as the equivalent of worshiping an idol. They have developed a belief that the mental and social construct of the ego is the real and only self. Because the transcendent Christian views this ego construct as a false and fallen self based on separation and independence from God they do not see a need to love the illusion. The transcendent Christian does

not hate this self they just see through it as transitory, limiting and isolated. When we focus our love on Christ and the teachings of Christ the false ego begins to be seen as an object amongst objects rather than as the self. The real self emerges in an expansive and exhilarating way. We begin to experience our self as being united with God in love. We experience our true self as created in the image and likeness of God. We do not glorify or love our ego, but by loving God we love ourselves as well. We no longer experience God as being out there in heaven, but feel his love and presence in our daily lives, growing ever expansive and deepening as God empties us of our selfish and separate tendencies. Hating sin is not about self-criticism or self-loathing or judging others in pious righteousness, but about hating separation from God.

Families like civilizations will reflect the same values generation after generation maintaining the same dysfunctional patterns of behavior. There is a family that I have counseled that exhibits generations of dysfunctional family patterns, as far back as is known by the family. This family reports that every female member of the family has been sexually abused before the age of 10, including the Grandmother, the Mother, Aunts, Cousins, and sisters. The males in the family generally have alcohol and drug problems, have been in jail or prison on multiple occasions, have violent tempers, and appear in

and out of the family at unpredictable times. When they do appear they are usually forced to leave because of domestic violence, alcohol problems, or sexual and physical abuse against family members. The daughters have a serious mistrust of males in general; however they use their sexuality as a way of manipulating men, and sometimes other women. They have poor relations with males in general and invariably become involved in relationships with abusive men who have alcohol, drug and legal problems. They are unable to maintain any type of employment, and live primarily on what they can obtain from others, family members or the Government. Although they have been through many hours of counseling and psychiatric interventions most members of this family have been unable to fundamentally change their behavior.

This family suffers from chronic and severe anxiety, which has crippled their ability to experience faith and emotional security. The same phenomenon occurs to some degree or another with anyone who experiences separation from God. The humanist has faith in individual power and human potential, the Christian has faith in God. Faith in God is considered a foolish denial of will to power by humanistic standards. Fromm explains that, "Irrational faith is rooted in the submission to a power which is felt to be overwhelmingly strong, omniscient, and omnipotent, in the abdication of one's own power and

strength, rational faith is based upon the opposite experience. We have this faith in a thought because it is a result of our own observation and thinking. We have faith in the potentialities of others, of ourselves, and of mankind because, and only to the degree to which, we have experienced the growth of our own potentialities, the reality of growth in ourselves, the strength of our own power of reason and of love." From the humanist perspective rational faith is concerned with belief in the intellectual process, reason, and scientific determinability.

Faith in God can be an empty attempt at alleviating social and personal anxiety. The humanist Christian may profess their faith in God yet hold on to faith in their own powers, in their abilities, in society, in the church, their neighborhoods, their country, in their education, their intellectual prowess, their family. Through this faith they find the same security the humanist finds through reason and their ability to determine social predictability. Our level of anxiety is related in part to our faith in ourselves, our social and cultural surroundings, and in God. The family described above has absolutely no faith in themselves, in other family members, in God, or in their social surroundings. Their level of personal faith is non-existent which creates a constant attempt towards obtaining control over their environment. They have few skills to achieve control so their lives are

in a constant state of unfocused chaos. They do not have the anchor of social norms, family, church or God. They experience considerable anxiety which fuels their desire for relief.

Relief is found from anxiety in our society in any way that works for us. We may achieve relief through reason and intellectual pursuits. Through this reason we find security and safety in our own will to power as many humanistic thinkers attempt to do. We may find relief from anxiety in pursuing the status quo. We look to maintain what we know and do not attempt to look too deeply into the inner workings of our own life. We may attempt to achieve relief through our submission to an authority or social group we view as greater than ourselves such as the church, a cult, socialism, communism, totalitarianism, humanism, or scientology. We may also attempt to find relief by falling in love, alcohol or drug addiction, work, hedonism, deviant sexuality, social pursuits, exercise, or food. Or we may look within to God. Faith in God is deceptively simple, yet easily hidden within the obstacles of self.

Secular culture is filled with the promotion and development of faith in everything but God. Our rational mind will not accept the fact that we are to have faith in only God. We hear the church promote faith in God as though it was one of many things to have faith in. It is either stated or implied that we should have faith in our pastor, our

church, our country, our family, our self. Of course this does not mean we should not love others as ourselves, but to have faith in anything other than God is creating separation from God. Alternative faith concerns clinging to a false anchor; which is not God. The pastor may point to God but he/she is not God. We read in proverbs 23: 26, "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe thy ways." And, in Matthew 9: 14-16, "He that loveth Father and Mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." This is not to imply that we should not love our churches, our pastors, our family, and friends, but to hold faith as the exclusive domain of God. The humanist holds faith in self as the reasonable alternative to the non-thinking person's faith in God. The transcendent Christian holds faith in God as the only faith that is eternal, everlasting, and constant.

We see in many families a severe version of inherited family dysfunction. If the child is told they are ugly, hateful, bad, stupid, unwanted because they are a girl or a boy, evil, possessed, hated, or mean they will grow up seeing this as their individual and social identity. They may experience severe anxiety anytime they find

themselves in a situation that may risk the potential for rejection. If they grow up seeing themselves as loved, smart, capable, athletic, talented, funny, pleasant to be around, then they will interact with society from this vantage point. We also see children who are successful in spite of growing up in a severely dysfunctional family. Some of this may be attributable to temperamental and intelligence factors but is also as result of caring and nurturing people the child encountered while growing up.

Children are not only influenced by parents in positive or negative ways but are influenced by others as well. If a child has a teacher or counselor or coach or grandparent that takes special interest in them then the child may respond in a positive manner. Often societal aversive conditioning will not save a child from a life of crime or dysfunctional behavior. If the child is punished by society for his misbehavior he may learn to modify his behavior, but also may learn how to avoid being caught in the future or become even more rebellious and defiant. Punishment works to some degree with children in families because punishment is balanced with nurturing, respect and love. If a child only receives punishment without the corresponding nurturing and love then they will become either distant and depressed, or rebellious and overtly defiant.

If we help our children learn to communicate effectively they will

be better able to express anxiety, disappointment, and anger in more productive ways. If we model rejection towards our children by ignoring them they learn to channel the expression of their anxiety in other directions and away from the family. Passive-aggression can appear through behavior such as ignoring the parent when they ask to turn the music down, appearing five minutes past curfew, or never doing the chores entirely correct. They may also just choose to fight in overt ways through defiance and aggression. They may also numb their feelings through drugs, sex, and alcohol. This inability to effectively communicate to others does not simply correct itself when the child becomes an adult. Their ineffective communication continues until they develop an effective way to correct their communication deficits.

Generally the child with severe anxiety has several unsuccessful relationships or only marginally successful relationships. This is seen commonly in their marriage, friendships, and work related settings. Even in the "ideal" family the child will struggle to develop an ability to communicate needs, develop independence, and emerge with an intact self-esteem. The task of the child is to learn how to be an individual within the norms and expectations of the society. Within the dysfunctional family they have serious difficulty with problem solving, communicating, learning how to balance emotional and social

concerns, coping with stress and change, and developing a clear understanding of current identity. Their self-esteem is seriously damaged and they over-compensate for this damaged self-esteem by reckless behavior, withdrawal, anger, sex, and/or exaggerated feelings of importance or rejection. On the other extreme you have a child that is undeveloped socially, passive, and content with the status quo. They may never really question their expected role in life and live out their subcultures family and social expectations. They may become a Christian, Muslim, Baptist, Catholic or Atheist without ever seriously questioning the "rightness" or "wrongness" of these beliefs for them.

They may originate from a wealthy family and accept the career their parents expect of them, marry the right type of girl or boy, get the right house, have the right amount of income, have the right balance of materialistic beliefs, be liberal or conservative all based on the family and societal expectations they find themselves in. They may also have grown up in a working class or poverty stricken family with the social expectation that they will have limited opportunities. They may from time to time begin to question the social values of their culture or subgroup or family and find that they are chastised for the effort. A strong self-image and self-esteem is critical to the growing child's ability to control anxiety, social relations and make independent decisions in the future. If the child has a poorly developed self-image

and self-esteem they will lack the resources to face the anxiety inherent in a need to grow in independence and independent decision making as an adult. With their poor resources and low self-confidence they accept the easy route and accept the status quo of their social surroundings. This is of course culturally related as well, as in some cultures there are strong norms against specific male and female choices. However, the growing child capable of making independent choices will weigh the social taboos against their own needs to express themselves independently. Through this independent analysis they will be able to act according to the promptings of their desires.

To some this need to develop independence and self-esteem as a child may seem like a contradiction to the premise of self-transcendence. This is however, no contradiction when you consider the role of free-will in the Christian tradition. The child is unable to advance beyond the status quo, beyond their anxiety and fear into a subjective experience of God without offering up the self in renunciation and repentance. If the individual has no developed self to offer to God then the return to God is empty of meaning. There must be a moving away before there can be a moving to God. The child needs to develop an independent self as a strong point of orientation. If the child does not develop a stable ego then it becomes difficult to find the faith to move into an authentic relationship with God. The

anxiety involved in the letting go process of faith is a difficult concept for someone riddled with paralyzing fear and self-doubt. Those who have a strong character development will be able to use this identity to move towards greater independence and self-promotion or to renounce their self-promotion in humble obedience to God. Those who are confident and strong-willed will not be able to simply allow the forces of their culture to determine their destiny. They will consciously make a choice concerning the direction of their lives.

When the humanist encourages the seeker to develop courage in creative self-affirmation the seeker has an acceptable range of independent options. When we talk about creative expression of will it is rarely understood in humanistic literature to choose to will towards faith in God. To accept the Christian premise of either/or. Either we live our life in service to God, or choose to question, doubt, interpret, pick and choose, maintain the status quo with minor changes. Rarely would an "enlightened" group in a counterculture movement encourage the person to live their life in a conservative Christian movement. There are specific rules concerning acceptable and unacceptable behavior which the person is expected to conform to. If they break these rules they will be chastised and corrected, and eventually isolated and removed for their unacceptable and counterculture behavior. These social expectations are true for this

group and for any group. We are all subject to the rules of conduct in our established social settings. It is for this reason that many of the most dangerous and deviant criminals seem to prefer being alone rather than attempting to follow the rules of a subculture. However, there are some Christians that God calls towards social separation and isolation as a way to help them grow in awareness and understanding of his divine presence. Jesus wants us to be united in him. He prays to God in John 17: 21-23, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

Feelings of guilt and remorse are frequently tied in with development of our social dimension. If we have a set of moral beliefs and values and have internalized these values then we are likely to feel guilty when we behave contrary to these beliefs. These beliefs and values are largely developed as a result of our social conditioning. If a child is brought up in the church then they will have a set of strongly held values associated with common church practices. Any internalized codes of conduct will likely cause feelings of guilt and remorse. When we violate these rules we trigger internal social demands and beliefs reflected towards our feelings of acceptance and

self-worth.

The "should" expectation without the softening of these expectations with self-forgiveness, love of self, and kindness towards self creates what Albert Ellis calls the tyranny of "should." Of course Albert Ellis would not agree with the concepts related to a higher power, love of self, or self-forgiveness. Feelings of guilt are largely social constructs; feelings of remorse which results in repentance and change are spiritual concepts.

The counselor in a mental health setting will see many people who are depressed and anxious because of chronic feelings of self-doubt and self-loathing. This self-doubt is a result of internalized social norms and personal tyranny triggered when disobeying these norms. They are chronically critical towards themselves and towards others as well. This is largely developed by our social relations with family, cultural norms and friends. While growing up we make assumptions about our worth based on our personal experiences and experiential interpretations of the behavior of others towards us. If we are told that we are worthless and internalize this message then we will be increasingly sensitive to the criticism of others. We may attempt to prove to ourselves and others that we are not worthless, or simply live out the expectations and self-perceptions we have of ourselves. There may also be an interactive effect which involves fluctuating feelings of

exaggerated worth and sporadic feelings of exaggerated worthlessness.

We become increasingly mistrustful of our own independent decision making and look to be accepted by others either individually or in groups. If we are looking to be accepted by an individual we may gravitate towards relationships that make us feel special and appreciated. We may also attempt to look to someone we can take care of, control, and feel needed. Often this type of relationship has disastrous consequences, especially if both have similar or conflicting agendas. Many people who experience recurrent bad relationships wonder why they continue to end up in the same type of dysfunctional relationships. They have no personal insight into their dependency or control needs and repeatedly attempt to satisfy these needs through recurrent dysfunctional patterns.

Those who have control needs with underlying insecurities and low self-esteem will often become an enabler of the chronically self-destructive. They may gravitate towards the alcoholic, drug abuser, unemployed, the charlatan, the sick, the pitiful and overcompensated. In these relationships they are in control which keeps them from taking the risk of rejection by an independent and socially mature partner. They simply can't risk rejection which would wound their already fragile self-esteem and trigger increased feelings of self-

loathing and guilt. Those who gravitate towards the flatterer and charmer want someone to prop up their low self-esteem and take care of them, to be an alter-ego of sorts that supports the damaged self-esteem they are currently nurturing. They become dependent on the positive affirmation and acceptance of others and establish a pleaser role in their relationships. Everything goes on marginally smooth until the inevitable let-down occurs and they feel betrayed by their friends or partner. The average person usually falls somewhere in between these two extremes. Anytime we are looking to the world outside for stability and continuance we are going to be disappointed.

If we are looking towards a group to feel loved and accepted we are often disappointed as well. This could be a positive group such as a supportive church affiliation, academic or athletic group, or a potentially damaging group such as a cult, drug subculture, spiritualist group, criminal group or any other group in which we feel appreciated and accepted. We often wonder how bright young people get involved with cults. There are a multitude of possible factors involved, but the ground has to be fertile for the cult to take root in their lives. This fertile ground is a naïve view of spirituality, low self-esteem, a rebellious and hostile view towards current social conventions, few strongly held social contacts, disengaged from family and friends, feelings of meaninglessness, unsure about future direction, idealistic,

and passive dependency related to social immaturity. They largely shut down their normal tendency to distrust these groups by the immediate feelings of acceptance they feel when talking to the group members. They finally feel they have found a sense of belonging with other "like minded" individuals. The old life passes away and they become remade in the image and likeness of the ideological beliefs of the leader.

Over time many will break away from the group if the factors listed above are tempered by other social and emotional considerations such as family connections, and an ability to think outside the box. In cults and in most groups the group member is accepted only as long as they follow the expectations of the group. When they begin to think independent of the group's rigid allowable thought range, they are rejected and eventually banished from the group if they insist on independent thought.

When there is change in the group there is associated anxiety and depression. The more we cling to the group for meaning and purpose the more anxiety we will feel as the group changes or deteriorates over time. If we have few intellectual, spiritual, or transcendent tendencies we will experience more anxiety and alienation than if we have a transcendent relationship with God. When our center of self is grounded in God we have an unwavering and ever

deepening relationship with God. We are grounded within our spiritual nature and relate to the external world from subjectivity. Our meaning is not found in our social relations but is found in a living dynamic relationship with God. Because of societies alienation from God the cast away accepts their alienated state as hopeless. They may become indifferent and/or socially deviant, or find meaning in other social relations. Hopelessness results in cynicism, intellectual speculation, sophism, hedonism, or atheism. Those who fall into this category include writers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, Kafka, or Camus.

We establish our feelings of belonging and meaning in the groups we are associated with. This may include our church, our work group, our families, our friends, our political party, our town, and our country. It is because of this social dependency that there is deep anxiety, depression, and feelings of meaninglessness in society today. Those who have no transcendent connection with their spiritual self and ultimately God, find that they need to necessarily find meaning and purpose in their social relations. We believe that our feelings of value and self-worth and self-esteem are determined by our personal wealth, our success on the job, our acceptance by the church, how much our family love's and values us, how good or powerful our country is, how attractive others think we are, and/or how holy others believe we are. When these social relations are in place and generally

fulfill our expectations we feel complete, loved, and appreciated. We believe that our life has meaning and purpose, and take great pride in how well we are perceived by others. We believe that God must see us in the same way since we are doing good things in the community for our church and others. Our judgment is tainted by our personal point of reference which is social and outer directed. It is because of this conformist tendency that we experience the phenomenon of the conformist mentality. We can only feel alive when the crowd we value loves and accepts us in some way. Or perhaps when the crowd we oppose truly despises us with a loyal vengeance.

To be persecuted for common beliefs brings groups together, which further reinforces their feelings of purpose and belonging through the group. In our fear of being overwhelmed by outside forces we find great comfort in our illusions, habits, and social relations. Through this fear and anxiety we become dangerously distant from our own ability to think independent of the group collectivism. We cling desperately to our self-esteem and self-confidence which is found in the safety of the psychologist interpretation of mental health, the self-actualizers, and the psychiatrist who help medicate us when our illusion of self and self-esteem begins to break down. If we live long enough most of us will experience a general shrinking of our social self; some more so than

others. If we are deeply attached to this desperate ego island we will begin to experience considerable isolation and a constant realignment with our external circumstances. Those we love may drift away one by one as our children grow up, we retire, we move to new and unfamiliar locations, our parents die, our spouse dies, we become physically dependent, our good looks fade away, and we are left stripped and emotionally drained of our former supports which gave our life meaning.

This is why we begin to experience a moving towards God as we become older. It is almost as though it is God's way of preparing us for the life after this one. By removing those external objects which cloud our vision God is bringing us into a clearer vision of his grace and love. It is difficult when we are young to see past all the physical and social veils which separate us from God. When we experience loss and separation from our social objects of meaning we can find comfort in the assurance that God is removing these external ties in order to bring us closer to him. It takes a significant leap of faith and courage to become unattached to the external social and artificial objects of meaning and cling to God which is all life, light and love. All life flows from God and in him all life has purpose and meaning. By sacrificing the self on the cross of selfless devotion to God in imitation of Christ we are transformed into a living witness of the truth of Christ. We are

no longer a leaf in the wind of external social relations but dwell in the house of the living God. And in that relationship we find meaning and purpose through a love that is ever deepening. John describes this best in I John 4:16, 12. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. No man has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

Counselors consistently see clients that complain of depression and anxiety because they either fear losing some social idol, or have lost some social relationship or object that gave them considerable meaning, belonging and purpose. Although most of us would grieve at the loss of a close relation or be anxious at the loss of our livelihood, it is our relationship with God that determines the manner and extent to which this affects us. If we cling to God in selfless devotion we will find our meaning, sense of belonging and purpose in our relation with God. Through our faith in God we will find comfort in our experiential understanding of the perfect love inherent in God's intentions. Through our loss we will find support in the grace of God and comfort in his will.

God explains that all things work towards the good for those who love God. When a Christian experiences a transcendent relationship with God there is never a time when they do not feel his comforting presence and constant love. This is not an intellectual understanding

or an occasional peak experience but a constant connection with God through the Holy Spirit. If we want to be less depressed and anxious we need to become less dependent on external relations and social circumstances and allow God to work through us. It is difficult to feel sorry for ourselves if we are spending our energy in devotion to God. Paul Tillich describes this self-acceptance by saying, "Where the New Reality appears, one feels united with God, the ground and meaning of one's existence. One has what has been called the love of one's destiny, and what, today, we might call the courage to take upon ourselves our own anxiety. Then one has the astonishing experience of feeling reunited with one's self, not in pride and false self-satisfaction, but in a deep self-acceptance. One accepts one's self as something which is eternally important, eternally loved, eternally accepted. The disgust at one's self, the hatred of one's self has disappeared. There is a center, a direction, a meaning for life. All healing—bodily and mental—creates this union of one's self. Where there is real healing, *there* is the New Being, the New Creation."

The depths of individual values are related to an identification with and respect for those who teach us. If we have close ties to our parents and community then we will likely adopt the values associated with the church and family. If a child feels a need to assert their independence they may go through a period where they reject the

church or community values. They may also enter other communities such as colleges and universities which reflect the social norms and values of this group. Our tendency to change values, beliefs, and circumstances is largely related to the rigidity or flexibility of our current beliefs. Beliefs tend to be more fluid in our teenage years and become more crystallized as we age. However, as we age our mortality becomes more of a reality which compels us towards the search for meaning and purpose in life.

As human beings with free will we have to choose something. To choose not to choose is to accept the social norms of our given situation. To believe that we have escaped our social conditioning and are free thinkers is merely the philosophical delusion of the self-deceived. We are all subject to the ideological objectivism that we choose to follow or not follow. In other words we are all subject to the norms and expectations of our past and present assumptions about how the world works and how we fit in that world. As a self, centered in ego awareness we can not transcend the social conditioning of our society. This is because our social surrounding and interpretations of its "rightness" or wrong headedness is derived exclusively from our surroundings. Every group establishes a set of beliefs and principles to live by. Some people simply accept the norms of their immediate culture others reject that set of beliefs for another set of beliefs. This

could be the beliefs of the humanist, the Christian, the wealthy, the pragmatist, the poet, the democrat, socialist, or republican. We all live within an adopted set of beliefs taken from the world in which we inhabit.

If we choose to be free from one set of beliefs we will simply choose to adopt a second set of beliefs. We are especially ensnared when we have strongly held ideological beliefs about atheism, freedom of will, the larger social norms or religion. We can not be free from our beliefs, social conditioning, ideological leanings, and social expectations. Anytime we live within the ego we are subject to the social influences we are surrounded by. The only true liberation from this social conditioning and false freedom is in the relinquishment of the objective self in a transcendent subjectivity with God. Through this letting go process we are transformed by a supernatural power not limited by the social norms, thoughts, and conditioning of any given culture. Paul describes this supernatural intervention in Romans 8:26-27, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

The contemporary Christian's behavior and world orientation is

often identical with the kind non-Christian. There is a moral and behavioral change which is consistent with the tendencies of the new Christian towards conformity to the acceptable standards of behavior in their Christian circle. Not all Christians interpret the bible in the same way and there is a significant amount of variability between denominations in different parts of the world, cultures and subcultures. The casual observer of the Christian experience often interprets the Christian's behavior as incongruent with their professed beliefs. Although many attend church on Sunday, read their bible regularly, and profess the sinners prayer, they remain essentially unchanged.

Many Christians experience Christianity as an objective truth and a moral roadmap rather than as a living subjective transformation. They remain bound to their ego-ideal of me and mine and have not yet experienced the transcendent experience of spiritual renewal. When a Christian is immersed in the Spirit they become a new creature and all old things pass away. It is only in this transcendent state of subjectivity that the Christian begins to shake the bonds of their cultural and social conditioning and experience an intuitive and supernatural understanding of God. Only the pure in heart will begin to experience this subjective transformation. Christianity needs to necessarily take us beyond the world's understanding of self and into a

new self-transcendence of Christ consciousness. If we continue to maintain our self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, ego identity separate from God, then we will be limited by the social interpretation and conditioning of our historical circumstances. The ego can only conjecture about a spiritual consciousness, it can never really know. God is not only to be objectively studied but subjectively experienced.

Those who function in the social dimension are concerned with meeting instinctual needs yet these needs are tempered by their historical social conditioning. They have checks and balances in their behavioral responses as a result of this social conditioning. They primarily respond to their external environment based on trendy and cultural influences of the identified group. This may include the type of religion they pursue if any, the political affiliation, the jobs they are interested in completing, racial and social prejudices, and personal habits. They are motivated and controlled by social reinforcements and personal experiences. The rewards of social recognition, approval and aversions of social disapproval and non-acceptance determine their present and future behavior. They are heavily conditioned by commercial advertisements, cultural values, popular pastors, social stars and stereotypes. They may attend their church or synagogue on a regular basis; go through the motions of being a "proper" Christian, give to the church, confess their love for God and are never really

changed by this experience. They do not think too deeply about their relationships, and likely do not see any looming problem. They point to the Godless in the world, and see the hedonist as the antithesis of their current state of holiness. The true and hidden motivation, especially from the conscious mind, is social conformism, habit, fear of going to hell, or desire for a reward.

Worship of God in a selfless and pure manner, without selfish interests or considerations, courageously emptying personal wants and desires is essentially absent. At this level we are concerned with pride, self-esteem, personal interest, fitting in to church styles, norms of dress, behavior, and ambitions. The real concerns are related to self-directed and externalized considerations. These could be social considerations as well, which may include church growth, numbers of baptisms, or reputation in the community. There is nothing inherently wrong with these considerations, but to the socially driven they become all important because of personal ambition as well as job security in the church. The motivation for pursuing these issues are social, personal, and self-centered factors rather than a pure love for God.

Christian leaders are often more concerned with the numbers of converts rather than the purity of the members already in the church. We often talk about giving our will over to God but we continue to nurture

our private ambitions and goals. These goals and ambitions are designed to boost our personal wealth, self-esteem, standing in our community, or pride. We often make plans without ever truly considering our motivations for these plans. If these plans are designed to solely boost personal wealth and personal ambitions then we are doing this for self rather than for God. Any time we are completing daily tasks to fulfill personal desires we are boosting our separation from God. This does not mean that our work is not directed by God, it means that our motivations are concerned with self which separates us from God. Even winning souls in the church and boosting church attendance can be motivated by personal ambition, a need for job security, to collect tokens in heaven, to be seen as holy by others. God may have called on us to be a soul winner for Christ but because of our personal ambition the activity actually brings us farther away from the subjective experience of God and deepens our spiritual isolation.

God is not concerned with the amount of souls we win but the sincerity and depth of our commitment. Many seem to think that the Christian needs only to say the sinner's prayer and they will be saved. They go on as always neither cold nor hot, with no noticeable life changing experience and some superficial behavioral changes. Jesus makes this very clear in Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness

exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” This is not about earning our way to heaven but letting go of our ambitions and motivations in order to fulfill the will of the Holy Spirit within. On our own we will wither and fade into one of a multitude of individuals separated from God. When we let go of our desire for personal ambition and separation and let God work through us we begin to intuitively experience the presence and will of God in our lives.

The social experience of doing rather than being is related to our need to find our feelings of worth through our jobs, our good looks, our achievements. We are alienated from the idea of worth through the image and likeness of Christ. We find feelings of self-worth and self-esteem through our pursuit of Christianity, the size of our church, how many souls we converted to God, how biblically astute we are, how kind we are, or how enlightened we are. It is so difficult for us to just be and live in Christ, very simply, directing our will in humble obedience, knowing that our efforts at righteousness are as filthy rags, letting go, waiting on God. When we let go of our own efforts towards righteousness, living simply and quietly, we learn to be in God, in faith in his timing, his love, his wisdom.

Our ego establishes its worth or lack of worth in what it possesses or does not possess rather than its ontological state in God.

If I have riches, a good job, serve as a minister, a doctor, a lawyer, a father, a criminal, bankrupt, a mother or any other object of identification and label then we find worth or lack of worth in that label. Through this label we become removed from being through our identification with our role in life, or our ability or inability to carry out these functions. If we are performing our role as intended by the social norms of our culture then we have value and worth through that role, when our fortunes change our worth changes. We become significantly alienated from our real authentic self-worth which is related to being in Christ. We have inherent worth in Christ, not because of our social role or beliefs, but because we are loved and love others in God's realization of himself through our faith. In the Christian faith God requires the type of faith Paul aspires to in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When we establish an authentic and transcendent relationship with Christ our views related to the worth of others change. The worth of others is found in being itself. We no longer define ourselves in terms of what we have or what we do, but experience being in God as the only true state of authentic existence. In this awareness of being

in God we are no longer acted upon by social forces that define and manipulate our actions, but are able to be in the social environment in love. This is not the heady humanist "love" that is concerned with pragmatic responsibility to the community for the greater good, but a love for the authentic human being, in essence a love of God in the ground of their being. This is related to Gabriel Marcel's existential social philosophy which states that, "The important experience in life is to have the individual become conscious of himself as being in action, not as being acted upon. To know others existentially is to become aware of them, not as things, but as people." In our will to God the self freely accepts God's infinite and merciful love which results in union with the divine. Through this relationship God extends his love through the being of the Christian to his daily social encounters as a living witness. The Christian is not acted upon by the moving agenda of the social environment but acts upon this environment with true independence, spontaneity, and freedom of expression.

The humanist and secular scientist see this type of union with God as the highest form of self-deception. The isolated ego simply cannot see past the boundaries of its mental prison. The isolated ego weaves a reality of its own creation and lives within this materialistic bubble. When the Christian achieves union with God the self becomes absorbed in the power and beauty of God. The false boundaries of self

begin to crumble in the consciousness of God as though an island of darkness is being consumed in a sea of light. The question of being acted upon or experiencing ourselves as being in action becomes meaningless. We are no longer subject to the false dualities of acting towards or being acted upon. We are no longer a being in action but a being in God. It is through that being in God that all true creativity and love spring. Thomas Merton describes this non-duality by explaining that, "This inmost self is beyond the kind of experience which says "I want," "I love," "I know," "I feel." It has its own way of knowing, loving and experiencing which is a divine way and not a human one, a way of identity, of union, of "espousal," in which there is no longer a separate psychological individuality drawing all good and all truth toward itself, and thus loving and knowing for itself. Lover and beloved are "one Spirit."

Chapter 4

Cognitive Dimensions

The cognitive self is concerned with intellectual discernment. Through our ability to reason we make determinations about the rightness or wrongness of our experiences. It is because of this ability to reason that our behavior is not determined exclusively by our social conditioning. Although we may be rewarded for certain beliefs and behaviors, our ability to determine if they are right for us influences our social conditioning. We may have been rewarded by our parents for being a Christian or an atheist while growing up and shamed for following alternative beliefs. Our ability to reason filters this social conditioning and determines if this conditioning needs to be modified. There are many people who only superficially modify their social conditioning and beliefs and remain essentially unchanged throughout their lives. There are others who are reactive and believe that most of what they were taught was wrong. They may do this as a way of rejecting the parents or authority in general, which leads them down blind alleys of mindless opposition. There are still others who take a measured look at their beliefs and attempt to honestly discern what they believe and how these beliefs affect their lives.

Those who are ruled by cognition alone are scientific and

practical minded. They do not believe in God, or a higher power other than what is found through cognitive processes. The secular humanist will often talk about self-actualization and peak experiences but they continue to refer to an emotional and cognitive induced state triggered by the individual's ability to creatively free the ego from their general social conditioning. The self-actualizing condition is related to how well they are being themselves and for themselves. In other words how well they have achieved their full potential. Potential according to humanist thought is determined by how true the individual is to their own individuality, creativity, and personal will to meaning. This is a way of becoming a super ego, self-confident, with high self-esteem, which often results in contempt for the "myth" of Christianity. One of the leading advocates of the humanist position was Corliss Lamont who outlined ten central propositions of the humanist philosophy.

These are:

1. Humanism believes in a naturalistic metaphysics or attitude toward the universe that considers all forms of the supernatural as myth.
2. Humanism, drawing especially upon the laws and facts of science, believes that we human beings are an evolutionary product of the Nature of which we are a part; that the mind is indivisibly conjoined with the functioning of the

brain; and that as an inseparable unity of body and personality we can have no conscious survival after death.

3. Humanism, having its ultimate faith in humankind, believes that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems, through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision.

4. Humanism, in opposition to all theories of universal determinism, fatalism, or predestination, believes that human beings, while conditioned by the past, possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are, within certain objective limits, the shapers of their own destiny.

5. Humanism believes in an ethics or morality that grounds all human values in this-earthly experiences and relationships and that holds as its highest goal the this-worldly happiness, freedom, and progress—economic, cultural, and ethical—of all humankind, irrespective of nation, race, or religion.

6. Humanism believes that the individual attains the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self-development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare of the community.

7. Humanism believes in the widest possible development of art and the awareness of beauty, including the appreciation of Nature's loveliness and splendor, so that the aesthetic experience may become a pervasive reality in the lives of all people.

8. Humanism believes in a far-reaching social program that stands for the establishment throughout the world of democracy, peace, and a high standard of living on the foundations of a flourishing economic order, both national and international.

9. Humanism believes in the complete social implementation of reason and scientific method; and thereby in democratic procedures, and parliamentary government, with full freedom of expression and civil liberties, throughout all areas of economic, political, and cultural life.

10. Humanism, in accordance with scientific method, believes in the unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions, including its own.

Corliss also explains that, "It is true that no people has yet come near to establishing the ideal society. Yet Humanism asserts that human reason and human efforts are our best and, indeed, only hope; and that our refusal to recognize this point is one of the chief causes of our many human failures throughout history."

These ten assumptions of humanism succinctly and quite correctly sum up the humanist position. Many of these may be recognized as beliefs held by Christians in your church or community. How many of us would agree with the statement that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems, through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision. Christians routinely adopt these self-reliant humanist messages without really understanding the contradictions they hold to the principles of faith in God. When we continue to have faith exclusively in reason, our abilities, individual efforts, pride in accomplishing our goals, we are in fact maintaining a belief in our ability to accomplish a task on our own outside of God.

The humanist and secular cognitive behaviorist would think it absurd to be humble before God, to give God the credit for inspiring us to act, for giving us strength and life. The secular humanist will always look in pride at their individual efforts and refuse to offer praise to a god they see as a ridiculous myth. In Proverbs 3: 5-6 we read, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him; and He will make your paths straight. And in Philippians 2:5-8, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something

to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”

In a humanist belief system reason and the scientific method are the only reliable ways of establishing “Truth.” In this system there can be no truth outside of reason and that which can be understood as objective and scientifically sound. Epicurus sums up the historical contempt towards the idea of a God when he records, “God either wants to eliminate bad things and cannot, or can but does not want to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wants to and can. If he wants to and cannot, he is weak -- and this does not apply to god. If he can but does not want to, then he is spiteful -- which is equally foreign to god's nature. If he neither wants to nor can, he is both weak and spiteful and so not a god. If he wants to and can, which is the only thing fitting for a god, where then do bad things come from? Or why does he not eliminate them?”

If we look at each of Lamont’s principles more carefully we can see the threads of humanism running throughout our culture today. When Lamont refers to the naturalistic metaphysics he is referring to the naturalist philosophy which is concerned with human beings relation to the natural world and creation. The most prominent

naturalist was Charles Darwin who proposed the theory of evolution. Darwin and the naturalist propose that human beings, the earth, and the unending universe of space and time are all parts of one great nature. The whole of existence is equivalent to nature and outside of nature nothing exists. The naturalist belief does not hold out any possibility for a God outside of nature or the material world. They do not believe in placing the mind and soul outside of or above the natural world.

The scientific method says Yes, to self, to all that we can touch, feel, and think as it relates to the material world. They deny the existence of a soul or any experience through which they can not grasp in a material and scientific manner. Materialism is a school of thought that is based on the scientific method. In the materialist school of thought only the material world can truly be known to exist. All other intuitive speculations such as an all knowing God outside and independent of mind are unrealistic. Materialist philosophy lies at the basis of the theory of evolution. Materialism rests on the supposition that everything that exists is matter. According to this philosophy, matter has existed since eternity, will continue to exist forever, and there is nothing but matter. The materialists add support to their theoretical beliefs through the use of reductionism. This is the idea that things which are not observable can also be explained by material

causes. For example, the act of faith, thought, love, joy, are not observable but can be explained in materialistic ways. The materialists believe that these experiences are a result of chemicals in the brain that secrete thought much like the thyroid secretes hormones. They believe that all human activities can be reduced to material causes. Materialism relies first and foremost on the scientific method, believes in the ultimate atomic structure of things, and finds in nature an order and a process that can be expressed in scientific laws of cause and effect.

Humanistic psychology is popular today in modern literature and woven in the fabric of secular culture. In the psychology of humanism the individual is encouraged to find their true purpose and meaning in creative self-affirmation. The existentialist Rollo May said we have to create our own values, each of us individually. Not forced on us, but "offered up" for us to use as we will. Humanism is about creating your own interpretation of reality through the use of creative self-expression, personal experience, values, self-image and self-esteem, and personal courage to create something new and authentic within our life. The transcendent Christian does however break from the crowd and create something authentic through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not the authenticity of the separated humanist, but the authenticity of the courageous Christian with the power to be empty of self and filled with

the power of God. Much of humanistic psychology is concerned with the issues related to self-image and self-esteem. There is endless psychological and self-help literature designed to boost self-esteem. On the surface we may look at this literature and think how nice it is to find people helping us with our self-esteem. However, self-esteem is founded within the humanist ideas of self-expression, pride, self-confidence, and independence. Again, the average person may look at this and wonder how this could be harmful to pursue. To create self-esteem is to create separation from God. It is concerned with developing trust in our own ability to accomplish a task rather than trust and confidence in God fulfilling this task through us. It is about personal pride, self-image, and creative courage in self, personal strength, independence, love of self in its separation from God.

Nathaniel Branden has written extensively on the development of self-esteem. Branden writes that, "Apart from problems that are biological in origin, I cannot think of a single psychological difficulty—from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, to alcohol or drug abuse, to underachievement at school or at work, to spouse battering or child molestation, to sexual dysfunctions, or emotional immaturity, to suicide or crimes of violence—that is not traceable to poor self-esteem. Of all the judgments we pass, none is more important as the one we pass on ourselves. Positive self-esteem

is a cardinal requirement of a fulfilling life.” Self-esteem according to Brandon is a cardinal requirement which brings it in the realm of theology. For many psychologists self-esteem is considered the most important determinant of psychological and emotional health. I would agree with self-esteem advocates as far as children are concerned. The development of a healthy and strong self-esteem in children is dramatically important to the child from a developmental perspective. As we grow older however, spiritual maturity requires us to put aside childish dependencies on self-esteem and move into an adult understanding of our spiritual center. According to Branden, “The tragedy is that so many people look for self-confidence and self-respect everywhere except within themselves, and so they fail in their search. We shall see that positive self-esteem is best understood as a kind of spiritual attainment—that is, as a victory in the evolution of consciousness.” When Branden refers to the place within our selves he is referring to a cognitive state of self-confidence and positive self-acceptance. The Humanist and self-esteem advocates do not differentiate between the infantile and mindless dependency on religious ideology, and the spiritually mature Christian who experiences faith as union with Christ. They generally place all pursuit of Christian ideals as a rush away from self, into a world of guilt, self-deception, alienation, fear, and inauthentic expressions of self. In

some cases they may well be correct. Most people are initially attracted to Christianity and religion because of reasons that are personal in nature. We always need a starting point when pursuing any endeavor. As the Christian matures spiritually God develops within those who will hear a deeper relationship with him.

The secular humanist cannot see past the surface and view all Christians who seek out Christianity as escaping from the “courage to be.” In some cases they are right as many Christians seek out Christianity as an escape. They are often the humanist Christians, who live out the values of the humanist beliefs within the traditional belief in God, almost as a way of covering all bases. There may also be those who have arrived at the Christian religion through habit, cultural expectation, or belief. This belief however is deeply tainted with self-will, pride, spiritual laziness, distance from God, and ego-identification. These Christians often travel through life going through the motions of Christianity but never or only rarely connect with God in a profoundly spiritual manner. The self-esteem advocates and secular humanist see this individual as being enslaved in an ideology that tends to trap them in guilt, lowers their self-esteem and independence, makes them vulnerable to manipulation by unscrupulous “religious” ideologues, and keeps them from being in freedom. In this inauthentic state of religion we are held in this belief

system by feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety and social expectations.

There is "faith" but is a cognitive faith, concerned with belief in the words without experiencing their meaning.

God has told us that the Lamb's book of life is written in our hearts. The faith of the spiritually mature Christian is not a faith of words or cognition, but an experiential faith that is found through grace and purity of heart. It was to the apostle Paul that the revelation was given that the Book of Life, the Book of the Lamb, the Book of the Son of God is a people. "Forasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. Who also has made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (II Corinthians, 3:3, 6.) This type of transcendent relationship with God through Christ makes the distinctions between cognitive efforts concerning creative self-expression and self-esteem nonsensical. The Christian is not attempting to escape the expression of self through self-esteem and independence but is moving towards the ground of being itself. The transcendent Christian is finding esteem for God, and in that transcendent esteem for God, the self emerges in a truly creative expression of God's love.

The humanist and self-esteem advocates have several key principles which are designed to help the person discover self-esteem. Branden explains that, "self-esteem has two components: a feeling of personal competence and a feeling of personal worth. In other words, self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It reflects your implicit judgment of your ability to cope with the challenges of your life (to understand and master your problems) and of your right to be happy (to respect and stand up for your interests and needs.)"

In Christianity the spiritually mature Christian is not concerned with feeling self-confident or improving feelings of personal worth. We must ask ourselves how feelings of self-confidence are developed. As was stated earlier self-confidence is an important aspect of the growing child's personal development. Self-confidence occurs through experiences of success in our daily lives. As we exercise our independent judgment and learn from our successes and failures, we develop an estimation of our personal abilities. If we are encouraged and supported by our families to make independent decisions, praised when we are successful and loved unconditionally when we are not as successful, we learn to have self-confidence. Through this self-confidence and self-knowledge we develop the strength and courage to pursue our personal self-interests.

According to William James self-esteem is different when aligned

with the different components of the material self. James explains that, "One may say, however, that the normal *provocative* of self-feeling is one's actual success or failure, and the good or bad actual position one holds in the world. "He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum, and said what a good boy am I." A man with a broadly extended empirical Ego, with powers that have uniformly brought him success, with place and wealth and friends and fame, is not likely to be visited by the morbid diffidence's and doubts about himself which he had when he was a boy. "Is not this great Babylon, which I have planted?" Whereas he who has made one blunder after another, and still lies in middle life among the failures at the foot of the hill, is liable to grow all sicklied o'er with self-distrust, and to shrink from trials with which his powers can really cope." Self-esteem is related to how closely our personal and social definitions of success align with the reality of our everyday experience.

Contrary to what many secular humanist and self-esteem advocates would have us believe, self-confidence can result in works which are socially and morally considerate, or works which result in hurt and cruelty towards others. There are many self-confident criminals, narcissists, and sociopaths. This begs the question of self-esteem in these personalities. The self-esteem advocates would insist that anyone with this flawed personality has no self-esteem, which is

why they act out on their criminal and socially deviant enterprises. However, many socially deviant criminals have feelings of personal confidence and feelings of personal worth. Self-esteem advocates assume that criminals and socially deviant people can not have self-esteem by virtue of their criminal behavior. We can see this is not true when we interview criminals that seem to have no real remorse for their deviant behavior and brag about their skills as a criminal. In their social group they are highly esteemed as a smart and competent career criminal and to be respected and admired.

We may also see self-esteem in people who have risen to the top of a terrorist organization or an organized crime syndicate. They are admired by their peers and often by many in the community. The psychologist may deny that they have "true" self-esteem but nevertheless they often feel quite satisfied with their role in the enterprise. Our values determine how we perceive the personal worth of another human being or culture. If we do not approve of the behavior of another individual or group we may very well project onto that group our belief about their worth to society and as a result make a projection based on our values as to their self-esteem. Psychologists have a difficult if not impossible time keeping self-loaded theoretical world-views out of the counseling session. Through these examples we can conclude that self-esteem is not a moral issue and is more

complicated then what can be determined by our social and humanistic sensitivities.

Many of the humanistic and self-esteem advocates assume that the higher the self-esteem the higher the individual in being socially conscious, loving and sensitive to others needs, more creatively expressive in their everyday lives. Branden explains that authentic self-esteem is found within the individual, not dependent on what others think, on our jobs, or family relations; self-esteem is a core belief concerning our personal worth. William James however explains that, "In fact we ourselves know how the barometer of our self-esteem and confidence rises and falls from one day to another through causes that seem to be visceral and organic rather than rational, and which certainly answer to no corresponding variations in the esteem in which we are held by our friends." The definition by Branden which states that self-esteem is unrelated to what we do is unconvincing. In fact it seems to contradict his previous argument which states that "self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It reflects your implicit judgment of your ability to cope with the challenges of your life." Where does our judgment of our abilities come from? They in fact arrive from our experiences we encounter within our daily interaction with others. As James states, if we discover that our choices have resulted in positive outcomes then our feelings of self-

esteem are boosted. If we discover that our choices have resulted in disaster our self-esteem suffers. This is of course tied to our beliefs about the relative importance of these incidents.

The secular humanist understanding of self-esteem is limited to their philosophical speculation about self-esteem and personal determinants related to how self-esteem develops in the individual. According to William James self-esteem develops within each individual as a result of personal choices about perceived strengths and weaknesses and the relative importance they place on each of these assessments. James explains that, "With most objects of desire, physical nature restricts our choice to but one of many represented goods, and even so it is here. I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the *bon-vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike

possible to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs, carrying shame and gladness with them. This is as strong an example as there is of that selective industry of the mind on which I insisted some pages back; our thought, incessantly deciding, among many things of a kind, which ones for it shall be realities, here chooses one of many possible selves or characters, and forthwith reckons it no shame to fail in any of those not adopted expressly as its own." This explanation by James is important in understanding how the self-esteem really works in the practicality of our daily lives. Our self-esteem is tied to a number of factors which we have loaded with relative importance. According to James self-esteem is not a global construct but is compartmentalized within each component of the personality. We can have self-esteem which is tied to our material self, our family, our love interests, our physical appearance, our financial resources, physical health. Each of these areas can erode self-esteem and self-confidence based on the relative importance we place on each of these aspects of our identity.

Another component of self-esteem is concerned with our social self. This is concerned with how we are viewed by our friends, co-workers, community, and those we admire or consider to be of importance to us. We can have partial self-esteem when the material component of our self-esteem is working well, and the social aspect of this self-esteem is in crisis. James also explains that we have a spiritual component of our personality which is concerned with our intellectual, moral and religious aspirations. Many academic philosophers place great importance on their intellectual and moral aspirations. Their feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem are tied in with their self-perception of being capable intellectually. They also hold the idealist view of a moral and social responsibility towards the community. Many humanists have redefined religious aspirations to mean spiritual aspirations. They may have the historically religious social component of brotherly love, social ethics, and social responsibility but view these as a higher human quality based on human potential and secular spirituality.

There are many people who have established in part their self-esteem on the pursuit of these higher social components. They hold the belief that higher pursuits such as creativity, art, philosophy, intellectual pursuits, social development, will lead to greater feelings of happiness and self-actualization. They have placed a moral judgment

on the relative value of these pursuits as opposed to the less valuable pursuits of physical labor and routine family relations. It is because of our beliefs about the relative importance of each of the components of our "I" that we are shaped and ordered in our self-esteem. Someone that is dominated by their materialistic dimension will see a serious deterioration in their self-esteem when they begin to age, have an accident, or find that they no longer receive the type of response from others concerning their physical appearance that they require in order to maintain their current level of self-esteem. This would be true for social components and "spiritual" components as well.

Branden is however attempting to establish a self-esteem that is independent of materialistic, social, and spiritual considerations and establish self-esteem rooted in belief or cognition. According to Branden self-esteem is independent of these social, materialistic, and spiritual considerations and is developed and maintained on a belief about who we are independent of what we have, or do, or experience. This is basically a state of being in self-esteem. However, the self-esteem is a component of the "I" which is one aspect of our being in the world. The self-esteem is developed out of our experiences within the world and cannot be removed from that which composes its essence. We can not simply will ourselves to self-esteem through a supreme act of cognition. We can hold the belief that we love

ourselves independent of our social circumstances, choices, and beliefs, but we are in fact simply deluding ourselves. We can not separate self-esteem from the ego-self which is the intellect turned back upon itself.

The ego is created through our personal experiences and cannot be separated from them. Anytime we are esteeming our self we are esteeming our ego or "I" which makes up our self. This self is always changing and subject to change as the individual components that it is made of change over time. According to Branden, "Self acceptance, in the ultimate sense, refers to an attitude of self-value and self-commitment that derives fundamentally from the fact that I am alive and conscious, that I exist. It is an experience deeper than self-esteem. It is a pre-rational, pre-moral act of self-affirmation, a kind of primitive egoism that is the birthright of every conscious organism, and yet that human beings have the power to act against and nullify." However, the ego is subject to the elements of space and time, of social and instinctual forces, and of subconscious influences. Sigmund Freud explains that, "There is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. That such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inwards, without any sharp delimitation,

into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as the id and for which it serves as a kind of façade.” The illusion of our ability to exercise our power of belief in self-esteem independent of experience can only last until our intellectual powers of denial are no longer able to maintain the energy it takes to continue in this effort. As long as our ability of cognition remains relatively intact we may be able to believe that our self-esteem is independent of experience but as we age, experience loss, contradictions in our belief, and incongruence we see this weaken. This belief that we “should” have self-esteem as a core part of our being can have unintended negative consequences as this belief breaks down under the reality of a changing ego. Any rigid core belief of this nature can produce feelings of anxiety, guilt and disappointment, which results in lowered self-esteem as these efforts prove to be unsustainable.

Those who have a chronically low self-esteem are experiencing a disconnection between what constitutes success and what they are actually experiencing. If we grew up in an environment with critical and rejecting parents we may begin to believe that we are fundamentally flawed. We see examples in every face, every failed effort, and every partial success. The person has a core belief that they are seriously flawed, without true value, unable to achieve anything of lasting value, and perhaps even evil. These beliefs make

up the sum total of their identity. They may have components of their personality that they are able to hinge some positive feelings of self-esteem. For example, a female may believe that she is attractive, or smart, or sexy. She may repeatedly seek out experiences that reinforce these feelings of self-esteem. When she is reinforced her core beliefs concerning her lack of worth is eased, when she is rejected she may become depressed, hurt, or angry.

Because of a core belief concerning her inadequacy and worth she is in a constant state of anxiety. She may avoid circumstances that involve rejection and seek out safe circumstances with very little risk to her fragile self-esteem. Often these individuals will seek out friends and relationships that help stabilize her self-esteem and are quick to abandon any relationship that does not meet this requirement. If our core beliefs concerning self-worth change, we will begin to take risks in spite of our anxiety. A person can also change by taking risks in spite of their anxiety which helps contradict their core belief as being incapable of acting. In this contradiction the person is able to challenge their assumption that they are incapable of achieving their goals. From these successes at meeting goals the self-esteem is changed and our core belief concerning personal worth is altered.

Behavioral interventions of personality change the person's behavior by correcting self-defeating behavioral responses. Cognitive behaviorists change thinking and beliefs which results in corrected behavior. According to the cognitive behavioral theorist changing irrational beliefs about personal worth will improve self-esteem, lower anxiety, and increase self-confidence. Cognitive behaviorists primarily practice psychology without consideration of the historical or subconscious etiology of existing pathology and focus their efforts on current rational-emotive processes. For example, how an individual's low self-esteem developed is irrelevant to a successful outcome in cognitive behavioral therapy. What matters are resulting beliefs associated with these experiences. If a person's self-esteem is damaged because of personal beliefs concerning self-worth then the emphasis will be on changing this belief to improve self-esteem. A person may believe they are worthless, ugly, or useless, which has the effect of paralyzing self-confidence and creating an emotional response such as depression and anxiety. The cognitive behaviorist will help them change this belief to a more realistic and functional self-assessment. Albert Ellis is one of the leading advocates of the cognitive behavior method of mental health and change.

According to Albert Ellis and the cognitive-behaviorist, Activating Events (A) or external experiences do not directly cause Emotional

Consequences (C). Emotional consequences such as anger, depression, and anxiety are largely resulting from our Belief System (B). Because consequences are related to belief the individual can Dispute (D) these irrational Beliefs (iBs) and change them. The ideas related to self-esteem are not considered in the same way that Branden discusses them. Ellis believes that the origins of low self-esteem are irrelevant to helping the person change the related thoughts and emotions. Low self-esteem according to Ellis involves our beliefs associated with this esteem. If we believe that we "should" or "must" be the best student in the classroom at all times then our anxiety is raised, and we find feelings of depression or anger when these internal demands are not realized. Since we did not fulfill our expectations we experience feelings of self-loathing, shame, and a sense of failure. Ellis would ask the person in this example to change their demands to a preference. For example, they may change this "must" to a preference to be the best student in school. If they by some chance find that they are second best or lower, then the emotional impact and feelings of self-loathing will be lowered. This approach does help the ego significantly improve its ability to maintain emotional stability and is the best secular approach in psychology today.

Ellis and the secular behavioral counselors do not believe in God,

or in developing religious aspirations, and see religion as the root of many neurotic episodes. In the cognitive-behavior approach we see many humanist beliefs related to independent decision making, breaking from dogma, from shoulds, oughts, religiosity, mysticism, and positive thinking. Ellis advocates the scientific method towards problem solving and staying within the boundaries of cognition. To Ellis and the secular cognitive-behaviorist there is no savior out there in this nebulous transcendent reality, but maintains that the savior is found in self, the scientific method, and cognition. According to Ellis RET (Rational Emotive Therapy) "shows you how to be an honest hedonist and individualist—to be true to thine own self first, but at the same time live happily, successfully, and related in a social group."

The philosophy of Ellis, the behaviorist, and others adds support to the belief that we are the sum total of our experiences. This "I" would include related thoughts, emotions, and biological processes. According to William James the self is in a constant state of change because of the changing nature of our everyday experiences. James explains, "For there it is obvious and palpable that our state of mind is never precisely the same. Every thought we have of a given fact is, strictly speaking, unique, and only bears a resemblance of kind with our other thoughts of the same fact. When the identical fact recurs, we *must* think of it in a fresh manner, see it under a somewhat different

angle, and apprehend it in different relations from those in which it last appeared. And the thought by which we cognize it is the thought of it-in-those-relations, a thought suffused with the consciousness of that entire dim context. Often we are ourselves struck at the strange differences in our successive views of the same thing. We wonder how we ever could have opined as we did last month about a certain matter. We have outgrown the possibility of that state of mind, we know not how. From one year to another we see things in new lights. What was unreal has grown real, and what was exciting is insipid. The friends we used to care the world for are shrunken to shadows; the women, once so divine, the stars, the woods, and the waters, how now so dull and common; the young girls that brought an aura, of infinity, at present hardly distinguishable existences; the pictures so empty; and as for the books, what was there to find so mysteriously significant in Goethe, or in John Mill so full of weight? Instead of all this, more zestful than ever is the work, the work; and fuller and deeper the import of common duties and of common goods. But what here strikes us so forcibly on the flagrant scale exists on every scale, down to the imperceptible transition from one hour's outlook to that of the next. Experience is remolding us every moment, and our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date."

With each new experience we are changing, our world view changes, the "I" we see as solid and real is in a constant flux based on our daily interaction with our social environment. However, the various elements of consciousness remain stable in spite of the changing external and internal experiences. These elements are relatively stable and change without noticeable interruption which gives us a stable sense of identity. James explains that "On waking from sleep, we usually know that we have been unconscious, and we often have an accurate judgment of how long. The judgment here is certainly an inference from sensible signs, and its ease is due to long practice in the particular field. The result of it, however, is that the consciousness is, *for itself*, not what it was in the former case, but interrupted and continuous, in the mere time-sense of the words. But in the other sense of continuity, the sense of the parts being inwardly connected and belonging together because they are parts of a common whole, the consciousness remains sensibly continuous and one. What now is the common whole? The natural name for it is *myself, I, or me.*"

Our internal dialogue reinforces and assigns values to our various experiences. We are constantly maintaining our sense of "I" through the ability of consciousness to turn back and look upon itself, or "I" evaluating "I." Our feelings occur in relative intensity based on

assigned values of each thought. These values are the personal assigned level of importance we give a thought which results in an emotional response. We assign a relative importance of a thought based on our personal experiences. If we grew up in a house that valued a certain religion, and was taught that the religion could not be questioned, than to the extent that we internalized this value, would determine an appropriate response. In the same house we would also be taught appropriate responses which would include an appropriate emotional or physical reaction. As we obtain other associated or related experiences our reactions to these experiences are modified. The sum total of all of these learned values determine our individual identities and learned responses. This is why cognitive-behavioral therapy works so well in altering moods and behavior. By targeting the value we place on certain thoughts and events through our cognitive processes we change the emotional output of these thoughts. In essence we change our "I" to a similar but different person.

Concepts such as high or low self-esteem have no real meaning in terms of our real self other than increasing the ability of "I" to feel better about living within an artificial construct. The ego is real yet constructed by our experiences and the values we have placed on these experiences. As Descartes explains, "I think therefore I am." The "I am" is the existence of self as constructed from the stuff of

experience. For the materialist and the secular humanist we can only rely on that which we can know. From this point of view, all that exist is what we know, therefore the conscious "I" is the true and only "I."

Thoughts and their loaded values are fueling the self to react in specific ways to daily events encountered in the world. We in essence uphold and shape our reality by the recurrent thoughts that make up our internal dialogue. This internal dialogue never seems to slow down in most people and often occurs on an almost unconscious level. We communicate our beliefs, prejudices, values and ideas through our self-talk. This internal dialogue stimulates moods and emotions such as happiness, depression, anxiety, and anger. If we are critical and judgmental towards an ethnic group, a socioeconomic subculture, the poor, the rich, everyone with blond hair etc... we will find ourselves developing a predictable reaction associated with each triggering stimulus. Because of our prejudices, beliefs and related thoughts we become increasingly narrowed in our ability to be "free." The more rigid this ego has become, the more incapable it becomes of making independent decisions.

This tendency in us to narrow our available options in an unconscious manner can be seen in the mind control of a religious or political cult, or any totalitarian or dictatorial organization. When a convert is brought into a cult the first thing the organization wants to

do is disrupt all of the previous social ties and related emotional and intellectual ties to the past. The social dimension they once knew is altered to include only the "approved" social relations and beliefs of the cult organization. They may hear directly or indirectly the important truth that "Thinking will get you nowhere." Any thought that is not approved by the group is prohibited and arrives directly from the enemies of the organization. The group teaches the individual to construct an internal "thought police," which replaces all unapproved thoughts with only those thoughts sanctioned by the group. This enemy could be Satan, Demons, or any other designated enemy of the approved state. This manipulation can be found in religious organizations, totalitarian and established governments, subcultures, ethnic groups, and spiritualist. These dogmatic and strict demands are in part what Albert Ellis warns against when he talks about the "Tyranny of the Shoulds, or musturbation." The person has forfeited their freedom of independent thought for the rights of the group. They have come to believe that the group's right to exist supersedes the rights of their individuality. This tendency to renounce their personal freedom often occurs because the cult member finds that the anxiety associated with their individual freedom is intolerable. They may also believe consciously or unconsciously that the group will offer them the freedom from choice and anxiety they desire.

The problem with Albert Ellis and many secular humanists is that they emphatically believe that strong religious beliefs and their related values are one of the primary sources of current neurotic tendencies in their clients. Our beliefs as counselors, helpers, and friends influence the way we interpret and process the information others tell us. If as a counselor we see a client that has strong religious beliefs and we hold an opinion that religion is an escape from authenticity then our intervention will reflect this belief. Those who have no reality other than the reality of the created ego are only able to live and react within the boundaries of their thoughts and associated values. It is true however, that many of us never think very intensely about our beliefs, and have simply adopted the values and inherited beliefs derived from the sum total of our experiences. It is difficult to monitor our internal dialogue and make evaluative assumptions about the quality and truth of our thoughts.

It is because of our tendency to escape from anxiety into dogmatism and "truth" that keeps so many from seeing beyond the limited ego. This truth can be a truth that is limited to only our church, our way, our interpretation, and excludes the possibility that other Christian interpretations, rites or rituals can possess truth as well. It may also be the "truth" of the atheist or humanist that does not believe in any reality outside of the encapsulated ego. The more

rigidly we hold onto our "truths" the more likely we are to act in predictable ways. There are some predictable patterns of behavior that are functional for the individual and serve the greater good; not all patterned and strongly held opinions are suspect. In the Christian belief there are accepted values and beliefs that are accepted by the Christian religion and adopted by many humanistic philosophers. These are taboos against murder, incest, stealing, battery, rape, and disrespect for human rights.

Many people today like to think that there is no "truth" except for the relative truths related to the greater good, and even this is often subject to the individual's interpretation of truth. The humanistic interpretation of relative truth is based on the individual experiences of the person. The Christian however, does believe that truth exists and it rests within the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. There is an endless array of interpretations and expressions of Christianity, and many Christians believe that their interpretations are the only interpretations that could possibly be correct. Christians differ on what the bible has to say about issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and women in the ministry. However, Christianity is in truth a subjective existential experience that draws the Christian beyond the symbols into a subjective rebirth of the spiritual life within. If our belief in Christ is tangled in Christian debates, in symbols, in the intellect and

interpretations then we will remain at the surface, and never move into the spiritual dimensions of Christianity. Christ is found in the ground of being, towards an awareness of his presence, transcending the separated self and lifting the Christian through the Christ nature in union with God.

Chapter 5

The Will

When we discuss the function of the will we have to understand how the will is defined and understood. When the will is discussed in psychology or philosophy it is generally defined differently than motivation. Motivation is defined as the biological, emotional, cognitive, or social forces that activate and direct behavior. We are generally motivated by events external to ourselves. This might be by external, social and/or cultural reinforcements, internal biological or emotional drives, psychic energy seeking equilibrium, or by cognitive factors designed to achieve an established goal. The will is the power of the mind which we exercise to try to cause something to occur by our thoughts. We often use will in terms of individual will-power, and in the will of God, as God's will be done. Motivation and will is often used interchangeably in our culture confusing will-power, with motivation, and the will of God.

There are numerous self-help books and manuals which attempt to motivate readers towards specified goals. The individual then applies their will towards achieving these goals. These goals vary widely but are often designed to create greater wealth, security, and personal feelings of happiness. The motivational speakers and positive thinking advocates

attempt to apply techniques of creative visualization and positive reinforcement towards the use of will to achieve these personal goals. There is such a vacuum of meaning and purpose in many of our lives that we are experiencing a crisis of will. There are few external forces that stimulate our will to meaning. The will to work everyday in a repetitive automated job creates in us a desire for a paycheck and nothing more. So many people feel like they are little more than a circuit in a great incomprehensible computer. They do not find meaning in their work and are only motivated by the financial compensation. Many of us also fail to find meaning or purpose in our private lives such as our marriages, families, neighbors, or society. We have become absorbed in stressful jobs, computers, laptops, big screen televisions, cell phones, church, gambling, pornography, sex, and new age spiritualism which are designed to fill the void in our lives with meaning and purpose. As a result of this alienation and sadness we move from self-help fad to self-help fad in an effort to understand our reason for being.

If we exercise our will at all it is used in a way of escaping from something rather than moving towards meaning. For example, attending our church can be a fulfilling experience if we understand this as a place of worship rather than an escape from our lonely and alienated lives. If we attend our church out of habit, obligation, conformism, social recognition, a place to meet people, to be seen, self-glorification, self-promotion, pursuing self-interest, as an ego-boost, then we are not going to find the deeper and spiritual meaning of the church. Our church will be another place of self-promotion and alienation which brings us away rather than towards God.

The Church of God exists exclusively as a means of serving and glorifying God and sharing that worship of God with like-minded Christians. The true church is found within a living relationship with Christ. We read in 2 Corinthians 6:16, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

There are increasing numbers of people who do not attend any church and believe that they do better with their own interpretations and experiences concerning faith. Many of these have in essence abandoned worship of God altogether except when they find themselves in an emotional and/or physical crisis. Many of us, including the churched, are motivated simply by fads, recognition, power, wealth, entertainment, and external stimulation. If God is considered at all it concerns belief and faith solely in the written word, rather than a profound experiential and meaningful subjective transformation. Often Christians of faith believe they can live a superficial Christian life, which may appear in many ways the same life as the average non-Christian in the world. To be sure, this pseudo Christian may have an occasional glimmer of God's love or presence, but this experience is often fleeting and seen as an anomaly rather than a consistent holy interaction. Our ego does not want to relinquish the throne of the supreme being of self. As long as we live in the ego, pursue a secular lifestyle and a lukewarm Christian life we will remain trapped in the illusion of control and independence. In the absence of God's spiritual union we are influenced

by and organized by the forces of the secular world around us. We must be in the world but not of the world. There is no way that our will is pure enough, powerful enough, or wise enough to become holy and united in Christ. Our will is limited and can only carry us to the light (Christ) that brings the power of the Holy Spirit into our being. The Christian can not exercise their Victorian Era will-power in hopes to find their way to God. Many people today attempt to force purity on themselves and those around them by an act of Herculean willpower. And, naturally they fail to achieve holiness by the letter of the law and only serve to alienate those they love. There is a great amount of pride in the drive to please God. It is like trying to build a Tower of Babel to God. We keep building and it keeps crumbling and we build again and it crumbles again, and we wonder why God is so unkind to us. Doesn't he know that we are trying to live his life by our will-power? In our zeal to live perfectly by the letter of the law we become increasingly resentful of those around us who sin openly, have a joyous time in the church, and do not take their Christian life as seriously as we think they should. So we discuss their problems quite discreetly with others who may offer us a sympathetic ear. We are so angry with God and with ourselves because we can not achieve holiness by an act of will, yet we continue on trying to be perfect, trying to earn God's admiration and respect.

Paul addresses this problem in Galatians when he noticed a return to a strict observance of the law in the church. In Galatians 2:17-21 Paul writes, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes

sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! And Paul also writes in Galatians 3:1-5 "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" Clearly Paul is saying that human effort and strict observance of the law will not bring us into righteousness, but only through the grace of God in faith will we find salvation.

This creates a serious problem with our ego's need to climb the pinnacle of success and be the best holy person we know. Christians often admire and respect those they see as powerful and holy in the church. There are also many ambitious Christians in the church that

want to be seen by their pastors, priests and others as holy, pure, and a powerful soldier in the holy crusade. So we borrow a little from this self-help book, a little humanistic philosophy, a little Nietzsche in a will-to power, a little self-righteousness, some psychology, something from the positive thinker's manuals, and go out to save the world from Satan in an iron-willed evangelistic approach. We look down on the sinners, the self-deceivers, on those who do not interpret the bible like we think they should; and in righteous indignation we feel great pride in our individual and collective efforts. Yet, God has his own plan. He said the meek shall inherit the earth. It is difficult to be meek and humble when the ego is on a roll to power.

We also see will-power promoted in self-help books, which is often a humanistic moral puritanical will-power designed to achieve "success." This is the success of the driven, the enlightened, or the commando type that approaches life as an enemy mountain to attack and conquer. They have learned to focus the will to achieve their goals. The focus is on achieving what they want, what is best for them, how it will benefit self in terms of status, power, financial independence, personal respect and the respect of others. There is nothing wrong with accomplishment and achievement, the concern is related to the motivation behind the will. When we identify what motivates us, we will understand where our treasures lie. Are we motivated by finances, personal power, lust, control, service to others, love of self, love of family, love of our church, or perhaps love of God. This is a difficult

question for many of us to answer honestly. To truly search our heart, our thoughts, and beliefs honestly requires us to stop long enough to consider these motivations. We must ask ourselves about the combination of motivating factors that influence our destiny. Rarely will we be driven by one thing only. Once we have determined what motivates us we need to make value judgments about these motivations. A good exercise is to rank order the things that seem to be motivating us and rank order these in terms of their importance in our life. Not in terms of what we think should be the order, but the actual order they appear in our life. You can know them by their fruits. Look at your thoughts, time spent in various activities, thoughts and energy on something, including the time avoiding certain events or thoughts.

Soren Kierkegaard challenges us to consider the pure in heart that wills one thing. He states "Father in heaven! What is a man without thee! What is all that he knows, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if he does not know thee! Thee: Thee the one, who art one thing and who art all! So may Thou give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing; to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that wills only one thing. In prosperity may Thou grant perseverance to will one thing; amid distractions, collectedness to will one thing; in suffering, patience to will one thing." How many of us will God as the only "one thing," pure in heart, through prosperity and pain, willing God in our life by our actions and thoughts. Most of us will many things, and maybe will God as the one thing on occasion. Many of us, if we are honest

with ourselves, do not even will God as one thing at the church on Sunday for an hour. Are you willing to suffer for your convictions, to appear as overzealous, overly committed in action and deed, dying to self in Christ so God can live through you? Or are we like the rich man who could not follow Jesus because he would not sell all that he had to follow Jesus. I am not suggesting you sell all that you have, but to be willing to become unattached to the outer trappings of the world in order to fulfill your commitment to Christ. To let go of our desire to live for self in order to die to self so God can live through us in purity of heart. Meister Eckhardt writes, "THEN is the will perfect, when it has gone out of itself, and is formed in the will of God. The more this is so, the more perfect and true is the will, and in such a will thou canst do all things."

There are also many of us who are motivated only by the avoidance of anxiety. Motivation by avoidance is a reaction to debilitating anxiety and depression. We may avoid being fired, sinning, being confronted, hard work, thinking any significant thoughts about our life, our spouse, our faith, God, poverty, our children. Those who are motivated by avoidance see the world as a hostile place, unpredictable with no hope of escape. They do not will-to-power like the secular humanist and existentialist, but will to avoid the paralyzing anxiety they feel in their life. If they are inclined towards Christianity they may find a safe church to escape into, being neither cold nor hot. They will not take risks outside of the accepted range of commitment, and sit back on Sundays in perfect satisfaction with the status quo. If the pastor calls upon them to seriously consider their commitment to

Christ they will experience the anxiety they have managed to avoid, and will either find another church, run the pastor off, or encourage the pastor to change his message. Often the pastors are also avoiding their own anxiety and are infinitely practical people, and will modify the sermons to accommodate the nervous congregation in order to keep their job. Needless to say, not all pastors nor do all congregations fit into this avoidance category.

There are others that avoid anxiety through entertainment, socializing, drug or alcohol abuse, intellectualizing, rationalizing, withdrawing, illness, victimization, family, sexual promiscuity, or spiritualizing. There are many ways we work to avoid having to confront our lives and the current emptiness we feel at the core of our being. We may follow the humanist will to power in order to establish greater meaning in our lives, yet we cannot escape the alienation we feel without a meaningful connection with God. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas "There is an Eternal Will, which is a first principle and substance in God, apart from all works and all externalization; and the same will is in man, or the creature, willing and bringing to pass certain things. For it pertains to the will, to will *something*. For what else does it exist? It would be a vain thing if it had no work to do, and this it cannot have without the creature."

There are many psychological theories associated with the origin of will and personal motivation that may be considered when determining the causal factors of will. According to Sigmund Freud human beings are driven by the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle maintains that

human beings are driven by a desire for pleasure in order to fulfill hedonistic ID impulses. Freud explains that we frustrate this drive for pleasure through the need to maintain social appearances and standards referred to as the Reality Principle. The ego is the balancing mechanism between the needs of the ID impulses and the learned societal demands of the Superego. Freud goes on to say that because of our frustrated ID impulses we develop subconscious forces which appear as slips of the tongue, neurosis, dreams, and unexplained behavioral reactions. Therefore, according to Freud we are driven by biological drives and instinctual forces such as sex, hunger and thirst. Until we are able to become conscious of the drives and instinctual forces that motivate us we are simply driven by unconscious forces and societal demands. According to Freud we are not as free as we think we are and are primarily reacting to instinctual forces and subconscious processes. Freud proposed that only by extensive psychoanalysis could someone, including himself, learn what subconscious forces are affecting our behavior.

Freud demonstrates considerable contempt for the religious experience related to faith, free-will and transcendence. He shares the secular humanist view that religion is a movement away from "will to meaning" and a step towards intellectual bondage. Freud explains that, "Religion restricts this play of choice and adaptation, since it

imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner—which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcibly fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis.” With this definition we can see that Freud as well as many other humanist thinkers, view religious oriented individuals as suffering from a cult-like mind control and mass delusion in a psychical infantilism.

This view of religion by Freud as well as many atheistic and secular humanist writers, reflect a total misunderstanding of the nature of the religious experience. It is as though they fear this intuitive and subjective experience, and do not wish to look too deeply unless they find themselves contaminated by its message. It is so simple to reject religion on the obvious premise that those who participate in religion have exchanged their will towards self-actualization for the will of God or the church. The argument maintains that since they have accepted a set of moral and religious standards than they have necessarily willed away their independent thought and existence. They often mistakenly and naively believe that religious people are too dumb to understand the treacherous

possibilities inherent in a pursuit of religious truth. It is however impossible for the proud and self-assured person to understand the true nature of God and the profound depths experienced by the transcendent Christian. Freud primarily viewed the will as determined by instinctual and social drives and did not believe that we are truly free in the sense of a capacity for free-will or choice.

Although it is true that our instinctual impulses such as drives for sex, survival, and thirst influence behavior, they do not determine behavior. We see that for some people the sexual impulses are more influential than for others. According to Freud this difference is related to the power of individual social expectations (superego) developed within each person. Freud would see religion as an imposed social sanction designed to control unacceptable sexual impulses. From this perspective Freud and many others would see religion as a created function of society to control instinctual and unacceptable behavior. From a Christian point of view, these sexual impulses are in some ways a result or indication of our fallen carnal state of mind. The more we indulge these sexual impulses the more likely these instinctual needs will dominate the personality. It is because of sin and separation from God that these instinctual impulses carry such power in our lives. Our social standards are largely derived from religious teachings throughout the centuries. So it is not a coincidence that

many societal values and taboos have their origins in Christian and religious teachings.

The Christian religion, as do most world religions, offers social guidelines for controlling and expressing instinctual impulses. According to Freud, societal and religious guidelines are in essence creating pathology, when in fact these religious principles are offering a way to manage these impulses in harmony with God and society. It is when we freely disobey the social guidelines taught in the religious texts that we find greater personal pathology and deviance. These religious guidelines have been interpreted in many ways today, some to accommodate a changing culture in positive ways, others to accommodate humanistic philosophy and sin. Far from making us neurotic, religious norms and values help us find peace and strength through obedience to God's law through love and social responsiveness.

Abraham Maslow interpreted will as the individuals attempt to fulfill a hierarchy of basic needs. The most basic of these needs for survival and the most fundamental include the need for air, water, food, shelter, sleep, and sex. Maslow explains that this basic level of need would have to be moderately fulfilled before the next level could be realized. He explains that as each need is fulfilled others such as the need for safety and security, belongingness and love, self-esteem

and respect and finally self-actualization needs arise. Maslow writes that "These physiological drives or needs are to be considered unusual rather than typical because they are isolable, and because they are localizable somatically. That is to say, they are relatively independent of each other, of other motivations and of the organism as a whole, and secondly, in many cases, it is possible to demonstrate a localized, underlying somatic base for the drive." In other words Maslow believed that we are motivated by drives but not to the extent Freud believed, and that there are many other factors involved in behavior that appear as instinctual drives.

Maslow also explains that, "It should be pointed out again that any of the physiological needs and the consummatory behavior involved with them serves as channels for all sorts of other needs as well. That is to say, the person who thinks he is hungry may actually be seeking more for comfort, or dependence, than for vitamins or proteins. Conversely, it is possible to satisfy the hunger need in part by other activities such as drinking water or smoking cigarettes. In other words, relatively isolable as these physiological needs are, they are not completely so. Undoubtedly these physiological needs are the most pre-potent of all needs. What this means specifically is, that in the human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the

physiological needs rather than any others. A person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else.”

This argument on the surface appears to have some validity for the average person in a typical situation. It makes perfect sense that someone might attempt to establish homeostasis by being concerned with safety before esteem needs. Their will, would be directed towards establishing basic needs and would not be concerned with self-actualization as Maslow defines this term. However, we see examples of saints and spiritual seekers who leave all that they have and follow the path of renunciation and personal hardship to deepen their spiritual experience. They live on very little food, do not seek safety except in Christ, already have love and fulfillment through God, self-esteem is avoided, and the goal of self-actualization is considered a sin. Although there may be physiological drives such as sexuality, thirst and hunger, these will have limited influence because of the mental and physical discipline that accompanies their life. Also, the supernatural power of God gives these individuals power to control and overcome physiological urges and desires.

How these needs influence us will be largely contingent upon our values and beliefs concerning each need. Maslow seemed to think that these needs were universal and affected everyone in generally the

same way. Yet, as was demonstrated above, various cultural and religious values also influence how we rate the relative importance of each level of need. What would be considered an adequate level of food for one person may not be considered adequate for another. Esteem needs may not be important at all for some while others may rate it even higher than safety needs. For deeply religious individuals the need for love of God would take priority over their safety and esteem needs as was demonstrated by Paul and the apostles of Jesus. Maslow explains that a need for love becomes increasingly important as physiological and safety needs are satisfied. He explains that, "In our society the thwarting of these needs is the most commonly found core in cases of maladjustment and more severe psychopathology. Love and affection, as well as their possible expression in sexuality, are generally looked upon with ambivalence and are customarily hedged about with many restrictions and inhibitions. Practically all theorists of psychopathology have stressed thwarting of the love needs as basic in the picture of maladjustment. Many clinical studies have therefore been made of this need and we know more about it perhaps than any of the other needs except the physiological ones."

The need to love others transcends the mundane and becomes spiritual when we direct this love towards our love for God. In Matthew 22:35-40 we read, "Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him

a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." And in Corinthians 13:1-13, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Through these scriptures we can see that God would rate love for him and love for our neighbor as the highest aspiration of the Christian spirit. We are not encouraged to seek out food, shelter, safety, esteem or self-actualization, but are simply asked to love him first, and all things will be added unto us. This requires a significant act of faith, of letting go of self-needs and consider only the needs of God and the fulfillment of his commandments.

When our will is directed towards love for God we begin to find that the love of God is our manna from heaven, fulfills our security needs, our safety needs, our need for belonging and love, as well as self-actualization. When Maslow Discusses our need for esteem he explains that "All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others. By firmly based self-esteem, we mean that which is soundly based upon real capacity, achievement and respect

from others. These needs may be classified into two subsidiary sets. These are, first, the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom. Secondly, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation.”

The transcendent Christian seeks esteem and respect for God, not in individual accomplishments as defined by the culture, but through their love for God. Esteem and respect for God is a result of our love for God, not as a result of our personal estimation of our value to self. When we love God, God loves us back in infinitely expansive ways. Through this love from God we can not help but identify with God and his loving nature towards his creation. This becomes a kind of self-esteem but not in the way Maslow is describing self-esteem. In our union with God we feel his love for us and our love for him uniting in a form of God’s love for himself and his creation. This is the highest and most pure form of self-esteem available to the human spirit while on earth. Many of Maslow’s ideas are grounded in religion as are many of the secular humanist beliefs. They have transposed our love for God to a form of self-love that is humanistic in nature.

When Maslow talks about self-actualization he explains that, “It

refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. The specific form these needs will take vary greatly from person to person. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions. It is not necessarily a creative urge although in people who have any capacities for creation it will take this form.” When a Transcendent Christian considers self-actualization, they are referring to the need to let go of self and become united in their love for God. Through this union with God they will be directed into an actualization of his will. This is not about self-will, but will to serve God in self-abandonment. Anytime we give of ourselves to God we receive back infinitely. This need to give to receive is of course giving for selfish purposes and will serve as our reward. Our will to God must be free of self-will, selfish motivations, and a desire to give to get. Anytime we are told to give to God, such as in an offering plate to receive a reward, such as money, goods, or services, we should be cautious of the motives of those who are asking.

Carl Jung began in the psychoanalytic tradition with Sigmund

Freud and later developed his own theories concerning motivation and will. Jung did not agree with Freud's contention that libido is sexual energy and the main driving force of personality. Jung believed that libidinal energy was a creative life force that could be applied to the ongoing life force of the patient. Jung Explains "I see in all happening the play of opposites, and derive from this conception my idea of psychic energy. I hold that psychic energy involves the play of opposites in much the same way as psychical energy involves a difference of potential, which is to say, the existence of such opposites as warm and cold, high and low." According to Jung we have a collective unconscious which is that part of a person's unconscious common to all human beings. It contains archetypes, which are forms or symbols that are manifested by all people in all cultures. They are said to exist prior to experience, and are in this sense instinctual.

Jung also discusses his view of the pursuit of religion and spirituality as an important element of this driving force behind psychic energy. He explains that, "For thousands of years, rites of initiation have been teaching spiritual rebirth: yet, strangely enough, man forgets again and again the meaning of divine procreation. This is surely no evidence of a strong life of the spirit; and yet the penalty of misunderstanding is heavy, for it is nothing less than neurotic decay, embitterment, atrophy, and sterility. It is easy enough to drive the

spirit out of the door, but when we have done so the salt of life grows flat—it loses its savor.” Jung believed that this psychic energy was a driving force behind our tendency towards self-actualization. Jung did not see the purpose of life as being the struggle of good versus evil. Jung believed that mental health was concerned with developing wholeness, of all elements of the self moving in a homeostatic dance, in and out of balance, in a creative drama of growth. Jung believed this balance continued throughout a person’s life.

Although Jung’s theories suggest a spiritual dimension related to psychic energy from subconscious and collective forces, he principally believed that people are motivated by repressed experiences in the personal unconscious of the psyche, as well as by experiences inherited from our ancestors found in a part of the psyche he termed the collective unconscious. Carl Jung describes this spiritual state of being as the collective unconscious. Unlike the Platonic spirituality of the world of forms, Jung’s descriptions of the collective unconscious were largely of an instinctual and biological nature; this began to be interpreted as a spiritual state in his later writings. On discussing his use of the expression of subconscious forces in his patients through the creative process of art Jung explains that “what he paints are active fantasies-it is that which activates him. And that which is active within is himself, but not in the sense of his previous error when he

mistook his personal ego as the self: it is himself in a new sense, for his ego now appears as an object accentuated by the life-forces within." Jung goes on to explain that "it is highly important for a young person who is still unadapted and has as yet achieved nothing, to shape the conscious ego as effectively as possible- that is, to educate the will...It is otherwise with the patient in the second half of life who no longer needs to educate his conscious will, but who, to understand the meaning of his individual life, must learn to experience his own inner being." In a sense Jung was right in that we are motivated internally by psychic energy, but this energy comes from God's strength, God's will, God's love for his creation. We are collectively called by God to fulfill his will and purpose, but few heed the call of God. So the collective unconscious is a collective connection we all have to the ground of our being and the source of all life which is in God. This is addressed in Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose."

Other psychological theories such as behaviorism attempts to explain motivation and will by suggesting that we are shaped and motivated by rewards and punishment. Alfred Adler maintains that we are driven by the pursuit of power and the need to overcome feelings of inferiority we developed as children. Other theorists, such as cognitive-behaviorist, believe we are motivated by our cognitive

interpretations of experience. The secular humanists believe we limit ourselves and our will to authenticity by following our past traditional interpretations of experience.

There is some truth that can be found in many theories concerning will and motivation. For example, we are shaped in part by rewarding experiences and aversive stimuli we find in our environment. If we are burned when we touch a hot stove then a rational person will avoid touching a hot stove in the future. If we were rewarded by our parents, friends or pastor for being baptized at church then we may continue to attend church to receive the same positive rewards from our church community. If we later were ridiculed by our new friends or acquaintances while at college, we may turn away from the church. The religious experience has to go deeper than just rewards and punishment. If we are not converted with a spiritual awakening, then the conversion is surface and doctrinal and will be vulnerable to new rewards or aversion in the future.

We can all think of people motivated by power, a desire for control, and driven by feelings of inferiority. These are the people that seem to exaggerate their personal importance, are filled with anxiety, and are obsessed at being the "best" at what they do. Often they may be seen as self actualizing individuals who have fully arrived professionally and personally. Their motivation and will are directed

towards and against. That is, towards achieving their goals, and against their anxiety related to fear of failure, being powerless, being one of the anonymous faces in the crowd. The will at its best, is directed towards being an individual, self-actualized, independent, and socially responsible. The motivation for self-actualization is to fulfill personal goals related to an individual interpretation of success. The transcendent Christian's motivation for being socially responsive is to serve God. Self-actualization has no meaning in the transcendent Christian's life in the traditional sense of the word. We are not concerned with attempting to achieve service to self, but service to God.

To the outside observer these two lives may look similar. We may have two people that are both serving the community, have achieved success in the world's terms, yet this is manifested entirely different on a spiritual level. The secular humanist will often redefine spirituality to mean personal freedom, creativity, love for the natural world, service to humanity. The transcendent Christian will define spirituality as union with God, service to God, as an expression of God's divine will. Spiritual maturity is found through a process of spiritual development. On conversion we are infants in our spiritual experience of God's presence within. As we mature in our spiritual relationship with God we experience an ever greater understanding

and love for God. The Christian experience is a spiritual experience, not simply a mouthing of words or a worship of empty symbols.

Victor Frankl believes we are driven by the need to find purpose in our lives through a will to meaning in the existential tradition. Frankl spent years in a Nazi concentration camp which served as the foundation for his views about the productive use of will in the development of meaning and spiritual health. He explains that those who did not survive the experience had a tendency to give up on their life. Frankl noted that the need to find meaning in suffering was the key to maintaining their will to survive. According to Frankl when discussing logotherapy, "the striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning* in contrast to the pleasure principle (or, as we could also term it, the *will to pleasure*) on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the *will to power* stressed by Adlerian psychology." Frankl explains that neurosis can occur as a response to feelings of meaningless and hopelessness. This neurosis may be evident in anxiety, depression, or anger.

Frankl also explains that we are ultimately free to respond to our experiences in any way we choose to respond to them. This was in part an answer to Freud and others who held that we are driven by drives and subconscious forces that existed as a result of our

instinctual and personal experiences. Frankl writes, "By declaring that man is a responsible creature and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be found in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. By the same token, the real aim of human existence cannot be found in what is called self-actualization. Human existence is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualization. Self-actualization is not a possible aim at all, for the simple reason that the more a man would strive for it, the more he would miss it. For only to the extent to which man commits himself to the fulfillment of his life's meaning, to this extent he also actualizes himself." Frankl holds the position that *will* as applied to individual meaning in life, is the goal of our life while we exist in the world. He would not see the pursuit of religion or the desire for spiritual attainment as a worthy goal. According to Frankl, the goal to pursue religion and holiness is an effort to achieve perfection or self-actualization rather than God. Frankl believes that spiritual attainment and self-actualization occur as a result of exercising individual freedom through the development of meaning and purpose in your life.

Frankl makes significant and valid points when he explains that the pursuit of religion and perfection should not be pursued as ends in themselves. It is very easy to believe that we are a "holy" person

when we are exercising our will towards the perfect observance of any given religion. We tend to get trapped in the symbols, in the words, in the rites, and lose the spiritual meaning behind the rituals. Through this perfect attention to the surface of the religion we develop spiritual pride, self-actualization in a secular sense of the word, a judgmental attitude towards self and others, rigidity, anger, anxiety, and a false sense of self-importance. The transcendent Christian has to let go of this desire to be perfect, to pursue God, to storm the gates of heaven and force God to love them in an iron-fisted way. As long as this effort towards self-will continues, the experience of God will be limited to the surface. Frankl believes we are essentially free to pursue the direction we take in life. We are essentially free to pursue our own will-to-meaning as Frankl understands this term, free to become an automaton in the societal will, free to be a self-actualized atheist, or free to become absorbed in union with God.

This immersion in the will of God does not mean that will-power has no place in the church. Our will is to be directed towards God through faith. In God's time and through his infinite grace and wisdom he supplants his will for ours. Meister Eckhart explains, "The inner work is first of all the work of God's grace in the depth of the soul which subsequently distributes itself among the faculties of the soul, in that of Reason appearing as Belief, in that of Will as Love, and in that

of Desire as Hope. When the Divine Light penetrates the soul, it is united with God as light with light. This is the light of faith. Faith bears the soul to heights unreachable by her natural senses and faculties." Therefore it is not by our efforts that we find redemption but through the grace of God through Christ. We must become empty of self and pride so that God can fill us with his Holy Spirit. We have free-will and can freely choose to serve self or to serve God.

This freedom is indicated in the story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve exercised their free-will away from God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. This point is dramatized by an anonymous author in *Theologica Germanica*, "This claim of his—this "I, me, and mine," were his error and his fall. And so it is to this day. For what else did Adam do? It is said that Adam was lost, or fell, because he ate the apple. I say, it was because he claimed something for his own, because of his "I, me, and mine." If he had eaten seven apples, and yet never claimed anything for his own, he would not have fallen: but as soon as he called something his own, he fell, and he would have fallen, though he had never touched an apple. I have fallen a hundred times more often and more grievously than Adam; and for his fall all mankind could not make amends. How then shall my fall be amended? It must be healed even as Adam's fall was healed. And how, and by whom, was that healing wrought? Man could not do it without God,

and God could not do it without man. Therefore God took upon Himself human nature; He was made man, and man was made God. Thus was the healing effected, so also must my fall be healed; I cannot do the work without God, and He may not or will not do it without me. If it is to be done, God must be made man in me also; God must take into Himself all that is in me, both within and without, so that there may be nothing in me which strives against God or hinders His work. Now if God took to Himself all men who are or ever lived in the world, and was made man in them, and they were deified in Him, and this work were not accomplished in me, my fall and my error would never be healed unless this were accomplished in me also. And in this bringing back and healing I can and shall do nothing of myself; I shall simply commit myself to God, so that He alone may do and work all things in me, and that I may suffer Him, and all His work, and His divine will. And because I will not do this, but consider myself to be mine own, and "I, me, and mine," and the like, God is impeded, and cannot do His work in me alone and without let or hindrance; this is why my fall and error remain unhealed. All comes of my claiming something for my own."

The proper use of our will is found in turning our will towards God's grace in faith. If we insist on helping God, retaining our will-to-power, containing our "me," then we will impede the progress of God

in transforming our will to conform to his will.

The anonymous author continues "Since God cannot exercise His will, in working and effecting changes, without the creature, He is pleased to do so in and with the creature. Therefore the will is not given to be exercised by the creature, but by God alone, who has the right to carry into effect His own will by the will which is in man, but yet is God's will. And in any man or creature, in whom it should be thus, purely and simply, the will of that man or creature would be exercised not by the man but by God, and thus it would not be self-will, and the man would only will as God wills; for God Himself, and not man, would be moving the will. Thus the will would be united with the Eternal Will, and would flow into it; although the man would retain his sense of liking and disliking, pleasure and pain. But nothing is complained of, except what is contrary to God. And there is no rejoicing except in God alone, and in that which belongs to Him. And as with the will, so is it with all the other faculties of man; they are all of God and not of man. And when the will is wholly given up to God, the other faculties will certainly be given up too; and God will have what is due to Him."

Many may believe this immersion in the will of God amounts to a negation of personal responsibility. Perhaps if our will is united to God then God must accept responsibility or blame for our choices. Many

people renounce personal responsibility and say the devil made them do it, or God told them to do this or that. We may perhaps be tempted to justify running from our destiny, our personal obligations, and choices concerning our life task. Some may think that God is telling them to leave their family, their wife, their community, their profession, their religion and radically change their life. When we experience the presence of God for the first time in a new and profound way our ego wants to take this experience and run with it. The ego always believes that it is special; that God has called the ego for a special purpose and that others are holding them back and must be left behind so they may follow God unimpeded. This conversion can be used by the self to justify all types of emotional neglect towards those who love the convert the most. In their zeal to follow God in a "real" way they forget to demonstrate love and respect for those who God has placed in their life. It is no accident that this particular conversion occurred within these circumstances. If we are a carpenter, or a teacher, or a factory worker, or a bank president then we should continue in that job but with a renewed focus. If we are married then we need to honor the marriage, stay with our children, our communities, soccer team, boy scouts, or church. God has placed us in these positions to be a witness for him in our community. Do any of us really believe that we can worship God

better on a mountaintop than with our families and community? God will use us to be a living witness in our everyday circumstances for his grace and love. When we direct our will towards God he will help us become more than we could ever have become through our own efforts. Our will through God is enhanced, clarified, refined, and focused. We actualize not in self but in God.

Chapter 6

Spiritual Dimensions

It is within the spiritual self that we begin to break away from our identification with the ego and experience higher states of consciousness. This includes the subconscious forces that appear in our dreams, spiritual beings that influence our lives of both dark and light natures, the collective unconscious of psychic collectivism, dark and light magic, astral planes, and all types of spiritual and spiritualist beliefs. In the spiritual state the unconscious call of God begins to be recognized and realized. Those who respond to this call of God do so in many imperfect ways. The imperfect manner we respond to God is related to how we maintain our self-seeking and selfish ego and carry this self into our spiritual quest for God.

There are many religions that call on the aspirant to put away their self-centered illusions and become immersed in God. From these religions the Christian can make some parallels and learn from their beliefs and practices. Sufism is a mystical religion that brings the aspirant to a transcendent unity with God. One of the major beliefs of Sufism is that God is lover and the beloved. Through our love of God we find the attractive power of God which creates an eventual union

with the divine. According to the Encyclopedia of Spiritual Knowledge Jalaluddin Rumi wrote that God leads us to himself in several ways:

1) through the development of the emotional, cordial love for all the beautiful and harmonious in the world;

2) through active, sacrificial love-service to people;

3) and then — through extending this love to all manifestations of the world without discriminating between them; the Sufis say: “If you make a distinction between things originating from God — you are not man of spiritual Path. If you think that a diamond can ennoble you and a stone lowers you, then God is not with you”;

4) such developed love for all elements of the Creation is redirected then to the Creator — and man begins to see that, according to Rumi, “the Beloved is present in everything”.

Jalaluddin Rumi has written many poems which express his mystical experience. The following is an example of one of his poems:

This is love: to fly to heaven, every moment to rend a hundred veils;
At first instance, to break away from breath -- first step, to renounce
feet;

To disregard this world, to see only that which you yourself have seen

I said, "Heart, congratulations on entering the circle of lovers,
On gazing beyond the range of the eye, on running into the alley of
the breasts."

Whence came this breath, O heart? Whence came this throbbing, O
heart?

Bird, speak the tongue of birds: I can heed your cipher!

The heart said, "I was in the factory whilst the home of water and clay
was abaking.

"I was flying from the workshop whilst the workshop was being
created.

"When I could no more resist, they dragged me; how shall I
tell the manner of that dragging?

And the following:

Again I am raging, I am in such a state by your soul that every
bond you bind, I break, by your soul.

I am like heaven, like the moon, like a candle by your glow; I am all
reason, all love, all soul, by your soul.

My joy is of your doing, my hangover of your thorn; whatever
side you turn your face, I turn mine, by your soul.

I spoke in error; it is not surprising to speak in error in this

state, for this moment I cannot tell cup from wine, by your soul.

I am that madman in bonds who binds the "divs"; I, the madman,
am a Solomon with the "divs", by your soul.

Whatever form other than love raises up its head from my
heart, forthwith I drive it out of the court of my heart, by your soul.

Come, you who have departed, for the thing that departs
comes back; neither you are that, by my soul, nor I am that, by your
soul.

Disbeliever, do not conceal disbelief in your soul, for I will recite
the secret of your destiny, by your soul.

Out of love of Sham-e Tabrizi, through wakefulness or
nightrising, like a spinning mote I am distraught, by your soul.

It is interesting and noteworthy that the love Rumi expresses towards
God has the passion of the Psalms of Solomon. There are numerous
examples throughout the history of men and women who demonstrate
great love for God. It is difficult for the compassionate Christian to
view all non-Christians as heretics, and therefore condemned to hell. I
think it is important for the Christian to stay away from harsh
judgments and remain focused on their Christian beliefs concerning
love and understanding. It is all too common for Christians to
condemn and judge other Christians as well. Love requires the
Christian to see beyond the divisiveness of judgment, and

condemnation, and seek within the Christian walk brotherly love and Christ-like attitudes and beliefs. Jesus demonstrated love and compassion towards others and expected his followers to do the same. From non-Christians who seek God with true sincerity we can attempt to understand and celebrate commonalities. We can attempt to find agreement and commonality amongst ourselves as well. This does not mean we have to give up being a Christian, but to love others as ourselves, knowing that the divinity of God is the Father of us all.

Those who practice Sufism maintain that they have to progress through seven states of consciousness. As each veil of consciousness is lifted the aspirant is lead closer to the final veil which is the "I", the sense that we are all separate human beings. The ultimate goal of this journey is to reunite with God until knower and known are one. This mystic philosophy is quite similar to the Christian mystics experience and is typical of most writings concerning mystic experiences. Other writings of the Sufi's explain that Sufism is related to the root of the word "safa" – to purify – here meaning to purify the heart of other-than-God. The Sufis take as their starting point the Unity of God – La ilaha ill Allah – There is no god but One God; there is no reality but One Reality. It is not that we have to acknowledge the Unity of God. God does not need our confirmation of His Oneness. It is for our own benefit. When one starts with Unity it is easy to integrate all the

different "I's" which have no function except to confuse and mislead us. For this reason the Sufis use the remembrance of Allah (Dhikr) and His Names, in various forms, to awaken the subtle centres of the self.

The Sufis do not believe in the incarnation and reject the idea that God can become man. This is of course where many traditional Christians will disagree with the Sufis. In the Christian belief God became man through his son Jesus Christ as atonement for the sins of humans on earth. There are Christians who would agree with the Sufi's on this point, and maintain that the Christian belief in Jesus as God is either misinterpreted, or symbolically spiritual in meaning. However, the belief in Christ as savior is central to the biblical teaching of Jesus Christ and has been passed down through the generations in numerous translations. Yet, much of the debate on this point is a matter of belief and faith and is often used as a way of avoiding the deeper spiritual meaning of the Christian experience.

There are many Christians who believe that if they confess that Jesus is Lord they will be saved. They then go about their lives with an extremely superficial approach to the teachings of Christ and fail to achieve any form of spiritual maturity. Jesus has told us that many will say Lord, Lord and will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. If we confess that Jesus is Lord or do not confess that Jesus is Lord, and fail to live a life devoted to the teachings of Christ, it is unlikely that we

will progress very far along the road of spiritual understanding. Belief is not as important to spiritual maturity as devotion and purity of heart. Often belief is used to condemn and judge and divide ourselves from those who hold contrary interpretations of the teaching of Christ. Jesus consistently taught brotherly love, devotion and compassion.

Sufism, like mystical Christianity, is concerned with love for God and immersion of the ego in unity with God. However, a Christian can not truly refer to self as a Christian if they do not find their love and devotion directed exclusively through Jesus Christ towards God. We can not honestly consider ourselves Christian if we believe that Jesus was one of many prophets who taught the way towards God. A Christian is devoted to Jesus Christ as The Way, The Truth, and The Life. There is a sacred marriage that occurs with Jesus and the disciple. The Christian is invited into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that is unlike any other on earth.

A Christian devoted to Jesus Christ will often find value in studying other mystical religions such as Buddhism and Sufism. Christianity is by nature mystical and those born of the Holy Spirit will not only seek to become conformed to the image of our Lord but will experience many proofs of the Spirit's presence in his soul. There are Christians who however become lost in these comparative religions and begin to deny their mystical union with Jesus Christ. They cease to

be Christians at this point as they pursue a path of many truths, as though other religions would work just as well. Indeed, I believe it is this eclecticism that leads the Christian into humanism and away from a Christian purity of heart. To be Christian involves a marriage to Christ through the miracle of Jesus Christ. Yet, to dismiss all other religions as irrelevant and unworthy of study is spiritually limiting.

The Encyclopedia of Spiritual Knowledge explains that Sufism and its teachings can be divided into several stages of realization:

The initial stage of the spiritual practice — ***sharia (law)*** — concerns strict obedience to all religious precepts. Initial learning of sharia is an obligatory condition for entering on the path of spiritual development. This is similar to the new Christian who begins his journey by reading the scripture and following the precepts of the written word. The law is not yet discovered in his heart, and is only of an intellectual or emotional understanding.

The esoteric learning begins on the next stage — ***tariqa (path, way)***. Mastering the tariqa is related to mastering a series of steps-*maqams*.

In the ethical aspect, ***maqams*** imply fundamental reassess of one's values. They imply finding one's own vices and repentance (*tauba*), abstaining from the forbidden (*zuhd*), strict distinction

between the allowed and non-allowed (*wara*), refusal of non-spiritual attachments and desires (*faqr*). Murids learn patience (*sabr*), “swallowing something bitter without showing distaste”.

Constant remembrance about death, about its inevitability leads murids to reassessing many things. In particular, murids develop a careful attitude to the time which they have on the Earth. Reflections on death are an efficient means of fighting unwanted attachments and habits. Al-Ghazali said: “If you like something of the world and an attachment is born in you — recall about death”. This stage corresponds to a “searching and moral inventory” of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is the stage where the Christian begins to “Soul Search” and make amends to those they have wronged. They learn to apply the word to their everyday life and begin to understand the finite nature of the human condition. This is the beginning of an experiential understanding of the Christ nature and the intuitive understanding of God’s Love towards his creation. The Christian begins to turn from selfish endeavors and live for a higher purpose.

On the stage of *tariqa*, one performs intense intellectual work. Sheiks constantly suggest to their students new themes for reflection, talk with them about the fundamentals of the teachings.

Murids become acquainted with various literary sources, which present many parables, educational stories, etc.

As the murid goes through all steps of this stage, he or she develops a strong desire to attain the unity with the Creator and enters the state of *rida*. The Sufis define *rida* as “unruffled attitude toward one’s predestination”, that is the state of serenity, calm in respect to what is happening.

They who successfully passed maqams of tariqa receive the possibility to go further the path of *marefat* — meditative cognition of God. On this stage, further ethical “polishing” of the student takes place; student’s love (in its different aspects), wisdom, and power are perfected. The Sufi who traversed this stage really cognizes the multidimensionality of space, “illusiveness” of the values of material life, receives living experience of communion with God. As *arif* (he who has cognized) such a person receives initiation into sheikhs.

Some arifs managed to reach the fourth stage — *haqiqat* (*haqq* means truth), on which one finally masters the true beingness. It brings the arif to the full mergence of the individual consciousness with the Goal of his or her aspirations — with the Creator.

This stage corresponds closely to the experience of the

Christian in a mystical union with Christ. This union however is uniquely Christian in nature and the intensity of the marriage to Jesus Christ is realized.

Like Christian mysticism and Sufism the Buddhist also believe that the aspirant should be unattached to the illusion of ego as self. There are some major differences however between the transcendent Christian and the practicing Sufi and Buddhist. The Buddhists describe the person as composed of five skandhas ("aggregates").

The body (rupa), including the sense organs. This aggregate would correspond closely to the material dimension. This level includes those who have no real awareness or control over impulses towards physical gratification of the senses. The Buddhist talk about the six doors through which we develop a consciousness of self. These are the seeing-consciousness, which experiences visible object through the eyes; hearing-consciousness which experiences sound through the ears; smelling-consciousness which experiences odor through the nose; tasting-consciousness which experiences flavor through the tongue; body-consciousness which experiences tangible object through the body; and mind-consciousness which experiences mind-objects through the mind. The Buddhist view attachment to and identification with these sense objects as the real problem for the seeker.

In the Christian tradition there is also a call to renounce the lust of the flesh, the desire for pleasure seeking, and the attachment to thoughts of self. In Matthew 19:21 we read, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give the money to the poor." I do not think God literally means sell all that we have but renounce our attachment to these external objects. The fallen state in the Christian tradition is a state of identification with and attachment to the state of sin and separation from God. We see the world around us and believe that this is what is real. We see our churches and believe they are the "real" church, we see our physical appearance and believe that this is who we are, we view the wealth of others and believe this is an ideal to pursue, or we view nature and see only nature, rather than a reflection of God's love. We identify with the appearances of the world around us and begin to believe that these appearances are who we are. We identify with all of the sense objects we encounter and believe that God is found somewhere else, out there, not in the here and now, not within. Although we can never escape experiencing life with our senses we can see past them with our spiritual intuition. The only way we can do this is by seeing beyond all of these physical sensations, refusing to identify and attach to the pleasures they provide, and listening to the quiet voice of God within. When we live to serve God, we let go of physical attachment and identification with

those things that are not God. We let go of our need to pursue excessive wealth, great personal achievement, finery and adornment, self-gratification, pride and vainglory, self-esteem, and sensual pleasure. This does not mean we need to practice great hardships through extreme personal efforts, but moderation and the pursuit of God through faith and simplicity. Christ is not found through personal efforts but through faith and immersion in the will of God.

Sensations and feelings (Vedanta), coming out of contact between sense organs and external objects. This involves becoming aware of sensations within the body. The purpose of this exercise is to reduce attachment to the sense organs. The Buddhist learns to objectively observe their reactions to sensations in the body. Through our social self and our interaction with the social environment we gain an understanding of how our actions are perceived by and affect others. We begin to check our physical desires through development of self-awareness and empathy. We experience emotional reactions towards others and seek out sensations related to our social and physical experiences. Christians can learn a lot about their tendency towards sinful and selfish responses towards others by being aware of their emotional and cognitive reactions. We do not necessarily need to fight against these emotional reactions at this level but simply observe them in the moment they are happening. This results in our ability to

obtain self-awareness. Through awareness of our emotional reactions our physical sensations will change. There are causal factors that create emotional reactions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety. At this level the emphasis is on awareness of these reactions, not a concern about the causal factors or how to change them. There are also simply sensations that occur as a result of touch, vision, walking, hearing, odors, and tasting. This is an important exercise which develops greater self-awareness.

Many may wonder why it is important for a Christian to be aware of these physical sensations. Through our awareness and increased consciousness of lower order and physical sensations, we can become aware of those emotions and sensations related to our physical nature rather than to our spiritual nature. By being aware of these sensations and emotional experiences we can become aware of how often we seek out ways to fulfill the needs of the lower nature, as well as create emotional reactions that separate us from the experience of God. Yes, we create our emotional reactions such as anger, sadness, depression, and anxiety, with few biologically based exceptions. Christians seek out physical sensations in clothing, food, sexual stimulation, (God has sanctioned sex in marriage), music, perfumes and incense, visual art, travel, recreation, entertainment, television, physical adornment, and sports. These physical sensations are not necessarily bad, and can be

used to glorify God or to be used to simply stimulate and promote the desires of the ego. By being aware of our pursuit of physical sensations and emotional reactions to our environment we will gain an understanding of our personal treasures. The physical is the temple of God and to be used to glorify God and for his good purpose. However, there must always be moderation and balance in our life. God allows us the joy of each other's company, the enjoyment of his creation, and the enjoyment of the physical world without attachment. We can celebrate God through our appreciation and love for his creation.

Perceptions and ideas (samjña), manifest in our ability to recognize ideas. Samjña corresponds closely to concrete levels of cognitive discernment which only involves cognition without formal operational thought. Emotional reactions occur as a result of thought and belief. Many of us are not aware of our thoughts and subsequent beliefs related to these thoughts. The Buddhist believes that the path to self-awareness is through an awareness of thoughts. It is important to become aware of your thoughts and how they effect your emotional reactions. By being aware of what you are thinking every moment thoughts will change. Our thoughts are the real force behind all emotional and physical actions. If we think that it will be a "tragedy" if we freeze during a speech then we will experience an emotional reaction such as anxiety and a physical reaction of avoidance. If we

modify this and think that it will instead be a positive learning experience then we will experience less anxiety. If we are constantly concerned with how others perceive us then we will be hyper-anxious about our personal appearance around others. If we have certain expectations concerning our social relations then we will experience an aversive reaction when these expectations are not met. Jesus has taught us how to think about ourselves and our social condition. It is the rare person however, that applies his teaching perfectly to their life.

Mental acts (samskara), particularly attention and will. The *Hinduism Dictionary* states that samskaras are "The imprints left on the subconscious mind by experience (from this or previous lives), which then color all of life, one's nature, responses, states of mind, etc." This sounds similar to Jung's collective unconscious; although Jung did not believe in reincarnation he did believe in instinctual and shared collective traits he referred to as archetypes. Our experiences particularly create and uphold our personal identity. Through our experiences we become to believe ourselves competent, capable, worthy, attractive, successful, loving, holy and intelligent. Everything we believe about ourselves and our social surroundings is created from our life experiences. Our ego is the sum total of our personal experiences and our interpretations of these experiences. It takes

considerable courage to understand the truth about this false identity and move past this identity in faith. When we live in the present, letting go, trusting in God, truly broken and empty, we will begin to sense the presence of God in a more profound way.

Basic consciousness (vijñāna). A vijñāna is a single moment of conceptual consciousness. It has two components: the awareness itself, and the object of that awareness (which might be a perception, a feeling etc.). Normal mental activity is considered to consist of a continual succession of vijñānas. When we hear someone insult our religion, or our country or family, we have a reaction based on what the appropriate response should be in these cases. These responses are programmed and practically automatic in most of us. It takes considerable discipline to react in a truly Christian way. The Christian way is identified by Jesus as forgiveness, love, prayer, and hope. When we experience these automatic responses we should know that these are part of our social and personal conditioning that shape our values, beliefs, and personal identity. The more deeply held these automatic responses are the more emotional the reaction is likely to be. Jesus helps us through this conditioning by commanding us to be empty of self, humble, at peace, keeping our spiritual focus on him. When we simply observe this conditioning without automatically reacting to it, we begin to be in control of these emotions, and learn that we have a

choice, a higher purpose and identity through Christ. We are not the sum total of our social and personal conditioning, our high self-esteem, or low self-esteem, or our looks, or our wealth or success, but are more than all of this through our love for God.

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths sound like the basics of any theory with therapeutic roots:

Life is suffering. The Buddhist believes that suffering is an inevitable part of our human existence, and that life is impermanent and constantly changing. Although there may be joy in life this joy is fleeting and subject to constant change. Therefore, in Buddhism the most significant fact of life is the first noble truth, the inevitable existence of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is a Pali word embracing all types of unpleasant experience — sorrow, fear, worry, pain, despair, discord, frustration, agitation, and irritation. This belief is consistent with the Christian belief that the material world is unsatisfying, fleeting and temporal. The Christian's believe that the disciple's of Christ should turn to God for comfort and permanence rather than the world which will inevitably lead to death, disappointment, and loss. In Romans 8:16-17 we read, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God,

and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.” Although the passage refers to suffering for our Christian beliefs, we can easily identify with the Buddhist belief that life is suffering.

Most of us identify with and cultivate our identification with the ego. Because of this identification there is constant difficulty involved with this social and contrived construct. We often identify with and cling to our emotional and physical suffering and do everything we can to avoid being uncomfortable. We spend lots of time worrying about what might happen in the future, what has happened in the past, and what is happening now that we wish was not happening. This constant anxiety that occurs from anticipating tragedy or clinging to the past keeps us from experiencing the present in any meaningful way. There is much depression related to anticipation and regret. The Buddhist belief's concerning suffering can be summed up as the attachment to transient things. Transient things do not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas, and in a more comprehensive sense, all objects of our perception. The Buddhist explain that the reasons for suffering are related to the attachment to desire, passion, the lust for wealth, status, popularity and social recognition. Because the objects of our attachment are temporary, their loss is inevitable, and suffering will necessarily follow. Objects of attachment also include

the idea of a "self" which is a falsehood, because there is no abiding self.

In the Christian tradition all suffering is caused by sin and separation from God. Any action that is designed to please self will inevitably lead to suffering. Everything that is physical and created by human beings is subject to loss and deterioration, only God is eternal and unchanging, When we complete an action for self, we should realize that it will only bring fleeting pleasure in the present moment. When we complete our actions for God, in faith, unattached to the outcome, it will bring lasting happiness. The outcome of the project is always in God's hands and will occur in the way that he deems significant. We can only serve in the best way we know how. We must know that we have no power over the outcomes, that we are subject to the power and control of the Holy Spirit, and we are an instrument for the will of God.

Suffering is due to attachment. The Buddhist believes that suffering is a result of our attachment to the ego and all that is involved with its creation and development. The second noble truth states that the cause of *dukkha* is desire or craving. This cause is explained as consisting of hatred, greed, and delusion. The Buddha also includes the cause of suffering as sensual lust, anger, sloth, worry and agitation, as well as doubt. Other causes of suffering is listed as a

false belief that the self is unchanging and permanent; skeptical beliefs, belief in salvation through the practice or rites, rules and ceremonies; sensual lust; hatred; craving for wealth and finery; craving for a long life; immodesty, and restlessness.

In the Christian religion Jesus has commanded us in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." The Buddhist and Christians have different views concerning attachment. The Christians like the Buddhist believe that suffering arises as a result of attachment to the world and the objects of sense. Jesus held that suffering comes from being separated from God. In the Christian tradition attachment to God is essential to developing a relationship with God. Although we are unattached from the world and the self-centered I, this emptiness is filled with the presence and love of Jesus Christ whom we adore. Many Christians become attached to the "good life" and find it troubling that God would bring upon them hardship, loss and pain. We thank God when we are prosperous and grudgingly endure the hard times. Many Christians see the things God has given them such as cars, money, security, health, prosperity, friends, and emotional health as being the "good" things God brings. They also view loss, pain, suffering, and personal instability as being "bad." We thank God for all the things we have and wonder why God is displeased with us when it is taken away. We

count it as good when we are prosperous and bad when we suffer misfortune. Yet in Corinthians 6: 4-10 we read, "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Ho'ly Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." How often do we hear others tell us to endure suffering and praise God for all the things he has done for us. According to God we are to be attached only to him. God tells us that all things work for the good for those who love him and keep his commandments. The ego finds it extremely distressing to experience pain, sadness, loss, and insecurity and is caught in the web of clinging and attachment to the external world. In our suffering we can rejoice in the fact that God is bringing us closer to him. In the Buddhist belief we suffer because we cling to the external objects we believe brings us happiness. However, the Christian is concerned with attachment to God. The Christian believes

we suffer because we are separated from God; that we cling to the external world and have faith in the world and ourselves rather than having faith in God. Through our union with Christ we find peace, strength and inward joy in the midst of our external suffering. A Christian may find sorrow in their attachment to a building of brick and stone. If we cling to our beautiful church building and it is destroyed we may experience great loss, sadness and identity confusion. If we reside in the church of the heart, we will know that God has a greater plan for us and the true church is still intact as ever. If we are attached to our car, our house, our jobs and community then we will experience great suffering when they are lost, deteriorate, or disappear. If we cling to God then the loss will be experienced as an inevitable part of the human condition. We will know that this loss is intended to strengthen our faith. Of course the ego will not understand this reasoning, and the greater the ego identity, the greater the loss will affect you personally. Of course we can modify the impact of this loss through our cognitive thought modifications, but the loss will still feel as though it is a loss of self. Because the ego is made up of external experiences any change in our external environment will create a change of identity. When we are rooted in God these external changes will have less of an impact on us. This identification with God

does not however make us less compassionate, but in fact more compassionate towards the suffering of others.

Suffering can be extinguished. The Buddhist's believe that suffering can be extinguished through the principles found in the Buddhist religion. Jesus did not promise an end to suffering in this world and instead promised that you are likely to experience increased suffering and persecution as a result of Christian involvement. Jesus himself experienced considerable emotional and physical pain on the cross, and suffered because of his humanity. Jesus loves his disciples and enemies as well. Although the concept of compassion is taught in the Buddhist religion the concept of Christian love and suffering for a wounded and fallen humanity is not considered in the same way. Jesus was united to God through his love for God and in God he saves a suffering humanity. Christian's hold key principles concerning suffering:

Suffering is not illusory in the Christian tradition. The world is filled with suffering. Even though we have faith in God, cling to God alone for assurance, we cannot extinguish our suffering without extinguishing our humanity. Love and compassion for others requires an attachment to God and sensitivity towards the suffering of others. In our Christ natures we suffer for the pain others feel, for the loss of a child, for the sick and the poor, for those attached to the physical

without a spiritual connection to God. We also suffer when we lose a child, go hungry, and experience physical pain. Although we experience suffering we do not identify with this suffering. Suffering is understood in its context with our love for God. Through our faith in God we know that God has a purpose for changes in the external environment. We are attached to God alone and cling to his word. The word of God is not only a sacred and holy text but a guide to a living spiritual experience. When we say we cling to his word we also cling to his power, in unity with his word which is God. We read in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word Was God." Through the living word we find comfort, wisdom, understanding and compassion.

Suffering is a result of our fallen natures. We suffer because of our identification with and indulgence of our sinful natures. Disobedience to the word of God is seen in the fall of Adam and Eve from God's grace. Because they turned away from God in willful disobedience they experienced suffering and separation from God. When we turn back to God through our spiritual union with God and are reborn into the spiritual life through Christ, we find greater peace, purity of heart, and love. As a result of our faith in God and compliance to his word, God through Grace brings us into a deeper and more powerful relationship with him. We no longer identify with

nor indulge our false self and fallen nature caused by separation and sin.

You reap what you sew. In Galatians 6: 7-8 we read, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." According to Paul the Christian is to work towards a spiritual relationship with Christ, and in this relationship we will find peace, harmony, and love. If we are engaged in sin, disobedience and separation from God then we will find corruption and disharmony. In the Buddhist and Hindu tradition this action and reaction is referred to as Karma. The Dalai Lama refers to Karma in this way, "Countless rebirths lie ahead, both good and bad. The effects of karma (actions) are inevitable, and in previous lifetimes we have accumulated negative karma which will inevitably have its fruition in this or future lives. Just as someone witnessed by police in a criminal act will eventually be caught and punished, so we too must face the consequences of faulty actions we have committed in the past, there is no way to be at ease; those actions are irreversible; we must eventually undergo their effects." He also explains that "Some people misunderstand the concept of karma. They take the Buddha's doctrine of the law of causality to mean that all is predetermined, that there is nothing that

the individual can do. This is a total misunderstanding. The very term karma or action is a term of active force, which indicates that future events are within your own hands. Since action is a phenomenon that is committed by a person, a living being, it is within your own hands whether or not you engage in action.”

In the Christian tradition there is no belief in a past life or reincarnation and the Christian will see the present life as the only opportunity one has in accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal savior. Our actions while on earth will determine our future state of being in the afterlife. However the concept of causal determination creates in the individual a need to accept responsibility for their actions. We are not simply victims of our environment and circumstances but are able to choose a course of action which will determine our future. We need to be careful however not to blame people who are truly victims of evil. We can not blame a child for being a victim of molestation or abuse. And there are truly accidents and illnesses that are not necessarily related to our past actions. However, we can see that if you steal from someone then you will reap the fruits of that action. This also would include brutality, hatefulness, sexual immorality, and selfish and self-seeking narcissism. It is important for Christians to live lives with awareness, with holiness, with an eye on our actions, with wisdom and understanding. Many

types of suffering can be avoided altogether if we live our life in service to God.

We suffer because of a sinful world. We also suffer not because of our actions directly but because of living in a sinful and violent world. Jesus did not suffer on the cross because of his sins but because of our sins. Jesus sacrificed his life so that he could bring us to God. We also see people born into poverty, into an abusive family, or biologically challenged. The law of Karma would say that this was caused by actions in a previous life. However, the Christian does not believe in past lives and would find this suffering caused by the fall of humanity into sin. We are born into a sinful world and in that sinful world we will experience persecution, suffering, and pain. Through our relationship with Jesus Christ we step out of the sinful nature and are reborn into the spiritual nature. Even though we may continue to suffer in the world, we have God through Jesus Christ to find comfort and renewal. To the degree we follow our spiritual union with Christ through the Holy Spirit is to the degree that we are free from suffering.

We suffer because of our love and compassion for others.

Another type of suffering is a holy type of suffering and is related to our love for God and a love for humankind. As our spiritual nature grows in love for God we begin to experience a love that comes from

God's compassion and holiness. This is the type of love Jesus had for everyone he met and motivated him to be willing to die to save us from the control of sin and separation. As we grow in union with God his love pours through us towards the world. When we see someone in pain, in poverty, lost in the flesh, hurt, sad and depressed, we feel deep compassion for that person. This is a type of suffering that can only come from a spiritual connection with God. It is a deep inner pain that arrives from within, beyond our thoughts and beliefs about such things as poverty, and loss. As we grow in Christ his love and compassion grows in us.

And there is a way to extinguish suffering. Buddha developed a way to bring his followers to enlightenment which he called the Eightfold Path. Jesus also taught us how to approach suffering. Jesus teaches in Philippians 4: 4-7, "Always be glad in the Lord: I will repeat it, be glad. Let your forbearing spirit be known to everyone—the Lord is near. Do not be over-anxious about anything, but by prayer and earnest pleading, together with thanksgiving, let your request be unreservedly made known in the presence of God. And then the peace of God, which transcends all our powers of thought, will be a garrison to guard your hearts and minds in union with Christ Jesus." Through our relationship and faith in Jesus Christ we will find comfort, hope and healing. The Buddha gave us guidelines to follow to overcome the

effects of suffering and reach a place beyond dualities of right and wrong, good and bad. These teachings can be useful towards an understanding of suffering and how to approach suffering when it occurs.

Right view -- understanding the Four Noble Truths, especially the nature of all things as imperfect, impermanent, and insubstantial and our self-inflicted suffering as founded in clinging, hate, and ignorance. According to the Buddhist the "Right View" is related to the impermanence and illusionary nature of the "ego" as well as the right understanding of the Four Noble Truths. The higher understanding of Right View requires the knowledge and understanding of the "not-self doctrine," as well as the five aggregates, the understanding of Karma, impermanence, and other doctrinal principles. Right view in the Christian tradition is concerned with understanding the fallen state related to sin and disobedience. The Christian is to let go of attachment to the flesh, sin, selfish considerations and seek first the kingdom of heaven. The Christian is to be "born again" into their spiritual nature and see beyond the fallen state separated from God. Right view is concerned with love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, unattachment, holiness, and virtue. These are not traits that are acquired through hard work but are gifts that occur as a result of our obedience to God and an understanding of his holy word.

Right aspiration – This is concerned with right thought, or having a true desire and dedication to free oneself from attachment, hatefulness, and ignorance. The Christian also needs to approach the worship of God with the right attitude and right thought. If our reasons for pursuing Christian traditions are related to a need to be recognized, seen in the public square, enhance a social or political career, to get to heaven, or out of fear (which is common for new Christians), or to fulfill family expectations then our reasons are motivated by self achievements rather than for God. It is only in our complete abandonment of self-centeredness and selfish motives will we find a more pure relationship with Christ. Jesus showed us how to love God, and Mary showed us how to love Jesus. Mary did not fear Jesus but loved him with a pure and holy love. In Proverbs 1:7 we read, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." This fear is concerned with separation and distance. Through our maturity as a Christian this fear turns to awe and respect. We learn to trust and love God; we have faith in his promises as we experience his holy love and Holy Spirit comfort and teach us. This love is like a love of a child for a beloved parent. This child loves the parent, respects the parent, feels safe and protected, and trusts this parent. Although they may be chastised and corrected, the core of their trust and love is not shaken but enhanced. If we are pursuing God because we fear going to hell

or desire to go to heaven then these motives are selfish and self-centered and serve to fulfill ego desires. The carnal mind is concerned with preserving the ego; the spiritual mind is concerned with spiritual union.

Right speech – This is concerned with abstaining from lying, gossiping, and hurtful speech generally. Speech is often our ignorance made manifest, and is the most common way in which we harm others. Mental health professionals and drug and alcohol recovery counselors emphasize that one should above all stop lying to oneself. Buddhism suggests that by practicing being true to others, one will find it increasingly difficult to be false to oneself. In the Christian tradition we are commanded to avoid lying, bearing false witness, profanity, deceit, gossiping, and hurting others in speech and deed. Through our speech we reveal our heart. If we are following God's commandments we guard our tongue, pay attention to the thoughts that arise in our minds, avoid the slanderous and hurtful crowd who whisper in corners about co-workers, bosses, spouses, children, and friends. When we speak, our values and Christian heart is revealed; all can see our witness concerning Christ. We read in James 3:5-10, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things, Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it

defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beast, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God, Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My bretheren, these things ought not so to be." There is a relevant saying concerning our speech as well, "Shallow brooks are noisy, but still waters run deep."

Right action – This involves moral guidelines such as being respectful of others and discontinuing actions which cause harm such as murder, theft, and irresponsible sex. Traditionally, Buddhists speak of the five moral precepts, which are...

- Avoid harming others;
- Avoid taking what is not yours;
- Avoid harmful speech;
- Avoid irresponsible sex;
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.

Christians are also required to comply with a set of moral standards.

There is a commandment which requires the Christian to do unto

others as you would have them do unto you. Christians need to look for the good in others and nurture that good. By nurturing the good in others they will also find the good in themselves. If we are judgmental, sarcastic, backbiting, and disrespectful of others then we are nurturing and developing these qualities in ourselves. Two of the Ten Commandments require that "Thou shall not steal" and "Thou shall not kill." There are numerous references against lust of the flesh such as in adultery and fornication. Also the bible instructs us that our body is the temple of God and should be treated with dignity and respect. This would include abstaining from drunkenness, idolatry, recklessness, and the use of the body to gratify the desires of the flesh for sinful pleasures. These moral standards are not simply listed to limit our immoral behavior, but to be used as a set of guidelines that will help us move beyond the carnal mind into a spiritual mind. We do not follow the letter of the law simply for the sake of following rules and guidelines, we do this out of love for God. If we are abstaining from sins because of moral obedience, yet continue to sin in our hearts, then our reward will be found in our spiritual pride and personal self-esteem. The right path towards union is to follow the commandments out of love for God. Through our faith we will be strengthened from within. God will teach us through the Holy Spirit how to transcend the lower nature and find fulfillment in obedience to

Him. We will never be able under our own power to follow perfectly the letter of the law. It is only through the grace of God that we will find spiritual progress. Eckhart explains that "The one work which God works in the soul is better and nobler and higher than all the world. Through that light comes grace. Grace never comes in the intelligence or in the will. If it could come in the intelligence or in the will, the intelligence and the will would have to transcend themselves. On this a master says: There is something secret about it; and thereby he means the spark of the soul, which alone can apprehend God. The true union between God and the soul takes place in the little spark, which is called the spirit of the soul. Grace unites not to any work. It is an indwelling and a living together of the soul in God."

Right livelihood – This is concerned with how we make a living. If we pursue a profession that promotes the good of the community in an honest and non-hurtful way then we will be strengthened. Much good can be accomplished from an honest, compassionate, hard-working person. If we pursue our profession in a greedy, cut-throat, dishonest manner then we will suffer the effects of these actions. Deng Ming-*Dao* writes in *EVERYDAY TAO*, "It is important to do the type of work that leads not simply to production, but to skill. In other words, the most important type of work is the kind that results from one's life, not from societal or economic pressures. When we work as part of life

it leaves a profound residue in our personality. It produces an attitude of accomplishment, an accumulation of working wisdom impossible to obtain in any other way...In olden times, people would say that a craftsman who had achieved great skill had realized the Tao of that art form. And once one has realized Tao in part, the whole is not far away."

Kahlil Gibran also speaks of work in his book *The Prophet*, "You have been told also life is darkness, and in your weariness you echo what was said by the weary. And I say that life is indeed darkness save when there is urge, And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge, And all knowledge is vain save when there is work, And all work is empty save when there is love; And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God. And what is it to work with love? It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth. It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house. It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit. It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit, And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching. Often have I heard you say, as if speaking in sleep, "he who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own soul in the stone, is a nobler

than he who ploughs the soil. And he who seizes the rainbow to lay it on a cloth in the likeness of man, is more than he who makes the sandals for our feet." But I say, not in sleep but in the over-wakefulness of noontide, that the wind speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks than to the least of all the blades of grass; And he alone is great who turns the voice of the wind into a song made sweeter by his own loving. Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy. For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half man's hunger. And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes, your grudge distils a poison in the wine. And if you sing though as angels, and love not the singing, you muffle man's ears to the voices of the day and the voices of the night."

Jesus also commands us to love one another; to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The disciples are commanded in Matthew 10:8-10 to, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat." Jesus wants his disciples to be concerned with their spiritual journey in faith, not with the things of this world.

Through our faith and concentration on his will the material things will be provided. When we complete our daily work requirements we are to approach this work with an attitude of holiness and service. We are not to be concerned solely with ourselves and what we can get out of it, but concerned with God and fulfilling his commandments. We work out of love for our family, our community, our co-workers, and God. When we work with bitterness towards others our community suffers. Each of our actions while at work has an effect on each individual at work. They in turn affect others and so on. If we work with love then we are working in the spirit of love, and God's grace will flow through our daily experiences. Try to find the good in your co-workers and nurture that good so it may grow.

Right effort – Right effort in the Buddhist tradition is concerned with taking control of your thoughts and the contents of the mind. The Buddhist believes that we are to develop good mental habits through simple and direct practice. When sinful or negative thoughts and impulses arise, they should be abandoned. This is done by watching the thought without attachment, recognizing it for what it is without denial or repression until it fades away. Good thoughts and impulses on the other hand should be nurtured. The practice involves exchanging negative thoughts for new and spiritually empowering thoughts. The approach of attention and non-attachment is similar to

the cognitive-behaviorist approach. The difference is that the cognitive behaviorists ask us to change these thoughts to a more tolerable and rational thought. Such as change a "must" or "should," to a preference. There are no moral guidelines to necessarily follow, although reason and social responsibility are considered. In the Buddhist tradition we are encouraged to simply see these dualities as attachments to our illusory identity. The aspirant is to pay attention to the thoughts without fear, anxiety, self-judgment, or intolerance. Through this awareness they are able to objectively see the thoughts that are self-defeating and negative and let them fade. They will also see the thoughts that are consistent with the Buddhist teachings and allow them to grow and flourish by right attention.

A.W. Tozer writes, "All social intercourse between human beings is a response of personality to personality, grading upward from the most casual brush between man and man to the fullest, most intimate communion of which the human soul is capable. Religion, so far as it is genuine, is in essence the response of created personalities to the Creating Personality, God. 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' (John 17:3) God is a Person, and in the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys feels, loves, desires and suffers as any other person may. In making Himself known to us He stays by the familiar pattern of

personality. He communicates with us through the avenues of our minds, our wills and our emotions. The continuous and unembarrassed interchange of love and thought between God and the soul of the redeemed man is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion." We also read in Romans 8:5, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

There are many Christians who think they can purify their minds through an act of self-will. When they have sinful thoughts they push these thoughts out of their minds until they disappear. However, thoughts do not simply go away when forced out of conscious awareness but are stored in a subconscious state. This suppression and repression of thoughts tends to add power and strength to thoughts that exist in a subconscious or semi-conscious form. These thoughts then return with even greater strength or manifest themselves in feelings of depression, anxiety and/or health problems. We can recognize and change these thoughts as cognitive behaviorists suggest we do, or simply acknowledge their existence without giving power to them. We can recognize them for what they are, and give our strength and attention to other more spiritual thoughts. Rather than fight these thoughts back into the subconscious mind; we can

place our attention to thoughts that arrive from our spiritual nature. Albert the Great writes, "Now there is no one who approaches God with a true and upright heart who is not tested by hardships and temptations. So in all these temptations see to it that even if you feel them, you do not consent to them, but bear them patiently and calmly with humility and long suffering. Even if they are blasphemies and sordid, hold firmly on to this fact in everything, that you can do nothing better or more effective against them than to consider all this sort of fantasy as a nothing. Even if they are the most vile, sordid and horrible blasphemies, simply take no notice of them, count them as nothing and despise them. Don't look on them as yours or allow yourself to make them a matter of conscience. The enemy will certainly take flight if you treat him and his company with contempt in this way. He is very proud and cannot bear to be despised and spurned. So the best remedy is to completely ignore all such temptations, like flies flying around in front of your eyes against your will." When the cognitive behaviorists suggest we change these thoughts they do not suggest we change them towards a spiritual consciousness but to a secular humanistic awareness related to self-will. The Christian listens to the voice of God that rings in the heart of the soul like the music of a sacred harp.

Right mindfulness -- mindfulness refers to a form of meditation that involves an acceptance of thoughts and perceptions without attachment. This mindfulness is also extended to our daily lives. This mindfulness is a way of developing awareness of the thoughts and beliefs that determine our daily interaction with our environment. The Buddhist views the average person as sleepwalking through their lives because of a lack of awareness of their thoughts. In cognitive behavior therapy the client is to recognize and change the thoughts that appear in their conscious awareness. In Buddhism the practicing monk is to simply be mindful without attachment, without attempting to alter, or fight against, or judge or become distressed by the thoughts. The idea behind this non-attachment is related to the concept of Yin and Yang and the law of Karma. If you push against something with moderate strength then an equal force will return with the same level of force to achieve equilibrium. Carl Jung also embraced the notion of equilibrium when he developed his temperament theory of types. So when we fight against a thought the thought returns with the same level of force.

The Christian religion also requires us to pay attention to our thoughts. In Romans 12:2 we read, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and

perfect." And in Isaiah 55:7-9, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." We read in much Christian literature about the battlefield of the mind. Many believe that the Christian has to fight against evil thoughts to keep the mind pure. As a result we have Christians who suffer from severe anxiety, depression and distress in a futile effort to fight off evil thoughts. When we fight off evil thoughts we are actually adding fuel to the fire and strengthening the energy we devote to these thoughts. With this effort of self the best we can hope for is to repress these thoughts in the subconscious mind. As the energy from these repressed thoughts builds we will find ourselves tired, anxious, overly controlled, irritable, depressed, with poor concentration and memory loss. On the surface we are winning the battle but in truth we are losing the war. This is all about the ego attempting to fight the battle that Jesus has already won. The ego always wants to be in charge with a Herculean attempt at self-control from self-effort. Can we renew our own mind through self-effort? The answer is a resounding no; only God can renew our mind.

There are three things we can do when we have unwanted thoughts.

- 1) We can change the energy related to these thoughts to more acceptable thoughts as do the cognitive behaviorist. This is a form of mental Judo which is way of redirecting the energy into a more acceptable form.
- 2) We can fight against these thoughts; which is a way of conducting a losing battle that can not be won and can at best be temporarily stalemated.
- 3) Or we can watch them without attachment and listen for the pure thoughts of God.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts. We can recognize the thoughts that are not of God by the selfish and sinful nature of these thoughts. Let God fight these battles for you rather than think that you can battle against evil thoughts under your own will and power. As evil and sinful thoughts arise simply see them for what they are, carnal thoughts that are not of God. Rather than beat them back into submission, simply let the energy related to these thoughts fade away. Attach yourselves to the thoughts that come from God, cling to Godly thoughts through your faith and love for God. If we spend all of our energy fighting off attacks from our carnal nature we have no energy

left for God's thoughts. There is no peace in this war, and the mind becomes an unhappy battlefield. When we become aware of our thoughts we see them arise in the mind and compete for our attention. We can attach our energy to any one of these thoughts or simply let them fade away out of existence. When we see thoughts that are in line with the teachings of Christ then we will find peace and joy in those precious gifts from God.

We surround ourselves with objects and activities that diminish our ability to be aware of our thoughts. This would include drugs and alcohol, unbalanced attention to work, sex, food, recreation, clothing, self-created rituals, television, mindless routines, and sports.

Everything we do should be done as a devotion to God, rather than as a way to gratify our ego desires. We can have fun in our life, as long as we are mindful of the way we conduct ourselves during the activity.

If we conduct our daily routine in a devoted and Christ-like manner then that routine will be productive and devotional in nature. We do not have to retreat from life to be a disciple of Christ and can enjoy the gifts God has given us without entering into self destructive behavior. Even if we attempt to limit our activities to a mountaintop, or only to church activities, we can be just as sinful as the worst of sinners. Sin is concerned with separation and disobedience towards God. If while in the church we are judgmental of others, rejecting,

gossiping, backbiting, critical, self-righteous, insensitive, and hostile then our efforts are all in vain. If by contrast the Christian embraces the world, feeds the poor, supports the downtrodden, demonstrates compassion, love, generosity, and offers hope and peace to those they encounter then they will abide in God's will.

Right concentration – This involves meditating in such a way as to empty the nature of attachment, avoidance, and ignorance, so the follower may accept the imperfection, impermanence, and insubstantiality of life. Right concentration is concerned with taking our current level of concentration and perfecting this concentration to develop a non-dualistic state of mind. When the mind reaches this level it is firm and unwavering in its neutrality. It doesn't waver when the eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an aroma, the tongue tastes a flavor, the body feels a tactile sensation, or an idea comes to mind. It consistently maintains a high level of purity. According to the Buddhist you can tell a bodhisattva from ordinary beings by the presence of four outstanding qualities, called the

Brahma Vihara:

Loving kindness to all creatures;

Compassion for all who suffer;

Sympathetic joy for all who are happy;
And equanimity, a pervading calm.

We can also see a form of right concentration in the Christian literature as well. John Tauler writes, "He must have peace with our Lord, so that no created being can disturb his inner peace. Thus saith the prophet: "He will give you true peace in this place." The spouse of our Lord must so comport herself, that she readily renounces all things in humble confidence, retaining her divine peace unimpaired within, and renouncing all things in Him and by Him. Now wouldest thou ask, with whom thou shalt have peace? With the world, the enemy, and thine own flesh. But how? With the world, by not heeding what the world may do unto thee, either taking thee or leaving thee; to this thou mayest attain with patience." And in Mark 12: 30-31 we read, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, There is none other commandment greater then these." In this passage we are asked as Christians to concentrate our attention on God and his commandments, including the love for our neighbor as well.

When Jesus commands us to love God with all our hearts he is

talking about an indwelling spiritual existence of concentrated focus. The heart is a spiritual state of being that is absorbed and united with its object of devotion. We read in the Christian writings of Dionysius the ideas inherent in unity and concentration. He writes, "Let us, then, consider that one and simple nature of the Peaceful Unity which unites all things to Itself to themselves and to each other, and preserves all things, distinct and yet interpenetrating in an universal cohesion without confusion. Thus it is that the Divine Intelligences derive that Unity whereby they are united to the activities and the objects of their intuition; Contemplation, Act of Contemplation, and Object Contemplated are all united together, and so imply a fundamental Unity which exists ultimately in God and rise up still further to a contact, beyond knowledge, with truths which transcend the mind."

Jesus commands us to love God with all our soul as well. When we love with our soul we love with an existential transcendence that goes beyond our interpretive awareness. This is a love that transcends the love the carnal and natural mind is capable of, and reaches a love that only God can stimulate and direct. This level of concentration is a spiritual state of being that connects with God in a way that can not be reached through our self-efforts. This love is a love that is willed and directed by God. Through our soul we enter the heart of Jesus that unites our humanity to God.

When Jesus commands us to follow God with "all our minds" he is concerned with turning our thoughts to God. This is also a form of directing our attention and concentration towards God. This involves becoming unattached to the thoughts of our carnal nature and opening our mind to Godly thoughts. This does not mean concentrating on what is not God, but focusing the attention and concentration on the presence of God. Through this immersion in the presence and will of God we experience greater attachment and spiritual union with God. Dionysius also writes, "From this Beautiful all things possess their existence, each kind being beautiful in its own manner, and the Beautiful causes the harmonies and sympathies and communities of all things. And by the Beautiful all things are united together and the Beautiful is the beginning of all things, as being the Creative Cause which moves the world and holds all things in existence by their yearning for their own Beauty. And It is the Goal of all things, and their Beloved, as being their Final Cause (for 'tis the desire of the Beautiful that brings them all into existence), and It is their Exemplar from which they derive their definite limits; and hence the Beautiful is the same as the Good, inasmuch as all things, in all causation, desire the Beautiful and Good; nor is there anything in the world but hath a share in the Beautiful and Good." Jesus commands us to pursue God, which in turn draws the love of God towards ourselves.

Jesus commands us to Love God with all our strength. When we love with all of our strength we concentrate on the will. God has given us free will which we can use for whatever purpose we so desire. If we concentrate the will on God then we are giving back what has been freely given us. When we give back to God he responds in kind. God wants us to freely love him, not as slaves, but as sons. The will is an essential part of our union with God. Our strength of will towards God is the only power we have of our own. We can at any time choose to direct our will towards our own selfish interests or cultivate a concentrated effort towards God. This direction of will is a form of Christian meditation that focuses the being towards renewal and union.

M. Scott Peck, MD describes spiritual development as occurring in four distinct stages. The following excerpt from *The Different Drum* describes his thoughts on these stages:

STAGE I:

“Chaotic, Antisocial. Frequently pretenders; they pretend they are loving and pious, covering up their lack of principles. Although they may pretend to be loving (and think of themselves that way), their relationships with their fellow human beings are all essentially manipulative and self-serving.”

This stage corresponds closely to the materialist dimension that

was discussed earlier. This stage represents an ego bound individual with very little ability to see beyond the needs of self. When this individual does good works it is out of a need for personal recognition and gain. This individual can appear on the surface as being pious and religious, but underneath that façade is a manipulative and narcissistic individual. This person may be so intensely shallow that they may not even understand how they manipulate others to meet their own narcissistic needs. An example may be of a televangelist who squeezes the last nickel out of a grieving person who in turn hopes the holy water they purchased will cure their loved ones cancer.

STAGE II:

"Formal, Institutional, Fundamental. Beginning the work of submitting themselves to principle--the law--but they do not yet understand the spirit of the law, consequently they are legalistic, parochial, and dogmatic. They are threatened by anyone who thinks differently from them, as they have the "truth," and so regard it as their responsibility to convert or save the other 90 or 99 percent of humanity who are not "true believers."

According to Peck stage two represents those who have no ability to see beyond their dogmatic and rigid beliefs. These are those who are dominated by the letter of the law with no or very little understanding of how the symbols apply to the sacred. He goes on to explain, "That is the narrow one-sided exclusiveness that limits insight

to one set of rules and one objective truth, under the literal logic or rationalism, that fails to apprehend the unseen intuitive essence of existence and ignorantly labels outsiders as misled sinners, while surrounding themselves with interior neurotic and finite walls of security and certainty.”

However, I think Peck mistakenly understands the “true believer” as necessarily dogmatic, shallow, and legalistic. Dr. Peck seems to hold the belief that if you have strongly held and traditional views of Christianity, then you are necessarily rigid and dogmatic and therefore spiritually immature. If a Christian holds the traditional and conservative opinion that Jesus was the son of God, who came to earth for the redemption of our sins, then according to this reasoning, they are dogmatic, parochial and legalistic. However, the Christian belief of redemption and resurrection is a matter of faith, and can not be proved or disproved. Anytime we begin to dispute the teachings of any religion, and call them untrue or dogmatic, we begin to tread into dogmatism ourselves. Dr. Peck has mistakenly confused the dogmatic with belief and faith. The fact is, that many Christians believe that Jesus was the son of God, sent to earth for the redemption of sins, including many Christian mystics, but this is a matter of faith and has very little to do with spiritual attainment. There are countless religious interpretations within each denomination,

religion, atheistic society, or humanist. This individual interpretation of religion is precisely why many people go to war over their religions and fight for their God, or right to pursue their God, which may include communism, atheism, or industrialism. In fact, individual interpretations of a given religion has very little to do with spiritual maturity.

This stage is not represented by personal belief, but by criticism, harsh judgment, rejection with a lack of compassion and tolerance for other beliefs. They view any threat to their interpretation as a personal threat to their well being. They believe that it is their moral duty to convert others to their point of view and will do so no matter who it hurts or inconveniences. This level may also include the atheist, or the psychiatrist who views a particular interpretation of a religion as dogmatic, the pastor who views as heresy the church member who interprets ever-so-slightly the bible or particular aspects of the bible differently than themselves, or the scientist who dogmatically and fanatically holds to their facts.

STAGE III:

"Skeptic, Individual, questioner, including atheists, agnostics and those scientifically minded who demand a measurable, well researched and logical explanation. Although frequently "nonbelievers," people in **Stage III** are generally more spiritually developed than many content

to remain in Stage II. Although individualistic, they are not the least bit antisocial. To the contrary, they are often deeply involved in and committed to social causes. They make up their own minds about things and are no more likely to believe everything they read in the papers than to believe it is necessary for someone to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior (as opposed to Buddha or Mao or Socrates) in order to be saved.”

Dr. Peck seems to have confused humanism with spiritual maturity. His maturity level three is concerned with questioning, doubt, skepticism, and liberal theology. According to Dr. Peck it is those who have renounced their faith in traditional Christianity that are now suddenly more spiritually mature. He equates spiritual maturity, as do many liberal theologians, with skepticism, scientific reasoning, and humanistic thought. It is quite valid to have a liberal point of view concerning the bible however it is not valid to say that one is necessarily more spiritually mature because of how they interpret the bible. Dr. Peck does nevertheless raise an interesting point.

Soren Kierkegaard also encourages the individual to have the courage to break from the crowd and accept the consequences of their convictions. This is a type of courage that calls on the believer to participate with their entire being in an act of worship and faith. This is the individual who has faith to be in and a part of their convictions, to

live within and beyond the symbols, who understand what it means to love their neighbor as themselves. They do not need to condemn and judge others who do not believe like they believe, are individuals in the true sense of the word, believe in miracles, in God on earth, in the truth as they understand it. Not the preacher, nor the humanist, or the scientist can move them from their goal of being in the heart of God. They are the seekers of the way, the true believers, able to break from slavish and faddish interpretations of truth. Spiritual maturity at this stage involves purity of heart, understanding your spiritual connection with God, being true to your set of beliefs, and being willing to lose yourself in the faith of that interpretation. An individual does not follow the guru, the preacher, the scientist, or the doctor, but enters into that quiet conviction of faith. Faith in God and spiritual maturity enters through the same doors, the differences are found in how true we are to our set of beliefs.

STAGE IV:

"Mystic, communal. Out of love and commitment to the whole, using their ability to transcend their backgrounds, culture and limitations with all others, reaching toward the notion of world community and the possibility of either transcending culture or -- depending on which way you want to use the words -- belonging to a planetary culture. They are religious, not looking for clear cut, proto type answers, but

desiring to enter into the mystery of uncertainty, living in the unknown. The Christian mystic, as with all other mystics, Sufi and Zen alike, through contemplation, meditation, reflection and prayer, see the Christ, Gods indwelling Spirit or the Buddha nature, in all people, including all the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews and so forth, recognizing the connectedness of all humanity with God, never separating oneself from others with doctrine and scripture, recognizing that all scripture acts as fallible pointers of inspiration, unable to capture the essence of truth outside of both human perception and the linguistic straight jacket of language and articulation, that is, the words of fallible men who experienced the nature of God, that of their inner true self..."

Thomas Merton is a good example of a Christian who has maintained his belief in God and the traditions he has learned within the Catholic Church. Thomas Merton describes his experience as follows: "To live "in Christ" is to live in a mystery equal to that of the Incarnation and similar to it. For as Christ unites in his one person the two natures of God and of man, so too in making us His friends He dwells in us, uniting us intimately to Himself. Dwelling in us He becomes as it were our superior self, for He has united and identified our inmost self with Himself. From the moment that we have responded by faith and charity to His love for us, a supernatural union

of our souls with His indwelling Divine Person gives us a participation in His Divine sonship and nature. I become a "new man" and this new man, spiritually and mystically one identity, is at once Christ and myself." There are many Christians who have stayed within the church, and continue to deepen in their spiritual maturity. They maintain the integrity of the teachings of their convictions but do not use this as an opportunity to judge and condemn others. They are not swayed by the humanist arguments, the enlightened and politically correct, or the liberal theologian. They maintain their faith in their personal convictions and hold to that belief in service to God. They love others and respect their right to think differently than themselves. A Christian is true to the spirit of Christ that lives within them, a Buddha is true to the Buddha nature that they seek, the Muslim loves and respects Muhammad, and others attempt to incorporate all religions into their belief system. It is through the teachings of Jesus Christ that I have found God. This is the way that is important to me, that God has called me to, and is felt and believed to be true with all my heart. A true Christian loves Jesus Christ and follows him with all his being, as the bride to the groom. I do not have to judge or condemn others for this relationship to be pure and strong. It is my truth, it works for me, and I am drawn within to the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit. E. E. Cummings describes the mystical

connection of the Christian with God quite well in his love poem i carry
your heart with me:

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear

no fate(for you are my fate, my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

Chapter 7

The Pretenders

Christians and spiritual seekers will often become sidetracked in their efforts to find God. In their zealous desire to answer the call of God they pass through spiritual paths that take them down the ego trip of an astral or carnal spiritual movement. There are endless spiritual movements that claim to have "The truth." There are none more fanatical in their claim for absolute truth than those who do not believe in absolute truth. The spiritualist claim that there are many roads to the same place and that each person must find their own road to truth. This eclectic view of truth is quite adamantly opposed to the Christian claim of Jesus Christ as being "The way, the Truth, and the Life." In John 14:6 we read, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me." For the traditional Christian these words have both literal and spiritual implications.

The Christian has a deep and abiding affection for Jesus Christ and view this path as the one and true path to God. Not unlike most other "True Believers" who follow a given religious path in search of God. Although the Buddhist may say they believe in many paths to God they truly hold a special affinity to the path they have embraced as the true path for them. Each religion is different with different "Truths" and methods towards realization of God. The path they have chosen has been in large part chosen for them; this includes those

who do not believe in any particular religion. If a person is born in India they are most likely going to embrace Hinduism, if they are born in China they may embrace Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism, or no religion at all in communist areas. If someone is born in Israel then they will likely embrace Judaism, or in Pakistan they will likely be Muslim. If someone is born in England or the United States they are likely to be Christian.

The denominational influences will usually be determined by ethnicity, sub-culture, demographics, and socio-economic status. The liberal versus conservative spectrum of any given denomination will also often be determined by what part of the country they are from. If they are from northern affluent regions they will usually be more liberally minded and less literal in their interpretation, if they are from the southern regions in the rural areas they are more likely to be more literal and conservative. This will further be influenced if they are African-American or Caucasian, Catholic or Baptist, from a conservative or liberal family, level of education and temperamental tendency towards passive or aggressive orientation towards authority. We see major disagreement among groups within every religion concerning the interpretive understanding of that religion. Can a Christian know for certain that their beliefs concerning Jesus Christ are absolute truth? Of course most would answer this question with a

resounding yes. Would we not have an equally certain belief concerning our truth if we were born in different circumstances? I think we would.

Of course most of us would say that this philosophical and theological speculation is irrelevant to the truth that we embrace. I would tend to agree with this point of view. Does it really matter whether others agree with our definition of truth, as long as they allow us to freely exercise our right to our religion? If within our faith we are required to convert everyone to Christianity and we do so in a loving and respectful manner then this evangelistic effort is acceptable. If in our effort to convert everyone to our religion we step on others rights to alternative beliefs, kill others because they disagree, outlaw, disrespect, ostracize, and humiliate, then we are practicing a form of hedonism and totalitarianism rather than religion.

Often we see wars, hate, division, fanaticism, selfishness, and superficiality in religion and many potential converts are turned off from religion as a result. We claim to have truth and use that truth to harm those we claim to want to save. In Corinthians 13:1-8 and 13, we read "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am

nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails....And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." And in 1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." And in 1 John 4:8, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. God is commanding us to love one another, to be tolerant of others points of view.

What in us causes us to become angry and violent when someone disagrees with our point of view? Christians often look on other non-Christians with disdain and intolerance, and seem to be in fear of other points of view. Those who practice intolerance are often reacting against levels of anxiety and fear they harbor within themselves. Or they may be reacting within a rigid and intolerant belief system or learned prejudice against non-Christians. There may also be a history of intolerance they personally experienced against their own beliefs, and because of these experiences they harbor anger and resentment. Unless we are being physically attacked because of

our beliefs, what difference does it make if they disagree? It seems that Catholics and Protestants far too often attack each other verbally and physically as a way of securing their own position in the Christian faith. We also see Christians verbally attack the non-Christian and atheist because they disagree with them. There is however nothing wrong with pointing out differences of belief and having a discussion about these differences. I believe everyone in some manner is looking to work out spiritual truth in their life. Everyone necessarily works out some basic belief system concerning their religion or lack of religion and what the truth of that belief means to them. They can and should speak to their truth as they see it which will add to the depth and understanding of everyone's truth.

There is a great amount of intolerance in the Christian religion which stems from control, imposition, and self-promotion. The ego is necessarily intolerant of those points of view it sees as contrary to its personal interests. If the ego is strongly bound together by a need to be right, coupled by an intolerant and rigid personality, then it will feel a righteous indignation when others disagree with them. There are of course moral considerations that complicate religious considerations, such as abortion, gay marriage, and prayer in school. These social considerations add fuel to the religious fire of intolerance, fanaticism and control. Social considerations such as these sometimes blur the

boundaries of religion and society and are the real battleground of religion today. Even these emotionally loaded social issues can be debated in a civil and respectful manner.

Beyond these social considerations are other considerations that are simply related to a disagreement of doctrine or belief. For example, we see the Christian who disagrees with the Muslim, or the Buddhist who disagrees with the Christian faith. A Christian does not have to react to disagreement by saying that those who have another opinion will be going to hell because of what they believe. Christians, Muslims, Hindu's, Buddhist or non-believers can be tolerant and respectful of others that disagree with them. Can we as Christians condemn all of those who do not believe as we do, including all the various denominations and sub-denominations of the Christian religion? Some would of course say yes, and are quite comfortable in believing that only their denomination or splinter group of followers are going to heaven. Many Christians however are not as comfortable about knowing the mind and ways of God, and are content to be a humble Christian living in faith and love for God.

There are many groups that choose to condemn and judge others in absolute intolerance and become trapped in their beliefs. This group would include Christians, atheist, spiritual cults, Hindu cults, as well as satanic cults and some humanist groups. We see

Christian groups that believe that only their way is the right way and anyone outside of their group is necessarily wrong and going to hell. They work to shut off contrary information to the group's point of view, and allow only the "truth" to be heard. Anyone that disagrees with them is believed to be possessed by the devil and summarily condemned to hell. They cite over and over again the scriptures related to the few who are chosen. Only the leaders can rightly interpret God's law and all others must have faith in the leader. The faith required by God is transferred to the leadership, and there is a dependency on the interpretation of the leadership and distrust in the individual's ability to reason. The direct connection to God is severed and union can only be found through the leadership and only then through God. The leadership in essence replaces Jesus Christ with their identity, and becomes the new Jesus Christ. This is often stated in many cults by the implied or direct belief that the founder or cult leader is the second coming, or God's special ambassador.

The seeker needs to be careful with the indulgent egoist that attempts to found a religious movement and places themselves as the spiritual leader. What passes for enlightenment is a form of self-worship that manipulates the seekers desire for self-improvement and enlightenment. The leader of a spiritual movement may have a hidden

agenda that is often subtle and difficult to detect. The characteristics of a cult leader are:

- 1) A unique way of interpreting scriptures given exclusively to him through a special relationship with God.
- 2) Highly charismatic and self-confident.
- 3) Reclusive and inward looking
- 4) Unable to maintain adult-to-adult friendships as equals
- 5) A Need to be in control
- 6) Intelligent, attractive, and idealistic
- 7) Rigid in thought
- 8) Sincerely believe they are chosen by God to fulfill a mission
- 9) Narcissistic and unable to tolerate diverse points of view
- 10) Need the validation of followers to feel complete

Cult members generally have the following characteristics:

- 1) Idealistic and religiously oriented
- 2) Low self-esteem and lack self-confidence
- 3) Average to above average intelligence
- 4) Believe in something greater than themselves
- 5) Poor family relations

- 6) Undeveloped religious beliefs
- 7) Want to be accepted and loved by others
- 8) Seek ways to escape from adult responsibilities

Cult members worship and idealize the group leader as having a special place with God not obtainable by the average member. They believe that only the group leader has access to the truth and their involvement with the leader assures them of deeper access to "The" truth. The cult leader indulges his own narcissistic and egoistic needs so he can make a God of his self-image. The true worship in this scenario is the worship of the ego of the cult leader, as the cult leader is unable to escape beyond the confines of self-worship and the prison of the ego. The followers are unable to escape beyond the ego mentality of desire and ambition. Through their zeal to be special they tend to glorify their own efforts, follow a false God (an Idol), and lose site of the true relationship with Jesus Christ. Anytime we are replacing an image, a leader, a ritual, a rite, a church, in place of a real relationship with God then we are looking at images and shadows. This often happens in spiritual movements that are eclectic in their understanding of God. This may be followers of a charismatic minister, preacher, or Guru. This can also apply to followers of the Christian religion that believe God can be found by anyone if they say the right words, regardless of lifestyle and personal choice. The

worship of self-appointed God's does not reach beyond the letter of the law and fails to reach the heart of God's love for his children. We see spiritual movements that are basically ego driven and works based, that try to meditate their way to heaven. They think that they possess a special truth that is found only in their group, and all other religious groups are necessarily wrong. The ego is powerfully persuasive and it is easy to find yourself self-deceived into a sense of false enlightenment and distorted self-knowledge.

The internet is full of examples of spiritualist, religious organizations and individuals who have an eclectic and humanistic approach to Christianity and religion. They combine various fragments of truth from different religious movements until they have a form of worship that is right for them. Or they follow someone that has woven a tapestry of beliefs into a personal unquestioned truth. When we look beyond the surface of these beliefs we see an odd form of narcissism and ego gratification, similar to the Christian evangelist who consistently points to himself when preaching. They often have a form of love for God that talks about our responsibility, our efforts, our interpretations, our afterlife, and our truth. There is great pride in their personal interpretations, a lack of faith in the unknown, a lack of poverty of spirit, a form of compassion that seems ego driven and forced, a self-confidence driven by self-esteem in a self-assured and

elite form of spiritualism. There is an artificial light that surrounds them, almost as though this glow comes from a state of mind that radiates confidence, personal love of their own ideas, forced peace and joy that is found in the happy ego. In these movements you will rarely hear about poverty of spirit, humbleness, faith in God, emptiness, or letting go of self-esteem and self-efforts. If we do hear these ideas they are filled with the voice of the self-assured, the artificial holiness of the spiritually prideful, the knowing that is found in self-knowledge, in books, in meditation techniques, and faith in gurus and narcissistic spiritual teachers.

When attempting to put together an eclectic religion we fall into the inevitable trap of constructing a shrine to our own personal history. When we walk into this shrine we walk into the construction of the ego. We can not find our way out of this personal shrine when we construct it ourselves. It seems so right, so perfect; we have created a path that works for us. This of course is the secular humanist influence in our culture that promotes the idea that truth is relative and individualistic; that the seeker must strive to be an individual in courageous self-affirmation. The fuel for this effort is concerned with the promotion of the individual and a self-superiority that is concerned with slavery to a religious ideology. They believe that truth is open for interpretation to anyone who can break out of

their slavish religious beliefs. There is however much self-deception in this humanistic interpretation of religious truth. When we attempt to create our own shrine to truth we are walking away from a spiritual center that has been developed by those Christian Saints far holier than ourselves and uniquely inspired by God.

The bible is the roadmap to God and can not be added to, changed, interpreted carnally, or improved. The bible is the perfect spiritual book; it is a map to a great and precious treasure. It would be quite foolish to take our treasure map and change parts of it because we thought that the map was wrong. We would of course never find our way to the promised treasure. It would also be equally foolish to continue stepping off the same paces and never digging on the X. The reason the bible brings us to God is because it makes us lose our self along the journey. In this walk through the bible there is a gradual stripping away of our old self, our self-confidence, our humanistic interpretations, our self-deceptions and illusions of greatness. When we have walked far enough and long enough with the grace of God we find that we can no longer walk this path under our own power. We finally die to self and fall on the mercy of God's love. It is in this brokenness that we begin to feel the presence of God and know he is with us. We begin to understand the suffering of Jesus Christ and know that he is the example on earth of perfect devotion to

God. We fall into his humanity and are resurrected through his love into spiritual union with God.

In every religion we will see those who have a sincere effort at finding God as well as the followers looking to glorify self on the coattails of a given religious movement. The Buddhist movement actively points away from the self in practice, but like any religious movement, can be distorted and misinterpreted by individuals and groups to glorify the ego in the name of God or Buddha. There is often great risk of exploitation towards individuals in a spiritual movement that is eclectic in nature and follows the interpretive teachings of an individual. If the leader uses the religion to glorify self, the followers are bound to do the same. There are also sincere and determined seekers in every religion which will progress along the path to spiritual fulfillment. As a Christian I have found a path that works for me. It is the only path that I have followed that has had positive results. From the time of my conversion my life has changed. In the past I have followed many other religious movements and did not feel the connection with God that occurred when converting to Christianity. This is the religion that works for me and the truth that I embrace. In *Theological Germanica* we read, " There is an inward sight which hath power to perceive the One true Good, and that it is neither this nor that, but that of which St. Paul saith; "When that which is perfect is

come, then that which is in part shall be done away." It is not an essential part of my belief that everyone be a Christian. In the Christian religion there is great peace, profound joy, and union with God. It is my sincere hope that those with other religious beliefs, who love God and seek God with sincerity of devotion, will find a place in God's kingdom as well.

The Christian needs to be comfortable with their interpretation of the Christian belief. However, the Christian religion goes far beyond simple belief and interpretation and becomes ever more meaningful as one reaches past the symbols. If we are strictly concerned with the letter of the law then we will be looking for all the interpretations that divide one believer from another. Paul addressed this concern when he chastised his followers for being overly concerned with circumcision. In Galatians 5: 2-6 we read, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Je'sus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Through these passages we can see that it is through faith rather than works that the Christian will find his way

to God through Christ. Today we can see many people argue the equivalent of circumcision and uncircumcision in their request that requires Christians to follow their interpretations to the letter of the law. Through our faith and the grace of God the spiritual understanding of these passages will be made clear. When we begin to understand the spiritual meaning of the word of God distinctions concerning interpretations become increasingly clarified.

There are many Christians who struggle with this dichotomy of belief and interpretation. They feel condemned by their own denomination and have been unable to locate a group that believes exactly like them. Through this confusion and self-condemnation they leave the church never to return. Or instead of leaving the church they quietly maintain their own interpretations and nod in agreement with the church doctrine. It is these Christians that look beyond the symbols, question the status quo and seek deeply from the fount of knowledge that demonstrate progress on the path to spiritual maturity.

Faith is not about accepting the beliefs of a given denomination or religion without question. When you enter a cult the new convert will hear something like, "Thinking will get you nowhere." The cult will manipulate the new convert with the notion of faith. In this suspension of critical thinking the cult begins to indoctrinate the

convert with information that is designed to trap the convert in a doctrinal prison. They are taught that critical thoughts which are contrary to the cults control are from Satan. The convert is taught to fear the thoughts that are contrary to the group. The fear comes from the learned belief that the world is full of hidden dangers and only the group can save them from illusion and destruction. There is strong emphasis on those within the group as being special and unique and those outside of the group as being evil and ignorant. They are usually surrounded by others and encouraged to stay in contact with the group. Any contact outside of the group is discouraged. The convert is asked to have faith in the group rather than have faith in God.

Faith in God is not about suspending all critical thought and accepting the denominational party line without question. God has given us an ability to reason and to use our reasoning capacity to escape the mindless conformism of false interpretations. We may, after thinking through our point of view come to agree with a particular belief, and in this acceptance is liberation. We never need to be afraid to question our identity, our beliefs, our denomination, pastor, guru, or spiritual teacher. In this conformism lies the robotic, the stale religious personality, that goes through the motion of religion; believes in the prevailing views of the community, the

assembly line religion. This is the type of religion that is empty and lifeless. The faith of the idle minded, the guilt ridden, the theocrat that smiles on Sunday through the veil of a dead faith. When the pastor preaches the church responds with the predictable AMEN, on cue, expects to hear the same sermon and does, hears the same predictable interpretations of the law, and accepts without question their understanding of faith and religion.

Sleepwalking in the Spirit is not faith but the opposite of faith. Faith is a dynamic changing communion with God through the Holy Spirit. Faith allows us to search our beliefs in the knowledge that God's truth will withstand the scrutiny of the intellect. It requires us to let go of all of our routines, and rituals, to be taught afresh by the inward workings of the Holy Spirit. This is a faith that is dynamic, ever deepening, holy, and fearless. Through this faith we suspend our efforts at holiness, we let go of our trust in rituals and rites, and place our love and trust on the mercy of God's love. This is a faith that lays bare the routine and mundane, demands that we walk away from the assembly line, demands we stop trying to buy our way to heaven with good deeds, beliefs and money. When we finally lay bare our pride, our hope of knowing, our fear, our manipulation, our self-confidence, we begin to catch glimpses of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. There comes a glimmer of understanding and love from within. God's

pull becomes more apparent, his love is felt, joy is found, peace is discovered, our priorities change, the self as we knew it begins to fade and disappear. A new being begins to exist in place of the old person. Not a new being remade in the image and likeness of the local denomination or spiritual leader, but the image and likeness of Christ as he is found within the heart of God

Often we see the face of the proud and self-assured attempt to touch the hem of the "enlightened" spiritualist as though they were God. They look down on Christians as though they were the most ignorant of the spiritual seekers. It seems rather fashionable these days to condemn the Christian as a group of unknowing idle worshipers. Yet if we look through history we can see that some of the most influential spiritual leaders were professed Christians. As Christians we do not have to react to every group of proud spiritual seekers that condemn or judge the followers of Christ. There is much within the Christian community that is imperfect, fraudulent, and worthy of condemnation. There is also much within the Christian community that is noble, holy, and beautiful. We need to find what is holy within ourselves and allow this holiness to interact with the world through our daily lives.

Chapter 8

The Christian Mystics

The Christian religion is rich with examples of Christian mysticism. The Christian mystic experiences a relationship with God that leads to a spiritual rebirth of a profound spiritual nature. Many Christians seem to think that the mystical experience is an aberration amongst Christians or perhaps an evil to be condemned. We are often fearful and mistrustful of those things that we do not understand. The ego also experiences this as threatening to its existence and unnecessary for Christian redemption. The normal experience of religion is intellectual in nature with an understanding of religion based on repentance without change. Or if we do change it is a shallow and superficial change that pays token homage to God. We are not transformed into his image and likeness but are simply changed to the image and likeness of the local pastor or congregation. It is rare to see a pastor or congregant experience a profound spiritual transformation. However, the bible commands us to "be born again." Not with a refined morality and a few superficial behavioral changes, but change that occurs with profound inwardness, newness and transformation, where we no longer live but Christ lives within and through us.

Even the secular humanist can change their moral and social behavior as they obtain a new sense of social responsibility. Many Christians cite evidence of their sincere transformation in Christ by pointing to behavioral changes that occurred on conversion. Yet the behavior and social learning theorist can demonstrate how this change may occur through reinforcement, positive thinking, and social support. These moral and behavior changes also occur in cults, students in universities, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, and others. Behavior changes are not necessarily evidence of true conversion. Conversion requires us to be taught by the Holy Spirit, to change and grow from the mustard seed of conversion and faith, to reach for the sun and flourish with love and holiness. Dionysius the Areopagite writes, "Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty. Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of

the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.”

The Christian experience only begins with the initial conversion, the journey to Christian maturity requires us to move into a true transformation. If we are living with the letter of the law then we are only experiencing the surface of Christianity. We talk about professing our faith to Christ as though our profession alone is the fullness of Christianity. Even Satan and the angels of darkness believe in Jesus Christ, but this does not save them; nor will works save us, or knowledge, or the pastor, or our beliefs that we are saved. When we are saved there is a seed of light that is planted in our hearts by God. Through our faith and obedience to his commandments that seed of light begins to grow. It first begins as a distant light in the darkness; a seed of incomprehensible hope in the ocean of turmoil and illusion. The Christian does not know what this light is, but only understands it intuitively and intellectually. It is like the pea under the mattress that disturbs our sleep at night, or the pearl that begins to form from the

irritation of the sand. The soul begins to be restless and uncomfortable because of this tiny light. Our intellect can not understand where this uncomfortable feeling comes from nor how to stop its influence. The seed of light turns to God who is its source. It seeks out and reaches for the sun that gives it life. The Christian ego finds this illumination quite disturbing and increasingly uncomfortable. We nurture this light through our will and attention to the inner workings of its power. We nurture this light through prayer and directing our will daily to God. This light is consuming and brilliant and assumes control of the Christian who begins to radiate the heart and mind of God.

Meister Eckhart writes that "GRACE is from God, and works in the depth of the soul whose powers it employs. It is a light which issues forth to do service under the guidance of the Spirit. The Divine Light permeates the soul, and lifts it above the turmoil of temporal things to rest in God. The soul cannot progress except with the light which God has given it as a nuptial gift; love works the likeness of God into the soul. The peace, freedom and blessedness of all souls consist in their abiding in God's will. Towards this union with God for which it is created the soul strives perpetually. Fire converts wood into its own likeness, and the stronger the wind blows, the greater grows the fire. Now by the fire understand love, and by the wind the Holy Spirit. The stronger the influence of the Holy Spirit, the brighter grows the fire of

love; but not all at once, rather gradually as the soul grows. Light causes flowers and plants to grow and bear fruit; in animals it produces life, but in men blessedness. This comes from the grace of God, Who uplifts the soul, for if the soul is to grow God-like it must be lifted above itself."

Thomas Kempis helps guide the aspirant through the illusion of self-seeking egoism to a profound experience of Christ. He begins by asking the reader to imitate Christ and despise all vanities on earth. He writes, "What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone." It is extremely difficult for most of us to turn from the world's constant reinforcement of vanity in order to power the great economic expansion. We are inundated from a very young age with positive images of physical beauty, wealth, youthfulness, fame, sex, and power. In the midst of these values are other values that often become lost such as brotherly love, helpfulness, faithfulness, and virtuous living. We are told that virtue is relative to the individual and

is open to a multitude of interpretations. There are some common social values we can agree on but these seem to be shrinking with each passing generation.

In the Christian faith vanities to be despised are the love of our ego image, money, fame and recognition, self-seeking, and power. There is a significant amount of unhappiness and depression related to the vanities. When we search for vanities in order to find happiness we are setting goals with empty consequences. Physical beauty is never perfect and is always subject to deterioration. Fame is fleeting and creates an artificial sense of self-importance and self-worth. Wealth creates anxiety, fear, separation, and a complicated life. Sexual prowess hurts those who become an object to us. The pursuit of selfish interests and goals always lead to an empty resolution. Anytime we are pursuing vanities we are pursuing the ego, as we strengthen the ego we fall farther away from God. It is only through our love of God and obedience to him that we emerge as an authentic self. Obedience to God and the pursuit of holiness is not some joyless and sterile Victorian style drudgery. It is through obedience to God that we find inner joy, light and peace. It is different than the joy found in vanities; it is a joy that emerges from within, from a meaningful relationship with God through our spiritual nature. Rarely do we emerge from our pursuit of vanities with a clear conscious. We

always find peace and happiness in our love of God.

The humanist would have us believe that virtue is concerned with being personally powerful, responsive to our own personal values and belief systems. They believe that the truly self-actualized individual has a well-developed social consciousness. However, the humanist does not define what constitutes right action, or right living, other than to demand that we are true to our own beliefs. Because we do not have a moral compass we become lost in the sea of ideas. We become vulnerable to vanities, cults, fad religions, spiritualists, manipulations, social agendas, and corporate greed. There are many of us herded into various directions by our lack of a moral center. It is because of this inner emptiness that we are vulnerable to unscrupulous preachers, depression, anxiety, and social immorality. If we accept the humanist belief that the individual has the answers then we must conclude that there are no answers other than the ones we make up through our personal experiences. There can be no "truth" and that God is truly dead in the sense that Nietzsche proclaims the death of an idea.

If we listen to the cognitive behaviorist they too will tell us to change these moral absolutes to cognitive alternatives. To ease our guilty conscious we need to simply think differently about our immoral behavior. Rather than insist that our behavior is awful we think that

our behavior is normal, or needs to simply be adjusted. We are told that our guilty conscious is a personal cognitive flaw and can be easily fixed by simply changing how we think about this behavior. Changing thoughts to manipulate moods and feelings is useful and can be used effectively in counseling as well. However, the problem arises when we use these cognitive skills to help us maintain our comfort level when separated from God. Rather than find God we find cognition and belief. We rationalize our vanities and find some artificial comfort in a superficial and separated life. In our mind we say, "this is all there is, don't be a fanatic, be reasonable and rational, be normal."

The authentic Christian will understand the universal truths that transcend the religious, and enter into the realm of the spiritual. Thomas Kempis knew these ideas and boldly proclaimed them as truths. He warned us against vanities and defined what these vanities consisted of. Because of our love of these vanities, our pride and pursuit of self, we tend to rationalize away the vanities and make many of them into virtues.

Thomas Kempis also instructs us to have a humble opinion of ourselves. Kempis writes, "If you wish to learn and appreciate something worth while, then love to be unknown and considered as nothing. Truly to know and despise self is the best and most perfect counsel. To think of oneself as nothing, and always to think well and

highly of others is the best and most perfect wisdom. Wherefore, if you see another sin openly or commit a serious crime, do not consider yourself better, for you do not know how long you can remain in good estate. All men are frail, but you must admit that none is more frail than yourself." These words are obviously written by someone of deep humility, love for others, and a genuine love of God. He looks into his own imperfect nature and understands how frail and prone to imperfection the human being is. Modern humanism and psychology and the self-esteem movement would look upon these words with horror, and declare that these are words that will lead to self-destruction. To think of ourselves as nothing and seek to be unknown is shocking to the ego, who wants to glorify in its own self-esteem. Modern secular psychology and the humanistic movement demand we have a high opinion of ourselves. We see this high self-esteem in the church, in business, in charity organizations, televangelist, gurus, and self-help books. Sometimes it seems the entire world demands us to prop up our self-esteem for our own good.

Modern psychology and self-help books have a difficult time understanding the difference between depression caused by self-hate, and humbleness created from love of God. When we are identified with the ego as self, then we are bound by the thoughts and experiences that create this self. Our self has become isolated and

separated from God, and our self-esteem becomes of critical importance in our ability to function in the world around us. If we are driven by our passions, isolated from God, then we have no inner light or wisdom from the Holy Spirit to guide our actions. We are reliant upon our own ability to create a reality from our experiences. If we have no or low self-esteem, and are isolated from God, then this low self-esteem will drive our actions in a conscious or subconscious manner. For example, if we have a low opinion of ourselves we may fear taking risks, pursuing our God-given talents, allow ourselves to be abused, or perhaps abuse others. We may fail to have the courage to express ourselves in positive and life affirming ways. Because of our low self-esteem we may become depressed, anxious, angry, isolated, suicidal and indifferent to others needs. Those who have a low self-esteem are often absorbed in their own insecurities and self-pity, unable to reach out to others in genuine and authentic ways, have low energy and are unable to live in a creative manner. On the other hand those who have a high self-esteem are subject to artificial self-promotion, isolation from God, illusion, alienation from their spiritual center, pride, and faith in self as opposed to faith in God.

The truly humble as Thomas Kempis describes humbleness does not have a low self-esteem as is understood by modern psychology, but identifies with a spiritual consciousness as self. Humanist and

modern psychology understands the self only in terms of the ego. So they conclude that self-esteem is always positive since the self is the ego. In spiritual terms the self is found in a transcendent state of consciousness that is united in the Holy Spirit. The Christian transcends the ego self and is reborn into a spiritual consciousness in union with God. The concepts of low self-esteem or high self-esteem are no longer understood as the secular world knows these concepts. Thomas Kempis does not suffer from a low self-esteem because he says that the Christian needs to despise the self. He is saying that the Christian needs to despise sin and separation from God. To despise the self that aspires to vanity, pride, independence and self-esteem. The Christian mystic identifies the self with God and therefore has great love for self in as far as it is united and identified with God. There is no self-loathing that occurs when the self is united in God. There is great joy, peace, and happiness in this union.

This is not a joy that is found in some fleeting external victory or action, but a joy that is constant, ever deepening, and subject to deterioration only when the lower nature asserts its presence. Thomas Kempis instructs the Christian to find this joy through transcending the dualities of high and low self-esteem and find peace in obedience to God. There are many of us who have great pride in our humbleness towards others. We make sure that everyone notices that we wear

humble clothes, fast, pray regularly, and volunteer for the poor and sick. Jesus had this type of spiritual pride in mind when he instructs us to go to our closet to pray. We boost our self-esteem and create separation from God when we are artificially humble. When we make sure others see us volunteering at the local church we feel good about our power and love of God, and make sure others are converted to our point of view. We also make sure others notice how compassionate we are in the soup kitchen, in the community, and with the elderly. We parade our deeds around with great pride and deceive ourselves with the notion that we are doing this as a witness to Christian virtue. John Tauler writes, "Then came a fire, and God was not in the fire. Fire is a thing which can never say "Enough;" and it represents the heart of a man who is never satisfied, either with his goods or with the gifts of God; but is always burning to increase without measure those things which are neither divine nor pure; desiring to receive comfort or other temporal things, and to find love and pleasure in them. All this is a sign that the Spirit of God is not there."

Humbleness comes from seeing into our prideful nature, our sinful attitudes, love of the ego, selfishness, and the Beauty of God. When we catch glimpses of the glory of God we can not help but be truly humbled. When we touch the robe of Jesus and feel his love, power and glory we can not help but be startled by his Beauty and our

smallness in contrast. When we understand that all good comes from God and under our own efforts we can accomplish nothing of any real value we change. When we become broken and poor in Spirit because of our experience of his goodness we change. This change is interior and holy, and transcends the external righteousness of the ego bound Christian. Our actions become sincere and holy out of our love for God rather than our love for self. Through this love for God and our understanding of our insignificance in isolation from God we become truly humble.

Thomas Kempis warns the Christian against pursuing knowledge over experience. He explains, "Every perfection in this life has some imperfection mixed with it and no learning of ours is without some darkness. Humble knowledge of self is a surer path to God than the ardent pursuit of learning. Not that learning is to be considered evil, or knowledge, which is good in itself and so ordained by God; but a clean conscience and virtuous life ought always to be preferred. Many often err and accomplish little or nothing because they try to become learned rather than to live well." This is a common problem in modern Christianity. We often see Christians who have practically memorized the bible but do not understand the power of its words. The bible is of course a spiritual book, and can not be truly understood from a carnal mind. Through our faith in God we are emptied of our

own understanding and the light of Christ helps us experience the power of the word of God. This experience of God is not about saying that we believe but growing in spiritual maturity and wisdom. The Holy Spirit brings us to an ever deepening spiritual journey that transcends the lower nature and enters into a spiritual experience of God. This spiritual experience is not an intellectual and learned experience but a true transformation of self. This transformation is a rebirth into our spiritual nature. In this spiritual transformation we die to our old self and become a new creature. This new self is not a superficial change of behavior alone but an inner transformation and union with our divine nature. This transformation is ever deepening and is a result of our faith and obedience to the word of God. It is also a result of grace and the gift of understanding that God allows us to experience. We can not develop this spiritual transformation through our own works but only through the grace of God. Although we may have much understanding of the word of God our experience of God can be infantile at best.

This superficiality of experience can be seen in the spiritual seeker who follows the Buddhist text without understanding. In the spiritualist who believes they are enlightened because they practice meditation and possess crystals. In the Christian who follows the letter of the law but never understands the power beyond the symbols.

The roots of self-deception are always found in the common individual. Not the individual who breaks from the crowd, but the herd individual in the humanistic sense of the word; the cliché of a person who creates themselves as a mini-god and makes it up as they go. In *Theologia Germanica* we read, "Let no one suppose, that we may attain to this true light and perfect knowledge, or life of Christ, by much questioning, or by hearsay, or by reading and study, nor yet by high skill and great learning. Yea, so long as a man taketh account of anything which is this or that, whether it be himself, or any other creature; or doeth anything, or frameth a purpose, for the sake of his own likings or desires, or opinions, or ends, he cometh not unto the life of Christ." Jesus commands us to deny ourselves and follow him. The carnal mind will never be able to discover the truth of Christ under its own light.

John Tauler writes that the soul will find God "In many ways in which the soul receives instructions. First, the soul finds God her Creator on the heights of penance or penitence. Therefore the soul must, above all things, exert all her strength to subdue her own free will, ready, for God's sake, to learn to give up all things both great and small, to do hard penance, and to punish herself for following the will she had forsaken. The more the soul exercises herself in these works, the more will she find God in her, and herself in God." When God

works in our souls the deeds of the carnal nature become bitter and unpalatable. We no longer find joy in the superficial pleasures of the flesh and find ourselves frequently suffering from a guilty conscious when we disobey the will of God. Of course a guilty conscious in modern psychology and secular humanism is often perceived as a neurotic reaction to an unrealistic moral standard; and of course guilt can be neurotically expressed by our unrealistic expectations and rigid moral precepts.

Modern society wants everyone to feel good about who they are, and to accept their morality as negotiable and subject to changing interpretation. We do not want guilt to cause self-esteem problems, or feelings of depression or anxiety. So as a result we change our "should" to preferences, and accept a superficial form of holiness as the best we can do while we are on the earth. When we are convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit we understand this conviction as a message of love, rather than a neurotic form of self-loathing. God convicts us when we choose wrong actions that lead away from him. The neurotic form of this chastisement is concerned with obedience to the letter of the law in a Victorian sense of the word. This neurosis is related to moral interpretation and personal learned cultural and social values. When this is in place we may often create greater separation from God through our violence we do to the social self. We must

always keep in mind that God loves us in spite of our flaws. We must exercise self-forgiveness, charity towards self and others, and patience when we fall outside of God's will. However, the power and purity of God's love commands us to change, convicts us when we disobey, brings us back to him, and creates in us humbleness and purity. Sin no longer becomes easy but uncomfortable. It is only when we repeatedly and willfully disobey God that this sensitivity to God's voice is diminished.

Christians today have bought into the feel-good generation perpetrated by the humanist and the psychologist. We are told that something must be wrong if we are not feeling good about ourselves. We go to a psychologist who tells us that we are behaving in a neurotic manner by insisting on a holy lifestyle. We have our religious leaders tell us that we can feel good about ourselves, be happy in the church, get nice cars and be successful in God. We can have it all and still be a Christian. Often we hear that we are all sinners and we should accept this sinful nature. The truth is that when one becomes a Christian sin becomes bitter, distressing, uncomfortable, and creates guilt. We can then decide to go to a psychologist that tells us we are being neurotic and help us accept this sin. We can go to a humanist pastor who is fearful of losing his congregation and tells us the same thing, which helps us learn to accept Christendom as the only true

path. Or we can begin to humble ourselves, embrace this conviction and welcome the bitterness of sin as the healing fire of change. God's chastisement is deep, profound, life changing, instructive, and healing. If we embrace this change through an abandonment of self-will and intellectual feel-good psychology we will change.

John Tauler writes that, "At another time man finds God in the wilderness, in the burning bush, as Moses found Him. The bush in the wilderness signifies such a temper or spirit that, withdrawn and estranged from all creatures, puts forth leaves or blossoms on the heights of the Eternal Godhead. As the Divine Being comprises within Himself three Persons, so also this spirit has laid hold of God in His threefold powers, as the bush laid hold of the flames in its blossoming branches; and this is of grace. This putting forth of leaves causes the soul to grow steadily in light, in godlike virtues, day by day without ceasing, until she, with the vision of angels, beholds God in Zion." Jesus has told us that many are called but few are chosen. This burning bush in the wilderness represents the discovery of God in our own inner nature. We have to forsake the path of the known and trust in God to prepare us for his light and truth. The well worn path will not lead us to the burning bush of God's presence. So often the Christian is led away from the wilderness into the city of alienation, superficiality, false teachings and empty understanding. As we put

forth the branches of divine love, wisdom and spiritual union we find ourselves absorbed in the flames of the Holy Spirit. The grace of God develops our connection to his word, gives us deep roots and branches that give us life and strength and connects us to the holy life of Christ. We begin to burn with his presence and become inflamed with his divine love.

John Tauler goes on to write that, "Thirdly, God may be found on the mountain, in the cloud; for the union (Testament) of Divine Light and of the commandment was written on the stone by the finger of God. The mountain is like a high-minded, large-hearted man, who has no pleasure in any of his works, neither can he find any rest in them, unless, like St Paul, he is confirmed in all his works by an express sign of the Will of God; so that the will of the soul does not even carry on human actions according to his own will, but after the manner appointed by the Divine Will, divinely." It is easy to deceive ourselves into believing we are carrying out the will of God. When we live in the despair of egoism, self-delusion, pride and vanity we fail to follow the will of God. We must leave the world behind, wrestle with our own dark tendencies through trials and temptations, and emerge on the other side victorious and conscious of our divine destiny.

John Tauler writes, "Do not be ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ and to seem poor in this world. Do not be self-

sufficient but place your trust in God. Do what lies in your power and God will aid your good will. Put no trust in your own learning nor in the cunning of any man, but rather in the grace of God Who helps the humble and humbles the proud.” It is difficult to do good deeds and to not be wounded by the very deeds we perform. When we perform good deeds, preach the word of God, attend church, give to the poor; we frequently reflect back upon our selves with great satisfaction and pride. We search the church or the community around us and find endless examples of others who are not completing the good deeds we are completing. It is very tempting to serve others for the love of self rather than the love of Jesus Christ. We love the fact that we are a “good” person and despise the fact that others are not doing their part, or living up to our expectations.

We make sure that others see our good deeds and are profoundly impressed by our level of commitment to God. We have become like the secular humanist that holds a belief in the power of good works, and completes these works out of an abundant self-esteem and belief in the good of positive social change. In these works we do not seem poor in spirit but rich in self-love and self-esteem. The motives are ego driven rather than God centered, and cause us to feel profoundly self-satisfied in our virtue. We must place our trust in God, offer up any good works as an outpouring of God’s

love to the world. We can not accept credit for these works, but do them in humble reverence and obedience towards God. Through our poverty of Spirit and humble obedience towards God we shall grow in our experiential understanding of God. Albert the Great writes, "For it is absolute madness to seek, hunger for and aspire to human praise or renown, from oneself or others, when one is in spite of it all inwardly full of cravings and serious faults. And certainly the good things we have talked about above will flee him who chases such vanities, and he will merely bring disgrace on himself. So always keep your faults and your own incapacity before your eyes, and know yourself, so that you can be humbled."

It is impossible to let go of our pride, self-esteem, sinful nature and motives under our own power of will. It is only through the grace and power of God that any habits of virtuous living will develop. Under our own power there is always self-deception, love of our ego identity, personal self-esteem, and condemnation of others. Under our power we can not develop grace, holiness, inwardness, poverty of spirit and virtue. The Christian can only find true holiness through repentance and redemption, to trust only in God. Thomas Kempis goes on to say "Do not think yourself better than others lest, perhaps, you be accounted worse before God Who knows what is in man. Do not take pride in your good deeds, for God's judgments differ from those of

men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you, see more good in others, so that you may remain humble. It does no harm to esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one. The humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger."

In the Dark Night of the Soul Saint John of the Cross describes ten steps of the mystic ladder of divine love. The first step of love "Causes the soul to languish, and this to its advantage. The Bride is speaking from this step of love when she says: 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that, if ye find my Beloved, ye tell Him that I am sick with love. his sickness, however, is not unto death, but for the glory of God, for in this sickness the soul swoons as to sin and as to all things that are not God, for the sake of God Himself.'" God is always calling us back to himself. He knocks on our inward door and calls us to return to our spiritual nature. When we do those things contrary to God we find separation, when we answer the call of God we find union. God keeps returning the seeker back to himself, makes it uncomfortable to ignore his call and draws the seeker towards a profound and steady inwardness. As the soul progresses on its spiritual journey it begins to despise separation and sin, or anything that is a barrier between itself and God. The soul becomes sick in its

separation and sin and turns away from those things that cause distance. Saint John explains that "in this degree of love the soul loses its taste and desire for all things and changes its color and the other accidentals of its past life, like one in love." Many of us experience this type of love sickness when we first convert to Christianity, but find it fades over time as we fall back into our former lifestyle. How many of us can say we feel truly in love with God, as a bride towards her beloved bridegroom. Solomon describes this type of love for God in Solomon 4: 9-11, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eye, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine! And the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Leb'a-non."

The second step according to Saint John "Causes the soul to seek God without ceasing." Saint John explains that "In whatsoever it thinks, it thinks at once of the Beloved. Of whatsoever it speaks, in whatsoever matters present themselves, it is speaking and communing at once with the Beloved. When it eats, when it sleeps, when it watches, when it does aught soever, all its care is about the Beloved, as is said above with respect to the yearnings of love." This

step is concerned with ceaseless prayer. We become ever mindful of our thoughts, actions, and deeds. There are many that think a Christian needs to stop what they are doing and consciously think about God. This compartmentalization of worship is a form of separation and distancing from God. Every action needs to be an act of love and obedience towards God. There are many of us that only think of God at church, or in the evening when we pray, when we are fearful, or perhaps when we have done something we feel guilty about. Living a holy life is about being ever mindful of every thought and action, and to instantly recognize when our thoughts or actions are turned towards or away from God.

It is difficult to understand how we can be both self-forgetting and self-aware simultaneously. When we are mindful of God's presence we become ever immersed in our experiential understanding of God. Our actions are known only in the presence of God's love. We do not think of ourselves as separate from God, but as united to God. In this union there is no compartmentalization of being possible. We do not have to stop and think about God as many may imagine, the presence of God is there on an intuitive level. This intuitive understanding is subtle at first and becomes ever present over time. We no longer compartmentalize our worship time but enter a state of ceaseless prayer.

Teresa of Avila described this state as entering an interior castle. She explains "I thought of the soul as resembling a castle formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. If we reflect, sisters, we shall see that the soul of the just man is but a paradise, in which, God tells us, He takes His delight. What, do you imagine, must that dwelling be in which a King so mighty, so wise, and so pure, containing in Himself all good, can delight to rest? Nothing can be compared to the great beauty and capabilities of a soul; however keen our intellects may be, they are as unable to comprehend them as to comprehend God, for, as He has told us, He created us in His own image and likeness." According to Teresa of Avila we enter ever deeper into these interior states through the grace of God and our obedience to his word. Our experience of God and the world changes as our conscious awareness is centered in the soul as opposed to centered in the ego and worldly affairs. It is in this state that we are aware of our constant presence in God and the forgetting of our being as an individual ego.

According to Saint John "The third step of the ladder of love is that which causes the soul to work and gives it fervour so that it fails not." He also explains that "On this step the soul considers great works undertaken for the Beloved as small; many things as few; and

the long time for which it serves Him as short, by reason of the fire of love wherein it is now burning.” In this step the Christian begins to understand how truly faulty they are, and how little they can accomplish for God. All that they do seems to fall short; they are troubled by their sinful nature, and deepen in their humbleness towards God. They are zealous in good works but see these as too little and of small consequence. They stop condemning others as they see themselves as flawed and sinful as well. They notice every small indiscretion, every subtle sinful act and deed, and are convicted by their great love for God. It is at this point that they become increasingly humble and compassionate and consider themselves of small consequence before the power and majesty of God. They are willing to take up their cross and follow God, even to the ends of the earth. In this selfless devotion to God they begin to break down their self-importance and develop a greater belief in the importance of God.

The humanist and self-esteem advocates will of course gasp at the thought of such acts of self-denial and self-condemnation. However, what Saint John is describing is a form of self-love rather than self-hate. He is appalled at the unnatural state of separation and embraces the reality of his divine nature. He loves the soul that is formed in the image and likeness of God, and condemns the illusion of self that is formed from a fallen condition of separation. How can we

embrace and love evil, selfishness, greed, backbiting, lust, anger, and jealousy? It is these self-defeating actions that Saint John condemns; he embraces all of those actions that are of God.

Many of us simply accept our imperfect nature as the inevitable consequence of a fallen state. We are not deeply wounded by our sinful actions and simply find some way to justify or rationalize our behavior. We do this through cognitive methods, repression or suppression. Some of us do not believe it is important to live a holy life and find the hedonist lifestyle as the most self-satisfying. Most Christians have a mixture of sinful and Christian behaviors. Their beliefs concerning the acceptable level of sin will determine the amount of guilt they feel or lack thereof. Few of us are deeply wounded by sin and have a limited capacity to use this sensitivity to draw us closer to God. Also, many of us simply use this guilt as another way of feeling sorry for ourselves in self-indulgent self-pity. Or perhaps we rationalize our sinful nature as the way it is and there is little we can hope to achieve otherwise. Without a deep and abiding love for God to counteract our sensitivity towards sin, our life deteriorates into self-condemnation without love of our divine nature. We must always love others as ourselves; which means we must love our divine nature in God, and condemn the sin that keeps this divine nature from emerging. If we keep our faith in God, God will continue

to give us the strength and wisdom to carry on. God will take possession of the soul, stir the soul to greater heights, and give the soul the strength to endure all things for his name sake.

Saint John describes the fourth step of this ladder of love as "That whereby there is caused in the soul an habitual suffering because of the Beloved, yet without weariness. For, as Saint Augustine says, love makes all things that are great, grievous and burdensome to be almost naught." He also explains that "In no way does the soul here seek its own consolation or pleasure, either in God, or in aught else, nor does it desire or seek to pray to God for favors, for it sees clearly that it has already received enough of these, and all its anxiety is set upon the manner wherein it will be able to do something that is pleasing to God and to render Him some service such as He merits and in return for what it has received from Him, although it be greatly to its cost." We often hear the preacher on the television or in the pulpit appeal to our selfish nature when asking us to follow Jesus Christ. For example, the appeal is to give a donation so we can receive a blessing from God; or perhaps to follow the teachings of Christ so we can receive everlasting life; or to follow Christ to avoid burning in hell. Our carnal nature is always looking to give so we can get something in return. It is difficult for the average Christian to expect nothing in return. This lack of bargaining with God for our safety, financial

security, health, soul, or well-being is foreign to the ego's sense of fair play. The ego expects to get something back if it invests time and energy into a religion or a God.

To many of us God is an investment that is expected to pay big dividends in financial security and/or everlasting life. Yet, Saint John explains that this type of doing to get is contrary to the Spirit of love for God. The saintly Christian neither desires nor expects anything beyond what God gives him. The Christian does not serve God to get but serves God out of love and humble obedience. This Christian is motivated solely by love for God, rather than lust for everlasting life and earthly comfort. It is because of this turning away from earthly consolation, self-seeking materialism, ego-gratification that we suffer so severely when seeking God. This longing for God in self-denial is burdensome to the ego which desires to seek selfish pleasures. This self-denial breaks down and erodes the habitual self-seeking ego which causes a sweet suffering and a deepening awareness of God's presence within. Like the Buddhist, Saint John embraces the notion of the inevitability of suffering. It is during this ladder of love that we begin to recognize that the attachment that leads to suffering is related to our sinful natures and our tendencies to remain attached to sin and self-seeking hedonism. It is at this time that we drop our giving to get, without expectations, and begin to love God

unconditionally, simply because he is God.

The fifth ladder of love as described by Saint John “makes the soul to desire and long for God impatiently. On this step the vehemence of the lover to comprehend the Beloved and be united with Him is such that every delay, however brief, becomes very long, wearisome and oppressive to it, and it continually believes itself to be finding the Beloved. And when it sees its desire frustrated (which is at almost every moment), it swoons away with its yearning, as says the Psalmist, speaking from this step, in these words: ‘My soul longs and faints for the dwellings of the Lord.’” At this stage the Christian will seek God for more pure motives, has abandoned the desire for material gain, and is beginning to seek God for the sake of love alone. However, they continue to pursue God in an effort to hold him and make him conform to their need for his love. Much of this pursuit is imperfect, and directed from the ego’s desire to receive favor from God. There are many Christians who believe that if they are pursuing God or completing good works for God that they have reached the pinnacle of success in the Christian world. In the fifth ladder of love the Christian’s pursuit of God is self-directed and works-oriented, which is fueled in part by the ego’s desire to achieve union with God. God frustrates this attempt to force the Christian to fall back on faith and grace rather than ego-driven works. Many of us think that we

will progress as Christians if we say the right words or pursue God through good works. God requires us to say the prayer of salvation and do good works. However, neither brings us to spiritual maturity. Only through an act of grace through faith will we be saved. God quickens those he will when he wills to do so. The development of spiritual maturity is a gift from God and can only occur through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Through our prayers God is moved, and in his perfect time we will be transformed.

According to John, "On the sixth step the soul runs swiftly to God and touches Him again and again; and it runs without fainting by reason of its hope. For here the love that has made it strong makes it to fly swiftly. Of this step the prophet Isaiah speaks thus, "The saints that hope in God shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as the eagle; they shall fly and shall not faint." At this time the Christian's capacity for love has been expanded and they begin to touch God again and again. This touching of God is related to the capacity of the individual to unite with God from an interior connection without the filter of the self-centered ego identity. When we touch God we experience a spiritual connection with God that is intuitive and mystical in nature. I think most sincere Christians and spiritual seekers will have accounts of "peak" spiritual experiences where they feel profoundly in touch with their spiritual center in God. In the

mystical tradition these peak experiences are a recurrent touching of God's love again and again.

According to John, "The seventh step of this ladder makes the soul to become vehement in its boldness. Here love employs not its judgment in order to hope, nor does it take counsel so that it may draw back, neither can any shame restrain it; for the favor which God here grants to the soul causes it to become vehement in its boldness." There is a sense of knowing that is humbling yet emboldens the Christian. At this point the Christian has transcended the lower nature yet is still subject to its laws. They are united in a mystical sense with their spiritual nature and know that they have developed a relationship with God that they have not experienced before now. There is a quiet knowing that sweeps the Christian into a state of being, reborn into the image and likeness of Christ. The infinite beauty and love of God is known in a profound and interior way, and the soul becomes expansive in its experiential understanding of God. "The eighth step of love causes the soul to seize Him and hold Him fast without letting Him go, even as the Bride says, after this manner: 'I found Him Whom my heart and soul love; I held Him and I will not let Him go. On this step of union the soul satisfies her desire, but not continuously. Certain souls climb some way, 'attain to setting their foot and then lose their hold; for, if this state were to continue, it would be glory

itself in this life; and thus the soul remains therein for very short periods of time.” According to Saint John there is a time where the Christian experiences the mystical union to different degrees.

The ninth step according to Saint John “Makes the soul to burn with sweetness. This step is that of the perfect, who now burn sweetly in God. For this sweet and delectable ardour is caused in them by the Holy Spirit by reason of the union which they have with God. For this cause Saint Gregory says, concerning the Apostles, that when the Holy Spirit came upon them visibly they burned inwardly and sweetly through love.” Saint John concludes by saying that, “The tenth and last step of this secret ladder of love causes the soul to become wholly assimilated to God, by reason of the clear and immediate vision of God which it then possesses.”

Few of us can relate to a spiritual state as described in the latter steps by Saint John of the Cross. However, because we have faith in God and the power of hope through the grace of God we can reach levels of Christian maturity we had never dreamed possible. The mystical experience is concerned with being reborn into the image and likeness of Christ. It is not simply the superficial rebirth that may occur if we change doctrines, or belief or even behavior, but a profound transformation in how we experience God. The Christian

faith is a spiritual experience that in its fullness is to be lived, rather than simply thought of in a distant and intellectual manner.

Chapter 9

Habits of Virtuous Living

It would be grand if all of those who simply “will it,” can experience this deep mystical experience as described by Saint John of the Cross and others. However, the mystical experience is a gift from God and can not be bought at the price of personal sacrifice. We can not be good enough, or work hard enough, or demand loud enough that God give us what we think we deserve. The mystical experience arrives almost unexpectedly, when we stop struggling for personal gain, when our only desire is to love and please God. God has given us the perfect example of holiness through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus has paved the way for his followers and has shown us what we need to do to be reborn into the Spirit. There is extensive debate as to the interpretation of Christian teachings and often this debate divides the Christian into various camps of believers. Most of us will believe that our interpretations are the correct ones and will vigorously defend our point of view. In that defense we may condemn other Christians as heretics, unbelievers, false prophets, and enemies of the Cross. However, through these differences we generally find a common theme of love for Jesus and a deep and profound respect for

his lifestyle and teachings.

Even amongst non-Christians, spiritualist, Buddhists and Muslims, we often see a respect for the teachings of Christ. These religious teachings of Christ and its Jewish roots are the foundation of many of our current values, moral beliefs, and laws. Most compassionate Christians will struggle with these differences and try to make some sense out of the cacophony of voices related to Christ and Christian teachings. Through my struggles with this issue I have found a profound respect for Jesus Christ, and have come to the realization that no other teacher or prophet can bring me to the same connection with God. It is in this love for Jesus and his teachings that I have found peace, joy, spiritual awakening, and truth. Shall I condemn those of other faiths or beliefs; heaven forbid. This lack of condemnation does not mean I believe that all truth is relative to the believer. I have been placed on the Christian path by God, yet it is not a part of my path to condemn and judge all of those who disagree with these beliefs. The truths in the bible are spiritual truths and are interpreted through imperfect souls. However, there are common teachings found in the bible that can lead the Christian to a more profound spiritual relationship with God through Christ.

To change and grow as a Christian requires of us an acknowledgement of a need to change. Jesus calls on us to turn away

from our self destructive lifestyle and to call on him to help us find meaning and peace. God is always calling on us to turn away from our ego driven self-promotion and to look to him for hope and healing. However, many of us go on with our selfish attitudes, pride, recklessness, and greed. It is when we truly repent from this lifestyle and turn to God in true and humble repentance that we first hear the small voice of God within. God speaks to us in a spiritual voice that parts the sea of bitterness and sin and carries us across the divide to the promised lands. The Christian witnesses that first miracle of recognition, that light of the Holy Spirit that comforts the repentant Christian for the first time. There are many Christians that have never truly repented from their sinful attitudes of pride and self-will. The egoist will not experience the profound depths of brokenness that is required in true repentance. It is in this brokenness that we are able to temporarily abandon self and place our hope in Christ. The pseudo Christian lives a comfortable and shallow life of materialism and social responsibility. They are "good" according to the standards of the world and believe that because of this goodness they are saved. This is why Jesus taught that it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not the wealth that creates the obstacle but the comfort and self-assurance that is created in these safe conditions. When we are bruised by sin, jostled and terrified by our own

disobedient nature, we are more likely to turn to God in true abandonment. When we feel hopeless, terrified by our inability to control our carnal impulses, overwhelmed by the emotional obstacles confronting us, will we be able to turn to God in true repentance. In our comfortable illusions of Christian virtue we feel prideful, critical, self-assured, and distant from the sinners and outsiders. Our church is our sanctuary from the sinners that exist outside of its walls, the ones that do not believe like us, and are not as saved as we are. This attitude of spiritual pride will keep us from seeing God, experiencing God, and will keep us stuck in an infantile spiritual state. We often see Christians who have experienced this profound sense of repentance only to return to their former habits and prideful attitudes as soon as the crisis passes. They discover that they no longer need God and will once again place him on their "just in case shelf" for a future crisis.

We see God moved to a distant place in all denominations as Christians turn back to their self-will and ego desires. We also see Christians continue to repent and turn back and repent and turn back and struggle with their ability to consistently turn away from their carnal nature. This cycle will likely continue until through grace they are able to truly repent, and sincerely request of God the strength to break this cycle. Just as in AA, the Christian has to reach the point of being sick and tired of being sick and tired. As the

Christian sincerely struggles with their carnal nature they develop a humble spirit and a profound understanding of their own inability to do it on their own. God allows this struggle so the Christian will rely on him to defeat the demons of a sinful nature. The Christian will never be able to triumph over their sinful nature. Only through the grace of God will we experience any success, and that success is dependent on the timing and will of God.

The Christian needs to cultivate the habit of prayer and repentance. Through the habit of prayer and repentance God works in our souls. The ego is weakened when our self perception is focused on our inadequacy, brokenness, powerlessness, and humility. The secular society demands just the opposite of the ego, and views the humbled Christian with pity and perhaps contempt. This is not the broken spirit of the depressed, but of the holy. When the ego is shaken and repentant, God is able to emerge through the inward soul, creating peace, joy, harmony, and mental health. We begin to sense his presence, feel the ravages of our internal turmoil comforted and experience the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

Albert the Great writes, "So simplify your heart with all care, diligence and effort so that still and at peace from the products of the imagination you can turn round and remain always in the Lord within yourself, as if your mind were already in the now of eternity,

that is of the godhead. In this way you will be able to renounce yourself through love of Jesus Christ, with a pure heart, clean conscience and unfeigned faith, and commit yourself completely and fully to God in all difficulties and eventualities, and be willing to submit yourself patiently to his will and good pleasure at all times. For this to come about you must repeatedly retreat into your heart and remain there, keeping yourself free from everything, so far as is possible. You must always keep the eye of your mind clear and still. You must guard your understanding from daydreams and thoughts of earthly things. You must completely free the inclination of your will from worldly cares and cling with all your being to the supreme true good with fervent love. You must keep your memory always lifted up and firmly anchored in that same true supreme good and only uncreated reality. In just this way your whole mind gathered up with all its powers and faculties in God, may become one spirit with him, in whom the supreme perfection of life is known to consist. This is the true union of spirit and love by which a man is made compliant to all the impulses of the supreme and eternal will, so that he becomes by grace what God is by nature." Albert the Great calls on the Christian to renounce the concerns and distractions that are of this world and focus on our relationship with God. He is not calling us to abandon our love for each other, but to love God above all

things, and through that love God's love manifests through our lives. Albert the Great explains, "Love after all is the life of the soul, the wedding garment and the soul's perfection, containing all the law and the prophets and our Lord's teaching. That is why Paul says to the Romans, Love is the fulfilling of the law, (Rom 13:8) and in the first letter to Timothy, The end of the commandment is love. (1 Timothy 1.5)"

Meister Eckhart also explains that only through grace can our love for God and each other truly manifest in our daily lives. "In this sense the New Birth of man is the focus towards which all creation strives, because man is the image of God after the likeness of which the world is created. All time strives towards eternity or the timeless Now, out of which it issued at creation. The merely temporal life in itself is a negation of real being, because it depends on itself and not on the deepest foundation of life; therefore also natural love is cramped finite and defective. It must through grace be lifted to the highest sphere of existence, and attain to freedom outside the narrow confines of the natural. Thereby love becomes real love, because only that is real which is comprehended and loved in its essence. Only by grace man comes from the temporal and transitory to be one with God. This lifting of manifoldness to unity is the supreme aim of ethics; by thus the divine birth is completed on the

side of man.” There can be no true love for one another without the grace of God. It is only the love that God produces within us that is pure and holy, and this is only in proportion to the grace that God has imparted within the soul. As we repeatedly look to God for guidance and obedience God imparts within our souls the light of understanding through his grace.

Meister Eckhart asks us, “How can a man abide in love, when he does not keep God’s commands which issue forth from love? How can the inner man be born in God, when the outer man abides not in the following of Christ, in self-mortification and in suffering, for there is no being born of God, except through Christ. Love is the fulfilling of *all* commands; therefore however much man strives to reach this freedom, the body can never quite attain thereto, and must be ever in conflict. Seeing that good works are the witness of the Holy Ghost, man can never do without them. The aim of man is not outward holiness by works, but life in God, yet this last expresses itself in works of love.” When Meister Eckhart talks about works of love he is referring to the school teacher who is compassionate and patient towards their students, the young man who is responsible, works hard, and respectful of others, the worker who works hard with integrity and honesty, the pastor who lives what they preach.

Good works is concerned with living our life in love of God and obedience to his commandments.

This love of others is concerned with an abandonment of self-will to the eternal movement of love through you. This love through us is God in all his glory. The more refined God makes us the more we are able to project the Holy Spirit into the world around us. Miguel de Molinos writes, "The perfection of the Soul consists not in speaking nor in thinking much on God; but in loving him sufficiently: This love is attained to by means of perfect Resignation and internal Silence, all consists in Works: The love of God has but few Words. Thus St. *John* the Evangelist confirms and inculcates it. (Epist. I. Chap. 3. v. 18) My little Children, let us not love in Word, neither in Tongue, but in Deed and in Truth."

We can profess our love and devotion to Christ but without true repentance and resignation we will never go very far towards spiritual union with Christ. Jacob Boehme writes, "*SELF* is but a Slave to its temporal Possessions, but *Resignation* ruleth over all that it hath. *SELF* must do what the Devil will have it do in *fleshly Voluptuousness* and *Pride of Life*; but *Resignation* treadth it all under with the Feet of the Mind. *SELF* despiseth that which is lowly and simple; but *Resignation* sitteth down with the lowly in the Dust. It saith, I will be simple in myself, and understand nothing, lest my

Understanding should exalt itself and sin. I will lie down in the Courts of my God at His Feet, that I may serve my Lord in that which He commandeth me. I will know nothing of myself, that the Will and Power of my Lord may lead and guide me, and that I may only do what God doth through me, and will have done by me. I will sleep in myself until the Lord awaken me with His Spirit; and if He will not, then will I look up to Him in Silence, and wait for His Commands." It is difficult for modern Christians to devote our lives to God in true love and resignation, when the secular humanist and modern psychologist are repeatedly telling us we are wrong. The first step for the Christian is to repent from self-will and be obedient towards God in true love and resignation.

We know that we have started down this road when we consider God in everything we do. We no longer compartmentalize our love for God but rise each morning with a song in our heart for God. We can read of this type of love for God in Psalms 18:1-2, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in who I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." And in Solomon 5: 2, "I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks

with the drops of the night.” How many of us are so filled with love for God that we have trouble sleeping, and eating and thinking of anything else but love that knocks on our hearts night and day? This knock sometimes occurs all of a sudden and in other times it approaches gradually. As we turn to God in faith and resignation God turns towards us with his infinite love and grace. He forgives us of the numerous trespasses we have committed and those we will surely commit in the future. When God so wills he stokes the fires of love for Him and at other times we may feel as though He has abandoned us entirely. The true Christian will love God in both the dark and dry times as well as those times filled with the comfort of his holy touch.

It helps to read the bible but it is more important to live the bible. The bible is a holy and sacred text that brings the follower to a divine and holy union with God. It is not meant to be studied in some sterile and distant manner but to be lived and experienced. To truly understand the power of the words we must allow God to teach us the path of spiritual insight. This holy path is a gift of grace that transforms the seeker into a Christian. This path is not the path of the cold, analytical, serious, and distant, but the path of love, compassion, engagement, and evangelism. Evangelism is about being a witness for Christ. When God is working in our souls we can

not help but be a witness for Christ. We are a living witness for God and a magnet for souls to God. As we are attracted to God so are we an attractant to others towards God. The Christian will stumble many times but continue to be lifted in God's grace. As we walk along that glorious path in true resignation and faith we begin to notice a transformation occurring. Each day over time we begin to appear more Christ-like in our daily life.

In our walk we begin by professing our love and belief in the life and testament of Jesus Christ, experiencing the mercy and grace of God; and becoming humble and tested, broken and resolute, learning to consistently direct our will to God. We learn to recognize the voice of God and begin to be more responsive to His will. We become increasingly humbled and contrite by our inability to achieve anything of spiritual value on our own, our repeated failures, the impossibility of holiness, and as a result, paradoxically deepens our faith and dependency on God. We experience greater temptations and failures, greater compassion and humbleness, and increased appreciation of the power of God. We begin to understand that any successes can be attributed to God and that we are nothing without God. We begin to love Him when He touches our inner souls with His sweetness, and when He chastises us when we stray. We grow increasingly empty of self and increasingly filled with His love. We

begin to think of Him night and day without ceasing, we become intoxicated with His love and the joy and pain of being close to His holy presence. He teaches us, loves us, demands of us and consumes us with the fire of His love and the overwhelming power of His being. It is somewhere along this journey that a sense of me and thou loses meaning and our soul is reborn into the spirit and likeness of Christ. Over time we move in and out of a state of "I and thou" with the times of immersion growing and the times of separation diminishing. It is in this union that we find feelings of great love for God and compassion for others. We strive to be obedient to God and his commandments and are successful as is allowed by the grace of God.

Most of us will fall well short of any union with God and may be tempted to fall back in the category of intellectualization and profession of faith without spiritual progression. As in James 2: 17-20, "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble. Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless?" If we simply

believe in God without spiritual progression and maturity we are tied to a stale and anchored religion.

God is dynamic, changing, holy and powerful. There are many that will refuse to see beyond the frail religion of the surface and will condemn all efforts towards the extraordinary. However, the Christian religion is a powerful and dynamic religion that is anchored in a spiritual connection with God through the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Through this path God wants to lift the believer from the world of the mundane to the dynamic life of the holy and sacred. This path is the most simple, yet the most difficult of all spiritual paths and will take us on a creative and deepening spiritual journey. This journey can not be discovered by the lukewarm, the egoist, or those who reside in the stagnant letter of the law, but only by those who are willing through faith to be reborn into spiritual consciousness. It is concerned with the transformation of the heart and will, the transcendence and triumphant victory over the lower nature, the focusing of the mind, and the baptism into a spiritual relationship with Christ.

When God chooses a Christian for his bride there is a transformation that begins in a profound way. The soul feels a restlessness it has not felt before and a desire to run to God for love and comfort. This uneasiness continues as long as the Christian

continues to say yes to God and remains open to his love and instruction. This yes must be a yes that continues every day for the rest of our lives. There may be times when we say no through our actions but our heart and soul continue to say yes to God.

Sometimes our carnal nature flares up and overwhelms the spirit and causes a sense of loss and distance. When we are called by God we are not made perfect instantly, but are filled with the carnal habits and sins of a lifetime of separation. Through the grace of God these sins are diminished. Through the grace of God we are taught how to love and develop as an authentic Christian. This daily yes causes us sorrow and grief, a sense of dying to the old self, a turning away from the darkness that is the world, and a loss of friendship and perhaps a loss of friends even within the church. Your zealous habits of love for God will be misunderstood, and others will attempt to bring you back to the "real" gospel. A Christian chosen by God is tried and tempered by the fires of God's love in a daily dying to self. We find that the burning bush is within us, within our hearts and minds, chastises and consumes all that is not of God.

If we are true to the bible and filled with the Holy Spirit we will navigate the dangerous waters of spiritual progression. There are many false paths and paths that lead to dead ends and stagnant

waters. The truth of Christianity is always fresh, and joyous, and never oppressive, boring, or frightening. It is not something to fear but something to embrace in love for Jesus Christ and the example he demonstrates to his followers. The path of Jesus Christ leads us to run towards others rather than away from others, and requires us to embrace humility and compassion. As Christians we need to grow in God towards continuous love and peace. We will find hope in our love for God and joy in his infinite presence.

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