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**Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Spiritual Formation in an Ecumenical World –
Exploring the Practice of the Eastern Orthodox Jesus Prayer with the Evangelical
Protestant Tradition**

Craig Francis Bosman

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Philosophy (Theology)



School of Philosophy and Theology
Fremantle Campus

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Contents

Acknowledgments.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: Biblicism – The Jesus Prayer in the Bible and Christian Tradition	18
The Essential Characteristics in the Bible	20
The Divine Name.....	20
Constant Repetition.....	21
The Plea for Mercy	23
The Quest for Silence.....	25
Embodiment.....	27
The Essential Characteristics in Tradition	28
Early Christian Origins	30
Formal Christian Acceptance.....	33
Conclusion	38
Chapter 2: Crucicentrism and Conversionism – The Jesus Prayer in Evangelical Soteriology and Spiritual Practices	39
Exploring the Evangelical Identity	39
Theological and Sociological Markers	40
Evangelicalism within a Denomination: Anglicanism	44
Religious Research Agencies.....	46
A Theological Paradigm: The Five <i>Solas</i>	48
What is an Evangelical? – Conclusion.....	49
Exploring Evangelical Soteriology and Spirituality	50
The Evangelical Concept of Salvation.....	51
The Evangelical Concept of Spiritual Disciplines – Scripture Union and Cru.....	54

A Contemplative Evangelical Perspective.....	55
A Confessional Evangelical Perspective	58
A Postconservative Evangelical Perspective	62
A Lutheran Evangelical Perspective.....	63
What Does Evangelical Spirituality Look Like? – Conclusion	65
Evangelicals – Experience and Reason.....	65
New Mysticism.....	66
Evangelical Mysticism.....	67
Subjective Mysticism.....	68
Mysticism During The Evangelical Great Awakening.....	69
Evangelicals and Mysticism – Conclusion	70
Conclusion	71
Chapter 3: Conversionism and Activism – The Jesus Prayer in Research	73
Research Studies Overview	74
Four Empirical Research Studies.....	75
An Eastern Orthodox Study	75
A Non-Conventional Roman Catholic Study	76
Two Protestant Studies on the Prayer	79
A Protestant Study on Contemplation.....	80
A Literature Study.....	81
A Neuroscience Study.....	83
A Case Study.....	85
Research Studies Discussion.....	88
Responding to Four Key Evangelical Concerns	90
The Prayer as an Ethical Practice.....	90

The Prayer as a Sustaining Practice	94
The Prayer as a Christian Practice	97
The Prayer as a Supportive Practice	103
Conclusion	107
Conclusion	108
Bibliography	113

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Abstract

The question that forms the heart of this research is: “Can the Jesus Prayer establish roots to develop and flourish, and be accepted as a new, legitimate practice in Evangelicalism?” To begin answering, the practice will be explored within its Eastern Orthodox context focusing on the Jesus Prayers’ biblical roots, early development, and official acceptance within Orthodoxy. Then the Evangelical movement will be surveyed to gain an understanding of its identity from a sociological and theological perspective with special attention on its soteriological framework, customary spiritual disciplines, and general attitudes toward mysticism (defined as direct experience of God through apophatic, non-discursive contemplative practice). Finally, empirical research will be consulted to elucidate the mental, physical, and spiritual benefits of meditative practice, informing a discussion addressing special issues of concern for Evangelicals, including how the practice of the Jesus Prayer relates to ethics, daily life, Eastern religion, and communal engagement. The conclusion then draws the findings together and offers a proposed relational approach for conveying the practice to Evangelicals allowing for graded ports of entry accommodating a spectrum of understandings, attitudes, and openness. Overall the thesis will propose that the research question can provisionally be answered, “Yes, depending the type of Evangelical, and the method of practice on offer.”

Introduction

The word *hesychia* is the transliteration of a Greek word referring to a deep “silence, quiet, stillness, or rest”¹ that creates a space within for a receptive and “profound, attentive listening.”² Hesychasm is the contemplative tradition of the Christian Eastern Orthodox Church in which the Hesychast, a practitioner of Hesychasm, engages in, among other things, the contemplation of God – a practice known as *theoria*, meaning “the vision of God.”³ This type of contemplation is “non-discursive and non-iconic”⁴ in that it includes preparing oneself for a direct experience of God unmediated by thoughts or images. It is therefore known as apophatic, a word derived from two Greek words meaning “‘denial’ and ‘to speak’”⁵ denoting a contemplative pathway of “negation, elimination, forgetting, [and] unknowing”⁶ (the *via negativa*). It is differentiated from cataphatic contemplation which involves “the use of words and images”⁷ for sustained intellectual reflection, known as the *via positiva*, a contemplative pathway of “affirmation”⁸ and knowing comprised of “object-focused awareness.”⁹ Apophatic contemplation “passes beyond the exercise of the human faculties to rest in God”¹⁰ instead of drawing on “the exercise of our rational faculties to access divine union.”¹¹

Apophaticism is thus a transrational (though not irrational or anti-rational) practice which engages the *nous* (“the eye of the soul”¹²), the spiritual perceptive faculty of a person which transcends the rational perceptive faculties allowing for an encounter with the transcendent God

¹ Frederica Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2009), 19.

² Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 19.

³ Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, trans. Esther Williams, 3rd ed. (Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2017), 294.

⁴ Kallistos Ware, *The Power of The Name* (England, Oxford, Fairacres: SLG Press, 2007), 17.

⁵ Taliaferro, Charles C, “Apophatic,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed, edited by Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-80.

⁶ D. Egan Harvey, S.J., “Christian Apophatic and Cataphatic Mysticism,” *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (1978): 403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056397803900301>.

⁷ Veola E. Vazquez and Gregory Roy Jensen, “Practicing the Jesus Prayer: Implications for Psychological and Spiritual Well-Being,” *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 39, no. 1 (2020): 67.

⁸ Andrew Louth, “Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Patricia Z. Beckman and Amy Hollywood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137.

⁹ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder CO: Shambala, 2016), 137.

¹⁰ Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, 20th Anniversary ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 5.

¹¹ Keating, *Open Mind*, 5.

¹² Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 122.

in an immanent way.¹³ It is not only a pathway for encountering the Divine but also an activity that can “equip us to shift our awareness and to see more expansively, beyond our usual way of seeing”¹⁴ such that we become “less reactive, more insightful, and more compassionate.”¹⁵ It is therefore a transformative practice in addition to being a transrational encounter.

In Hesychasm, the primary spiritual discipline that facilitates this is known as ‘The Jesus Prayer’ (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Prayer’), which is the repetition of the words ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ or a shorter or longer variation thereof.¹⁶ This repetition can be done in one of two ways and preferably both: (i) “The ‘fixed’ use”¹⁷ – a daily psycho-somatic contemplative practice usually involving sitting in stillness and silence with eyes closed while focusing on the breath and reciting the words of the Prayer entrained to the breath which enables the letting go of thoughts and images;¹⁸ and (ii) “The ‘free’ use”¹⁹ – a mindful (known in Hesychasm as *nepsis* meaning “watchfulness... vigilance”²⁰) on-the-go practice of continual remembrance of God by reciting the words while doing the tasks of the day, grounding oneself in the present moment and in the presence of God.²¹ The prayer takes place on three levels – initially it is “of the lips”²² (spoken) then “of the mind”²³ (also known as “Mental Active Prayer”²⁴) and finally “of the heart”²⁵ (also known as “Mental-Heart Active Prayer”²⁶ or “prayer of the mind in the heart”²⁷). Thus, it is also known as the “Prayer of the Heart”²⁸ with other designations including “unceasing prayer”²⁹ (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17), silent prayer, wordless prayer, quiet prayer, and the like.

¹³ See Kallistos Ware, *The Jesus Prayer* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2017), 36.

¹⁴ Caroline Oakes, *Practice the Pause: Jesus’ Contemplative Practice, New Brain Science, and What It Means to Be Fully Human* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2023), 31.

¹⁵ Oakes, *Practice the Pause*, 24.

¹⁶ See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, xi-xii.

¹⁷ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 15.

¹⁸ See Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 27-28, 32.

¹⁹ See Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 27-28, 32.

²⁰ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 144.

²¹ See Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 16.

²² Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 35.

²³ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 35.

²⁴ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 109.

²⁵ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 35.

²⁶ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 111.

²⁷ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 35.

²⁸ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 35.

²⁹ Theophan the Recluse in Igumen Chariton, ed., *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 63.

The practice is referred to as both contemplation and meditation. These two terms are often used to denote different things with the latter referring to “a gentle process of pondering and reflecting on a holy text or a point of doctrine”³⁰ (i.e. cataphatic rumination) and the former referring to the moment “when the words will drop away and the wordless silence will embrace you as you simply sit in God’s presence”³¹ (i.e. apophatic silence). In this research, the terms are used interchangeably to both refer to the latter meaning relating to an apophatic approach.

The Prayer is done with spiritual formation in mind, which can be defined from a Protestant perspective as “using certain practices to cultivate an inner life that is strongly connected to God... in which the character of Christ is fashioned in us.”³² For the Hesychast this is a spiritual journey culminating in *theosis*, also known as divinisation or deification meaning “to become God-like, to be filled with the utter fullness of God”³³ (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). Hesychasm can thus be described as “the perfection of the person by union with God through perpetual prayer.”³⁴ During this union the Hesychast’s “own distinct personality remains intact”³⁵ paradoxically maintaining a difference between the self and God while simultaneously giving the practitioner the sense of complete oneness with the Divine. In this moment, the practitioner is “purified and made translucent, serving as a lantern for Christ’s light.”³⁶

In the Hesychast tradition spiritual formation begins with “purification... (katharsis)”³⁷ wherein the practitioner, in seeking to “draw close to God”³⁸ and be “a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit,”³⁹ seeks to “become pure”⁴⁰ (cf. Matthew 5:8). This includes actively forsaking sinfulness

³⁰ Carl McColman, *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism: The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2011), 190.

³¹ McColman, *The Big Book*, 189.

³² Jan Johnson, *When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer* (Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 1999), 31.

³³ McColman, *The Big Book*, 156.

³⁴ David Hester, *The Jesus Prayer: A Gift from the Fathers* (Chesterton IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2010), 6.

³⁵ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 125.

³⁶ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 125.

³⁷ Andrew Louth, “Denys the Areopagite,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 265.

³⁸ “Our Purpose Our Passions,” Ancient Faith, accessed 28 March, 2023, https://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/orthodox_spirituality/our_purpose_our_passions.

³⁹ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁴⁰ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

and especially cutting out any “major ongoing sin”⁴¹ which involves forsaking the passions, which are “disordered affections”⁴² prone to become “compulsions and addictions”⁴³ that “enslave us and make us powerless.”⁴⁴ Conversely this includes pursuing the virtues which embraces the doing of “good works.”⁴⁵ Embarking on purification opens the Hesychast up to the prospect of “illumination... (*photismos*)”⁴⁶ wherein the *nous*, descending into the heart through unceasing prayer, is opened and *theoria* occurs. This experience is illustrated by the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1-12 in which three disciples “experienced the divinity of Christ, the glory of God externally, shining forth from the human Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ Purification and illumination then unfold into *theosis*, as described above. These stages are “hierarchical and build upon themselves”⁴⁸ and yet they are “not exclusive, one to another”⁴⁹ and could thus be thought of not as a linear-journey, but as a spiral-journey that intensifies throughout the practitioner’s lifetime. As one passes through ever deepening cycles of purification, illumination and deification, they are ever growing in purity, clarity and union.

A key mechanism of the Prayer, especially as the practitioner starts out, is that it enables them to watch their thoughts (“*logismoi*”⁵⁰ in transliterated Greek) and feelings in order to become adept at differentiating what they are from what they think and feel. Once the Hesychast awakens to the reality that that they “are not [their] thoughts and feelings”⁵¹ they begin to become adept at watching those thoughts and feelings such that they can be interrupted and prevented from becoming entrenched and leading to behaviours which can become habitual and addictive.⁵² This experience is illustrated by Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 where Jesus interrupts the tempting thoughts of pleasure, power and comfort with a short phrase from Scripture. Orthodox elders suggest the process by which thoughts become addictions involves the following five

⁴¹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 49.

⁴² Simon Tugwell, “Evagrius and Macarius,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 245.

⁴³ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 154.

⁴⁴ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁴⁵ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁴⁶ Louth, “Denys the Areopagite,” 265.

⁴⁷ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁴⁸ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁴⁹ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

⁵⁰ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 39.

⁵¹ Martin Laird, *Into The Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, 9th ed (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 2006), 93.

⁵² See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 149-55.

stages (based on James 1:14-16): Provocation, Interaction, Consent, Captivity, and Passion.⁵³ If thoughts can be interrupted at the Provocation stage using the Prayer, it prevents them from progressing while gaining strength and momentum leading to the next stages and eventually to addictive habits. Thus, Hesychasm can be thought of as “literally therapeutic”⁵⁴ and a “method of healing”⁵⁵ to aid mental health, however usually with an important disclaimer that the Prayer is to be seen as only one element in this therapy. There is a stern caution in the tradition against practising the Prayer if one is “not fully engaged in the life of the Orthodox Church, receiving the sacraments and guided by a wise spiritual elder”⁵⁶ lest they come to harm.

The Prayer’s foundations are thoroughly biblical reflecting “the many times people asked Jesus for mercy during the years of his earthly ministry”⁵⁷ (cf. Matthew 15:22; Luke 17:11-19; Mark 10:46-48; and Matthew 17:14-15). Those foundations were then built upon in the 4th and 5th centuries among the Egyptian Desert Mothers (*Ammas*) and Fathers (*Abbas*) who “experimented with different forms of constant prayer”⁵⁸ and eventually “the form ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’ emerged as the universal favourite.”⁵⁹ Thereafter it spread and through controversy and council was eventually formally admitted into the Orthodox fold in 14th century Byzantium, care of St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who set it “on a firm dogmatic basis by integrating it into Orthodox theology as a whole.”⁶⁰ Later the practice was renewed among the Greeks Hesychasts in the 18th century on Mount Athos, the “chief centre of Orthodox monasticism”⁶¹ which was then followed by its “Russian flowering”⁶² in the 19th century. Finally, in the 20th century it leaped over the East-West boundary through migration and thus entered the ecumenical (inter-church, inter-denominational, inter-religious) context of the West, coming into general awareness through various publications and prominent figures resulting in

⁵³ See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 149-55.

⁵⁴ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 154.

⁵⁵ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 289.

⁵⁶ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 112.

⁵⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

⁵⁸ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 4-5.

⁵⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 4-5.

⁶⁰ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity* (UK: Penguin Books, 2015), 63.

⁶¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 36.

⁶² Christopher D. L. Johnson, *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation* (London: Continuum, 2010), 45.

the drawing of many adherents from outside the Orthodox tradition.⁶³ In the 21st century its popularity and use merited scientific investigation with several peer-reviewed studies measuring its positive effects, which are discussed in chapter 3.⁶⁴

While the Prayer has experienced various levels of uptake among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians and several other groups,⁶⁵ the focus of this research is on one group in particular: the Evangelical Protestant tradition (hereinafter referred to as ‘Evangelicals’ or ‘Evangelicalism’). Protestants comprise a major division among the large Christian groupings alongside the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox.⁶⁶ Beginning in Europe around the 16th century with the Protestant Reformation, many Protestant groups thereafter developed as the movement grew over the ensuing centuries.⁶⁷ This included significant branches such as “Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican”⁶⁸ which further expanded to produce a variety of denominations in the 17th and 18th centuries including, for example, Baptists and Methodists.⁶⁹ Across and within all these groupings, Evangelicalism became a distinguishable movement particularly in the 18th century during what is known as “The Great Awakening” in America, “Pietism” in Germany and Scandinavia, and the “Evangelical Revival” in Britain.⁷⁰

Evangelicals have come to be popularly defined by historian David Bebbington as having four distinctives known as Bebbington’s Quadrilateral: “conversionism; activism; Biblicism; and crucicentrism.”⁷¹ Each one of these poses a pertinent question for this research to explore.

⁶³ For an overview of this history see Johnson, *Globalization*, 32-87.

⁶⁴ For an example of its growing popularity in Korea see Euiwan Cho, “Resisting Restless Protestant Religious Consumers in the Korean Burnout Society: Examining Korean Protestantism’s Rising Interest in Apophatic and Desert Spirituality,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 13, no. 1 (2020): 30-31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1939790919894560>.

For two examples of scientific studies see Joshua J. Knabb and Veola E. Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial of a 2-Week Internet-Based Contemplative Prayer Program for Christians With Daily Stress,” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice (Washington, D.C.)* 5, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000154>, and Joshua J. Knabb et al, “Christian Meditation for Repetitive Negative Thinking: A Multisite Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of a 4-Week Preventative Program,” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 7, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000206>.

⁶⁵ See Johnson, *Globalization*, 51, 62.

⁶⁶ W. David Buschart, “A Comparison of Major Christian Traditions,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G. G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2011), 139.

⁶⁷ See Bruce L. Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 235.

⁶⁸ Shelly, *Church History*, 235.

⁶⁹ See Shelly, *Church History*, 306.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Morris, *A People's Church: A History of the Church of England* (Great Britain: Profile Books, 2023), 174.

⁷¹ Morris, *A People's Church*, 175.

Conversionism is the belief that a person must make a “personal decision to live a new life for Jesus Christ through inward transformation by the Holy Spirit in response to repentance and faith.”⁷² This distinctive could prove to be an ally for the Prayer since it focuses on personal experience and relationship with Jesus which the Prayer can foster. However, it also introduces a significant obstacle since conversionism entails a radical identification with Christian practices over, and often against, practices which are or appear to be non-Christian. For example, Warren Wiersbe who is described as “one of the Evangelical giants”⁷³ wrote “Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like.”⁷⁴ Such a stance poses a significant Evangelical resistance to the Prayer because outwardly it “appears to be quite similar to the methods set out in another religious tradition, namely that of yoga that developed from ancient times in India.”⁷⁵ This distinctive therefore poses this significant question for Evangelicals: “Is the Prayer a distinctly Christian practice arising from Christian tradition and distinguishable from non-Christian practices?”

While conversionism may be an ally due to its emphasis on personal experience, it is a double-edged sword. Even though the Prayer invites personal experience, this can be seen as a potential threat to the authority of Scripture as Biblicism suggests. This tension is further complicated by the fact that some Evangelicals “expunge from their theological vocabulary the category of mystery”⁷⁶ tending “toward a dry, know-it-all rationalism in the form of a systematic cognitive covering of all intellectual bases.”⁷⁷ Indeed Evangelicalism is a post-Enlightenment belief system and therefore deeply influenced by Rationalism, which makes it both suspicious of mystery and also cautious of ecclesiastical tradition and personal experience. While this is not necessarily true for all Evangelicals, it is an issue that will need attention by posing the question: “Is the Prayer too focused on personal experience?”

⁷² Roger E Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2013), 171.

⁷³ “Warren Wiersbe, ‘One Of Evangelicalism’s Giants,’ dies,” Baptist Press, accessed 21 January 2024, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/warren-wiersbe-one-of-evangelicalisms-giants-dies/>.

⁷⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1996), 104.

⁷⁵ Eiji Hisamatsu and Ramesh Pattni, “Yoga and the Jesus Prayer—A Comparison Between Aṣṭāṅga Yoga in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali and the Psycho-Physical Method of Hesychasm,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 28, no. 1 (2015): 56, <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1606>.

⁷⁶ Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 145.

⁷⁷ Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible*, 145.

Activism refers to evangelism and community outreach evidenced by the way Evangelicals have historically “poured immense energy into saving souls and promoting works of philanthropy.”⁷⁸ With the Prayer’s focus on an inward journey comprising of solitude, stillness and silence, this distinctive poses the question: “Does the Prayer promote an outward focus of loving service?” Certainly, as some have pointed out, one great peril of the contemplative tradition is the “tendency to separate it from ordinary life”⁷⁹ including how it can “keep some people from serious engagement with the pressing social issues of our day.”⁸⁰

Both conversionism and activism imply a strong group identity to facilitate both communal worship and effective outreach, thus another potential point of tension is the supposed contemplative “tendency to neglect the importance of the community of faith.”⁸¹ Evangelicals would concur that “spiritual disciplines are necessary for the formation of the godly Life”⁸² with the second item on their spiritual discipline list after Bible-intake likely being “regular church attendance.”⁸³ Thus, another question Evangelicals might have is: “Does the Prayer support or detract from communal faith practices?”

Biblicism includes “the primacy of Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice”⁸⁴ over, and often against, “other writings... church tradition... individual religious experience... conscience... revelations, dreams, and vision and... culture.”⁸⁵ This distinctive poses a most important question for Evangelicals: “Is the Prayer biblical?” Crucicentrism includes a soteriology emphasising that “salvation is by grace-alone through faith-alone... in Christ-alone”⁸⁶ over, and often against, salvation through merit or works – “It is all grace and gift.”⁸⁷ Evangelicals see salvation as incorporating the following three aspects: justification (“being

⁷⁸ Morris, *A People's Church*, 175.

⁷⁹ Foster, *Streams*, 53.

⁸⁰ Foster, *Streams*, 54.

⁸¹ Foster, *Streams*, 55.

⁸² Simon Chan, “Spiritual Practices,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 247.

⁸³ Chan, “Spiritual Practices,” 247.

⁸⁴ Richard J Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Broadway, New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 222.

⁸⁵ Foster, *Streams*, 222.

⁸⁶ Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 18.

⁸⁷ Foster, *Streams*, 222.

rightly related to God”⁸⁸), sanctification (“growth in holiness”⁸⁹), and glorification (“the spiritual nature of the believer will be perfected”⁹⁰). While some Protestants view all three as monergistic (“solely and exclusively the work of God”⁹¹), many view sanctification as synergistic (“they can cooperate with God in the sense of being submissive and responsive to his work.”⁹²) This is a distinction that has import for this research and so will be explored further in chapter 2. This distinctive poses this significant question for Evangelicals: “Does the Prayer promote grace-based salvation?”

In light of these four distinctives that will be explored further in chapter 2, the overarching question being explored in this research is as follows:

Can the Prayer establish roots to develop and flourish, and be accepted as a new, legitimate practice in Evangelicalism?

It has been suggested that the Prayer “may well be one of the finest gifts Eastern Orthodoxy has to offer to all Christians. It certainly is the most borrow-able.”⁹³ This assertion sums up the question of this research – “Is the Prayer a borrow-able gift that Evangelicals can readily accept and greatly benefit from?” Such a question is important when considering firstly the prediction of Jesuit Priest and Roman Catholic Theologian Karl Rahner that “the Christian of the future will either be a mystic or no Christian at all”⁹⁴ and secondly the observation of Philosopher and Psychologist William James that Evangelicals have “seemingly abandoned everything methodical”⁹⁵ related to mysticism. While mysticism is a “broad and inclusive ‘container’ for spirituality that can manifest in a variety of ways”⁹⁶ herein it refers specifically to apophatic contemplation that is both a holistic transforming practice and a transrational experience with the Divine, as discussed above. If Rahner and James prove to be correct, then Evangelicals may

⁸⁸ Buschart, “A Comparison,” 141.

⁸⁹ Buschart, “A Comparison,” 141.

⁹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 919.

⁹¹ Buschart, “A Comparison,” 141.

⁹² Buschart, “A Comparison,” 141.

⁹³ Foster, *Streams*, 289.

⁹⁴ See Daniel T. Pekarske, *Abstracts of Karl Rahner's Theological Investigations 1-23* (United States: Marquette University Press, 2001), 555.

⁹⁵ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (United States: Random House, 1994), 334.

⁹⁶ Carl McColman, *The New Big Book of Christian Mysticism: The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2023), 37.

stand to benefit from having the mystical element of Hesychasm with its contemplative method of the Prayer added to the Evangelical repertoire of spiritual practices. On the other hand, should Rahner and James prove to be mistaken, Evangelicals at the very least, remain to benefit from having the Prayer for the extraordinary psychological, physical and spiritual benefits it cultivates, including the following three: (i) Fostering “greater forgiveness toward others but also toward the self,”⁹⁷; (ii) “A greater ability to tolerate uncertainty,”⁹⁸; and (iii) “The development of positive external or behavioral qualities.”⁹⁹ Thus, the Prayer is both for the purpose of unmediated connection with the Divine (which the tradition emphasises is “is entirely a gift of grace.”¹⁰⁰) and the growth of the individual in their spiritual capacities for the benefit of self and others.

To explore the research question post above, this essay is structured with the following three chapters:

Chapter 1: Biblicism – The Jesus Prayer in the Bible and Christian Tradition provides an overview of the Prayer by identifying its essential characteristics and situating them in the bible and in Eastern Orthodox tradition. The two major areas of discussion focus on the biblical nature of the Prayer and how it is a distinctly Christian practice arising from and approved by the Christian tradition.

Chapter 2: Crucicentrism and Conversionism – The Jesus Prayer in Evangelical Soteriology presents further insights about Evangelical identity followed by a discussion on the Evangelical perspective on salvation and the interplay of the spiritual disciplines in Evangelical spirituality. The general attitudinal stance of Evangelicalism toward mysticism is then explored considering the topics of experience and reason. Here the focus is on how the Prayer promotes grace-based salvation and is therefore not a method of earning salvation by work or merit.

⁹⁷ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁹⁸ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁹⁹ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71. All three benefits proposed by the authors are presented by them as theses needing to be tested. Other studies, for example those mentioned in footnote 64 bear up the theses.

¹⁰⁰ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 104.

Chapter 3: Conversionism and Activism – The Jesus Prayer in Research begins with four empirical studies, a literature study, a medical study, and a case study to demonstrate the psychological, physical and spiritual benefits of contemplative practice. This is followed by a discussion on four special interest questions that arise as Evangelical concerns: Is the Prayer ethical/other-focused? Is the Prayer relevant to everyday life in a busy world?, Is the Prayer distinguishable from non-Christian practices?, and Is the Prayer supportive of cataphatic communal Christian practices?

Finally, a summary of findings is given in the conclusion, followed by a brief discussion of the importance of friendship for conveying a new practice into an established tradition. With the focus of the thesis being on the acceptability of the Prayer within Evangelicalism, a simple framework for inviting a friend into the practice will be proposed. As the thesis will reveal, there are a wide variety of ways to practice the Prayer (chapter 1) and there is a diverse spectrum of Evangelicals (chapter 2), therefore having a range of entry points into the practice seems key. This should suit the myriad understandings and attitudes toward contemplation and mysticism within Evangelicalism resulting in the Prayer finding purchase and developing its own unique flavour and expression within the Evangelical tradition, gifting its adherents with a wealth of psychological, physical, and spiritual benefits (chapter 3). Finally, ideas for further research are suggested to test both the findings of this research and the hypothesis of having a friendship-based tool with several ports of entry for introducing the Prayer.

Chapter 1: Biblicism – The Jesus Prayer in the Bible and Christian Tradition

In light of Evangelicalism's distinct characteristics of Biblicism and conversionism this chapter seeks to answer this question: "What are the essentials of the Jesus Prayer, are they biblical, and do they arise from Christian tradition?" The goal is to draw out the lived experience of the Prayer as its various contours arises from Scripture and within Christian history. For over a millennium the Prayer has been practiced in a wide variety of circumstances by a broad spectrum of people leading to the following five characteristics which give the Prayer its distinctive character. These emerged at different times, eventually coalescing into what is considered to be the essential ingredients of the practice today.

The first ingredient is the Divine name for which there is "a strong respect"¹⁰¹ and particularly a deep "devotion to the Holy Name 'Jesus'"¹⁰² such that it acts "in a semi-sacramental way as a source of power and grace."¹⁰³ The second ingredient is the practice of "frequent repetition of short prayers"¹⁰⁴ known as "arrow prayers"¹⁰⁵ or "monologic prayer"¹⁰⁶ consisting of one word or one phrase comprising a condensed and concentrated expression of faith. Augustine writes of these as being "very frequent... very brief... [and] sudden and ejaculatory"¹⁰⁷ such that "wakeful and aroused attention"¹⁰⁸ is preserved. Indeed, the Prayer "quiets and unifies the scattered and wandering *nous*, so that it can focus on God's presence in simplicity, with love."¹⁰⁹

The third ingredient is the "the appeal for divine mercy, accompanied by a keen sense of compunction and inward grief (*penthos*)."¹¹⁰ The prayer, 'Lord, have mercy' (*kyrie eleison* in transliterated Greek) is one of the most repeated phrases in the Eastern Orthodox liturgies

¹⁰¹ Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

¹⁰² Kallistos Ware, "The Origins of the Jesus Prayer: Diadochus, Gaza, Sinai," in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 254.

¹⁰³ Ware, "Origins," 254.

¹⁰⁴ Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ware, "Origins," 254.

¹⁰⁶ Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, "Letter CXXX" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 1 Volume 1: The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine, with a Sketch of his Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff trans. J. G. Cunningham. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 465.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, "Letter CXXX," 465.

¹⁰⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Ware, "Origins," 254.

occurring 44 times in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.¹¹¹ The fourth ingredient is “the quest for inner silence or stillness”¹¹² (*hesychia*) which is a state of “imageless, non-discursive prayer.”¹¹³ The Prayer leads to and maintains this stillness and silence and is in itself an expression of the same.

The fifth and final ingredient is an embodied psychosomatic practice involving sitting in silence, eyes closed, entraining the prayer to the breath, and often using a prayer rope to occupy the left hand while keeping count of repetitions, and periodically making the sign of the cross with the right hand.¹¹⁴ Further to these embodying aspects, the importance of the physical heart cannot not be overestimated. Not only is it metaphorically “the very deep centre of the person”¹¹⁵ signifying “a spiritual attitude”¹¹⁶ toward life, but it is also literally the locus of a “strong, sensation-based physical practice.”¹¹⁷ Sometimes, though with great caution, it is suggested that the words of the Prayer be entrained to the heartbeat with one’s attention on the place of the heart with the understanding that the inhale is literally transporting the *nous* into the physical heart via the Prayer.¹¹⁸ This is an embodied expression of “the principal thing”¹¹⁹ in this practice which is “to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.”¹²⁰

In sum, at its bare minimum the Prayer consists of quietly and frequently invoking the name of Jesus while expressing a deep desire for God’s mercy. Perhaps its most basic form is ‘Jesus’ on the inbreath and ‘mercy’ on the outbreath in the stillness and solitude of ‘private prayer’ and in the hustle and bustle of everyday activities.¹²¹

¹¹¹ “Kyrie Eleison, Lord Have Mercy,” Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, accessed 15 February 2023, <https://www.goarch.org/-/kyrie-eleison-lord-have-mercy>; and “GOA Digital Chant Stand: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom,” The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, accessed 16 February 2023, dcs.goarch.org.

¹¹² Ware, “Origins,” 254.

¹¹³ Ware, “Origins,” 254.

¹¹⁴ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 62.

¹¹⁵ Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, 26.

¹¹⁶ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer*, 100.

¹¹⁸ Daniel M. Rogich, *The Friend of God - An Illustrated Manual of the Jesus Prayer* (Canton, Ohio: *Hesychia* Press, 2017), 69; and Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 32-33.

¹¹⁹ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 63.

¹²⁰ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 63.

¹²¹ Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, 35.

The Essential Characteristics in the Bible

Given Evangelicals hold firmly to Biblicism and *Sola-Scriptura* (Scripture-alone), a study of the Prayer's Scriptural resonance within each essential characteristic will address the key question, *Is the Prayer Biblical?* which will further help to situate the Prayer within the Eastern Orthodox tradition and perspective. This also gives opportunity to clear up several inappropriate uses of the Prayer in relation to each characteristic in anticipation of basic objections that any group, including Evangelicals may have.

The Divine Name

Scriptural evidence for the first essential (appealing to the Divine Name) is abundant. The Christian Scriptures demonstrate this evidenced by the following five sample passages:¹²² Matthew 6:9 (“May your name be revered as holy”); John 16:23 (“If you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you”); Matthew 28:19 (“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”); Acts 4:12 (“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”); and Philippians 2:10 (“At the name given to Jesus every knee should bend”).

The Hebrew Scriptures likewise demonstrate that to “attentively and deliberately... invoke God's Name is to place oneself in his presence, to open oneself to his energy, to offer oneself as an instrument and a living sacrifice in his hands.”¹²³ Thus, for the Israelites, a person's name reveals their identity and essence, and an invitation to use their name is an invitation into a relationship of reciprocity and trust.¹²⁴ The power and sacredness of God's name is shown in how the *tetragrammaton* (YHWH) (cf. Exodus 3:15) was forbidden to be pronounced out loud except once a year by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies.¹²⁵

¹²² See Ware, *The Power*, 12-13.

¹²³ Ware, *The Power*, 12.

¹²⁴ Ware, *The Power*, 11.

¹²⁵ *Tetra* referring to *four* and *gramma* referring to *letters* representing God's proper name in Hebrew rendered YHWH in English lettering. See Ian McFarland, “Tetragrammaton,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 499.

In the case of the Prayer the “invocation of the Holy Name”¹²⁶ infuses one’s “entire being”¹²⁷ leading them ever deeper into “inner silence.”¹²⁸ Proverbs 18:10 states that “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.” It might be said that invoking the name of Jesus by praying the Prayer represents this act of running into the safety and salvation of the Name.

This invocation should not be thought of as a way to gain mastery over God as if knowing and repeating the name acquires “control over”¹²⁹ God. The Prayer is not a “technical method”¹³⁰ or “magical talisman”¹³¹ by which one can obtain power through manipulation. Rather it is an act to be “inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit”¹³² such that it is said with a sense of “repentance and sorrow.”¹³³ The name is always to be uttered with deep respect and awe. The Second Commandment in Exodus 20:7 acts as an important caution here where “wrongful use” of God’s Name includes any attempt to manoeuvre God for personal gain like, for example, Simon in Acts 8:18-19 who tried to purchase the ability to distribute God’s power.

Constant Repetition

Scriptural evidence for the second essential of constant repetition is equally abundant, particularly in the Christian Scriptures, for example:¹³⁴ Romans 12:2 – “persevere in prayer”; Ephesians 6:18 – “pray in the Spirit at all times”; Colossians 4:2 – “devote yourselves to prayer”; and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “pray without ceasing.” This injunction to pray unceasingly is especially important in the Hesychastic tradition as a foundational verse¹³⁵ and is closely connected to the concept of *nepsis* (watchfulness) which is that constancy of attention wherein

¹²⁶ Gabriele Winkler, *The Jesus Prayer in Eastern Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 14.

¹²⁷ Winkler, *The Jesus Prayer*, 14.

¹²⁸ Winkler, *The Jesus Prayer*, 14.

¹²⁹ Ware, *The Power*, 11.

¹³⁰ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 296.

¹³¹ Ware, *The Power*, 13.

¹³² Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 296.

¹³³ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 296.

¹³⁴ See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 3.

¹³⁵ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 63.

“everything which impedes the mind’s ascent toward God”¹³⁶ is let go of, including thoughts and feelings. Christian Scripture is awash with commands to be clear-minded, alert and awake, such as: 2 Timothy 4:5 – “be sober in everything”; 1 Peter 5:8 – “keep alert”; and 1 Thessalonians 5:6 – “keep awake and be sober.”¹³⁷

The Prayer is the means by which this watchfulness is animated since it stands guard against any thoughts and/or feelings which may arise in the mind, which is why it can be referred to as, a form of therapy.¹³⁸ In this regard it is both “preventative”¹³⁹ and “therapeutic”¹⁴⁰ shielding the mind from incoming new thoughts and helping to uproot existing entrenched thoughts leading to an ever clearer and purer mind along the journey.

Sometimes people confuse the goal here as to stop thinking and give up practising because they cannot stop thinking, but this is a misnomer as thoughts and feelings will always and forever arise.¹⁴¹ Rather, the goal is to learn to reflexively let go of any thoughts or feelings that arise, instead of letting them gain mastery or control over the mind. A related Christian contemplative practice called Centering Prayer has this basic guideline which is apt here: “Resist no thought, retain no thought, react emotionally to no thought”¹⁴² but rather simply “return”¹⁴³ to the Prayer at least initially as “a place of refuge”¹⁴⁴ from the internal onslaught. This seems to have been Jesus’ approach during his desert temptation in Matthew 6 where he “avoided getting caught up in any sort of conversation with Satan”¹⁴⁵ by quoting “lines of Scripture”¹⁴⁶ so as to “break the cycle of inner chatter that would only hold his attention captive the more he listened to it and indulged in it.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly the hesychast, instead of getting drawn into their thoughts and

¹³⁶ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 114.

¹³⁷ See Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 300-01.

¹³⁸ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 215.

¹³⁹ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 215.

¹⁴⁰ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 215.

¹⁴¹ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 22.

¹⁴² Keating, *Open Mind*, 127.

¹⁴³ Keating, *Open Mind*, 127.

¹⁴⁴ Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Martin Laird, *A Sunlit Absence - Silence, Awareness and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁴⁶ Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Laird, *A Sunlit Absence*, 13.

feelings, quotes the Prayer, and finds freedom to be completely attentive to God in the present moment.

One objection that usually arises when discussing constant repetition in an appeal to Matthew 6:7 where Jesus while teaching on prayer says, “use not vain repetitions” (KJV). However the Prayer is not a matter of vain repetition but of relational repetition involving “inward sincerity and concentration.”¹⁴⁸ Moreover, healthy repetition is known to quieten and unify the mind “clarifying the mental processes, healing memories, bringing all parts of the mental and emotional life into right relation with each other, restoring the body to its healthy role, and uniting every facet of body and soul in vibrant peace.”¹⁴⁹ Healthy repetition produces a kind of vibrational resonance in the *nous* which brings one’s entire being into harmony. Furthermore, healthy repetition fosters constant remembrance of God such that one forms a “habit of always being in communion with God,”¹⁵⁰ thereby living in constant “aliveness to God,”¹⁵¹ being “present to him,”¹⁵² having the heart “constantly permeated by the thought of God,”¹⁵³ “having a constant feeling of God,”¹⁵⁴ and having the inner person “consecrated wholly and completely to the service of God.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, healthy repetition can result in obedience to the command to “set your minds on things that are above” (Colossians 3:2, NIV) and to be always “fixing our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 2:2, NIV).

The Plea for Mercy

Examples of the third essential element (the plea for mercy) are plentiful in the Gospel narratives, for example:¹⁵⁶ In Matthew 15:22 a Canaanite woman shouts to Jesus “Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David.” In Luke 17:13 ten lepers say to him “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” In Mark 10:47-48 Bartimaeus, a blind man, repeatedly pleads with him “Jesus, son of

¹⁴⁸ Ware, *The Power*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 19, 120.

¹⁵⁰ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 71.

¹⁵¹ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 83.

¹⁵² Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 85.

¹⁵³ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 85.

¹⁵⁴ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 86.

¹⁵⁵ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*.86

¹⁵⁶ See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

David, have mercy on me!... Son of David, have mercy on me!” A father in Matthew 17:15 says, “Lord, have mercy on my son.” A Pharisee in Luke 18:13, looking down and beating his chest prays, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” which is an echo of Psalm 51:1, a pristine example from the Hebrew Scriptures of the plea for mercy – “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.”

This appeal is not what it is sometimes mistaken to be – a prisoner begging an unmerciful judge for leniency¹⁵⁷ which is stingily withheld while threatening severe punishment. This comes from a misunderstanding of the nature of God where God is seen as being fundamentally unmerciful and needing to be convinced to show mercy. Rather, God’s character is the opposite of this and is best summed up in 1 John 4:8 with the words “God is love.” It is helpful to take the lead of some ancients who connect the Greek word for mercy (*elios*) to the Greek word for *oil* (*elaion*)¹⁵⁸ to make the point that mercy refers to wholistic healing and restoration. Relating these words to one another, while “bad etymology,”¹⁵⁹ is very “good theology.”¹⁶⁰ Indeed, among the ancient people and still today, oil has a variety of important uses including providing light (olive oil clay lamps), healing wounds (pouring oil on injuries cf. Lk. 10:34), facilitating fragrance (used in perfume), providing nutrition (used in food), and anointing people (for example, new kings cf. 1 Sam. 16:13), etc.¹⁶¹ Although asking for mercy does include a request for forgiveness (cf. Lk 18:13), in God’s economy, forgiveness is a given¹⁶² and therefore it is mainly a request for “release from the tyranny of sin”¹⁶³ which is a cry for help to the Saviour so that one can live in freedom. In sum, it is not a feeling of condemnation but a feeling of sorrow.¹⁶⁴

Asking for mercy can be summarised as a request for wholeness and purpose, the latter touching on the use of oil for anointing a person into a role with responsibilities as seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. In sum, ‘have mercy on me’ could be thought of as a request to ‘deliver, illuminate,

¹⁵⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 79.

¹⁵⁹ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

¹⁶¹ See Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 79.

¹⁶² See Ware, *The Power*, 11.

¹⁶³ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On The Jesus Prayer*, trans. Father Lazarus (Boston: Shambala, 2013), Kindle ebook, 123.

heal, refresh, feed, and empower me’ – a thoroughly Scriptural plea for comprehensive peace, freedom, and flourishing (*shalom*)¹⁶⁵ to the One who is more than happy to supply it.

The Quest for Silence

The biblical witness on the importance of the fourth essential (quest for *hesychia*) is pervasive. Psalm 46:10 stands as the foundational Scriptural verse for Christian contemplation in general – “Be still and know that I am God.”¹⁶⁶ Isaiah 30:15 is a similar invitation – “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”¹⁶⁷ A key Scriptural verse is Matthew 6:6 – “But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” This is not to be taken literally but rather metaphorically – it means to “invoke [God] in your heart.”¹⁶⁸ The verse shows us a “cascading movement... into ever deeper states of silence:”¹⁶⁹ leaving the noise of the world, leaving the noise of the self, and entering the stillness of God within. Thus, in this verse, “Christ commended the value of noetic *hesychia* and release from the passions that are in us.”¹⁷⁰ Perhaps the best commentary on Matthew 6:6 is Luke 17:21 – “The kingdom of God is among [or within] you” – “This region is the cloud of Divine glory, which only the pure in heart enter, to contemplate the face of their Lord.”¹⁷¹ This contemplation is a type of “seeing” (*theoria*) which brings about “transformation” (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). Moreover 1 Corinthians 6:19 makes it explicit that the body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit within” – God dwells in us and when we follow the path of interiority through silent prayer, we meet with God in the silence within, and we are transformed “from one degree of glory to another” (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). The Christian Scripture which crowns all these is Luke 10:38-42 where Mary, “who sat at Jesus’

¹⁶⁵ *Shalom* is a word “signifying well-being, wholeness, fulfillment, prosperity, and absence of strife” – Klaus Issler, “Happiness,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G. G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2011), 493.

¹⁶⁶ Cited as “part of the hesychast tradition” in Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 158.

¹⁶⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 158.

¹⁶⁸ Barnasuphius and John. “Directions in Spiritual Work.” In *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, Tenth Impression, ed. and trans. E Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 369.

¹⁶⁹ Keating, *Open Mind*, 3.

¹⁷⁰ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 299.

¹⁷¹ St Isaac the Syrian in Callistus and Ignatius, “Directions to Hesychasts,” In *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, Tenth Impression, ed. and trans, by E Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 233.

feet and listened to what he was saying” (v39) is commended by Jesus as doing the one needed thing, “the better part” (v42) over and against being busy (non-*hesychia*).

Like the other characteristics, silence can also be misunderstood. Hesychastic silence “is not negative but positive”¹⁷² in that we are not merely entering into the absence of noise, but into the presence of the Divine. It is a full silence, not an empty silence – a “listening silence, expectant, rather than a mental vacancy,”¹⁷³ a silence that is attentive, receptive, and relational. It is a not unlike when someone sits in silence with a person who they love – it is not an emptiness, but a fullness, an engagement which transcends the need for words. It should also be noted that it is not an enforced silence which can be experienced as oppressive and abusive, for example when a person is forbidden from speaking because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, or some other characteristic. Rather, *hesychia* is a chosen silence based on an act of free will, which can be experienced as a harmonious peace within.

Hesychia contributes to the ultimate goal of Orthodox spirituality which is the “healing [purification through asceticism], illumination [*theoria*], and transfiguration”¹⁷⁴ of the human being, where *transfiguration* is known in Eastern Orthodoxy as “*deification, divinisation, or theosis*.”¹⁷⁵ To be deified is to recover the likeness of God through union with God “without confusion”¹⁷⁶ between Creator and creature. This recovery of the likeness is necessary because the Orthodox believe that in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1, Adam and Eve’s *nous* was in a state of perfect union, but after the Fall in Genesis 3, that union was shattered/dispersed and *hesychia* is needed as part of the process by which that union is restored.¹⁷⁷ The primary vehicle to bring this about is the Prayer through which “our body and our dispersed thoughts and all the movements of our heart are brought to an inner concord and final unification.”¹⁷⁸ It brings us

¹⁷² Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 20.

¹⁷³ Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 155.

¹⁷⁴ James A. Bernstein, *Surprised by Christ: My Journey From Judaism To Orthodox Christianity* (Chesterton Indiana: Conciliar Press, 2008), 278.

¹⁷⁵ Bernstein, *Surprised*, 278.

¹⁷⁶ Bernstein, *Surprised*, 259.

¹⁷⁷ “Joseph Honeycutt: Soteriology, Hesychasm and Huneycutt in Beaumont.” Podcast audio, posted by Ancient Faith, 17 December 2009,

https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/orthodixie/soteriology_heychasm_and_huneycutt_in_beaumont. Ancient Faith is a peak Eastern Orthodox body representing the views of Eastern Orthodox beliefs and practices.

¹⁷⁸ Winkler, *The Jesus Prayer*, 14.

from “dividedness to unity, from dispersion and multiplicity to singleness.”¹⁷⁹ It is indeed “training for the ‘third eye’”¹⁸⁰ (cf. Matt. 6:22-23) which speaks of inner unification of perception.

Embodiment

The fifth essential of embodiment is more nuanced than the previous four. Many Eastern spiritual practices are accompanied by certain postures, breathing techniques, and religious equipment. While Hesychasts in the 14th century tended to have specific psychosomatic guidelines (to be explored later), contemporary Eastern Orthodox practitioners generally say these are optional – “There are no rigid rules, but variety and flexibility.”¹⁸¹ For example, one can lie down (if necessary), sit, kneel, stand, or walk; open or shut their eyes, or even keep them slightly open; entrain the prayer to their breath or not; breathe deeply or normally; use a prayer rope or beads, or nothing at all; make the sign of the cross, or do prostrations or simply be still; count the number of prayers completed or time oneself, or just be; pray at a fixed time in a private place, and/or pray during another task etcetera. Most sources suggest that deciding how to practice the Prayer is something to be worked out with an experienced spiritual director – “it should be individually coached or tutored by a spiritual mother or father.”¹⁸² This flexibility does not imply that these variations are unimportant, but rather that the Prayer should be adapted to one’s circumstances and needs. For example, a nun living in a convent and a businesswoman who has a family would likely have different approaches for obvious reasons.

The Christian and Hebrew Scriptures neither stipulate nor forbid specific techniques. Thus, it seems that whatever best helps one “go into their room and shut the door” (cf. Matthew 6:6) is advisable. The way one person fosters wordless, imageless interior attention and receptivity is different to the way another person might do the same. This flexibility is a strength of the Prayer

¹⁷⁹ Ware, *The Power*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (Mulgrave, Vic: John Garratt Publishing, 2009), 166.

¹⁸¹ Ware, *The Power*, 8.

¹⁸² Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 14.

since it can therefore have wider appeal to a variety of people.¹⁸³ Moreover it emphasises that these outer techniques are not mere spiritual technologies to be used to achieve desired psychosomatic experiences, though that is a possible way of using them, which is not advised as these experiences can be misleading. Instead, they are helpful additions when needed to maximise one's watchfulness and humble receptivity to God's gracious action.

This brief overview of the Scriptural contours of the essential characteristics of the Prayer demonstrate that the practice is thoroughly grounded in the Bible. All the necessary ingredients can be found therein to create a prayer practice which, some say, summarises the whole of Orthodox spirituality – “There are only a few words in the Jesus Prayer, but they contain everything.”¹⁸⁴ Pending further research analysing the hermeneutical and interpretive complexities of the passages cited above, it seems that a provisional answer to the question of the practice's resonance with Scripture is positive.

The Essential Characteristics in Tradition

While Evangelicals prize Biblicism over and sometimes against tradition, it is still necessary to situate the Prayer in its historical context to demonstrate that it is not a recent innovation. It has historical precedence, which is not an unimportant consideration for Evangelicals. The role of tradition relates to this research question from the introduction: “Is the Prayer a distinctly Christian practice arising from the Christian tradition?” Prominent Evangelical scholar Roger E. Olson adds the following to the Bebbington Quadrilateral as a necessary component of Evangelicalism: “respect for the great tradition of Christian orthodoxy.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, continuity with the past, though not authoritative and of lesser importance than the Bible, still holds some weight in Evangelical discernment. More to the point, Methodists use the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral”¹⁸⁶ in

¹⁸³ Christian contemplative Carl McColman states, “Psychologically speaking, the simple fact is that the ‘contemplative personality’ is only found in about 1% of the general population.” Thus, a practice which is pliable will have wider appeal. See Carl McColman, “Reconciling Mystical Teachings with Conventional Christianity,” *Anamchara* (blog), 14 March, 2021, <https://anamchara.com/reconciling-mystical-teachings-with-conventional-christianity/>. McColman is a well-known and respected voice within contemplative Christian circles.

¹⁸⁴ Theophan the Recluse in Chariton, *The Art*, 111.

¹⁸⁵ Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 186.

¹⁸⁶ Kevin E. Lawson, “Theological Reflection, Theological Method, and the Practice of Education Ministry: Exploring the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and Stackhouse's Tetralectic.,” *Christian Education Journal* 1NS (1997): 55.

their process of theological reflection which consists of “Scripture, tradition, experience and reason”¹⁸⁷ with Scripture holding the position of “primacy”¹⁸⁸ as the authority.

With tradition carrying less weight than Scripture, the Prayer’s full genealogy and theological evolution is not necessary for the purposes of this research.¹⁸⁹ The following bird’s eye-view synopsis of two historical highpoints suffices to demonstrate that the Prayer traces its ancestry within the Christian fold and it is not a recent and/or alien import from elsewhere. Indeed “the Christian East”¹⁹⁰ is the “homeland of the Jesus Prayer.”¹⁹¹ The two aspects to be focused on are: (i) The early origins of the Prayer showing its ancient Christian pedigree; and (ii) The Prayer’s formal acceptance into Orthodoxy showing its authentic Christian credentials. The happenings outside of these two highpoints, though significant and important, are outside the specific Evangelical concerns of Christian origin and approval. These include, for example: the compilation of the Philokalia in the 15th century and its translations into other languages¹⁹²; the writing of the anonymous book ‘The Way of a Pilgrim’, a manual in narrative-form for the lived experience of the Prayer and its translation into other languages¹⁹³; the influence of fictional books such as Fyodor Dostoevsky’s ‘The Brother’s Karamazov’ and J.D. Salinger’s ‘Franny and Zooey’¹⁹⁴; the western migration of Eastern Orthodox peoples due to war¹⁹⁵; and the influence of vital figures like Thomas Merton (d. 1969) who straddled the East-West religious boundary and

¹⁸⁷ Lawson, “Theological Reflection,” 55.

¹⁸⁸ Lawson, “Theological Reflection,” 56.

¹⁸⁹ For an in-depth overview of the early tradition see sections IV-VI in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds., *The Study of spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and see chapters 2-4 in Johnson, *Globalization*.

¹⁹⁰ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, xv.

¹⁹¹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, xv.

¹⁹² Philokalia means ‘love of beauty’ and denotes a collection of Eastern spiritual writings ranging from the 4th to 15th centuries compiled in the 18th century by two monks on Mount Athos. See Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychast Renaissance,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 364.

¹⁹³ First published in Russia in 1884 by Ignattii Brianchaninov (1807-67), it tells the story of a Russian pilgrim who embarks on a quest to discover the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (‘pray without ceasing’). See Sergei Hackel, “B. Russian,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 382.

¹⁹⁴ Dostoevsky (d. 1881) published his book in 1880, Salinger (d. 2010) published his book in 1961. Both featured the Prayer and through the popularity of their books drew much attention to the practice. See Sergei Hackel, “B. Russian,” 383-84; and Johnson, *Globalization*, 42.

¹⁹⁵ The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 led many Russian intellectuals to flee to Western Europe, taking with them the Hesychastic tradition. See Johnson, *Globalization*, 41.

acted as a conduit for sharing spiritual traditions.¹⁹⁶ These point to the importance of spiritual literature as a vehicle to spark interest and encourage uptake of the Prayer.

Early Christian Origins

The first evidence of the full formula of the Prayer as ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me’ is by Abba Philemon, an Egyptian Monk who lived in the sixth or seventh century.¹⁹⁷ The first recorded use of the phrase ‘The Jesus Prayer’ is by St. John Climacus, also an Egyptian Monk who lived in the seventh century.¹⁹⁸ For the Prayer to appear with its full formula and official designation in these writings strongly implies that its practice was known and in use prior to the seventh century.

Three of the five essential elements, namely ‘constant repetition’, ‘a plea for mercy’ and ‘a quest for silence’ are found in the fourth century among the Egyptian monastics.¹⁹⁹ They were Christians who left the comforts of the city to take refuge in the desert and pursue an ascetic life away from the excesses and distractions of a non-persecuted and legalised Christianity in the city.²⁰⁰ These spiritual athletes pursued a “hidden martyrdom”²⁰¹ of dying to self and pursuing “constant awareness of God.”²⁰² This is no small point for many Evangelicals who prize “emotionalism and personalism”²⁰³ in their spirituality. Both of these are closely related to Bebbington’s ‘conversionism’ in that they refer to a heartfelt and intimate personal walk with God over and against a “dry formalism”²⁰⁴ of religious ritual separated from daily life. Indeed, these monastics show that “Deeper faith or ever more superficial fundamentalism is the constant

¹⁹⁶ Philip Sherrard, “The Revival of Hesychast Spirituality,” in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louise Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 425.

¹⁹⁷ Abba Philemon, “A Discourse on Abba Philemon,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 2) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 343, 348.

¹⁹⁸ Ware, “Origins,” 260; and St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (New York: Harper, 1958), accessed 27 February 2024,

<https://www.carmelitepriory.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/02/TheLadderofDivineAscent.pdf>, 47, 61, 116.

¹⁹⁹ Ware, “Origins,” 252.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *Globalization*, 31-32.

²⁰¹ “Saying the Jesus Prayer,” St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, accessed 23 February 2023, <https://www.svots.edu/saying-jesus-prayer>.

²⁰² “mneme Theou” – “remembrance of God.” See Ware, “Origins,” 253.

²⁰³ Morris, *A People's Church*, 177.

²⁰⁴ Morris, *A People's Church*, 177.

choice of religion.”²⁰⁵ With the building blocks of the Prayer worked out in the 4th century by faithful Christian monastics who were committed to taking their faith to heart and integrating it into every aspect of their lives, there is already a rich ground of affinity for Evangelicals. Defined by a sense of conversionism and activism, to be an Evangelical means to live out a heart-felt faithfulness to Jesus that pervades every moment of daily life.²⁰⁶ While ‘constant repetition’ and the ‘plea for mercy’ were common among the Coptic monks, the apophatic ‘quest for silence’ was championed by Evagrius of Ponticus (d.399)²⁰⁷ who described apophatic prayer simply as “the shedding of thoughts.”²⁰⁸

St. John Cassian (d. 435), a Western Monk, visited these radical monastics and in an interview with one (Abba Isaac) he learned about their practice of the continual repetition of the plea for mercy found in Psalm 70:1: “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me!”²⁰⁹ He published this finding in the West under the heading, “Of the method of continual prayer”²¹⁰ which not only illustrated the typical practice of the desert monastics, but it also secured the planting of the seed of unceasing interior prayer in Western soil. Indeed, John Main OSB (d. 1982), the founder of the World Community for Christian Meditation,²¹¹ traces the lineage for his practice of the constant repetition of the prayer word, ‘Maranatha’²¹² to John Cassian’s writings.

Evidence connecting first essential element of the Prayer (‘the Divine name’) with ‘constant repetition’ is found in the fifth century, initially in embryonic form with St. Nilus of Ancyra (d.

²⁰⁵ Lawrence Freeman, “Introduction,” in *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (London, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 13.

²⁰⁶ “It was precisely a focus on ‘lived experience’ that united evangelicals in a common mission from the outset of the movement.” D. B. Hindmarsh, “Contours of Evangelical Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Christian spirituality*, Ed. by G. G. Scorgie, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2011), 147.

²⁰⁷ Ware, “Origins,” 253-54.

²⁰⁸ Evagrius the Solitary, “On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 1) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 64.

²⁰⁹ John Cassian, “X. The Second Conference of Abbot Isaac,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2 Volume 11: Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, ed. by Philip Schaff and trans. by Edgar G.S. Gibson. 405. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

²¹⁰ Cassian, X. *The Second Conference*, 405.

²¹¹ See <https://wccm.org>

²¹² John Main, *Word into Silence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 9-11.

c. 430) and then decisively with St. Diadochus (d. 468, Bishop of Photice).²¹³ He connected ‘the Divine name’ with ‘a quest for silence’ writing the following:

When we have blocked all its outlets by means of the remembrance of God, the intellect requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfillment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer ‘Lord Jesus.’²¹⁴

St. Diadochus is followed by St. Barsanuphius (d. 563) and St. John (d. 543), hermits living in a monastery outside of Gaza. These two combined ‘the Divine name’ with ‘constant repetition’²¹⁵ advocating a variety of formulas including, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”²¹⁶ Their main disciple, St. Dorotheus (d. c. 560), founder of a monastery near Gaza, combined ‘the Divine name’ with ‘constant repetition’ and ‘a quest for silence’ promoting two formulas: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me” and “Son of God, help me.”²¹⁷ The high point of the genealogy of the Prayer’s early origins is then reached with the aforementioned Abba Philemon (sixth or seventh century) who combined St. Dorotheus’ two prayers into one giving us the first recorded full formula, writing:

Without interruption, whether asleep or awake, eating, drinking, or in company, let your heart inwardly and mentally at times be meditating on the psalms, at other times be repeating the prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.’²¹⁸

This high point is sealed by the aforementioned St. John Climacus (seventh century), Abbot of St. Katherine’s monastery in Sinai, because his writings contain the first record of the designation, ‘The Jesus Prayer.’ The following excerpts from his writings demonstrate the Prayer connected to all its elements, including embodiment (specifically the breath): “Always let... the

²¹³ Ware, “Origins,” 254.

²¹⁴ St. Diadochus of Photiki, “On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 1) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 270.

²¹⁵ Ware, “Origins,” 258.

²¹⁶ Ware, “Origins,” 258.

²¹⁷ Ware, “Origins,” 257.

²¹⁸ Philemon, “A Discourse on Abba Philemon,” 348.

Prayer of Jesus, said as a monologue, go to sleep with you and get up with you,”²¹⁹ “Flog your enemies with the Name of Jesus,”²²⁰ “[*Hesychia*] is the banishment of thoughts and ideas,”²²¹ “[*Hesychia*] is unceasing worship and waiting upon God,”²²² “Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath,”²²³ “Shut the door of your cell to your body, the door of your tongue to speech, and the inner gate to evil spirits,”²²⁴ “Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.”²²⁵

This short genealogy from the fourth to seventh century is sufficient to demonstrate that “The Jesus Prayer emerged in the Christian East as a recognised spiritual ‘way’.”²²⁶ The presented data is sufficient to give a positive answer to the question of whether the Prayer is a distinctly Christian practice with verifiable Christian origins.

Formal Christian Acceptance

It is in the 14th century that the essentials of the Prayer were “called in question, reaffirmed and deepened”²²⁷ cementing the practice into the Eastern Orthodox tradition as officially ‘orthodox’ (‘right worship’) such that it can now be described as “the basic method of the Church for gaining spiritual health.”²²⁸

This process happened in Byzantine over a period of 13 years through robust controversy involving three Church Synods with two notable people at the centre – St. Gregory Palamas (d. 1359) and Barlaam of Calabria (d. 1348). Palamas, aptly described as “a monk, theologian, and

²¹⁹ Climacus, *The Ladder*, 61.

²²⁰ Enemies refers to demons which could be interpreted as intrusive thoughts. See Climacus, *The Ladder*, 71.

²²¹ Climacus, *The Ladder*, 116.

²²² Climacus, *The Ladder*, 116.

²²³ Climacus, *The Ladder*, 116.

²²⁴ Climacus, *The Ladder*, 112.

²²⁵ Climacus, *The Ladder*, 120.

²²⁶ Ware, “Origins,” 262.

²²⁷ Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts: Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Nicolas Cabasilas,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986), 347.

²²⁸ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 289.

pastor,”²²⁹ at great personal cost to himself including enduring a period of excommunication and imprisonment,²³⁰ defended the Prayer against Barlaam, a visiting monk and scholar from Italy. The controversy began when Barlaam arrived in Constantinople in 1338 and it ended at a Church Synod in 1351, considered by many to have as much “doctrinal authority”²³¹ as the first official seven councils of Christendom. This was a tumultuous journey for Palamas wherein he was supported by the first council (1341), condemned in the second (1346) and vindicated in the third (1351) all the while enduring the six-year Byzantine civil war from 1341 to 1347.²³²

The scene for this controversy is set by the way the Prayer was being practiced at that time on Mt. Athos in Greece. Through the writings of St. Nicephorus the Hesychast (a monk of Mount Athos, late 13th century),²³³ St. Gregory of Sinai (who came to Mount Athos early 14th century until 1335, d. 1346),²³⁴ Maximus of Kapsokalvia (a monk on Mt. Athos at the same time as St. Gregory),²³⁵ and St Theoleptos of Philadelphia (Archbishop of Philadelphia d. 1320, who initiated Palamas into Hesychasm),²³⁶ we discover that the Prayer had evolved a distinctive “physical technique.”²³⁷ It is in this time that the fifth and essential element of embodiment was in the foreground, the seeds of which were only present in St. Climacus.

The instructions consisted of the following elements (see footnotes for corroborating quotes from the aforementioned historical figures): sitting on a low stool,²³⁸ hunched over with the chin on the chest,²³⁹ staring at the abdomen,²⁴⁰ while searching “inwardly for the place of the heart”²⁴¹

²²⁹ Emmanuel Cazabonne, “Gregory Palamas (1266-1359): Monk, Theologian, Pastor,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2002): 303, Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost.

²³⁰ Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 22.

²³¹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 64.

²³² Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 22; and Cazabonne, “Gregory Palamas,” 308-09.

²³³ See Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 348-51.

²³⁴ See Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 351-53.

²³⁵ See Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 353-54.

²³⁶ See Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 20-21.

²³⁷ Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 348.

²³⁸ “You should sit on a stool.” Gregory of Sinai, “On Prayer: Seven Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 275.

²³⁹ “Rest your heard on your chest.” Likely written by St. Nicephorus the Hesychast – see Pseudo-Symeon, “The Three Methods of Prayer,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 67, 72.

²⁴⁰ “Focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel.” Pseudo-Symeon, “The Three Methods of Prayer,” 72.

and then slowly breathing²⁴² the intellect of the mind down into the heart²⁴³ while continuously reciting the Prayer as a means to ward off thoughts.²⁴⁴ These instructions are more exacting than those of today since the embodiment aspect in the 14th century was intended to be painful to “serve as a physical expression of the penthos grief.”²⁴⁵

While these particular guidelines were not obligatory then²⁴⁶ or now,²⁴⁷ it shows that “the body as well as the soul has a positive, dynamic part to play in the task of praying.”²⁴⁸ However, the technique that may be best for a person and their circumstances is best worked out in submission to the guidance of a spiritual mother or father wherever possible, since there is a persistent disclaimer in the tradition warning of the spiritual and health dangers of the ill-advised use of bodily methods – such as delusion and damage to the lungs and heart.²⁴⁹

While practising the Prayer with a physical technique, some would have the experience of seeing a light, which could be put down to the following two possibilities,²⁵⁰ where the second was considered to be purely a God given gift, and not something that could be attained:²⁵¹ (i) The

²⁴¹ Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 349.

²⁴² “Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily.” Pseudo-Symeon, “The Three Methods of Prayer,” 72.

²⁴³ “Concentrate your intellect, and lead it into the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart.” Nikiphoros the Monk, “On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 205.

²⁴⁴ “Pure prayer, uniting to itself intellect, intelligence and spirit, invokes the divine name with the intelligence; with the intellect it concentrates its unwavering attention on God whom it invokes; and with the spirit it manifests compunction, humility, and love.” Theoliptos, “On Inner Work in Christ and the Monastic Profession,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 184.

²⁴⁵ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 64.

²⁴⁶ By St. Nicephorus or by St. Gregory, see Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 351, 52.

²⁴⁷ In the nineteenth century they were “separated from the Jesus Prayer as unnecessary for praying the prayer fruitfully.” Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 20.

²⁴⁸ Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 350.

²⁴⁹ For example, “Of those who have used with special diligence the material aids very few have attained success, but very many have deranged and harmed themselves. With an experienced director the use of the material aids incurs little danger; but with the guidance of books it is very dangerous since it is so easy, through ignorance and imprudence, to fall into delusion and other kinds of spiritual and bodily disorder.” Brianchaninov, *On The Jesus Prayer*, 114.

²⁵⁰ A third possibility would be delusion, which is why a spiritual director is advised.

²⁵¹ “It is not a gift of human nature, but of the Holy Spirit.” Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 325.

vision of the practitioner's own shining intellect,²⁵² and (ii) The vision of the Divine light,²⁵³ preceded by a "feeling of joyful sorrow"²⁵⁴ and a spiritual warmth in the heart.²⁵⁵

The second experience has precedence in Scripture including the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor (see Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36) and Moses' vision of God on Mount Sinai evidenced by his shining face (see Exodus 24 and 34). Hesychasts believed that the disciples Peter, James, and John saw the Divine light as Jesus shone in his glory, as did Moses, and they held these to be direct encounters of God wherein the body and soul engaged in a state of unification with God – essentially, a taste of *theosis*.²⁵⁶ Thus we see a picture of Hesychasm in the 14th century wherein there is a total unification *within* the self and *with* God – a total "reintegration"²⁵⁷ of being ("an indivisible psychophysical unity")²⁵⁸ with Being Itself. This sense of total union is visually depicted by the Hesychast's curled over position which forms a flowing circle between their mind and heart.²⁵⁹ Most significantly is that it is not something that merely happens in the intellect, but something that happens with the entire person including the physical body.²⁶⁰

²⁵² "For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart ... It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous." Pseudo-Symeon, "The Three Methods of Prayer," 73.

²⁵³ "Then his intellect ascended to heaven and beheld another light, more lucid than the first." Pseudo-Symeon, "The Three Methods of Prayer," 18.

²⁵⁴ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 353. Presumably referencing this – "For beginners prayer is like a joyous fire kindled in the heart." Gregory of Sinai. "On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; on Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and Also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty Seven Texts." In *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 237.

²⁵⁵ "The true beginning of prayer is the warmth of heart." Gregory of Sinai, "On Stillness: Fifteen Texts," in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 270.

²⁵⁶ "The Vision of the uncreated Light [*theoria*] is man's deification," and "The vision of God [*theoria*], deification, union, and knowledge of God are closely bound together. They cannot be understood apart from one another." Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 325, 27.

²⁵⁷ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 351.

²⁵⁸ Hester, *The Jesus Prayer*, 19.

²⁵⁹ "Outwardly curling himself so far as is possible into the form of a circle, in conformity with the mode of action that he tries to establish in his intellect, he also, through this same position of his body, sends into his heart the power of the intellect that is dispersed outwardly when his gaze is turned outward." Gregory Palamas, "In Defence of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness," in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 4) Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markarios of Corinth*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 338.

²⁶⁰ "Theoria of the uncreated Light... [is] not an unfolding of the rational power... [it] is sensory and suprasensory." Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 328.

Barlaam's critique of both this experience and the technique of the Hesychasts was threefold:²⁶¹

(i) God, being utterly transcendent cannot be experienced directly but only "through Scripture and tradition, through signs and symbols"²⁶²; (ii) Therefore the light the hesychasts were seeing must be "a physical and created light"²⁶³; and (iii) The physical method is too bodily-focused ("materialistic"²⁶⁴) such that Barlaam famously labelled the Hesychasts *omphalopsychoi* meaning "those who locate the soul in the navel"²⁶⁵ i.e. navel gazers. These three objections were an attack on mystical practice which is by definition a direct experience of the Divine. Similar objections may be levelled by some Evangelicals today, for example: God can only be experienced indirectly through Scripture, seeing a light might well be a satanic delusion, and bodily techniques for meditation amount to a narcissistic navel-gazing.

Palamas addressed Barlaam's challenges as follows:²⁶⁶ (i) God can be experienced directly in God's uncreated energies, but God's essence remains hidden; (ii) Therefore, the Divine light is an uncreated energy that can be perceived through and beyond the senses once they have been transformed by the grace of God; and (iii) The body and soul are inextricably united and therefore both share in the experience of salvation – the soul does not escape the body to experience a bodiless, spiritualised salvation, but is part of the process and experience.

Barlaam took the approach of a Platonist²⁶⁷ wherein a sharp distinction is made between the body and the spirit, and also between the present and the future. For him, what can be experienced by the spirit in the eschaton cannot be experienced in the body now. Palamas took a holistic biblical approach²⁶⁸ which so integrates body and soul into an indivisible unity that the experience of eternal life is accessible in the here and now. This is an important issue for Christians, including Evangelicals, who can sometimes be prone to see the body and soul as enemies instead of having an incarnational mindset which sees them as friends.²⁶⁹ Former

²⁶¹ See Ware, "The Hesychasts," 355-56.

²⁶² Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356.

²⁶³ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356.

²⁶⁴ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356.

²⁶⁵ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356.

²⁶⁶ See Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356-61.

²⁶⁷ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 356.

²⁶⁸ Ware, "The Hesychasts," 360.

²⁶⁹ For example, Roman Catholic Richard Rohr speaks of having grown up thinking this. See Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton), Kindle ed., 52.

Evangelical Brian McLaren speaks of how he grew up with the idea of salvation being an “evacuation plan to get souls into heaven after death” and only came to see it in later life as “a transformation plan to bring justice and peace for the earth and all its creatures.”²⁷⁰ This tension is explored in chapter 2 and 3 focusing especially on Evangelicals and the psycho-somatic routine of the Prayer, and the sacred importance of the body.

This brief overview of the Hesychast controversy of the 14th century has provided historical evidence showing that the Prayer received the full stamp of approval from the Christian tradition in which it arose, and therefore bears authentic Christian credentials.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer this question: “What are the essentials of the Jesus Prayer, are they biblical, and do they arise from within the Christian tradition?” The answer it has given to the first part is that the Prayer consists of the constant embodied repetition of the Divine name combined with a plea for mercy in pursuit of apophatic silence. The answer to the second and third part is that the seeds for the Prayer can be found in the Christian Scriptures, and those seeds did indeed sprout and grow up within the Christian tradition, and when it reached a point of controversy, it was not rejected as a heresy. In sum, “the Christian mystical tradition has a long and rich history that reaches back to the New Testament and the first 500 years of church history.”²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Brian D. McLaren, *Faith after Doubt: Why Your Beliefs Stopped Working and What to Do About It*, (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton), 2021, Kindle ed., Loc 3094.

²⁷¹ McColman, *The Big Book*, 13-14.

Chapter 2: Crucicentrism and Conversionism – The Jesus Prayer in Evangelical Soteriology and Spiritual Practices

Considering the two Evangelical distinctives of crucicentrism and conversionism, this chapter primarily seeks to answer this question: “Does the Prayer promote grace-based salvation?” To answer, the Evangelical identity will be further explored with a focus on their understanding of soteriology and the accompanying spiritual disciplines that they use in relation to the salvation process. This includes exploring Evangelicalism’s receptivity to spiritual disciplines which are mysticism-based (transrational, dependent on the *nous* – apophatic) as opposed to reason-based (rational, dependent on reason – cataphatic). The goal is to draw out the lived experience of Evangelicals to examine whether the Prayer might become a welcome part of that their spiritual toolkit.

Exploring the Evangelical Identity

In this section the Evangelical identity will be explored drawing on the following resources: (i) A seminal book titled ‘Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism’ (hereinafter referred to as the “four views book”) in which four well-known and respected Evangelicals represent and explain four different streams of their Tradition²⁷²; (ii) A peak Evangelical body from the United States of America called The National Association of Evangelicals (hereinafter referred to as the NAE) who, in conjunction with peak Evangelical researcher Lifeway Research have developed a doctrinal litmus test for Evangelical identification²⁷³; (iii) The sociological tool developed by historian David Bebbington – the Bebbington Quadrilateral²⁷⁴; (iv) An historical figure who is considered to be a spokesperson for Evangelicalism – J.I. Packer (d. 2020)²⁷⁵; (v) Two peak agencies who have conducted in-depth research on Evangelicals – The Barna Group and The

²⁷² Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli, eds. “Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism,” (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2013).

²⁷³ “NAE LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition,” National Association of Evangelicals, accessed 16 March 2023, <http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NAE-LifeWay-Research-Evangelical-Beliefs-Research-Definition-Methodology-and-Use.pdf>.

²⁷⁴ “What is an Evangelical?,” National Association of Evangelicals, accessed 16 March 2023, <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/>.

²⁷⁵ Bruce Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer Was the Robin Hood of Evangelicalism,” Christianity Today, 22 July 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/july-web-only/ji-packer-robin-hood-of-evangelicalism.html>.

Pew Research Centre)²⁷⁶; (vi) An instrument which summarises Reformation doctrine – The Five *Solas*²⁷⁷; and (vii) The instrument that many Evangelicals use for theological reflection – the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.²⁷⁸ Together these seven resources reveal the basic building blocks of what broadly constitutes the identity of Evangelicalism, clarifying the issues and concerns needing to be addressed for the acceptance of the Jesus Prayer into the Evangelical experience.

Theological and Sociological Markers

Evangelicals are notoriously difficult to define, as seen, for example, in the following wide range of descriptors used from within the group itself – “We are conservative, progressive, postconservative, and preprogressive evangelicals. We are traditional, creedal, biblical, pietistic, anticreedal, ecumenical, and fundamentalist. We are ‘followers of Christ’ and ‘Red Letter Christians.’”²⁷⁹ This list was written by an Evangelical in the introduction to the book ‘Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism’ in which four Evangelical scholars each put forward their view on what an Evangelical is, as follows: Fundamentalist Evangelicalism (Kevin T. Bauder), Confessional Evangelicalism (R. Albert Mohler Jr.), Generic Evangelicalism (John G. Stackhouse Jr.), and Postconservative Evangelicalism (Roger E. Olsen).²⁸⁰ The first two define Evangelicalism primarily from a theological perspective which is seen as a “prescriptive approach”²⁸¹ in that it focuses on the theological markers to which a person or group must adhere to be called Evangelical. The latter two define it primarily from a sociological perspective which is seen as a “descriptive approach”²⁸² which focuses on phenomenological markers. In other

²⁷⁶ “U.S. Adults See Evangelicals Through a Political Lens,” Barna Group, accessed 24 September, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelicals-political-lens/>, and “How Does Pew Research Center Measure the Religious Composition of the U.S.? Answers to Frequently Asked Questions,” Pew Research Center, accessed 17 March 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/07/05/how-does-pew-research-center-measure-the-religious-composition-of-the-u-s-answers-to-frequently-asked-questions/>.

²⁷⁷ Nichols, *The Reformation*.

²⁷⁸ Lawson, “Theological Reflection.”

²⁷⁹ Collin Hansen, “Introduction,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2013), 9.

²⁸⁰ Hansen, “Introduction,” 17.

²⁸¹ Andrew David Naselli, “Conclusion,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2013), 209. The difference between these two groups is the Fundamentalist defines essential doctrines more narrowly and limits ecumenical cooperation more strictly – they are more focused on doctrinal accuracy and separation than the Confessionalist.

²⁸² Naselli, “Conclusion,” 209.

words, the theologian prescribes what an evangelical must believe (based on Scripture) whereas the historian describes what an evangelical is (based on observation).

An example of a prescriptive approach is the research tool developed by the NAE in partnership with Lifeway Research and in consultation with a wide range of Evangelical scholars. The conclusion of their consultation is that anyone who ‘strongly agrees’ to each of the following four statements is identified as an Evangelical:²⁸³ (i) The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe; (ii) It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour; (iii) Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin; and (iv) Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Saviour receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.

In contrast, an example of a descriptive approach is the Bebbington Quadrilateral which is defined by the NAE as follows: (i) Conversionism – “The belief that lives need to be transformed through a ‘born-again’ experience and a life-long process of following Jesus”²⁸⁴; (ii) Biblicism – “A high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority”²⁸⁵; (iii) Activism – “The expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts”²⁸⁶; and (iv) Crucicentrism – “A stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.”²⁸⁷

While there is an overlap between NAE/Lifeway Research’s four theological markers and Bebbington’s four sociological markers (i and ii; ii and iii; iii and iv; iv and i), it appears that the historian uses the Bebbington Quadrilateral as a tool to observe how an individual or group behaves in practice to ascertain their Evangelical status whereas the theologian uses the former as a litmus test of personal belief to determine the same. Put another way, where the former observes practice, the latter seeks a doctrinal declaration, hence the distinction between sociological markers and theological markers. The former is an inclusive centre-set that seeks to ascertain who can be included whereas the latter is an exclusive bounded-set that seeks to

²⁸³ NAE Lifeway Research, “NAE LifeWay Research.”

²⁸⁴ NAE, “What is an Evangelical?”

²⁸⁵ NAE, “What is an Evangelical?”

²⁸⁶ NAE, “What is an Evangelical?”

²⁸⁷ NAE, “What is an Evangelical?”

determine who should be excluded.²⁸⁸ Thus each tool will produce two different sets of Evangelicals, one based on social markers, the other based on doctrinal markers.

Since the Bebbington Quadrilateral is a well-known descriptor among Evangelicals it is not surprising that three of the four scholars in the ‘four-views’ book address it directly.²⁸⁹ The Fundamentalist who fails to mention it uses only one criterion for Evangelical identity: “the gospel”²⁹⁰ which they define only through Scriptural exposition.²⁹¹ This suggests that the Fundamentalist, in commitment to the exclusive authority of Scripture, seeks no external authority of appeal. The Confessional is not dissimilar from the Fundamentalist since they dismiss the Quadrilateral as “so vague as to be fairly useless.”²⁹² Rather the Generalist²⁹³ and the Postconservative²⁹⁴ appeal to the Quadrilateral as a useful definition for Evangelicalism, while adding slightly to it to reflect their own unique perspectives (see below). The Generalist and Postconservative define the movement broadly while focusing on inclusive sociological factors rather than more excluding theological and doctrinal factors.

The Generalist supplements the Bebbington Quadrilateral with these additional elements: (i) “Transdenominationalism” [referring that] “Evangelicals gladly partner with other Christians who hold these concerns, regardless of denominational stripe, in work to advance the kingdom of God,”²⁹⁵ and (ii) “The concepts of “orthodox, ‘orthopath,’ and orthopraxy” [signifying that] “Evangelicals share the primary beliefs, affections, and practices of their particular traditions

²⁸⁸ Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 179.

²⁸⁹ Naselli, “Conclusion,” 209.

²⁹⁰ “What all Christians hold in common is the gospel.” See Kevin T. Bauder, “Fundamentalist Evangelicalism,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 24.

²⁹¹ Kevin T. Bauder, “Fundamentalist Evangelicalism,” 24ff.

²⁹² R Albert Mohler Jr., “Confessional Evangelicalism,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2013), 73.

²⁹³ The Generalist view is that “evangelicalism cannot be sharply characterized in its beliefs, affections, and practices beyond understanding it to be observant Protestant Christianity expressed in authentic, vital discipleship issuing forth in mission with similarly concerned Christians of various stripes.” See John G. Stackhouse Jr., “Generic Evangelicalism,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Collin Hansen and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 141.

²⁹⁴ The Postconservative view sees “evangelicalism as a broad and inclusive movement of people, churches, and organizations commonly committed to certain experiences and beliefs in varying degrees. As a movement, it is unified without uniformity. Its unity is found in certain historical and theological family resemblances; its diversity is found in interpretations of the core, unifying beliefs and experiences.” See Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 186.

²⁹⁵ John G. Stackhouse Jr., “Generic Evangelicalism,” 124.

(Baptist, Methodist, or whatever).”²⁹⁶ The Postconservative adds this additional element: “Respect for, if not slavish adherence to, the great milestones of Christian doctrine... what some have called ‘generous orthodoxy.’”²⁹⁷ This shows that as one moves along the spectrum of Evangelicalism from Fundamentalism which is doctrinally strict and on the ‘right’ in terms of conservatism, to Postconservatism which is doctrinally lenient and on the ‘left’ in terms of being ‘moderate,’ the Evangelical becomes more receptive to other traditions and their practices, and to the traditions of historical Christianity as well.

This openness and receptivity to ecumenism is confirmed by each of the contributor’s (to the four views’ book) perspective on the Evangelicals and Catholics Together movement which started in the 1990s.²⁹⁸ They were asked to comment on the movement in terms of the relationship between Evangelicalism and Catholicism and particularly whether the two can accept one another and work together. Their reactions are indicative of the level of their openness to “Christian cooperation”²⁹⁹ – the Fundamentalist and Confessionalist reject the movement outright, while the Generalist and Postconservative accept and promote it.³⁰⁰ This suggests that the latter two types of Evangelicals might be more prone to engage in spiritual practices that are more ‘Catholic’ in orientation like the Prayer.

Furthermore the strictness and leniency in relation to doctrine is similarly confirmed by each contributor’s perspective on the doctrine of “Penal Substitutionary Atonement.”³⁰¹ Whereas the Fundamentalist and Confessionalist view it as an essential affirmation for an individual or organisation to be considered Evangelical, the Generalist allows for the possibility of a person denying it and yet still being called an Evangelical (albeit a mistaken one), and the Postconservative sees it as entirely optional.³⁰² Again, this suggests a movement from ‘closed’ to

²⁹⁶ John G. Stackhouse Jr., “Generic Evangelicalism,” 124.

²⁹⁷ Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 177.

²⁹⁸ “Some evangelicals have engaged in vigorous and constructive dialogue with Roman Catholics, much to the dismay of other evangelicals, which led to a 1994 document titled Evangelicals and Catholics Together that was amended in 2002. The evangelical and Catholic signatories affirmed that there is no substantial disagreement on the basic doctrine of salvation and that evangelicals and Catholics should not attempt to evangelize one another.” Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 184.

²⁹⁹ Hansen, “Introduction,” 16.

³⁰⁰ Naselli, “Conclusion,” 211-12.

³⁰¹ “The belief that Christ took on God’s wrath for sinners.” Hansen, “Introduction,” 18.

³⁰² Naselli, “Conclusion,” 183.

‘open’ as one moves from Fundamentalism on the more traditional and conservative (doctrinal) side of the spectrum to Postconservatism on the more progressive and liberal (sociological) side of the spectrum. What this suggests is that there is a wide range of types of Evangelicals, some of whom are open to other traditions with a doctrinal breadth, and some of which are closed to other traditions with a doctrinal narrowness.

While the four views book presents four types of Evangelicals along this spectrum, they are by no means the only four types. This suggests that Evangelicals cannot be referred to as a unitive group of likeminded individuals and organisations. Perspectives vary widely and the type of Evangelical likely to be open to the Prayer is only a subset of the whole category. However, as will be seen in the next section, labels are ultimately an insufficient predictor of openness to the Prayer – the Postconservative may appear to be the most open and yet provide strong critique of it.³⁰³ This suggests the Prayer have wide appeal across the spectrum of Evangelicalism depending not on a person’s label but possibly on their personality, circumstances, experience, tradition, etc. This will become clearer as this chapter progresses.

Evangelicalism within a Denomination: Anglicanism

Evangelical Theologian Michael Bird points out that “Evangelicalism is not an institutional entity; it is more like a tribe or a shared theological ethos that traverses denominational lines.”³⁰⁴ Nevertheless Evangelical Anglicanism is of special interest in this study because Bird, an Evangelical Anglican, states that “the genius of Anglicanism is in being able to be both Protestant and Catholic at the same time.”³⁰⁵ What he means is that it has a shared theological ethos while also embracing the great tradition which, for him, includes sacramentalism and liturgy, both of which are essential elements of the Prayer referring especially to the two elements of ‘the Divine name’ and ‘constant repetition.’ Evangelical Anglicanism boasts some impressive figures (such as C.S. Lewis) who have influenced Evangelicalism, but one among them all is widely accepted as a spokesperson for Evangelicalism – J.I. Packer (d. 2020).

³⁰³ See Olson’s comments on the Prayer in the next section titled “Evangelical Soteriology and Spiritual Practices.”

³⁰⁴ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1008.

³⁰⁵ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 34.

The Evangelical publication *Christianity Today* draws out six reasons why he is a celebrated figure for Evangelicals and in so doing they highlight six characteristics of Evangelical Anglicanism:³⁰⁶ (i) He was the “Robin Hood”³⁰⁷ of Evangelicalism because he took the riches of church history and the great tradition and gave it to Evangelicalism preventing it from becoming “ahistorical”³⁰⁸ and “anti-intellectual”³⁰⁹; (ii) He was the “Theological Traffic Cop”³¹⁰ of Evangelicalism because he provided it with a robust and systematic theological framework preventing it from drifting into “theological liberalism”³¹¹; (iii) He was the “Plumber”³¹² of Evangelicalism because he saw one of his roles as ‘digging foundations and putting in drains to keep the air clear’ so that spirituality could flourish alongside systematic theology; (iv) He was the “Catechist”³¹³ of Evangelicalism because he spoke and wrote in ways which ensured those who are not scholars or academics could understand, embrace, and grow from; (v) He was the “Bridge-Builder” of Evangelicalism because he always sought to find “common ground”³¹⁴ with those both inside and outside his tradition, seeing Evangelicalism as “an ethos of convertedness within a larger ethos of catholicity”³¹⁵; and (vi) He was the “Tigger” of Evangelicalism because he was full of “effervescent Christian joy.”³¹⁶ Looking at these six metaphors, an idealised picture of Evangelical Anglicanism emerges revealing it as an adventurous, serious, hands-on, engaging, down-to-earth, and exuberant movement with all hallmarks of a healthy orthodoxy (theology), orthopraxy (activity), and orthopathy (experience).

Considered thus, Evangelical Anglicanism appears to be deeply resonant with the Bebbington and Wesleyan Quadrilaterals, being grounded in the great tradition (Tradition), theologically sound (Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Bible, Reason), spiritually vibrant (Conversionism, Experience), egalitarian (from a clergy-laity perspective), cooperative (Activism), and all the while being permeated by a joyful passion (Conversionism, Experience). Based on the findings

³⁰⁶ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³⁰⁷ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³⁰⁸ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³⁰⁹ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹⁰ Rick Santorum, “Influential Evangelicals: J.I. Packer,” *Time Magazine*, 7 February 2005, https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235_1993243_1993310,00.html.

³¹¹ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹² Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹³ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹⁴ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹⁵ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

³¹⁶ Hindmarsh, “J.I. Packer.”

in chapter 1, these same characteristics could equally be applied to the Prayer which speaks to the hope of it finding acceptance among Evangelicals.

Religious Research Agencies

Further dimensions of what it means to be Evangelical are brought to light by The Barna Group which is a well-known religious research company in the United States. Their 9-point definition of Evangelicals encompasses both theological and sociological markers and includes the following four key points (parallels with the Bebbington and Wesleyan Quadrilaterals are indicated in brackets):³¹⁷ (i) a personal commitment to Jesus Christ (Conversionism, Experience); (ii) confession of sin and acceptance of Jesus as Saviour (Conversionism, Crucicentrism); (iii) personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs (Activism); and (iv) following key doctrines: Satan exists, eternal salvation is by grace not works (Crucicentrism), Jesus was sinless, the Bible is accurate in all it teaches (Biblicism, Bible), and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect creator and ruler of the universe. Here, personal faith, confession, righteousness and creed come together to characterise religious experience. As seen with Packer, the Barna definition also touches on all the aspects Bebbington and Wesleyan Quadrilaterals thus keeping these two as primary Evangelical identifiers in this research.

Barna, unlike another well-known religious research organisation in America called Pew Research Centre,³¹⁸ does not take into consideration Church attendance, denominational affiliation, or self-identification for their definition but rather ascertains who is an Evangelical as described above.³¹⁹ The Pew Research Centre, on the other hand, does use self-identification, church attendance, and denominational affiliation, however this seems to be prone to potential misclassification since all three of these identifiers can be misreported due to things like bias, lack of knowledge, and general misconceptions. Thus, Barna's threefold approach of assessing a person's beliefs (orthodoxy), affections (orthopathy), and practices (orthopraxy), seems more reliable. Even so Evangelicals themselves seem to argue about what the core issues and boundaries are in each of these three areas by using the Bible as an arbiter of truth while

³¹⁷ "U.S. Adults See."

³¹⁸ Pew Research Center, "How Does."

³¹⁹ "U.S. Adults See."

applying different hermeneutical principles evidenced in their arriving at different conclusions, as demonstrated in the four views book. This reaffirms the previous observation that labels are not necessarily helpful in this endeavour. People should rather be engaged with as individuals with their unique hopes, dreams, and ways of being in their own situations and contexts.

What this exploration shows is that it is difficult if not impossible to speak of ‘Evangelical Protestants’ without having to spend time qualifying the term *ad nauseum*, which brings the risk of it dying the death of a thousand qualifications. The four views book identifies four groups to work with but what of the other groups who use different nomenclature as mentioned earlier, especially these three: pre-progressive, progressive, and ecumenical? These adjectives appear to be less exclusive and are therefore perhaps more promising for this research in that they are identifiers which indicate greater receptivity to a newness, including a new spiritual practice from an external tradition. Even so, it seems doubtful that the traditional, conservative, fundamentalist (and also possibly confessionalist) “gatekeepers” would entertain such adjectives being placed in front of the word Evangelical due to what they might connote in terms of belief, affections and practice.

This suggests that there is a distinct tension within Evangelicalism which splits them into two groups – those who have a “strong anti-contemplative strain”³²⁰ and those who have a “distinctively contemplative-strain.”³²¹ Olson, the Postconservative contributor in the four views book picks up on this tension writing, “Contemporary evangelicalism is an unstable compound composed of two incompatible traditions... One tradition is rooted in Protestant orthodoxy [which] is heavily doctrinal and suspicious of experiential spirituality. The other tradition is rooted in pietism and revivalism and thrives on experiences.”³²² It seems that those with a distinct contemplative strain who thrive on experience are most likely to be open to the Prayer, but there are no guarantees in this regard since people within groupings vary widely.

³²⁰ See Johnson, *Globalization*, 64.

³²¹ Johnson, *Globalization*, 64.

³²² Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicalism,” 166.

A Theological Paradigm: The Five Solas

Thus far, two topics of utmost importance for all Evangelicals are allegiance to the Bible and to salvation by grace alone. As such, any suggested teaching or practice will first be sifted through the grid of Scripture to determine whether it is acceptable or not; and will secondly be assessed as to whether it supports the emphasis on faith, not works. If it fails either of these tests it will likely be treated as suspect and dangerous. These issues are drawn from the “Five Solas”³²³ of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. Stephen J. Nichols, a Reformed Protestant scholar, suggests that “many of the doctrines that... Protestants take for granted find their crystallized expression in the thought of the Reformers.”³²⁴ Indeed, Evangelical Protestantism which arose in the 18th century, along with several different types of Protestantism, finds its roots in the Protestant Reformation³²⁵ and so it is worth considering the core theological concerns of the Reformers as part and parcel of the definition of Evangelicalism. These consist of the “Five Solas” which describe soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) as being a matter of “*Sola Fide*... faith alone”³²⁶ in “*Solus Christus*... Christ alone”³²⁷ by “*Sola Gratia*... grace alone”³²⁸ according to “*Sola Scriptura*... Scripture alone”³²⁹ to “*Soli Deo Gloria*... God’s glory alone.”³³⁰ Of contention then is to speak of works (which tend to include obedience to the law of God), other mediators (such as saints, ecclesial leaders or ecclesial institutions), personal or transferred communal merit, church history and tradition, human ingenuity, and effort. Put another way – nothing is permitted to be added to faith, Christ, grace, Scripture, or God’s glory. This means that for Evangelical Protestants to reconcile the Prayer with their theology it must be demonstrated that none of these ‘Solas’ are undermined. Yet, there is a potentially apparent contradiction herein because as previously demonstrated by the Wesleyan Quadrilateral – tradition, experience and reason are not excluded from the Evangelical process of theological reflection. This apparent contraction speaks to the tension in Evangelicalism, further confirming that it is only with a certain type of Evangelical that the Prayer may find acceptance. At the same

³²³ Meaning “Five Alones” (‘sola’ is the Latin equivalent for the English ‘alone’). See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁴ Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁵ Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁶ See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁷ See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁸ See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³²⁹ See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

³³⁰ See Nichols, *The Reformation*, 18.

time, this tension may also speak of a hopeful paradox which invites the interruption of the Prayer into the lived experience of Evangelicals of all types, perhaps even resolving the tension for some.

What is an Evangelical? – Conclusion

In conclusion, and for the purposes of this research, when considering who an Evangelical is, the Bebbington Quadrilateral (Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, Activism), the Five *Solas* (Scripture-Alone, Grace-Alone, Faith-Alone, Christ-Alone, to God’s glory Alone), and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Bible, Tradition, Experience, and Reason) will be used to communicate the Prayer to Evangelicals. Two specific concerns have already been engaged – the Bible and Tradition in chapter 1. The rest of this chapter addresses Crucicentrism and Conversionism (which incorporate the Five *Solas*) and considers both Experience and Reason. The next chapter will focus on Experience and Activism.

Standing in the midst of these three tools is perhaps one of the most defining characteristics of an Evangelical: their emphasis which all Evangelicals place on having a ‘personal relationship’ with Jesus Christ.³³¹ Rachel Held Evans (d. 2019), an influential ex-Evangelical who became an Episcopalian, expresses this well: “For all that’s wrong with white American evangelicalism, I’m thankful to have grown up in a church tradition that emphasised the importance of nurturing a ‘personal relationship’ with God. From an early age, I had a deep and active prayer life, which meant that I was comfortable shooting the breeze with Jesus.”³³² This is good news because it speaks to the very heart of the practice of the Prayer: “This Eastern Christian path is not particularly concerned with morality or good behaviour, surprisingly enough; it is concerned with a relationship.”³³³ Any good relationship implies a deep connection and experience of the Other, which is the Prayer’s essence. This might be the one infallible window through which all Evangelicals may open to let the Prayer in as a friend.

³³¹ “Emotionalism and personalism” being two aspects of some forms of Evangelicalism. See Morris, *A People's Church*, 177.

³³² Rachel Held Evans, *Wholehearted Faith* (US: Harper One, 2021), Kindle ed, 115.

³³³ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 43-44.

With all this in mind, the next step in this chapter consists of exploring the Evangelical concept of salvation and their concomitant spiritual disciplines as issues related to Crucicentrism, Conversionism and the Five *Solas*.

Exploring Evangelical Soteriology and Spirituality

In this section the Evangelical concept of Salvation will be compared briefly to the Eastern Orthodox concept of salvation by consulting Evangelical Systematic Theologian, Millard J. Erickson³³⁴ and Orthodox Priest Fr. Stephen Rogers³³⁵ who writes for *Ancient Faith*, an Eastern Orthodox peak body in the United States of America. To supplement their material, Evangelical contemplative Jan Johnson³³⁶ and Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan of Nafpaktos³³⁷ will be drawn on, as well as some other helpful voices including J.I Packer³³⁸ and conservative Evangelical Donald S. Whitney.³³⁹ Following this, the Evangelical practice of the spiritual disciplines will be elucidated through several sources including the following: Scripture Union³⁴⁰ and Cru³⁴¹ (both Evangelical outreach organisations, the former being moderate and the latter being conservative), and the writings of Richard J. Foster (a Quaker theologian and an accepted authority among contemplative Protestants),³⁴² Timothy Keller³⁴³ and Paul E. Miller³⁴⁴ (both conservative Confessional Evangelicals), Roger E. Olson³⁴⁵ (a Postconservative), and Per Olaf Sjögren (a Swedish Lutheran Evangelical Protestant who died in 2005).

³³⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

³³⁵ Rogers, "Our Purpose."

³³⁶ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*.

³³⁷ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*.

³³⁸ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).

³³⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).

³⁴⁰ "About Us," Scripture Union Australia, accessed 28 March 2023, <https://www.suwa.org.au/about-us/>.

³⁴¹ "10 Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen Your Faith," Cru, accessed 28 March 2023, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/spiritual-disciplines-strengthen-faith.html>.

³⁴² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

³⁴³ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014).

³⁴⁴ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: CO: NavPress, 2009).

³⁴⁵ Olson, Roger, "There Is No Such Thing as 'Wordless Prayer'," *My Evangelical Arminian Theological Musings* (blog), 9 January 2023, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2023/01/there-is-no-such-thing-as-wordless-prayer/>.

The Evangelical Concept of Salvation

Millard J. Erickson is an Evangelical Systematic Theologian who has written a seminal systematic theology textbook for students of Evangelical Theology.³⁴⁶ In it he describes the Evangelical concept of salvation using the following five words which form a linear process that can be referred to as the *Ordo Salutis* (the Order of Salvation): (i) *Justification*, which refers to a change of legal status whereby people of faith are “declared just or righteous in God’s sight”³⁴⁷ removing their guilt and the penalty for their sin; (ii) *Adoption*, which refers to the restoration of their relationship to God whereby upon placing their faith in Jesus Christ they are “restored to favour with God and enabled to claim all the benefits provided by a loving father”³⁴⁸; (iii) *Regeneration*, which refers to a change of heart which is described as “an actual alteration of one’s character... an infusion of a positive spiritual energy”³⁴⁹; (iv) *Sanctification*, which refers to ongoing growth where “the individual’s spiritual condition is progressively altered; [and] one actually becomes holier”³⁵⁰; and (v) *Glorification*, which refers to the completion of the salvation journey wherein “the spiritual nature of the believer will be perfected”³⁵¹ and their provisional legal status change as justified and adopted is finally and fully manifested in their private and communal expression of holiness. For the Evangelical, Erickson’s first three aspects (justification, adoption, and regeneration) happen immediately when a person places their faith (alone) in Christ (alone) by grace (alone). Indeed, what connects all these words, and this process together is when a person begins with faith and goes on “maintaining faith and commitment to the very end.”³⁵² This describes a sixth word Erickson uses as part of the Evangelical salvation process: *Perseverance*.³⁵³

³⁴⁶ On the back cover, J.I. Packer, mentioned previously herein as a spokesperson for Evangelical Theologian, writes, “Erickson’s *Christian Theology* has established itself as the most widely used and most generally useful of modern Protestant surveys of Christian truth. Robustly evangelical, essentially conservative, thoroughly contemporary.”

³⁴⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.

³⁴⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.

³⁴⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.

³⁵⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.

³⁵¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 919.

³⁵² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 919.

³⁵³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 919.

In this structure, the human effort is in the *sanctification* stage wherein “spiritual formation”³⁵⁴ takes place “in which Christ is formed in us.”³⁵⁵ This requires some reflection on the previously mentioned distinction between monergism (God solely and exclusively acts) and synergism (humans act in cooperation with and submission to God) regarding who is responsible for the different parts of salvation consisting of justification, sanctification, and glorification. Some Evangelicals, desiring to preserve the fifth *Sola* (*Soli Deo Gloria*), err on the side of monergism for all three aspects so that God gets all the glory for every aspect of salvation from start-to-finish. Packer appears to make this point when writing in reference to the fifth *Sola*: “First to last, and at every stage in the process, salvation comes from the Lord.”³⁵⁶ However, Packer also goes on to write “Sanctification, however, is in one sense synergistic – It is an ongoing cooperative process”³⁵⁷ that is “neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but God-dependent effort.”³⁵⁸ This shows the complexity of the issue from an Evangelical point of view and especially the deep impulse to preserve salvation by grace by emphasising monergism. Erickson provides relief to the horns of this dilemma by suggesting that while Evangelical theology might lead one to conclude that “sanctification is completely a passive matter,”³⁵⁹ they should freely affirm that it is “exclusively of God”³⁶⁰ in that “its power rests on God’s holiness”³⁶¹ and yet conclude is not passive because “the believer is constantly exhorted to work and grow in matters pertaining to salvation.”³⁶² In other words, the Christian’s efforts preserve salvation by grace not works, because the works themselves depend on God’s help, as Packer describes above – they involve God-dependent effort thus preserving the fifth *Sola* while also calling for intense effort.

Nevertheless whether sanctification is seen as monergistic or synergistic the practical outcome in the life of the Christian is that they must do the work which consists of participating in “spiritual disciplines”³⁶³ which “cultivate an inner life that is strongly connected to God”³⁶⁴ resulting in

³⁵⁴ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

³⁵⁵ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

³⁵⁶ Packer, *Concise Theology*, 60.

³⁵⁷ Packer, *Concise Theology*, 170.

³⁵⁸ Packer, *Concise Theology*, 170.

³⁵⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

³⁶⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

³⁶¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

³⁶² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

³⁶³ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

“the transformation of our outer behaviour.”³⁶⁵ Donald S. Whitney, a conservative Evangelical, lists the following eleven spiritual disciplines: “Bible Intake... Prayer... Worship... Evangelism... Serving... Stewardship... Fasting... Silence and Solitude... Journalling... [and] Learning.”³⁶⁶ Jan Johnson, a contemplative Protestant who is an Evangelical and ecumenical in her outlook adds, “contemplative prayer”³⁶⁷ as one of the disciplines defining it as “listening prayer; wordless contemplation; waiting on God; and practising God’s presence”³⁶⁸ – a category into which the Prayer comfortably fits. Indeed, Johnson shares her own use of the Prayer as an indispensable help that got her through an intensely stressful situation on the heels of a difficult experience concluding, “I’d always thought ‘the Jesus Prayer’ was some vain repetition, but every word of that prayer has taken on great meaning for me now.”³⁶⁹

In comparison to the Evangelical process of salvation, the Eastern Orthodox concept of salvation consists of a circular spiralling process described by these three key terms: (i) Purification (*katharsis*) entailing, “renunciation, repentance, return, obedience, action, conversation, and participation”³⁷⁰; (ii) Illumination (*photismos*) – “the experience of the divine energies of God in all places, filling all things”³⁷¹; and (iii) Deification (*theosis*) – “the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which brings about direct communion with God through participation in his divine energies.”³⁷² It is a circular spiral process because “although these stages of purification, illumination, and deification are hierarchical and build upon themselves, they are not exclusive, one to another.”³⁷³ They interpenetrate one another like a spiral leading to ongoing growth in each of them over time. The locus of human effort in the Orthodox scheme is the stage of purification which, in sum, consists of “discipleship and obedience”³⁷⁴ and presumes an ongoing “right faith.”³⁷⁵ With

³⁶⁴ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

³⁶⁵ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

³⁶⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, Contents.

³⁶⁷ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 31.

³⁶⁸ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 35.

³⁶⁹ Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 150.

³⁷⁰ “This process of purification includes renunciation, a change of relationship between us and the world. It involves repentance, a recognition of our own sinfulness. It involves a return, a sincere desire to amend our ways. It involves obedience, submission to something other than our own will. It involves action, the practice of virtue and good works. It involves conversation and ongoing dialogue with God in prayer. And it involves participation, participation in the community of God’s Church in its sacramental and liturgical life.” Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

³⁷¹ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

³⁷² Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

³⁷³ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

³⁷⁴ Rogers, “Our Purpose.”

this framework in mind it seems that the overlap between the Orthodox and Evangelical soteriological processes where the human activity and initiative is, takes place under the headings of purification and sanctification, which are both fine arenas for the practice of the Prayer. With this understanding of Evangelical soteriology and the Prayer's potentially welcome place in it as a potential God-dependent activity, the Evangelical spiritual disciplines are now explored.

The Evangelical Concept of Spiritual Disciplines – Scripture Union and Cru

Evangelicalism has two primary practices – reading the Bible and praying, where reading the Bible is seen as God speaking to the individual and/or community, and praying is seen as the individual and/or community speaking to God.³⁷⁶ That is, as the Bible is read, God talks while the people listen, and as the people pray, God listens while the people talk. These two practices operate within the personal sphere during a daily time popularly known as the “Quiet Time”³⁷⁷ and they happen in the public sphere during, for example, weekly church and Bible study group gatherings. Both are cataphatic activities involving rumination and thinking.

A good example of this two-fold focus comes from the Evangelical organisation known as Scripture Union who are a moderate interdenominational Evangelical Christian outreach organisation who have been around for over a century. The following aim is core to their purpose: “Encourage people of all ages to meet God daily through the Bible and prayer.”³⁷⁸ This shows that these two exercises are the bread-and-butter of Evangelical spirituality, and they emphasise the relational nature of Evangelical spirituality as an ongoing personal and group conversation between the believer and God, along with one another.

A similar organisation, though more on the conservative end of the spectrum, known as Cru, previously known as Campus Crusade for Christ, list ten “Spiritual Disciplines to Strengthen

³⁷⁵ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 47.

³⁷⁶ Chan, “Spiritual Practices,” 248.

³⁷⁷ A daily time set aside in the morning or evening for Bible intake and personal prayer. See Chan, “Spiritual Practices,” 248.

³⁷⁸ SU Australia, “About Us.”

Your Faith”³⁷⁹ on their website. They divide their list into seven “Critical Spiritual Disciplines”³⁸⁰ and three “Helpful Spiritual Disciplines.”³⁸¹ The first three critical practices include “Bible reading,”³⁸² “Bible study,”³⁸³ and “Bible memorisation.”³⁸⁴ The fourth one is, “Prayer”³⁸⁵ which Cru defines as, “talking with God.”³⁸⁶ The one discipline on the list reminiscent of a contemplative practice is “Silence”³⁸⁷ which is listed as helpful but not critical and defined as when a person “sets aside times during their day when they can be quiet and aware of God’s presence.”³⁸⁸ With this list, Cru confirms that conservative Evangelical spirituality primarily consists of Bible reading, Bible study and Bible memorisation, followed by talking with God. It is promising that Cru gives room for Silence as a spiritual practice, and yet it is only as an optional extra with no help given on how to be in that silence. That is, that there is no explanation of the use of a practice like the Prayer to enter into and foster silence. So, the need for silence is recognised, but the ‘methodology’ is lacking, to which the Prayer could be a welcome solution.

A Contemplative Evangelical Perspective

Many Evangelicals point to Richard J. Foster,³⁸⁹ a Protestant Theologian of the Quaker tradition, as a resource for understanding and practicing the Spiritual Disciplines.³⁹⁰ On the other hand, he is also denounced by many Evangelicals and is seen as being dangerous.³⁹¹ This harkens to that

³⁷⁹ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁰ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸¹ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸² Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸³ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁴ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁵ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁶ “How to Pray: The Beginner's Guide,” Cru, accessed 28 March 2023, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/how-to-pray.html>.

³⁸⁷ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁸ Cru, “10 Spiritual Disciplines.”

³⁸⁹ Chan, “Spiritual Practices,” 249.

³⁹⁰ “Richard Foster has written a renowned Christian classic on the spiritual disciplines of meditation and solitude, among others, entitled *The Celebration of Discipline*... might be worth a read.” See “Cultivating Quiet,” *Family Life - A Cru Ministry*, accessed 17 February 2024, <https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/parenting-challenges/frazzled-family/cultivating-quiet/>.

³⁹¹ For example, see Got Questions article <https://www.gotquestions.org/renovare-Bible.html> where the author warns against Foster’s organisation Renovare writing that it “places a heavy emphasis on mysticism to the detriment of solid theology.” See “What is Renovaré / the Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible / the Life with God Bible?,” Got Questions, accessed 29 February 2024, <https://www.gotquestions.org/renovare-Bible.html>.

stark division in Evangelicalism mentioned previously and is a reminder that not all Evangelicals will embrace the Prayer, but many might. In Foster's book, "Streams of Living Water"³⁹² he shares essential practices from the following six traditions of Christianity: the Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical, and Incarnational traditions.³⁹³ The Contemplative tradition focuses on practices involving solitude, reflection, and silence.³⁹⁴ The Holiness tradition emphasises intense practice of the spiritual disciplines along with mentorship, accountability, and perseverance.³⁹⁵ The Charismatic tradition forefronts openness to experience and the leading of the Holy Spirit.³⁹⁶ The Social Justice tradition encourages awareness, advocacy, volunteering, and social and political engagement.³⁹⁷ The Incarnational tradition directs people to living an everyday life of loving service within the world including the home, workplace, and community.³⁹⁸

The 'Evangelical Tradition',³⁹⁹ sub-titled, "The Word Centered Life"⁴⁰⁰ presents Evangelicalism as, "a life founded upon the living Word of God, the written Word of God, and the proclaimed Word of God"⁴⁰¹ and he suggests that the main Evangelical spiritual practice is that of making "a really good friend of Scripture, reading it in substantial doses."⁴⁰² Foster suggests that the focus of the Evangelical spiritual practice is the written Word of God which is where the living Word (Jesus Christ) is communed with, and where the proclaimed Word (the Gospel/Good News) emerges from. Put simply, the Bible is the central piece in the Evangelical toolkit of spirituality. However, for Protestants in general, and Evangelicals who are open to it, Foster does not limit the Christian toolbox to that one tool. This is best illustrated in his popular classic book, 'Celebration of Discipline' published in 1978.⁴⁰³

³⁹² Foster, *Streams*.

³⁹³ Foster, *Streams*, Contents.

³⁹⁴ Foster, *Streams*, 56-57.

³⁹⁵ Foster, *Streams*, 95-96.

³⁹⁶ Foster, *Streams*, 131-32.

³⁹⁷ Foster, *Streams*, 181.

³⁹⁸ Foster, *Streams*, 269-71.

³⁹⁹ Foster, *Streams*, 185-233.

⁴⁰⁰ Foster, *Streams*, 185.

⁴⁰¹ Foster, *Streams*, 232.

⁴⁰² Foster, *Streams*, 233.

⁴⁰³ Chan, "Spiritual Practices," 249.

Foster begins his book with a chapter titled “Meditation,”⁴⁰⁴ and in it he does not limit the concept of meditation to merely include discursive rumination on Scripture (an accepted cataphatic practice), but he allows it to encompass far more. For example, although he does not reference the Prayer per se, he gives many hints to several of its essential characteristics. He quotes the Eastern Orthodox Russian mystic, St. Theophan the Recluse – “To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you.”⁴⁰⁵ He references Paul’s admonition to pray without ceasing from 1 Thessalonians 5:17⁴⁰⁶ and speaks of meditation as a return to the “recreating silences... the inner world,”⁴⁰⁷ restoring Adam and Eve’s “sense of perpetual communion,”⁴⁰⁸ seeking to be in the “perpetual presence of the Lord,”⁴⁰⁹ meeting with Christ in “the inner sanctuary of the heart.”⁴¹⁰ Further, Foster emphasised that one form of meditation he recommends is referred to as “re-collection... centring down... [being] still... entering into the recreating silence... [allowing] the fragmentation of our minds to become centred.”⁴¹¹ “What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.”⁴¹² All of these aspects are reminiscent of the contours of the Prayer elucidated in the first chapter of this study.

There are however points of apparent difference between Foster and Hesychasm, which are significant. First, Foster He suggests the use of the imagination to help one “descend with the mind into the heart,”⁴¹³ and second he specifically distinguishes ‘Eastern meditation’ from ‘Christian meditation’ by saying that the former is about emptying the mind while the latter is about filling the mind.⁴¹⁴ On both counts, the reality is more nuanced. In the first case, as an entirely apophatic practice the Prayer forbids the use of the imagination, and in the second case it encourages an apophatic emptiness. These differences are neutralised if Foster is interpreted as

⁴⁰⁴ Foster, *Celebration*, 19-41.

⁴⁰⁵ Foster, *Celebration*, 23.

⁴⁰⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 29.

⁴⁰⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 19.

⁴⁰⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 21.

⁴⁰⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 23.

⁴¹⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 29.

⁴¹¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 35.

⁴¹² Foster, *Celebration*, 24.

⁴¹³ Foster, *Celebration*, 29.

⁴¹⁴ Foster, *Celebration*, 24-25.

meaning for the imagination to be used merely as a preliminary help that is later to be let-go, and as meaning for the filling of the mind to be not with thoughts, but with the full and living *hesychia* of the Prayer – a silence saturated with the Divine as opposed to being a total blankness. Such interpretations of Foster fully support the Prayer. Nevertheless, whatever way Foster is interpreted he certainly demonstrates an openness to the Prayer in the very first chapter of this book, a book which is even recommended by the conservative Evangelical outreach organisation Cru.⁴¹⁵

The likelihood of Foster being interpreted as suggested above is evidenced his chapters on “Prayer”⁴¹⁶ and “Solitude”⁴¹⁷ in the same book, wherein he speaks of the “prayer of relinquishment... [of] letting go”⁴¹⁸, the prayer of listening – “listening to the silent thunder of the Lord of hosts”⁴¹⁹, the “inward attentiveness”⁴²⁰ and “inner silence”⁴²¹ promoting one to hold “in [their] heart a deep, inner listening silence”⁴²² where they are to “be still.”⁴²³ All of these refer to essential characteristics of the Prayer and of contemplative prayer in general. Thus, an Evangelical who is open to Foster is likely going to be open to the Prayer in one form or another. While Foster’s sentiments are encouraging, he represents a sub-group of Protestants, including Evangelicals, who are open to and interested in the spiritual disciplines and therefore open in varying degrees to the mystical and experiential. So, the question then arises: What of the non-fundamentalist conservative Evangelicals and their posture to the same? This is discussed next.

A Confessional Evangelical Perspective

Timothy Keller (d. 2023) is a popular and well-known Evangelical who fits into the ‘Confessional Evangelical’ camp and is well respected by many inside and outside his tradition. In his book titled ‘Prayer’ he acknowledges the new Evangelical (and Catholic) interest in

⁴¹⁵ See footnote 390.

⁴¹⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 43-60.

⁴¹⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 121-27.

⁴¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 49.

⁴¹⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 49.

⁴²⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 121.

⁴²¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 123.

⁴²² Foster, *Celebration*, 130.

⁴²³ Foster, *Celebration*, 130.

mysticism and contemplation. He does this in a way which gently but clearly expresses his concerns about it.⁴²⁴ He refers to methods like centering prayer, contemplative prayer, listening prayer, lectio Divina, and others, rightly placing them into the category of contemplative spiritual disciplines, yet he makes a point of labelling the whole field as “dangerous choppy waters”⁴²⁵ for those who are enquiring into the nature of prayer for the first time. He does not dismiss these methods outright, but he relates them to the Western interest in Eastern religion expressing a seemingly dangerous connection even though he does this in a veiled way. He then attempts to offer a solution he calls: “Intelligent Mysticism”⁴²⁶ which is a phrase he discovered in the writings of John Murray, a Scottish Theologian from the 20th century. The phrase occurs in the context of two typical contemplative themes: ‘union’ and ‘communion’ with the Divine. Keller when using the term ‘Intelligent Mysticism’ means “an encounter with God that involves not only the affections of the heart but also the convictions of the mind.”⁴²⁷ This shows the conservative importance of knowing and it begs the question of whether there is a place for the way of unknowing (the apophatic path) in his view. ‘Intelligent Mysticism’ appears to depend on a synthesis of the thoughts and feelings which apophatic mysticism would seek to transcend through the letting go of thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, while Keller may lean toward a type of mysticism which could certainly accommodate some aspects of the ways the Prayer can be practiced wherein elements akin to ‘convictions of the mind’ and ‘affections of the heart’ remain, it seems he would reject any practise of it which threatens to transcend those – to go beyond intelligent mysticism, not into unintelligent mysticism but rather trans-intelligent mysticism. This presents another opportunity because there is indeed a grey area in the practice of the Prayer between the cataphatic-style of practice (word-filled) and the apophatic-style of practice (word-less) since there is both the element of the words of the prayer, and there is also the element of going beyond the words of the prayer, such that “the Jesus Prayer may very well transcend these distinctions.”⁴²⁸ This is good news for anyone seeking to bring the Prayer into the Evangelical orbit since it is not necessarily strictly one or the other, however the attendant concern with this approach is that the

⁴²⁴ Keller, *Prayer*, 13-14.

⁴²⁵ Keller, *Prayer*, 13.

⁴²⁶ Keller, *Prayer*, 14-17.

⁴²⁷ Keller, *Prayer*, 16.

⁴²⁸ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 67.

essence of the Prayer may be lost if there is too much emphasis on the element of the Divine name and not enough on the element of the quest for silence.

Another popular conservative evangelical, Paul E. Miller has also written a book on prayer⁴²⁹ which is warmly endorsed by Timothy Keller and several other respected conservative Evangelicals including J.I. Packer.⁴³⁰ In his book the Prayer receives focused attention in a chapter titled, “Crying ‘Abba’ Continuously”⁴³¹ which presents nothing less than an Evangelical version of the Prayer of the Heart as per Keller’s ‘Intelligent Mysticism’ proposal.⁴³² He describes praying quietly to himself over and over again repeating the word ‘Father’ or ‘the name of Jesus’ or the name ‘Christ.’ This incorporates the first and second essentials of the Prayer, namely the Divine Name and constant repetition. Sometimes he repeats short phrases like ‘Come, Spirit’ or ‘Teach me’ or ‘Help me’ calling them ‘bullet prayers’ and ‘breath prayer’ meaning “prayer that can be prayed in a single breath.”⁴³³ This constant repetition helps his soul to be ‘quiet’ and to ‘find rest in God’ aligning with the fourth essential of the Prayer, the quest for silence. This helps him cultivate sanctification and purification wherein his practice directs his heart to ‘the life of God’ as opposed to giving in to his thoughts and impulses which often lead to habitual behaviours of “interrupting, selling, and boasting”⁴³⁴ which are reminiscent of the disordered passions discussed in chapter 1 of this research. He writes of how the Prayer arises within from a “poverty of spirit”⁴³⁵ signifying the third essential of the Prayer, the plea for mercy. He describes his practice as deeply relational involving “childlike dependence on God”⁴³⁶ a distinct characteristic of Christian prayer. Miller refers to the Prayer’s spontaneity such that he often does not realise he is praying but rather discovers the Spirit praying in him. This indicates the Prayer has become for him true Prayer of the Heart having moved from his lips to his mind and then to his heart and there emanates “from the core of [his] being.”⁴³⁷

⁴²⁹ Miller, *A Praying Life*.

⁴³⁰ Miller, *A Praying Life*, back cover.

⁴³¹ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 63.

⁴³² See Miller, *A Praying Life*, 63-68.

⁴³³ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 64.

⁴³⁴ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 64.

⁴³⁵ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 64.

⁴³⁶ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 64.

⁴³⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 19.

Discussing the transformative effects of his practice, Miller shares how it helps him be less judgmental and more empathetic, especially towards those who are different.⁴³⁸ Finally at the end of the chapter, he reveals that he is referring to none other than the Jesus Prayer from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. He affirms its Scriptural resonance by quoting several passages and specifically citing the key verse 1 Thessalonians 5:17 as its basis.⁴³⁹

The above strongly suggests the possibility that the Prayer can indeed find a home among Evangelicals, even conservative Confessional Evangelicals. However, it should be noted, like Foster, and even more starkly, Miller has taken great care to present a form of the Prayer differing in some ways from the Eastern Orthodox practice of it. He distinguishes it from “Eastern mysticism”⁴⁴⁰ which he defines as consisting of “a psycho-spiritual technique that disengages from relationship and escapes pain by dulling self.”⁴⁴¹ He sees Eastern mystics as “trying to empty their minds and become one with the nonpersonal”⁴⁴² and does not want the practice to be thought of in that way, as “a mindless chant... in order to reach some higher spiritual plane.”⁴⁴³

Miller’s presentation contains four of the essential characteristics of the Prayer including invocation of the Divine Name, constant repetition, the plea for mercy, and to an extent the quest for silence. What appears to be missing is the full element of the quest for apophatic silence which is often accompanied by a psycho-somatic embodiment appearing ‘Eastern’. His approved practice is described as something a person does ‘on the go’ but not as a psychosomatic practice to be done while sitting still, eyes closed, entraining the words to the breath, entering into apophatic silence while experiencing a deepening state of unification with the divine (without confusion between the person and God – the key distinction from Eastern mysticism). These aspects seem to be seen as being too like the non-Christian Eastern mysticism which he strongly denounces, and yet they are not necessarily the same. Thus, one of the most important questions

⁴³⁸ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 66.

⁴³⁹ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 68.

⁴⁴⁰ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 66.

⁴⁴¹ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 66.

⁴⁴² Miller, *A Praying Life*, 66.

⁴⁴³ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 63.

in this research is: Is the Prayer different from Eastern mysticism, and if so, how? This will be addressed in the next chapter.

A Postconservative Evangelical Perspective

Another Evangelical whose opinions will be considered here is Roger E. Olson, since he represents the Postconservative perspective in the four views book. As a Public Theologian he has discussed the Prayer on his well-known and popular blog. In these writings he reveals that he “has nothing against”⁴⁴⁴ the Prayer but he does not think it is biblical and specifically states that 1 Thessalonians 5:17 cannot be used as a “proof text.”⁴⁴⁵ He also does not think it fits into the category of ‘biblical prayer’ which he, drawing Evangelical scholar Donald Bloesch (who he describes as his mentor) defines as “conversation with God”⁴⁴⁶ (i.e. talking, not silence – cataphatic, not apophatic). In commenting on the related practice of Centering Prayer he says that although it cannot be called prayer, it might be placed into the category of “preparation for prayer”⁴⁴⁷ while also asserting that practices such as Centering Prayer are “not drawn from biblical, classical Christianity.”⁴⁴⁸ He suggests that Evangelicals who reach for practices like wordless prayer are drawing on “non-evangelical traditions and practices”⁴⁴⁹ suggesting that they are doing so because they have become “bored with traditional evangelical spirituality, worship, devotion, [and] life.”⁴⁵⁰ His other objection is that such practices are too alike to the practices found in mindfulness and Zen Buddhism which, according to Olson have nothing “to do with Christianity.”⁴⁵¹ Again, like Foster, Keller and Miller, this raises the spectre of non-Christian Eastern meditation and the need to show how the Prayer is clearly distinct from it. Olson’s blog comments show that even the least ‘conservative’ of the four types of Evangelicals in the four views book (the Postconservative) is not necessarily predisposed to the practice of the Prayer and yet neither are they necessarily opposed to it or closed to it. Once again it is evident that the

⁴⁴⁴ Olson, Roger “What Is ‘Prayer?’,” *My Evangelical Arminian Theological Musings* (blog), 28 April 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2020/04/what-is-prayer/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Olson, “What Is ‘Prayer?’”

⁴⁴⁶ Olson, “What Is ‘Prayer?’”

⁴⁴⁷ Olson, “No Such Thing.”

⁴⁴⁸ Olson, “No Such Thing.”

⁴⁴⁹ Olson, “No Such Thing.”

⁴⁵⁰ Olson, “No Such Thing.”

⁴⁵¹ Olson, “No Such Thing.”

value of labels is very limited and the need to deal directly one-on-one with individuals in their specific situations is needed.

A Lutheran Evangelical Perspective

The final Evangelical to be considered in this discussion is the most promising for this study. In 1975 Per-Olof Sjögren (d. 2005) wrote a book titled, “The Jesus Prayer.”⁴⁵² What makes this book significant is that Sjögren, a Swedish Lutheran Evangelical Protestant, is perhaps the only Evangelical Protestant who has written a book containing a thorough-going presentation of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer. David Adam writes in the foreword that Sjögren “enters the very depths of the Orthodox tradition of prayer and brings to it the riches of the [his] Protestant Evangelical insights.”⁴⁵³ Sjögren’s book, having been written by an Evangelical for Evangelicals has valuable insights to guide this exploration of the Prayer’s synthesis into Evangelical spirituality, some of which will be briefly explored below with more bring brought to light in the next chapter.

The contents (words) of the Prayer are, Sjögren suggests, “a capsule summary of Christian doctrine, summing up the whole teaching of the Bible about Jesus”⁴⁵⁴ and even the “whole content of the Bible”⁴⁵⁵ itself. Just this statement alone suggests that the Prayer poses no threat to the Evangelical identity. The following brief overview of the words of the Prayer, based on Sjögren’s book, demonstrates this clearly. They are derived from Scripture-Alone, which includes Biblicism. The first part of the Prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ,’ is a personal expression of Faith-Alone in Christ-Alone, which includes Conversionism and Crucicentrism. Saying these words with sincerity signifies a new loyalty to the once-crucified now-risen and reigning Saviour-King. The second part, ‘son of God, have mercy on me’ (with or without ‘a sinner’ on the end) is a humble request for Grace-Alone addressed to God the Father via God the Son, and thus honouring of God’s Glory-Alone. Saying this part with sincerity reveals a humble dependence on God for help. Overall, the Prayer is a cry of the unjustified for justification which

⁴⁵² Per-Olof Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, trans. Sydney Linton (London: Triangle SPCK, 1996).

⁴⁵³ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, xi.

⁴⁵⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 10.

⁴⁵⁵ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 17.

is freely given since ‘mercy’ incorporates everything that one needs as a gift to be received from God including justification. Once justified, it becomes the cry of the adopted and regenerated that expresses their ongoing relationship with God as they persevere through the ups and downs of sanctification on their way to ultimate glorification. Moreover, it is a Prayer that is thoroughly aligned with Activism and Crucicentrism since it in no way can promote inaction because the one being addressed is the embodiment of one who fulfils the command to, “Do justice... love kindness, and... walk humbly with... God.” (See Micah 6:8).

However, all this applies only to the Prayer’s content as an invocation of the Divine name (the first essential characteristic). This aspect of the Prayer is clearly not a problem for Evangelicals since the contents (the words) are inarguably biblical and fit comfortably within an Evangelical framework if the prayer is prayed with understanding and intentions that are formed by that framework. Again, it is the psychophysical ‘technique’ of the Hesychastic practice of the Prayer that is in question, namely: the bodily posture, the focus on the physical heart, the silent repetition entrained to the breath and/or heartbeat, the method of non-discursive ‘wordless’ contemplation, and the quest for a state of pure *hesychia* with the potential of seeing the divine uncreated light. Although Sjögren embraces these (to be explored in chapter 3), he surmises that it is these physical elements which give the “most offence in the western world”⁴⁵⁶ in that they are perceived as being “too physical, too primitive, too simple.”⁴⁵⁷ It is therefore these dimensions of the Prayer from which some Evangelicals recoil. Attached to this concern, Sjögren suggests, is that the Jesus Prayer being “simplest in form but richest in content”⁴⁵⁸ of all Christian prayers is perhaps neglected among Western Christians because of its “simplicity, as being beneath the level of intellectual sophistication – and complication”⁴⁵⁹ which, he claims, tends to be a hallmark of Western Christian prayer.⁴⁶⁰ This repeats a dual concern that has continually been raised in this chapter, expressed as the following question: Can Evangelicals find a place for the incorporation of the a psychophysical practice of the Prayer as an embodied ‘ritual’/routine that transcends wordy intellectual deliberation?

⁴⁵⁶ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 44.

⁴⁵⁷ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 44.

⁴⁵⁸ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 2.

⁴⁵⁹ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 4.

⁴⁶⁰ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 4.

What Does Evangelical Spirituality Look Like? – Conclusion

So far it has been established that Evangelical spirituality fits under the topic of sanctification which is a process in which the believer actively participates and in so doing is transformed into the likeness of Christ. It consists primarily of the discursive practices of Bible study and personal prayer, but there are hints among conservative, postconservative, and other Evangelicals that show there is a potential openness to going beyond discursive word-fulness into the silence of wordlessness, but to do so, certain obstacles are apparent, the greatest one being the threat of it being seen as a wordless path indistinct from non-Christian Eastern religious practices. Before this matter can be explored, the general attitudinal stance of Evangelicalism toward mysticism as direct experience of God will now be explored with reference to two Wesleyan Quadrilateral elements namely Experience and Reason.

Evangelicals – Experience and Reason

While Chapter 1 explored the first two parts of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Bible and Tradition) the second two parts (Experience and Reason) shape this part of the exploration of Evangelicalism's attitude toward Mystical experience.⁴⁶¹ On the one hand, 'Experience' partly addresses the Evangelical propensity for "emotionalism and personalism"⁴⁶² while on the other hand 'Reason' partly addresses the Evangelical tendency toward rationalism, which was raised as a significant issue in the Introduction. It is possible that in the interplay between the two that the interruption of the Prayer might become a welcome event since experience is essentially transrational and while it can sometimes be rationalised, this is not always possible. As a result, this allows experience to stand not under or over reason, but alongside reason. To explore this further, four essays about mysticism as a direct experience of God will now be consulted, two written by Roman Catholics, and two written by Evangelicals. This will bring background to create a depth of clarity around the relationship between Evangelicals and apophatic contemplation.

⁴⁶¹ Stackhouse, one of the contributors to the four views book (the Generalist view), defines reason as "the use of logic, intellectual inquiry, philosophical and theological thinking, and scientific inquiry, to arrive at knowledge" and experience as "the sense perception and spiritual perception by oneself and others past and present." See Lawson, "Theological Reflection," 57.

⁴⁶² Morris, *A People's Church*, 177.

New Mysticism

The first essay is by Bernard McGinn, a Roman Catholic and world-renowned expert on the history of Western Mysticism. Drawing on both Scripture and the long tradition of the Eastern and Western Christian Church, he defines Christian Mysticism as engaging in “spiritual practices”⁴⁶³ (e.g. contemplation, meditation, wordless prayer) in order to “prepare”⁴⁶⁴ oneself “for a deeper sense of God’s presence.”⁴⁶⁵ He explains that this ‘deeper sense’ is an experience that is “variously conceived of as seeing God, uniting with God, radical obedience to God, and even being annihilated in God.”⁴⁶⁶ This indicates that there is a wide spectrum of mystical experience in Christianity. He divides mysticism into the following five categories: patristic, monastic, medieval, Dionysian, and “New mysticism”⁴⁶⁷ pointing out that Dionysian mysticism was the least influential among Protestants while ‘New Mysticism’ played the biggest role.⁴⁶⁸ New Mysticism, dating from 1200 onwards,⁴⁶⁹ exhibited three characteristics which made it influential and accessible: it was “democratic,”⁴⁷⁰ “secular,”⁴⁷¹ and “vernacular”⁴⁷² in that it was addressed to all believers everywhere and it could be understood by everyone.⁴⁷³ While influencing both traditions, it also became controversial among Protestants and Catholics since these characteristics meant it became less restricted and more widespread leading to tensions between the authority of the Church, Scripture, and personal experience. If a person could experience the Divine directly without the mediation of the Church and/or Scripture, then it put ecclesial power at risk and it opened the possibility of the spread of potentially subversive teachings born from the womb of personal experience. This is precisely the concern some Evangelicals have with certain types of mystical experiences – they can be uncontrolled, unmediated experiments in spirituality. While this is a valid concern, not all mystical practice is individualistic and disconnected from community and other guardrails, a reality to be explored in

⁴⁶³ B. McGinn, “Mysticism and the Reformation: A Brief Survey,” *Acta Theologica* 35, no. 2 (2015): 52, <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v35i2.4>.

⁴⁶⁴ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 52.

⁴⁶⁵ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 52.

⁴⁶⁶ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 52.

⁴⁶⁷ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 52-53.

⁴⁶⁸ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 52-53.

⁴⁶⁹ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 53.

⁴⁷⁰ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 53.

⁴⁷¹ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 53.

⁴⁷² McGinn, “Mysticism,” 53.

⁴⁷³ McGinn, “Mysticism,” 53.

the next chapter. Also, this concern exists in Eastern Orthodoxy too as evidenced by the warnings about the possibility of delusion and the concomitant need for spiritual direction.

Evangelical Mysticism

The second essay is by an Evangelical theologian, Peder Stiansen. He makes strong distinctions between what he refers to as “Pagan Mysticism”⁴⁷⁴ citing Buddhism and Hinduism as two examples,⁴⁷⁵ “Early Christian Mysticism”⁴⁷⁶ which he defines as “communion with God,”⁴⁷⁷ “Roman Mysticism”⁴⁷⁸ which he refers to as “hermit life and asceticism,”⁴⁷⁹ and “Evangelical Mysticism”⁴⁸⁰ which he equates with “pietism,” “German mysticism,” and “Dominican mysticism.”⁴⁸¹ Stiansen’s ‘Evangelical Mysticism’ is comparable with McGinn’s ‘New Mysticism’ in that it was a reactive movement away from indirect, external experience toward direct, internal experience.

As “a reaction against the dominance of Scholasticism”,⁴⁸² Evangelical Mysticism encourages practitioners to move from a realm of abstract theory of the mind (rationality) to personal experience of the heart (relationality). Also being a “reaction against the system of sacramentalism”,⁴⁸³ it leads contemplatives to a directly accessible internal experience of grace apart from the grace mediated by the religious system. This provides a “a way of escape”⁴⁸⁴ from corrupted institutions to personally encounter a sense of immediacy with the Divine. A core emphasis of Evangelical Mysticism is “the importance of the new birth”⁴⁸⁵ signifying a shift from rule-based and culture-based religious observance toward a vibrant relationship with God. This speaks of a “communion through which God reveals [God]self to the soul”⁴⁸⁶ wherein the

⁴⁷⁴ Peder Stiansen, “Church Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April-June (1948): 342.

⁴⁷⁵ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 342.

⁴⁷⁶ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 342.

⁴⁷⁷ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 342.

⁴⁷⁸ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 343.

⁴⁷⁹ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 343.

⁴⁸⁰ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 343.

⁴⁸¹ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 343.

⁴⁸² Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 344.

⁴⁸³ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 345.

⁴⁸⁴ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 345.

⁴⁸⁵ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 345.

⁴⁸⁶ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 346.

practitioner transcends acquaintanceship with God to enter a relationship with God resulting in “deeper religious experience.”⁴⁸⁷ This produces in them a “a pure life and a deep humility”⁴⁸⁸ signifying the purifying and sanctifying effects of Evangelical Mysticism. Put simply, Evangelical mystics enjoy a relationship with God and as a result are deeply transformed.

These aspects of Evangelical Mysticism reflect a dual concern of Evangelicals known as the ‘Priesthood of All Believers’ and the ‘Lordship of Christ’ meaning that “every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ and that the church is a fellowship of priests serving together under the lordship of Christ.”⁴⁸⁹ As an axiomatic stance within Evangelicalism this principle explains why both New Mysticism and Evangelical Mysticism are so attractive to Evangelicals since both address the Protestant impulse toward autonomy issuing in a personal unmediated engagement with God. The Prayer is well suited to satisfy this impulse as a means for facilitating personal responsibility and direct access.

Subjective Mysticism

The third essay is by Martin Henry, a Roman Catholic theologian, who points out that Christian mysticism started out as “objective”⁴⁹⁰ during the patristic (and matristic) period, but it progressively became more “subjective”⁴⁹¹ particularly from the medieval age onwards. By ‘objective’ he means that it was a “concrete, real, objective, and substantial reality”⁴⁹² which Christians participated in communally and physically through the Divine Liturgy, whereas by ‘subjective’ he means that it was taken up in the “individualism, interiority, and introspection”⁴⁹³ of Western culture, becoming a somewhat private and inward pursuit. Although the Prayer emerged during the period of ‘objective’ mysticism and the originating tradition would probably like it to remain within that framework, it has been and is being reinterpreted within the

⁴⁸⁷ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 346.

⁴⁸⁸ Stiansen, “Church Reform,” 346.

⁴⁸⁹ R. A. Mohler, Jr., “Priesthood of All Believers,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles Draper Chad Brand, and Archie England (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2003), 1327.

⁴⁹⁰ Martin Henry, “How Christian is Christian Mysticism?,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1999): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114009906400103>.

⁴⁹¹ Henry, “How Christian,” 29.

⁴⁹² Henry, “How Christian,” 36.

⁴⁹³ Henry, “How Christian,” 41.

‘subjective’ mystical framework of Western spirituality. Henry points out that one of the outcomes of this move to subjectivism is that ‘spirituality’ has come to be seen as separate from ‘theology’ in the West, unlike in the East where they are one and the same, thus in the East one cannot separate mysticism from participation in the Divine Liturgy.⁴⁹⁴ Henry, like McGinn, also points out a wide range of possibilities with regards to the mystical experience of “union with God”⁴⁹⁵ describing that it can be experienced “in affective terms... in terms of will and knowledge, but knowledge of a non-intellectual kind... in intellectual terms (but where the intellect was supernaturally illuminated), and... in what one might describe as a union between God and the substance of the human soul.”⁴⁹⁶ These first three articles indicate that ‘New Mysticism’, ‘Evangelical Mysticism’ and ‘subjective Mysticism’ are all driven by a desire for person experience and thus appear to be receptive fields for the seeds of the Prayer.

Mysticism During The Evangelical Great Awakening

The fourth and final essay is by Tom Shwanda, an Evangelical Professor, who holds to this definition of contemplation from Richard Foster: “The steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us”⁴⁹⁷. He directly addresses Evangelical resistance to the emerging contemplative interest among Evangelicals by presenting a helpful case for its validity. His argument draws on both a presentation of Protestant Scripture⁴⁹⁸ and a presentation of the experiences of four prominent American Evangelicals⁴⁹⁹ from the time of the Evangelical Great Awakening in the 18th century. He reaches this instructive conclusion:

Contemplation and the more vibrant communion of enjoyment of God was common among eighteenth-century American Evangelicals. Regardless of gender, both men and

⁴⁹⁴ Henry, “How Christian,” 41.

⁴⁹⁵ Henry, “How Christian,” 38.

⁴⁹⁶ Henry, “How Christian,” 38.

⁴⁹⁷ Foster, *Streams*, 49. See Tom Schwanda, “‘To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord’: The Evangelical Resistance and Retrieval of Contemplation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 69-70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700108>.

⁴⁹⁸ He references the following verses: Ps. 27:4; 63:1-5; Ps. 42:1-2; 73:24; 131:2; Deut. 34:10; 1 Ki. 19:12-14, John 14:23; 17:21, 24-26; 2 Cor. 12:1-4; Gal 2:2; Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:6-7; Lk 2:19; 10:39, 42; Acts 7:54-56; 2 Cor. 3:18; Hebrews 12:2. See Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 70.

⁴⁹⁹ Jonathan Edwards (d.1758); Susanna Anthony (d.1791); Sarah Jones (d. 1794); and Francis Asbury (d.1816). See Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 71-80.

women; regardless of theological tradition; both Reformed and Arminian reveals ample appreciation for contemplation.”⁵⁰⁰

Schwanda also addresses several typical objections to contemplation by showing how his four historical examples reveal that “each person recognised the centrality of Jesus Christ and the role of Scripture”⁵⁰¹ (Crucicentrism and Biblicism) and moreover, “none of them sought to achieve these deep spiritual experiences by their own efforts apart from God’s enabling grace”⁵⁰² (Crucicentrism and Conversionism). In these two observations he shows that the Five *Solas* are also upheld. He also goes on to conclude that contemplative practice involves “temporary withdrawal”⁵⁰³ and not “permanent isolation”⁵⁰⁴ and is therefore not “not self-serving but radically directed beyond [the self]”⁵⁰⁵ (Activism). He then underlines the transforming power of contemplative practice by observing that “encounters with God brought conviction and renewed awareness of sin that created a more profound hunger for purity and holiness”⁵⁰⁶ (Conversionism and Activism). This shows that early Evangelical contemplation was not done in order to be ‘justified’ or to obtain ‘salvation’ but as a joyful and transforming spiritual discipline done by a person who is already justified by grace alone, and longs to grow in closeness to God and Christlikeness.

Evangelicals and Mysticism – Conclusion

What this brief reflection on these four essays demonstrates is that mysticism is indeed an experience that transcends reason but is certainly not necessarily against reason. The Divinity is a mystery, and an experience of that infinite Mystery must itself be an ineffable, inexplicable mystery. Like the topic of love, it is too diverse, complex, and beautiful to be captured, pinned down and put on display like a butterfly in a case (i.e. subjected to reason). The best that can be done is to point in its general direction and describe it in poetic approximations. Although most

⁵⁰⁰ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰¹ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰² Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰³ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰⁴ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰⁵ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

⁵⁰⁶ Schwanda, “To Gaze,” 83.

of the answer to the question, ‘What is mysticism?’ is simple – as per McGinn, it is engaging in spiritual practices which prepare a person to experience God – it is the ‘experiencing God’ part of the answer that is highly mysterious. It defies quantification and codification and must be allowed to exist in the realm of subjectivity that defies language. What is in the control of the individual is the practical part – that of availing oneself to the spiritual practices and letting the experience be what it may – an experience that defies language and is outside of Reason, and at best can be expressed in poetry and metaphor. Most of all, Shwanda shows that all this is part and parcel of the Evangelical tradition, and entirely supportive of the Bebbington Quadrilateral and the Five *Solas*.

Conclusion

This chapter primarily sought to answer the question “Does the Prayer promote grace-based salvation?” To begin with, the Evangelical identity was explored showing the key contours of the tradition and elucidating some of its main emphases. This revealed that Evangelicalism cannot be treated as a monolith but consists of a diverse range of expressions, some of which are open to new ideas and open to a broader conception of spirituality (these are the Evangelicals this research seeks to address). This exploration also confirmed the Evangelical commitment to crucicentrism and conversionism mainly in terms of the Five *Solas* which teach that salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to God’s glory alone, while being expressed through a personal relationship with God and an ongoing experience of God.

It was then shown that Evangelical spirituality fits under the concept of sanctification in their process of salvation, involving a concerted human-effort which in no way contradicts grace-based salvation because it is a God-dependant activity. The variety of spiritual practices which lead to Christlikeness and growth in holiness all involve grace-based effort. It was seen that in Evangelicalism these efforts mainly include cataphatic practices such as Bible reading, Bible study and word-based prayer. However, it was also shown that there are promising signs of a capacity for apophatic practices like wordless prayer, as long as it can strongly distinguished from non-Christian Eastern religious practices. An exploration of the Evangelical attitude toward mysticism further confirmed that there is a definite openness to a spiritual pathway which

promotes personal, direct, authentic, relational, intense, and transformative experiences of God, all of which mysticism promotes.

The next chapter will continue to explore these themes focusing on the positive effects of practising the prayer (Experience) and addressing further Evangelical concerns about the Prayer. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the most pressing concern to be addressed is how the Prayer can be distinguished from non-Christian Eastern practices like Zen Buddhist and Hindu Yoga meditation. Another pressing concern relating to Activism in the Bebbington Quadrilateral is whether or not the Prayer perhaps leads to selfish individualism instead of an outward focus resulting in ethical behaviour toward others. Adjacent to this is the question of the Prayer's suitability and usefulness for a non-monastic person living a busy and active life in the marketplace. Finally, there is the concern about the Prayer's potential to draw the practitioner away from engagement with Christian community into a self-focused narcissism, which is reminiscent of the 14th century accusation of 'naval gazing' levelled against the Hesychasts by Barlaam. With communal cataphatic practices being deeply embedded in the fabric of the Evangelical identity, the Prayer must be seen to support these without drawing practitioners away from church engagement, Bible reading and study, and conversational prayer. These topics will now be more closely examined.

Chapter 3: Conversionism and Activism – The Jesus Prayer in Research

The previous chapter ended with a focus on the importance of experience in Evangelicalism. This will now be engaged further through interacting with seven research studies exploring the Prayer's effects in participants lives. This includes four empirical research studies that were conducted to ascertain the psychological, physiological, and spiritual effects of Prayer, including: a study with Eastern Orthodox participants in 1998⁵⁰⁷; a study with non-Conventional Catholics in 2017 (with two parts – qualitative and quantitative)⁵⁰⁸; and two studies with Protestants in 2018 (one on the Prayer and the other on Christian contemplation in general).⁵⁰⁹ Following this, three further research studies will be consulted to gain a broader understanding of the Prayer in recent research, from the perspective of literature, science and society, namely: a literature study from 2020 resulting in three testable hypothesis⁵¹⁰; a medical study by a Neuroscientist showing the effects of meditation on the brain⁵¹¹; and a case study from 2019 investigating the lived experience of Korean Protestants with Eastern Orthodox Spirituality.⁵¹²

These seven research studies will pose and answer some questions while also forming the basis for a follow-up discussion on these four questions: (i) Is the Prayer ethical/other-focused?; (ii) Is the Prayer relevant to everyday life in a busy world?; (iii) Is the Prayer distinguishable from non-Christian religious practices?; and (iv) Is the Prayer supportive on communal cataphatic Christian practices? In answering these four questions, the remaining questions raised in the Introduction will be addressed.⁵¹³ The focus here is on developing a case for the synthesis of the

⁵⁰⁷ George Stavros (Clinical Associate Professor of Pastoral Psychology at Boston University), "The Impact of Contemplative Prayer on Psychological, Relational, and Spiritual Well-Being: A Study of the Jesus Prayer," an unpublished article shared by the author via email and used with permission, June 26, 2020.

⁵⁰⁸ Marta Rubinart, Albert Fornieles, and Joan Deus, "The Psychological Impact of the Jesus Prayer among Non-Conventional Catholics," *Pastoral Psychology* 66 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0762-4>.

Marta Rubinart, Tim Moynihan, and Joan Deus, "Using the Collaborative Inquiry Method to Explore the Jesus Prayer," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 3, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000104>.

⁵⁰⁹ Knabb and Vazquez, "A Randomized Controlled Trial."

Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation."

⁵¹⁰ Vazquez and Jensen, "Practicing."

⁵¹¹ Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

⁵¹² Cho, "Resisting."

⁵¹³ The remaining questions from the Introduction include: (i) "Is the Prayer a distinctly Christian practice arising from Christian tradition and distinguishable from non-Christian practices?" (corresponding to question iii in this chapter); (ii) "Is the Prayer too focused on personal experience?"; (addressed indirectly throughout this chapter); (iii)

Prayer into Evangelical spiritual practice by demonstrating its transformative effects and by resolving the most pressing issues.

Research Studies Overview

Another method for theological reflection that is useful to consider here is Richard Rohr's reframing of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral with a model that he refers to as a "tricycle."⁵¹⁴ In this model, the front wheel of the tricycle is "Experience"⁵¹⁵ which directs the two back wheels which are "Scripture"⁵¹⁶ and "Tradition."⁵¹⁷ The assumption of this approach is Rohr's assertion that Protestants tend to favour Scripture ("in both good and bad ways"⁵¹⁸) and Catholics/Orthodox tend to favour Tradition (also "in good and bad ways"⁵¹⁹), but neither have been very skilful or honest about the fact that we have all been "operating out of our own Experience."⁵²⁰ Thus the leading 'wheel' for this chapter on synthesis is Experience because, as Rohr suggests: "Christianity in its maturity is supremely love-centered, not information- or knowledge-centered"⁵²¹ and moreover, he observes that the "stance of honest self-knowledge and deeper interiority, the head (Bible), heart (Experience), and body (Tradition) operating as one, is helping many to be more integrated and truthful about their own actual experience of God."⁵²²

To put this another way, for the synthesis of the Prayer of the *Heart* into Evangelical practice it is apt that the *Heart* leads the case by allowing the lived experience of people to be the guide – both personal experience and the experience of others. Rohr does not give Reason its own wheel stating "if we give reason its own wheel, it will end up driving the whole car."⁵²³ With Reason being so prominent in the Western tradition, its unsurprising that it needs to be muted down (but not ignored or opposed) to hear the testimony and evidence of peoples' experiences. Thus,

"Does the Prayer promote an outward focus of loving service?" (corresponding to question i here); and (iv) "Does the Prayer support or detract from communal faith practices?" (corresponding to question iv here).

⁵¹⁴ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ* (USA: Penguin Random House, 2019), 213.

⁵¹⁵ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵¹⁶ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵¹⁷ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵¹⁸ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵¹⁹ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵²⁰ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵²¹ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵²² Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵²³ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

perhaps the tricycle can be ridden in a rational way⁵²⁴ keeping it in the frame as a tool for reflection, but not the primary directive tool. This tricycle model circumvents the tendency in Evangelicalism to place Reason above Experience, and so it interrupts the status quo allowing for new life to enter in. But why should Experience be allowed to be the front wheel?

Evangelicals have a strong ethical ethos which is evident in, for example, two of the four pillars in the Bebbington Quadrilateral: Conversionism and Activism. The former includes the idea of growth in personal holiness and the latter includes the idea of championing public justice. Both come under the rubric of sanctification (growth in holiness) which itself is the necessary evidence for justification since faith without works is dead (See James 2:14-26). If the research studies provide evidence that the Prayer produces growth in holiness (e.g. gracious speech, less reactivity, and more positive virtues) then Evangelicals would likely pay serious attention and perhaps take the experiential evidence of practising the Prayer more seriously. From a slightly different perspective this is a pragmatic argument simply stating – “It must be good if it produces Christlikeness.” Seven research studies will now be explored, followed by a discussion of their results in light of Rohr’s model and the passages cited above.

Four Empirical Research Studies

An Eastern Orthodox Study

In an unpublished article based on his 1998 PhD dissertation Dr. George Stavros (Boston University) presents the results of an empirical study on the effects of the Jesus Prayer with 45 participants from Greek Orthodox congregations throughout the United States.⁵²⁵ These participants were instructed on how to practice the Jesus Prayer and told to do so for ten minutes per day over 30 days. Before and after the study they were tasked to complete several instruments which were used to measure its effects.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 213.

⁵²⁵ The study consisted of a control group of 43 and an experimental group of 45. See Stavros, *The Impact*.

⁵²⁶ The five instruments included: Faith Maturity Scale, Goal Instability and Superiority Scales, SCL 90-R, Affective Relation to God Scale. See Stavros, *The Impact*.

The study found that those who practiced the Prayer “experienced a positive change in their relationship with God”⁵²⁷ leading them to receive “sustaining emotional and spiritual resources.”⁵²⁸ The Prayer seemed to act as both a bridge and a conduit, bringing a perceived deeper connection to God allowing for a sense of abundance and stability. The Prayer also triggered the practitioners’ “relaxation response, short-circuiting the non-productive thinking which drives the fight-or-flight response.”⁵²⁹ As a preventative measure the Prayer can interrupt being carried down the ‘first way’ of fight and the ‘second way’ of flight, opening up “Jesus’ ‘third way’ of being, the Way of Love”⁵³⁰ wherein the potential for “radical, inclusive, self-giving love resides.”⁵³¹ Furthermore the study indicated “a change in cognitive processes”⁵³² with the Prayer acting as “as a therapeutic intervention”⁵³³ contributing “to an overall decrease in depression, anxiety, hostility, and interpersonal sensitivity.”⁵³⁴ In other words, practicing the Prayer ten minutes per day over 30 days helped the participants change their “primitive”⁵³⁵ thought patterns transforming both their inner and outer lives while leading to the formation of the ‘good fruit’ described by Jesus in Matthew 5 to 7 (for example, “Do not worry about your life” in Matthew 5:25) and by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 (for example, “The fruit of the Spirit is... patience, kindness... gentleness”).

A Non-Conventional Roman Catholic Study

In 2017 Marta Rubinart, Albert Fornieles, and Joan Deus conducted an empirical study on the psychological impact of the Prayer among 10 non-conventional middle-aged Catholics in Spain.⁵³⁶ These participants were instructed to practice the Prayer for two months everyday

⁵²⁷ The vertical subscale to measure this was “the degree to which a person emphasizes maintaining, honouring, or heeding the relationship between self and transcendent reality”. See Stavros, *The Impact*.

⁵²⁸ Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵²⁹ Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵³⁰ Oakes, *Practice the Pause*, 155.

⁵³¹ Oakes, *Practice the Pause*, 155.

⁵³² Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵³³ Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵³⁴ Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵³⁵ “Characterized by harsh, global, moralistic, and irreversible ideas about the self and the self’s place in the World.” See Stavros, *The Impact*

⁵³⁶ No control group. All participants were raised Catholic, none were attending Mass regularly, one was a long-term Zen-Buddhist meditator, one described themselves as not very religious or spiritual, another was a catechism instructor, the rest were linked with a religious group since adolescence. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 490.

choosing their own length of time per day.⁵³⁷ They attended four sessions over the two months where the Prayer was prayed (10-minutes at the first, 20-minutes at the second, and 25-minutes at the third and fourth) and measurements were taken. Two instruments⁵³⁸ were used to measure psychological symptoms and personality traits at three points in the study– at the start, end, and 5-months after. Another instrument⁵³⁹ was used to measure mood states before and after the 25-minute practices. Finally, adherence statistics were collected two-years post-study.

The study revealed that praying the Prayer for 25 minutes “may deeply reduce participants’ states of anxiety and fatigue”⁵⁴⁰ while moderately reducing their “states of depression, confusion, and anger.”⁵⁴¹ This resonates with Stavros’ findings while adding the further benefits of more physical energy along with greater mental clarity, both of which could lead to a better quality of life with less worry, a clearer mind and a more energised body. Furthermore, the study suggested that “a 2-month intervention with the Prayer may notably reduce symptoms of Interpersonal Sensitivity and Phobic Anxiety”⁵⁴² leading to a more stable inner life along with healthier interpersonal relationships. It was shown how the Prayer generated “modesty, humbleness, and responsibility among participants”⁵⁴³ likely due to the Prayer drawing focus to the practitioner’s own shortcomings combined with the attendant plea for mercy. Each of these outcomes are also related to the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22-23 especially ‘gentleness’. Thus, the researchers surmised that the Prayer could potentially be used as “a relevant practice among Catholics both for well-being and spiritual purposes.”⁵⁴⁴ This research therefore confirms the Prayer as a type of Orthodox therapy for the healing of the mind, body and soul.

⁵³⁷ They were instructed to entrain the words to their breathing while focusing attention in the heart. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 493.

⁵³⁸ The Revised Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90-R) and on personality traits with the Revised Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI-R). See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 488.

⁵³⁹ The Profile of Mood States (POMS). See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 488.

⁵⁴⁰ $p < .05$. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 499.

⁵⁴¹ $p < .1$. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 500.

⁵⁴² “Phobic Anxiety mainly captures symptoms related to agoraphobia and social anxiety and that Interpersonal Sensitivity captures symptoms of feeling uncomfortable and inhibited with other people.” See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 500.

⁵⁴³ Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 501.

⁵⁴⁴ Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 487.

The two-years post-study adherence statistic indicated “three out of nine (33.33% of the final sample) had totally implemented the Jesus Prayer in their daily spiritual practice.”⁵⁴⁵ This demonstrates how challenging long-term adherence to contemplative practices is. The researchers therefore suggested that “until the mind is sufficiently trained, praying in a group may be a good resource for sustaining a regular practice.”⁵⁴⁶ Thus, beginning a practice like the Prayer can actually lead one into community and relationship with others, as opposed to isolating them in a prison of narcissism.

Rubinart et. al. also presented the qualitative results of their study in a separate article⁵⁴⁷ highlighting some of the more personalised subjective experiences of participants. All agreed to feeling “a deep calm and bodily sensation of tranquillity while praying the Jesus Prayer”⁵⁴⁸ speaking to the mental and physical benefits of the psychosomatic practice of the Prayer namely as engendering inner peace and outer stillness. They also indicated spiritual benefits which included “feeling a deep connection with the Divine, having a ‘vital trust,’ and obtaining several new insights on the Gospels.”⁵⁴⁹ That is, a closer relationship with God (James 4:8 – “Draw near to God and [God] will draw near to you”), a stronger faith and a better relationship with the Bible, all of which are core Evangelical aspirations. Interestingly some participants expressed that the Prayer was an “excellent tool for coping with conflicts”⁵⁵⁰ reaffirming that instead of drawing people away from engaging with others, the Prayer draws them toward others, equipping them to engage more skilfully. From a therapeutic perspective it was reported that the Prayer “enhanced participant’s mindfulness skills and fostered a deeper connection with their unconscious mood states, cognitive processes, and memories.”⁵⁵¹ This resonates with Thomas Keating’s insight from his book on Centering Prayer (a comparable Christian practice to the Jesus Prayer) where he speaks of the practice leading to the “unloading of the unconscious.”⁵⁵² This ‘unloading’ releases tensions and traumas that have been encoded into the body since

⁵⁴⁵ Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 495.

⁵⁴⁶ Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 501.

⁵⁴⁷ “In a CI, a group of peers who share a strong interest in the same topic join efforts to research the topic together as both co-inquirers and co-subjects.” See Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 140.

⁵⁴⁸ Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 148.

⁵⁴⁹ Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 148.

⁵⁵⁰ Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 148.

⁵⁵¹ Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 148.

⁵⁵² Keating, *Open Mind*, 98.

childhood, resulting in inner healing and freedom. Finally, one participant, a long-term Zen practitioner, revealed that she felt “the supportive presence of the Divine, which protected her in a highly challenging moment in her life.”⁵⁵³ This small anecdote signifies an important distinction between Zen and the Prayer namely the encounter with the Divine Other. Overall, this research study supports the proposal that the practice of the Prayer may provide a wealth of physiological, psychological, and spiritual benefits which relate to Christian character and behaviour.

Two Protestant Studies on the Prayer

In 2018 Joshua J. Knabb and Veola V. Vazquez conducted an empirical study on the use of the Prayer in helping reduce daily stress among 44 students from Christian universities in the southern USA.⁵⁵⁴ They participated in a two-week intervention which involved formal practice of the Prayer every day with the help of a 10-minute audio file and informal practice of the Prayer whenever they had the time.⁵⁵⁵ Various instruments were used to measure the respondents on day 1 and day 14.⁵⁵⁶

Measuring ‘perceived stress’ the study showed “a significant score reduction (a medium effect)”⁵⁵⁷ and measuring ‘surrender to God’ it revealed “a significant score improvement (a medium effect).”⁵⁵⁸ From these two results the researchers conclude that “the Jesus Prayer can be beneficial in short-term usage to help Christians manage stress, evaluate stresses differently, and increase spiritual awareness”⁵⁵⁹ and help in “drawing them closer to God.”⁵⁶⁰ These results echo what has already been found through the previous studies, confirming that the expected results of

⁵⁵³ Rubinart, Moynihan, and Deus, “Using the Collaborative,” 149.

⁵⁵⁴ 42 in the control group and 44 in the experiment group. See Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 37.

⁵⁵⁵ Practiced as “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” See Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 46.

⁵⁵⁶ Daily Spiritual Experience Scale; Perceived Stress Scale; and Surrender Scale. See Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 45-46.

⁵⁵⁷ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 48.

⁵⁵⁸ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 48.

⁵⁵⁹ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 48.

⁵⁶⁰ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 48.

practising the Prayer includes body-benefits like lower stress and spiritual benefit like deeper communion with God.

The researchers then compared their study to a similar one measuring the effects of mindfulness on reducing stress finding that “asking participants to draw the mind toward Christ appears to be just as effective (if not more effective) as encouraging the use of mindful awareness.”⁵⁶¹ Not only does this suggest that the Prayer “could potentially be used as an adjunct to treatment for a clinical population managing stress”⁵⁶² it also reiterates the distinction between the Prayer and practices like mindfulness (which is a secular form of Buddhist meditation) with the key difference being that the Jesus Prayer leads the practitioner to fixing the mind on Christ (See Hebrews 12:2). Since the benefits of both are similar, it means that there is no need to abandon theological convictions in order to practice a form of meditation that relieves stress, a compelling invitation for Evangelicals.

These findings are particularly significant since the intervention group consisted of respondents from a “conservative Christian university, with the majority of participants indicating they identified with more conservative denominations, such as Baptist.”⁵⁶³ The fact that they found 86 willing participants (42 in the waiting group and 44 in the intervention group)⁵⁶⁴ from this group may itself be indicative of an openness toward the practice among Evangelicals. Moreover, Evangelicals would be particularly interested in the Prayer as a tool for helping participants draw closer to God since they strongly emphasise having a close personal relationship with Jesus.

A Protestant Study on Contemplation

Another empirical research study among Protestants was done in 2018 by Knabb and Vasquez and is worth considering even though it was not specifically on the Prayer. They investigated the use of a combination of cataphatic and apophatic Christian meditation practices in helping

⁵⁶¹ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 49.

⁵⁶² Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 49.

⁵⁶³ Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial,” 50.

⁵⁶⁴ The ‘waiting group’ was used as the control group and consisted of those who applied to participate in the trial but were not allocated to the ‘intervention-group’ and then participated in the measurements for comparison, and after the trial they were given the intervention.

reduce repetitive negative thinking among 36 students from Christian universities in the southern USA.⁵⁶⁵ These students attended weekly classes including instruction on Christian meditation for four weeks and a variety of instruments⁵⁶⁶ were used to measure the participants after the first week's lesson and prior to the fourth week's lesson. The weekly instruction included teaching on both cataphatic and apophatic meditation. The latter involved 10-minutes of returning to the phrase 'let go' when the participant became aware that they were thinking of "earthly things."⁵⁶⁷ This practice was followed daily in the fourth week of the study. The study found that participating in Christian meditation reduced negative repetitive thinking,⁵⁶⁸ resulting from increases in scores on humility and surrendering to God (medium), increases in scores on nonattachment, and decreases in scores on preservative thinking (large).⁵⁶⁹ Specifically, the idea of increasing "humble detachment"⁵⁷⁰ appears to help the practitioner "successfully pivot from an anxious, distracted inner focus to surrendering to God, moment-by-moment."⁵⁷¹ Thus, the authors suggest that "Christian meditation may hold promise as a daily practice among Christians for the prevention of emotional disorders."⁵⁷² Indeed, Kyriacos C. Markides states this in an article on the healing spirituality of Eastern Orthodoxy: "The purpose of this practice is to minimize the creation of negative thought-forms and replace them with the memory of God as a vehicle for re-capturing the paradisiacal stage—which can be attained, by the way, in one's present life."⁵⁷³ This research shows that the Prayer is achieving its purpose.

A Literature Study

The fifth research study is a literature study Veola E. Vazquez and Gregory Roy Jensen survey a spectrum of "current literature addressing the benefits of religious contemplation and

⁵⁶⁵ A control group of 35 and an experimental group of 36. See Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 34.

⁵⁶⁶ Experiences of Humility Scale; Providence Scale; Surrender Scale; Non-Attachment Scale-7; Preservative Thinking Questionnaire; Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21; God Adjective Test List. See Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 42-44.

⁵⁶⁷ Somewhat like the Jesus Prayer, this process is based on *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the 14th century mystical classic written by an unknown author. See Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 37-38.

⁵⁶⁸ Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 47.

⁵⁶⁹ Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 35.

⁵⁷⁰ Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 47.

⁵⁷¹ Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 47.

⁵⁷² Knabb et al., "Christian Meditation," 35.

⁵⁷³ Kyriacos C. Markides, "The Healing Spirituality of Eastern Orthodoxy: A Personal Journey of Discovery," *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 8, no. 6 (2017): 109, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8060109>.

meditation”⁵⁷⁴ concluding with three hypothesis about the benefits of practicing the Prayer. Firstly, they “predict that practicing the prayer may not only influence greater forgiveness toward others but also toward the self.”⁵⁷⁵ This outcomxee is thought to be the result of focusing on ‘mercy’ and God’s willingness to forgive. It is suggested that this will result in less shame, guilt and condemnation, and more compassion toward self and others, which is thought to reduce stress and negative affectivity.⁵⁷⁶ Based on the results from the empirical studies above, this hypothesis can be confirmed. For example, Rubinart et al’s study indicated the Prayer fosters “modesty, humbleness, and responsibility”⁵⁷⁷ each of which relate to being more forgiving.

Then they “hypothesize that this deep peace may be linked to a greater ability to tolerate uncertainty.”⁵⁷⁸ The tranquillity that practitioners report in practicing the Prayer may be the reason for this benefit – it is surmised that one’s attention is redirected from stressful externalities onto the Divine which in turn is expected to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety often associated with unpredictable situations.⁵⁷⁹ In his book, “The Sin of Certainty”⁵⁸⁰ Pete Enns argues that a faith which depends on certainty is vulnerable because it “keeps the Creator captive to what we are able to comprehend”⁵⁸¹ which means that “all it takes to ruin faith is a better argument, and there’s always a better argument out there.”⁵⁸² If this is true, the Prayer can increase faith by making one more tolerant of uncertainty. This hypothesis can also be confirmed based on the empirical research studies considered previously. For example, Stavros’ finding that the Prayer triggers the “relaxation response, short-circuiting the non-productive thinking which drives the fight-or-flight response”⁵⁸³ meaning a person learns how to stay with an uncomfortable situation even if it involves uncertainty and risk.

⁵⁷⁴ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 70.

⁵⁷⁵ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁵⁷⁶ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁵⁷⁷ Rubinart, Forniels, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 501.

⁵⁷⁸ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁵⁷⁹ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁵⁸⁰ Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), Kindle ebook.

⁵⁸¹ Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*, 18.

⁵⁸² Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*, 22.

⁵⁸³ Stavros, *The Impact*.

Finally they suggest that the Prayer “may also benefit the user through the development of positive external or behavioral qualities.”⁵⁸⁴ The desire to pray the Prayer is thought to represent an initial desire for spiritual maturity and the actual practice of the Prayer is expected to produce spiritual growth. It is surmised that engaging in the Prayer will ultimately produce changed behaviour based on positive moral values, in turn reducing the depression and anxiety associated with negative habits. This hypothesis finds confirmation in the empirical studies as well with Rubinart et al’s study showing a large reduction in anxiety⁵⁸⁵ and a moderate reduction in depression.⁵⁸⁶ All the studies indicated changes of perception leading to changes of behaviour resulting in improvements in experiences.

In sum, these three hypotheses suggest that practicing the Prayer can help people become more merciful, more resilient, and more ethical – all basic aspects of a faithful Christian life (e.g. “Blessed are the merciful” in Matthew 5:7; “Blessed are the persecuted” in Matthew 5:10; and “Blessed are the peacemakers” in Matthew 5:9).

A Neuroscience Study

The sixth research study is a medical study from 2009. Andrew Newberg, a Neuroscientist, who is also a religious agnostic, has conducted brain scans on religious subjects while they practice their spiritual disciplines. Some of his conclusions show how spiritual practices such as contemplative prayer produce profound results.⁵⁸⁷

When done intensely over a long period of time, these exercises “enhance the neural functioning of the brain in ways that improve physical and emotional health.”⁵⁸⁸ Like an upgrade to the physical hardware of a computer, meditation can “permanently change the structure of those parts of the brain that control our moods, give rise to our conscious notions of self, and shape our sensory perceptions of the world.”⁵⁸⁹ In other words, a practice like the Prayer could help a

⁵⁸⁴ Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 71.

⁵⁸⁵ $p < .05$. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 499.

⁵⁸⁶ $p < .1$. See Rubinart, Fornieles, and Deus, “Psychological Impact,” 500.

⁵⁸⁷ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 6-7.

⁵⁸⁸ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 6.

⁵⁸⁹ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 7.

person stabilise their inner life while making them more self-aware and sensitive. Moreover, the part of the brain that “generates peacefulness, social awareness, and compassion for others” is strengthened, all of which are goals for sanctification and holiness in the Christian life namely inner-peace, other-centeredness, and compassion.

It is to be noted that this transformation is not only a change in thinking, but an actual change in brain structure. Newberg explains this is due to the neuroplasticity of the brain which he defines as “the ability of the human brain to structurally rearrange itself in response to a wide variety of positive and negative events.”⁵⁹⁰ Contemplation, as a positive event, can therefore be used to change the brain’s physical structure resulting in new habitual ways of thinking, producing, in turn, healthier ways of living. This is of particular interest to Christians because Jesus’ first word in the Gospel according to Mark is “repent” (Mark 1:15) which, in transliterated Greek, is the word *metanoia*, literally meaning to ‘change your mind.’ Instead of ‘repent’ merely meaning to ‘feel bad and try harder’ it means to actually perceive the whole of reality differently.⁵⁹¹ This is not a simple matter of trying to change the mind through thinking as if one could think their way to a new way of thinking using their old way of thinking, which is unlikely.⁵⁹² Rather it is a matter of changing the mind through, for example, contemplative practice which creates an apophatic space which transcends thought itself, so that a whole new way of perceiving can be constructed from the ground up, as it were.⁵⁹³ Thus, Newberg’s suggestion that contemplative prayer literally changes a person’s mind on the physical level leading to a change on the psychological level ought to be of special interest to Evangelicals.

A person can participate in a practice like the Jesus Prayer to literally renovate their brains on a physical level, leading to a deep and lasting change of perception. Newberg explicitly states this, writing that contemplation “can be used to enhance cognition, communication, and creativity, and over time can even change our neurological perception of reality itself.”⁵⁹⁴ This explains why the previously surveyed empirical studies report their various findings such as reduced

⁵⁹⁰ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 14.

⁵⁹¹ See Oakes, *Practice the Pause*, 21.

⁵⁹² “No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused it in the first place.” Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San-Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle ebook, 10.

⁵⁹³ See Oakes, *Practice the Pause*, 26.

⁵⁹⁴ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 7.

negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. This is the case because meditation “strengthens a unique neural circuit that specifically enhances social awareness and empathy while subduing destructive feelings and emotions.”⁵⁹⁵

One of the spiritual practices that Newberg recommends is a form of the Prayer⁵⁹⁶ involving the repetition of ‘Lord, have mercy’ according to a typical psychophysical technique (sit, eyes closed, repeat the words in time with your breathing, etc.). He specifically places this practice in the category of relaxation-response suggesting that after practising for a few weeks, one will experience “significant shifts in [their] awareness and behaviour. [They’ll] feel calmer, less anxious, and more receptive”⁵⁹⁷ and perhaps even “lose some of [their] desire to smoke, drink, or overeat.”⁵⁹⁸ Newberg’s findings should cause all Christians to pay close attention, especially those who desire to undergo true ‘metanoia’ per Jesus’ invitation.

A Case Study

The seventh and final research study is a case study. Euiwan Cho at Fuller Theological Seminary wrote an article in 2020 on religious consumerism and its consequent burnout among Korean Protestants who have a resulting rise in interest in “Apophatic and Desert Spirituality.”⁵⁹⁹ While his article focuses on Korean Protestants, it seems possible to extrapolate the findings to Western expressions of Protestantism since Korean Protestantism has been heavily influenced by Western Protestantism.⁶⁰⁰

Cho notes that conservative Evangelical Protestants in Korea who generally do “not like to associate with the Catholics and Eastern Orthodox”⁶⁰¹ are showing an unprecedented interest in

⁵⁹⁵ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 14.

⁵⁹⁶ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 184.

⁵⁹⁷ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 185.

⁵⁹⁸ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 185.

⁵⁹⁹ Cho, “Resisting.”

⁶⁰⁰ Cho mentions that “Western prosperity theology influenced by Korean shamanistic culture has become more familiar to Korean Protestants and has become a useful theoretical device to cater to individual desires.” Cho, “Resisting,” 30.

⁶⁰¹ Cho, “Resisting,” 23.

“apophatic spirituality and desert asceticism”⁶⁰² (i.e. Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer). His evidence for this interest is the burgeoning number of books being “competitively published”⁶⁰³ on this topic which are specifically aimed at Protestants, as well as an uptake of the language and practice of contemplation among Protestant leaders combined with the growth of the same in Protestant seminary course offerings.⁶⁰⁴ This newfound interest is interpreted by Cho as part of a “resistance to liberate the restless and unsatisfied religious consumers familiar with cataphatic tradition.”⁶⁰⁵ He basis this observation on a study⁶⁰⁶ which explored reasons why people are leaving Korean Protestant churches concluding that “hyperattention to growth-oriented strategy, coercive authoritarianism, and hyperactivity without reflection”⁶⁰⁷ were the primary factors.

Korean Protestants have become “exhausted by the excess of positivity and the exploitation of self”⁶⁰⁸ which, research shows, leads to depression.⁶⁰⁹ Cho suggests that many Korean Protestants have bought into a secular mindset that manifests itself in “religious consumerism, prosperity theology, and Tongsung prayer.”⁶¹⁰ The latter concept is especially relevant here since it is one of the core spiritual practices among Korean Protestants and in terms of the cataphatic-apophatic spectrum, it is the precise opposite of the Prayer. Tongsung prayer is a “unique style of Korean prayer”⁶¹¹ meaning “cry out together loudly”⁶¹² which Cho recognises as a good and healthy spiritual practice. At the same time, he suggests the following danger with it being so prominent and with the overall tradition lacking in a complementary and balancing apophatic prayer practice: Tongsung prayer “habitually maximises individual desires in a society of excess positivity”⁶¹³ with the potential of being “a prayer containing only the one-sided passion, will, and desire of the person praying.”⁶¹⁴ This might be said of any cataphatic or charismatic prayer

⁶⁰² Cho, “Resisting,” 23.

⁶⁰³ Cho, “Resisting,” 23.

⁶⁰⁴ Cho, “Resisting,” 30-31.

⁶⁰⁵ Cho, “Resisting,” 23.

⁶⁰⁶ “Chae-Yong Chong, *Unchurched: How to Understand Canaan Believers* (Seoul: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 24.” See Cho, “Resisting,” 28.

⁶⁰⁷ Cho, “Resisting,” 29.

⁶⁰⁸ Cho, “Resisting,” 38.

⁶⁰⁹ The author demonstrates this by drawing on this research: “Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015)” See Cho, “Resisting,” 23-24.

⁶¹⁰ Cho, “Resisting,” 29.

⁶¹¹ Cho, “Resisting,” 29.

⁶¹² Cho, “Resisting,” 29.

⁶¹³ Cho, “Resisting,” 30.

⁶¹⁴ Cho, “Resisting,” 30.

which focuses on verbal requests and does not give space to silent receptive sitting in the presence of the Other. As a result of their “swirl of vigorous activity and anxious reactivity as... [] ... achievement-subject[s],”⁶¹⁵ some Korean Protestants are looking beyond their tradition to Eastern Orthodoxy for the kind of help which is lacking in their own Protestant tradition.

For Cho, apophatic spirituality offers Protestants a way of “humility,”⁶¹⁶ “attentive listening,”⁶¹⁷ and “self-emptying”⁶¹⁸ that can free them from the quick moving ‘positivity’ treadmill of increasing consumption/production which often springs from a determination to be in control which in turn leads to a way of being in the world that inevitably leads to exhaustion and depression. The Prayer, as an apophatic way of ‘decrease’ and ‘negation,’ is thus the counter to the cataphatic way of ‘increase’ and ‘production/consumption.’

Furthermore, for Cho, “desert spirituality” is the antidote to a “culture that tirelessly stimulates human desire and activity”⁶¹⁹ since it involves prayer not as “a medium to get something”⁶²⁰ but rather as “a goal for pure union with God.”⁶²¹ He specifically highlights the quest for “stability”⁶²² in the ascetic tradition which he interprets for spiritually today as an attempt at “correcting and regulating the passions and habits to not wander from place to place.”⁶²³ Hence, it is indeed the antithesis to prosperity theology and to the restlessness of religious consumerism which focuses on continual movement and expansion.

Cho’s case study of Korean Protestants suggests that apophatic and desert spirituality (i.e. Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer) as a ‘way of unknowing’ (apophatic) is not only for Protestants who are burnt out on the ‘way of knowing’ (cataphatic), but perhaps for all those who have not yet burnt out, as a preventative measure.

⁶¹⁵ Cho, “Resisting,” 28.

⁶¹⁶ Cho, “Resisting,” 32.

⁶¹⁷ Cho, “Resisting,” 32.

⁶¹⁸ Cho, “Resisting,” 32.

⁶¹⁹ Cho, “Resisting,” 33.

⁶²⁰ Cho, “Resisting,” 35.

⁶²¹ Cho, “Resisting,” 35.

⁶²² Cho, “Resisting,” 36.

⁶²³ Cho, “Resisting,” 36.

Research Studies Discussion

The above research studies have demonstrated that the Prayer has positive impacts with a variety of benefits for practitioners in mind, body, and spirit. Examples of psychological benefits abound such as how the Prayer helps reduce repetitive negative thinking while increasing a person's ability to tolerate uncertainty. Similarly, there are many physiological benefits to practising the Prayer including how it triggers the relaxation response resulting in a deep sense of bodily calm. The spiritual benefits are equally manifold with the primary one being a sense of closeness with God, which denotes the ultimate goal of the Christian life – union with the Divine. It is not only the spiritual benefits that should be thought of as contributing to the life of faith, but the psychological and physiological ones as well. The life of faith is meant to be wholistic, incorporating body, mind, and spirit into a healthy union. This section briefly considers this idea.

Sjögren asserts that in the West, and especially the Protestant West, the function of the human body has been “overlooked”⁶²⁴ due to what he sees as the Western tendency to be fundamentally dualistic, separating things like the spiritual and physical, faith and works, the internal and external – which are all grounded in the “unbiblical separation of body and soul.”⁶²⁵ To counter this dualistic oversight he points out that in both the Eastern Tradition and in Biblical thought the body and the soul are not treated as separate entities but rather as an “indissoluble unity.”⁶²⁶ The human being is a psychosomatic-spiritual unity who, through the exercise of faith in praying the Prayer, experiences a range of psycho-somatic-spiritual benefits all of which relate to living faithfully in accordance with the Scriptures and tradition. To illustrate, the Apostle Paul tells his readers to “... present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God... which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). Presenting the body is an act of spiritual worship, which can also be translated as “reasonable service” (NET). What is done with the body matters just as what is done with the mind matters (Colossians 3:2 – “...set your minds on things that are above...”). As the various results were reflected on in the preceding section, whether they related to the body, mind, or spirit, they should all be treated as relating to the life of faith. Put another way, the psychological

⁶²⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 45.

⁶²⁵ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 41-42.

⁶²⁶ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 42.

and physiological benefits are no less significant than the spiritual benefits in relation to the religious life because the life of faith is a call to psycho-somatic-spiritual wholeness.

If the three categories are then considered together as the combined experience of a practitioner then they paint a picture of a person experiencing remarkable unitive wholeness with God, within themselves, and with others. This unitive state of being reflects the Great Commandment from Matthew 22:37-39: "... love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... love your neighbour as yourself." Hence, a wholistic love for God, self, and others is the greatest commandment and the Prayer, as empirically demonstrated above, fosters living that commandment out. For example, drawing on the above results, a person practising the Prayer experiences a deep connection with and surrender toward God (relating to the command 'love God'), greater responsibility toward others including less hostility, irritability/interpersonal sensitivity, and selfishness/preservative thinking (relating to the command 'love your neighbour'), and a deep connection with oneself accompanied by an inner peace with lower anxiety and depression, and a general restfulness with lower stress (relating to the words 'as you love yourself'). This is a sampling of a possible combination of a few results from the research studies. If all the psychological, spiritual, and physical benefits were combined, then so much more would be the experience of unitive inner and outer wholeness for the practitioner. They would encounter, as American Contemporary Catholic Musician John Michael Talbot writes, a fulfilment of the "the legitimate human need for meditative and contemplative prayer that brings health on the spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical levels of life."⁶²⁷

These results strongly suggest that a positive answer can be supplied to the four questions posed earlier, namely that the Prayer supports an ethical/other-focus (as per, for example, the above discussion on the Great Commandment), is relevant to everyday life (especially in interrupting negative thinking, lowering stress and offering rest), is distinct from non-Christian Eastern religious practices (noted in the I-Thou connection with the Divine Other especially evidenced through the Zen practitioner's feedback), and supports communal cataphatic Christian

⁶²⁷ John Michael Talbot, *The Jesus Prayer: A Cry for Mercy, A Path of Renewal* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 16.

participation (especially through increased responsibility toward others). With the above results in mind and drawing on other resources for further insight, these four areas will now be addressed in further depth especially in relation to the Evangelicals aversion towards contemplative practice consisting of these objections: it fosters selfishness, is impractical, is not ‘Christian’/biblical, and creates mavericks. These assertions will be explored and reflected on from the perspective of, among other things: experience, tradition, and Scripture.

Responding to Four Key Evangelical Concerns

The Prayer as an Ethical Practice

The first key Evangelical concern is the question of whether the Prayer is ethical/other-focused. Matthewes-Green addresses this question arguing that instead of the practice being “self-centered”⁶²⁸ and unrelated to “social action”⁶²⁹ the opposite is true, insisting that the Prayer “lifts you into the heart of God where you see all of creation from [God’s] eyes.”⁶³⁰ An anticipated result of this is that one is able to, from God’s heart-perspective, “perceive the real sorrows in the lives of other humans beings”⁶³¹ which fosters “compassion.”⁶³²

Sjögren, writing 35 years earlier, makes the same point similarly stating that the Prayer produces “contact with the heart of God”⁶³³ and is therefore “a prayer of social concern”⁶³⁴ because God is concerned for the welfare of people. Being immersed in the heart of God who, according to the Bible, is love⁶³⁵ and light,⁶³⁶ the Prayer therefore makes the practitioners “light-bearers, Christ-bearers”⁶³⁷ in that it “frees [them] from thinking about [them]selves”⁶³⁸ so that they can attend to others, bringing God’s love and light to them. Sjögren further suggests that sheer willpower will

⁶²⁸ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 162.

⁶²⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 162.

⁶³⁰ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 162.

⁶³¹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 162.

⁶³² Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 162.

⁶³³ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 8.

⁶³⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 77.

⁶³⁵ 1 John 4:8.

⁶³⁶ 1 John 1:5.

⁶³⁷ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 77.

⁶³⁸ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 77.

not achieve a life that is a profound blessing to others, but rather one needs to become a conduit of God's love "not by trying to imitate Christ, but by being transparent for him."⁶³⁹ He believes that the Prayer fosters this transparency since it "helps [the practitioner] to be watchful and open for Christ's presence in the heart of the other person, not just [their] own."⁶⁴⁰ So, as Christ is constantly called on, connected to and made present, the practitioner is able to live and act in the world in ways which are animated by the Divine ethic. Sjögren illustrates this by listing some real life situations in which the Prayer can be employed to help a person change how they might respond to difficult circumstances with equanimity including missing your train or bus, awaiting a difficult meeting with your boss, encountering the negativity of an angry person, coming home exhausted from a hard day's work, encountering a situation which calls for gratitude.⁶⁴¹ In all these kinds of situations one can use the Prayer to foster a change of mind (repentance) that leads to what the aforementioned empirical studies revealed, including lowered stress, tiredness and fear.

Ware, weighing in on the same issue, since it is a constant accusation that contemplative prayer is "egotistic and self-centred,"⁶⁴² shares an aphorism from Saint Seraphim of Sarov: "Acquire inner peace, and thousands around you will find salvation."⁶⁴³ If one is depressed, anxious, tired, and stressed (not having inner peace), it is far harder to be focused on the needs of others and be compassionate enough to do something about their struggles. But with inner peace, it becomes natural to minister to the needs of others. Ware goes on to suggest that the Prayer "makes our contemplation active, and our action contemplative"⁶⁴⁴ since praying it for 10 to 15 minutes a day helps one to be more available to others and it makes one's service to others come from depths that would not be available otherwise.⁶⁴⁵ It provides mental, physical, and spiritual reservoirs of resources which can be drawn on to serve the needs of others in a way that is not superficial and easily exhausted.

⁶³⁹ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 76.

⁶⁴⁰ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 76.

⁶⁴¹ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 73-74.

⁶⁴² Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 47.

⁶⁴³ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 47.

⁶⁴⁴ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 47.

⁶⁴⁵ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 47.

These three authors (Matthewes-Green, Sjögren and Ware) make it clear that if the Prayer does not produce ethical selfless service of others, then something has gone wrong in the practice of it, something that needs to be corrected, which is why the tradition requires one to have a spiritual mother or father as a guide. The fact that the Prayer cannot be practiced in isolation from such a mentor is itself an indication that the Prayer does not lead to isolation, but rather to an other-focus even in the way it is practised.

Furthermore, not only does the prayer produce an ethical other focus but it also produces an ethical personal life. The beginning of the Eastern Orthodox journey is labelled as ‘Purification’ which necessitates a renunciation of all that is unethical and anything that inhibits or obstructs ethical behaviour.⁶⁴⁶ This is the purification of the heart referred to in Matthew 5:8 where Jesus is reported to have said “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” This verse represents the whole journey of Hesychasm from start to finish – purification leading to illumination resulting in divinisation. This “Renovation of the Heart”⁶⁴⁷ is an activity humans participate in, a participation that is not a matter of works-based salvation, but rather a participation in a process of incremental growth. Dallas Willard explains that “God has provided a methodical path of recovery”⁶⁴⁸ such that “Grace does not rule out method, or method grace”⁶⁴⁹ but rather “Grace thrives on method and method on grace.”⁶⁵⁰ In this sense the Prayer is that path, that method that leads to a changed and changing heart which in turn leads to changed and changing “outlook, choices, and actions.”⁶⁵¹ In Matthew 6:6, Jesus’ instruction to, “go into your room and shut the door” is an invitation to enter the space within us to be renovated, that is to go “into the chamber of [one’s] heart, and there shut out all evil thoughts”⁶⁵² by praying the Prayer. Thus, the Prayer is one way that the heart is unceasingly renovated through unceasing prayer to

⁶⁴⁶ “In order to succeed in it, self-renunciation is necessary; the abandonment of worldly cares is necessary—not to mention diversions, amusements, and pleasures; it is necessary to live according to the commandments of the Gospel; necessary too is purity of mind and heart by which alone the spiritual, holy and mystical teaching of the Spirit can be discerned and understood according to the degree of one’s purification.” Brianchaninov, *On The Jesus Prayer*, 73.

⁶⁴⁷ This phrase is the title of a book by Dallas Willard in which he writes, “The greatest need you and I have – the greatest need of collection humanity – is *renovation of our hearts*. That spiritual place within us from which outlook, choices, and actions come has been formed by a world away from God. Now it must be transformed.” Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021), 6.

⁶⁴⁸ Willard, *Renovation*, 18.

⁶⁴⁹ Willard, *Renovation*, 18.

⁶⁵⁰ Willard, *Renovation*, 18.

⁶⁵¹ Willard, *Renovation*, 6.

⁶⁵² Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 22.

be a temple in which God can comfortably dwell (cf. Ps. 11:4) – “a little shrine, a local church, a personal sanctuary.”⁶⁵³ This leads to the eye of the soul (the *nous*) dwelling in the centre of the human (the heart) and becoming a place that is hospitable to God who is holy, who through indwelling further cultivates personal holiness – “[Christ] cleanses the temple”⁶⁵⁴ of “unruly thoughts and desires”⁶⁵⁵ i.e. purifying the heart so that the practitioner can become “translucent, serving as a lantern for Christ’s light.”⁶⁵⁶

In sum, not only is the practitioner lifted into the heart of God which increases compassion for others, but God is also drawn down into the heart of the person which fosters holiness. This heart-to-heart with God eliminates evil, creates good, and all the while one exists in increasingly relational inner and outer peace with God, self, and others.

It is no surprise then that the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos calls *Hesychia* a “fruiting stillness”⁶⁵⁷ since it “renews”⁶⁵⁸ (renovates) both the inner being of the practitioner and it “unites”⁶⁵⁹ them with God, such that “society is set right as well.”⁶⁶⁰ The Prayer is therefore not an invitation to seclusion, selfishness and inaction, but is rather a pathway toward personal spiritual growth and public service of others. Christine Valters Paintner, in her book ‘Breath Prayer’ sums it up well:

Ultimately our contemplative practice leads us into deeper love with the world and into compassionate action on behalf of other beings. This is how we know we are having a genuine encounter with the holy—it leads us away from the illusion of separateness and toward a deeper care for humanity and creation. The contemplative vision sees that we are all bound together in a communion of love.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵³ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 22.

⁶⁵⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 38.

⁶⁵⁵ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 38.

⁶⁵⁶ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 125.

⁶⁵⁷ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 302.

⁶⁵⁸ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 302.

⁶⁵⁹ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 302.

⁶⁶⁰ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 302.

⁶⁶¹ Christine Valters Paintner, *Breath Prayer - An Ancient Practice for an Everyday Sacred* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 13.

The Prayer as a Sustaining Practice

The second key Evangelical concern is whether the Prayer is suited to everyday life in a busy world. To be still, to enter *hesychia* is both God's uncompromising command but it is also a benevolent invitation addressed to a stressed, exhausted and depressed humanity (See Psalm 46:10). The Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Heirotheos writes of what he perceives as a pervasive "anti-hesychasm"⁶⁶² in the world today which views *hesychia* as "an antiquated method, as a life of inactivity, and not suited to our day, which is an age of action."⁶⁶³ Blaming the "hedonistic,"⁶⁶⁴ and "self-gratifying"⁶⁶⁵ impulse of this cultural moment he sees hope on the horizon as "many young people disenchanted with the contemporary climate of struggle and anguish, of action without stillness and mission without silence"⁶⁶⁶ are "turning more towards the hesychastic life"⁶⁶⁷ and "being nourished by it."⁶⁶⁸ Cho's research among Korean Protestants is strong evidence that this is happening.

Sjögren suggests that adopting the Prayer is "no big step"⁶⁶⁹ for Evangelicals because it is "singularly suited to the busy people of our workaday world"⁶⁷⁰ due to its "remarkable combination of brevity and fullness."⁶⁷¹ In its brevity it is always practical and easily accessible in all places. In its fullness, it a "veritable school of prayer"⁶⁷² since it "deepens spirituality, furthers devotion of every kind, nurtures fellowship with Christ,"⁶⁷³ all the while animating the practical outworking of Christian faith in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.⁶⁷⁴ Considering the Evangelicals' emphasis on having a vibrant daily relationship with the living Jesus the Prayer is not only an apt addition to their spiritual toolkit, but perhaps a primary element of it. It

⁶⁶² Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 307.

⁶⁶³ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 307.

⁶⁶⁴ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 307.

⁶⁶⁵ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 307.

⁶⁶⁶ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 311.

⁶⁶⁷ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 311.

⁶⁶⁸ Nafpaktos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, 311.

⁶⁶⁹ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

⁶⁷⁰ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

⁶⁷¹ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 5.

⁶⁷² Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

⁶⁷³ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

⁶⁷⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 6.

“enables [the practitioner] to maintain contact with Christ”⁶⁷⁵ such that saying the Name “serves as a bridge”⁶⁷⁶ between the practitioner and Jesus. Thus, in the busyness of life, the Prayer can be a helpful ‘tool’ indeed. The Apostle Paul’s instruction to “take every thought captive” (2 Corinthians 10:5) and to think on whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8) become achievable through unceasing prayer. This is the essence of a *neptic* (watchful) faith which is to live in constant attentiveness and awareness from the vantage point of faith, having constant connection with the Divine and experiencing fresh wisdom and ingoing assurance as a result. Matthewes-Green testifies to this reality in her own life writing that the “act of breaking up my routine and turning toward God in the midst of busy preoccupation was itself a valuable aid”⁶⁷⁷ resulting in “the biggest advance in her prayer life.”⁶⁷⁸

Rubinart et. al.’s finding that the Prayer resulted in a reduction of fatigue and confusion strongly supports that the Prayer is useful for busy, tired and distracted people. It suggests that pausing to say the Prayer for 25 minutes along with interspersing it in moment throughout the day may paradoxically result in greater and more meaningful productivity, not less. One might think of it as a tool to help achieve what Paul instructs in Galatians 6:9: “Let us not grow weary in doing what is right.” Furthermore, as a mechanism to improve concentration and reduce stress it is perfectly suited for a frenetic work-a-day world where people are constantly bombarded with information, especially now with the pervasive presence of social media, the 24-hour news feed, highly individualised advertising, and the rest of life’s inane distractions. Considering this from another perspective, Ware suggests that “if our words and actions do not come out of the stillness of prayer, they turn out to be superficial and impotent. But if they have their source in stillness, they can prove words and actions of fire and healing.”⁶⁷⁹ This means that claiming to be too busy to pray results in an empty and ineffective busyness, but using the Prayer constantly in the busyness results in a full and effectual busyness, a busyness that is a rich blessing for self and others, producing more good rather than less eventhough one spends less time doing and more time praying. Cho’s research seems to support this showing that busyness without *hesychia* leads

⁶⁷⁵ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 72.

⁶⁷⁶ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 72.

⁶⁷⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 55.

⁶⁷⁸ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 55.

⁶⁷⁹ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 48.

not to productivity with joy, but rather to burnout with depression. Moreover those living in that state eventually seek out help and find it in the very place that they rejected during the time that led to the breakdown.

There is a story in the writings of the Desert Fathers about a monk named Lucius who asked two other visiting monks what work they did for a living.⁶⁸⁰ Their response was they did not work due to being so focused on praying without ceasing. Lucius, scandalised by this, reacted by pointing out their inherent failure suggesting they cease praying to eat and sleep. In other words, they were using unceasing prayer as an excuse not to work, but not as an excuse to stop eating and sleeping! Anticipating the alternative of using work as an excuse not to prayer, Lucius says, “I sit down with a few palm leaves, and plait them, and say, ‘Have mercy upon me, O God...’”⁶⁸¹ In other words, Lucius sees work not as an impediment to practice unceasing prayer, but as an opportunity to do so. One need not choose between work and unceasing prayer, but, according to Lucius, should see them as mutually inclusive activities. Thus, whether one is a monastic or a businessperson, they are invited to participate in unceasing prayer, while at the same time being productive members of the society in which they live.

As with the previous section, Paintner will be given the last word in this section as well, with the emphasis on having a daily moment-by-moment portable sabbath⁶⁸²:

In making time for this ancient practice, we affirm again and again the goodness of rest. We celebrate the divine invitation to savor our lives and create spaciousness. We help to create a world that is not always anxious and obsessed with worry about the future. In saying no for a little while to the busyness, we say yes to what delights and restores us.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸⁰ Ward, Benedicta, ed, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, translated by Benedicta Ward, (England: Penguin Books, 2003), 131-132.

⁶⁸¹ Ward, *The Desert Fathers*, 132.

⁶⁸² Ex. 20:8 says, “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy” and Heb. 4:9-11 states, “A sabbath rest still remains for the people of God... those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labours... Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest.” This seems to indicate that the sabbath went from being a once-a-week observance to an unceasing observance pervading all of life.

⁶⁸³ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 161-62.

The Prayer as a Christian Practice

The third key Evangelical concern is whether the Prayer is distinguishable from non-Christian Eastern practices such as Hindu or Buddhist forms of meditation. It has been shown that Evangelicals are not opposed to reciting the Jesus Prayer occasionally as a personal expression of faith and repentance in the context of contemplation broadly defined. What they are likely to be wary about is, for example, a once or twice-a-day sitting in stillness and silence by themselves, for 20-minutes with their eyes-closed while entraining ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ to the inbreath and ‘have mercy on me’ to the outbreath, and focusing attention on the location of the physical heart all the while breathing Christ into the heart, and breathing the mind down into the heart, and doing this day-in-day-out for the rest of their lives. Certainly, no one starts here but the idea of building up to such a practice is what is in question here.

In 2015 Eiji Hisamatsu and Ramesh Pattni wrote an article comparing Aṣṭāṅga Yoga and the Jesus Prayer.⁶⁸⁴ They detail several similarities and some important differences between the two, revealing that overall similarity is seen at the superficial level but when looking deeper “the more differentiation is observed in the details of the practices.”⁶⁸⁵ Although both traditions encourage certain psychophysical ‘methods’ involving ascetic practice, certain posture, breath control, focusing the attention, repeating an invocation, and mystical experience, there are differences even in the psychophysical details.⁶⁸⁶ These need not be discussed here since they are debatable depending on which Hesychastic psychophysical technique one is using – as previously seen the Prayer’s psychophysical techniques are fairly flexible and can accommodate different people in a variety of situations. For example, Hisamatsu and Pattni highlight the difference in posture with Yoga having a relaxed posture whereas Hesychasts having a painful posture,⁶⁸⁷ however this is not necessary to explore in depth because the Hesychast posture need not be painful unless one is following the precise practice of the 14th century Hesychasts on Mount Athos, which is not prescribed among authoritative modern proponents such as Matthewes-Green and Ware.

⁶⁸⁴ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga.”

⁶⁸⁵ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 62.

⁶⁸⁶ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 70.

⁶⁸⁷ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 70.

Of greater significance are the fundamental differences which are deeper, existing on the level of “theological principles.”⁶⁸⁸ In Hesychasm the invocation represents a “personified God”⁶⁸⁹ whereas in Aṣṭāṅga Yoga the invocation represents a “non-personified image of... pure consciousness.”⁶⁹⁰ The experience in Hesychasm (*theoria*) signifies that “the vision of God through the vision of the state of the *nous* coming in its own light by its introduction into the heart,”⁶⁹¹ is dependent on God’s grace, whereas in Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, the experience is called “kaivalya,”⁶⁹² which consists of “aloneness of the primordial consciousness,”⁶⁹³ and it is achieved through “human effort and ability.”⁶⁹⁴ Accordingly, *theoria* involves encountering the divine Other in “one’s very inner world”⁶⁹⁵ whereas Kaivalya is when one “transcends material nature”⁶⁹⁶ entirely. Thus, Hesychasm is distinct in its emphasises on relationship with God, the necessity of God’s grace and an encounter within the material creation that includes the body and is not only and experience of pure consciousness. Considered theologically, Hesychasm is not just a form of Christian Yoga. Neither is it a Christian form of Zen which is well illustrated in the long-term Zen practitioners feedback in Rubinart et al’s research – they experienced a deep connection with the divine Other through the Jesus which was an encounter that was absent from their Zen practice. This echoes the first difference between Hesychasm and Yoga mentioned above, namely that there is an ‘I-Thou’ experience in Hesychasm which differs from the ‘I’ experience in Zen and Yoga. To the untrained eye, Hesychasm may appear very similar to Zen and Yoga, but to the discerning eye, they are very different, especially from a theological perspective which is a perspective close to the heart of Evangelicals.

Matthewes-Green concurs with this assessment highlighting key differences between Hesychast and Hindu practice.⁶⁹⁷ In Yoga, body energy ascends to the head, whereas in Hesychasm the *nous* descends to the heart. Practising Yoga, one manipulates body energy to achieve a mystical

⁶⁸⁸ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 72.

⁶⁸⁹ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹⁰ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹¹ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹² Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹³ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 56.

⁶⁹⁴ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹⁵ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹⁶ Hisamatsu and Pattni, “Yoga,” 71.

⁶⁹⁷ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 119.

experience, whereas in Hesychasm one relationally focuses on the person of Jesus Christ. Hence, Yoga encourages one to focus on any part of the body, whereas in Hesychasm it is suggested by many that one not focus below the heart as it may stir up unhelpful passions. Matthewes-Green then moves to make a comparison with Buddhist practice noting that while both may produce pleasant bodily experiences through breath control, the Hesychast aim differs in that the practitioner is wanting to be “led into further communion with God”⁶⁹⁸ and not merely seeking the attainment of “tranquillity and inner silence,”⁶⁹⁹ which is nevertheless usually a benefit of hesychasm, but not the ultimate goal. Sofia Carozza in an article critiquing the use of Buddhist-based secular mindfulness in Catholic schools, while arguing for the adoption of Catholic and/or Eastern Orthodox contemplative prayer sums it up well: Contemplative “prayer reveals the silence of the present moment not as emptiness but as the manifestation of the presence of God”⁷⁰⁰ and therein joy is found as the practitioner is united with the ‘Thou.’

Commenting on the depths of the I-Thou union, Thomas Merton writes that “the interior [person] dies and rises so completely united to God that the two are one and there remains no division between them except the metaphysical distinction of natures.”⁷⁰¹ The experience of union in Hesychasm is so profound that the distinction between God and the practitioner can seem blurred to the inexperienced, and yet the testimony of the tradition is sincere in maintaining what Merton refers to above as the ‘metaphysical distinction of natures.’ As discussed in chapter 1, during the Hesychast debates in 14th century Byzantium the distinction between ‘energy’ and ‘essence’ was introduced by Palamas as a way of preserving this metaphysical distinction such that the Eastern theologians could say that unification is with God’s energy but not with God’s essence. While theologians may argue over whether this distinction is correct or helpful, the point in mentioning it is simply to highlight that a core concern for Palamas was that the ‘metaphysical distinction of natures’ between God and humanity is preserved, and this is what allowed it to be accepted into Eastern Orthodoxy. Humans are indeed divinised, but they do not become God in God’s essence, but rather they are, to use a Protestant term glorified. This means that Evangelicals are not being

⁶⁹⁸ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 123.

⁶⁹⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 123-24.

⁷⁰⁰ Sofia Carozza, “Catholic Schools and the Values of Mindfulness,” *Church Life Journal* (3 February 2022 2022), accessed 28 May 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/mindfulness-is-not-value-free/>.

⁷⁰¹ Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H Shannon (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 100.

asked to adopt a non-Christian psychophysical practice but rather to adopt a thoroughly Christian psychophysical practice. It is a transfer from within the Christian family from the Eastern Orthodox to the Evangelical Protestants, not from Hinduism or Buddhism.

As Sjögren pointed out, Western Christians often have a more Neoplatonic view of the body and soul as two separate things (a duality) over and against an Eastern Christian view of the body and soul as one unitive entity (a nonduality). This seems to be the key issue needing to be resolved to help Evangelicals be more open to the Hesychastic embodied practice of the Prayer. To begin to resolve this, Sjögren makes this helpful suggestion – linking the Prayer with the functions of the body is a way to “dispose the whole of [one’s] being, body and soul, to prayer,”⁷⁰² which makes the Prayer as “important as... breathing and heartbeats”⁷⁰³ thus providing the Prayer with “room of its own”⁷⁰⁴ along with the functions of the body. To illustrate this, he comments on the monks on Mount Athos explaining that they “draw in the body and its muscles into a spiritual happening”⁷⁰⁵ by praying the Prayer. This means that the Prayer becomes so connected to a practitioner’s bodily functions and cognitive processes that it becomes part of who they are – their breath becomes prayer, their heartbeats become prayer, their thought becomes prayer, and this leads to the embodied unceasing “wordless prayer, being silent before God”⁷⁰⁶ spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 which is not merely, as Sjögren points out, a call to regular and routine prayer, but a call to becoming an embodied living prayer.

With the body and mind being a unity, it follows that what is done with the body affects the mind and similarly, what is done with the mind affects the body. Embodying prayer can therefore help the mind and the body stay connected to one another in helpful ways. For example, Paintner writes that the “softening of the body helps the mind and the spirit to soften as well.”⁷⁰⁷ This means that when “we make efforts to breathe and stay connected to our bodies, we are much less likely to get overwhelmed.”⁷⁰⁸ The Jesus Prayer literally helps a person drop their minds into

⁷⁰² Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 44.

⁷⁰³ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 44.

⁷⁰⁴ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 44.

⁷⁰⁵ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 45.

⁷⁰⁶ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 41.

⁷⁰⁷ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 125.

⁷⁰⁸ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 88.

their bodies and experience reality from a new perspective.⁷⁰⁹ Just as contemplation can reshape the physical brain, embodying-prayer can help the body “to surrender anything it is holding onto”⁷¹⁰ and to “incorporate what it has experienced”⁷¹¹ or put more simply – to let go of the bad (e.g. physical tension) and to take hold of the good (e.g. physical calm). This was evident in the empirical studies which showed that the Jesus Prayer can help a person escape the spiral of negative thinking and thereby de-escalate the body’s encoded fight-or-flight response. The body and mind work together to achieve this healthy outcome. The human being is not a soul trapped in a body but a psychosomatic unity in which the body looks after the soul as much as the soul looks after the body. If one recruits the body (and the senses) into the practice of the Prayer then the body itself can “carry the prayer”⁷¹² along with the mind, so that the body becomes an ally in the quest for *hesychia*, instead of being treated as something to escape from.

This is not a step too far for Evangelicals since they already practice a type of psychophysical technique in prayer which varies greatly but generally involves some bodily postures. For example, the Evangelical outreach organisation Cru, in their basic instructions for Christian prayer, suggest that “you can bow, kneel, stand or walk around when you pray. God will hear you whatever you do, so choose a position that helps you focus. Kneeling or bowing your head are great ways to focus your body and mind on God. It’s a symbolic way to demonstrate that you respect His authority.”⁷¹³ This speaks of an existing openness to embodiment in prayer, which is evident too in Evangelical church services where, even in the most conservative congregations, people will close their eyes, bow their heads, and stand or sit upright when in prayer.

One last related issue needing attention here is the idea of repeating what appears to be the equivalent of a Hindu mantra. Firstly, the issue of repetition has already been dealt with in chapter 1 by distinguishing between helpful heartfelt repetition and vain repetition. The latter is expressly forbidden by Jesus in Matthew 6:7 whereas the former is not forbidden and oftentimes repetition is seen in the Scriptures, for example the unceasing repetition of the words “Holy, holy, holy” by the heavenly beings in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. Secondly, the Prayer is not a

⁷⁰⁹ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 170.

⁷¹⁰ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 128.

⁷¹¹ Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 139.

⁷¹² Paintner, *Breath Prayer*, 58.

⁷¹³ Cru, “How to Pray.”

mantra, but rather an invocation⁷¹⁴ of the personal God. As Ware points out, “it is not simply a rhythmic mantra, designed to enhance concentration,”⁷¹⁵ though it can and does do that, “but a personal invocation addressed specifically to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.”⁷¹⁶ One may call it a ‘mantra’ and some do see it that way, but even so, it is only a ‘mantra’ insofar as it is a statement that is unceasingly repeated as an invocation to the Triune God for mercy. Thus, it is first and foremost a prayer grounded in the ‘I-Thou’ paradigm of Orthodox Christianity.

In sum, the invitation to practice the Prayer is not an invitation to practice the Christian-equivalent of Yoga, Zen or of secular Mindfulness, but rather an invitation to an authentic Christian practice that has a long history based in Orthodox Christian theology. No doubt, the Prayer, like anything, can be misappropriated (from the perspective of the originating tradition) such that its theological underpinnings are set aside and replaced with a Hindu, Buddhist, or Secular Humanist paradigm leading to it being practically indistinguishable from Yoga, Zen, or Mindfulness. In fact, some Christians (and non-Christians) do argue that it is the same and the differences are merely nominal.⁷¹⁷ While this is not helpful to the cause for the Evangelical adoption of the practice, it is probably helpful for the cause of inter-religious and non-religious relations but that is beyond the scope of this research. For the purposes of this research it can be unequivocally stated that while there exists the possibility for misappropriation from an Orthodox Christian viewpoint it need not be necessarily so for the Evangelical. While some of the effects of the various practices are indeed the same⁷¹⁸ the unique applicability of the Prayer to the Evangelical Christian is the continual invocation of the name of Jesus, the practitioner’s Lord and Christ, and the resulting relational affinity and faithful behaviour this constant prayer produces in their lives.

⁷¹⁴ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 124.

⁷¹⁵ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 33.

⁷¹⁶ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 33.

⁷¹⁷ One example would be Matthew Fox. See Matthew Fox, *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000).

⁷¹⁸ For example, Vasquez and Jensen commenting on the results of Knabb and Vazquez, “A Randomized Controlled Trial” state that “although limited in generalisability due to the small sample and lack of control group, this is not unlike findings related to short mindfulness meditation and breathing interventions, which have produced positive effects on mood.” See Vazquez and Jensen, “Practicing,” 70.

The Prayer as a Supportive Practice

The fourth and final key Evangelical concern is whether or not the Prayer supports communal cataphatic Christian practices. In his book “Falling Upward”⁷¹⁹ Richard Rohr presents a simplified stages of faith model consisting of two halves of life. The first half is about building a “container”⁷²⁰ and the second half consists of filling the container.⁷²¹ Put another way, “the first half of life is discovering the script, and the second half is actually writing it and owning it.”⁷²² In other words one begins with the cataphatic (the container, the script) and then moves onto the apophatic (the filling, the writing and owning), but they do this without ever leaving the cataphatic behind – “they have transcended but also included all that went before.”⁷²³ So a person first establishes “strong boundaries to contain Mystery”⁷²⁴ and then with that as their anchor they venture into the Mystery, without ever abandoning or forsaking their founding container/script. Ware shows this to be intrinsically true in the Hesychast tradition explaining that the Prayer “enriches the sacramental life but does not replace it”⁷²⁵ because it functions most healthily “not in isolation, but in an ecclesial and mysterial context”⁷²⁶ which “presupposes membership of the Church and participation in the Church’s sacraments.”⁷²⁷ The possibility of a person drifting off on their own abandoning community and cataphatic practices exists, but it would not be because the tradition advises or enables it. Sjögren similarly dispels Evangelical fears here by pointing out that “the Jesus Prayer assumes that Sunday by Sunday we share in the regular use of the eucharistic prayer and in other prayers throughout the day.”⁷²⁸

Rohr, Ware and Sjögren show that contemplative practice is something that awaits someone on the faith journey for when they are ready, when they are at the point where they are not only established enough to keep themselves tethered to their tradition, but also established enough in

⁷¹⁹ Rohr, *Falling Upward*.

⁷²⁰ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 214.

⁷²¹ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 214.

⁷²² Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 191.

⁷²³ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 393.

⁷²⁴ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 643.

⁷²⁵ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 43-44.

⁷²⁶ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 43-44.

⁷²⁷ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 43-44.

⁷²⁸ Sjögren, *The Jesus Prayer*, 66.

the tradition to endure “the immense gift of this burning, the inner experience of God”⁷²⁹ because they have done the work “creating a proper stable into which the Christ can be born.”⁷³⁰ Rohr also shows how his stages-of-faith journey does not suggest a spiritual hierarchy with the so-called enlightened at the top and unenlightened at the bottom. He does this by stating that everyone is “already in union with God”⁷³¹ from the outset. The journey is not a race in which some are winners and others are losers, or some are better, and others are worse, but rather is an experiential journey in which all are developing a “wineskin”⁷³² that can hold the “utterly intoxicating wine”⁷³³ of the phenomenological experience of union with the divine.

Thomas Merton, in his book *The Inner Experience* has a chapter on “Some Dangers”⁷³⁴ of contemplation focusing on “the heresy of quietism.”⁷³⁵ Quietism is broadly defined as a way of union with God that involves “passive tranquillity and renunciation of personal initiative”⁷³⁶ such that one enters total “apatheia”⁷³⁷ or “indifference”⁷³⁸ leading to a disengagement from everything including the pathos of religious life. It was primarily a 17th century Western movement, but it had adjacent representations in the East including a movement called Messalianism (not a direct parallel, but related). This was a condemned sect that “denied the necessity of baptism and other sacraments, rejected the need for social responsibility and recognized only charismatic leadership, as distinct from the teachings and pastoral ministry of bishops and priests.”⁷³⁹ The only similar characteristic between Hesychasm and Messalianism is that the Messalians claimed to “see the very essence of God with their material eyes.”⁷⁴⁰ This was not the same as the claim of Hesychasts who said they saw God’s energy (not essence) with eyes which have been transfigured through God’s grace. Nevertheless, this supposed link with Messalianism caused Hesychasm’s opponents to accuse them of being the same as Messalianism

⁷²⁹ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 663.

⁷³⁰ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 663.

⁷³¹ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 643.

⁷³² Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 663.

⁷³³ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, Loc 663.

⁷³⁴ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 108.

⁷³⁵ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 109.

⁷³⁶ Viktor Conzemius, “Quietism,” in *Sacramentum Mundi Online*, ed. Karl Rahner, SJ., Accessed 28 February 2024, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-483X_smuo_COM_003600.

⁷³⁷ Viktor, “Quietism.”

⁷³⁸ Viktor, “Quietism.”

⁷³⁹ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 3.

⁷⁴⁰ Palamas, *The Triads*, 8.

in every respect including anti-sacramentalism. Palamas defended Hesychasm against this accusation⁷⁴¹ and by implication he set it apart from all things related to it, including Quietism.

Merton asserts that there is a superficial similarity between Christian contemplation and Quietism “on paper”⁷⁴² but in practice they are fundamentally at odds with one another. He suggests that Quietism “encloses a [person] within [themselves] in an entirely selfish solitude which excludes not only other [people] but even God.”⁷⁴³ This is as opposed to Christian contemplative practice in which “God desires to bring us to this perfect union with [Godself] in order that our minds and wills, perfectly absorbed and united by [God], may act in perfect harmony and coordination with [God], as free instruments of [God’s] love and mercy.”⁷⁴⁴ The former is a “negative inactivity”⁷⁴⁵ which according to Merton amounts to “a complete blank or a mere spiritual chaos, without any love or desire of God,”⁷⁴⁶ whereas the latter is “positive contemplation”⁷⁴⁷ which necessarily includes “the desire and awareness of God”⁷⁴⁸ which may be almost imperceptible at times, but is always present in some shape or form even if it is as a lament for the lack of desire.

Merton explains that quietist “rebellion against outward conformity is not what constitutes the interior life”⁷⁴⁹ since it is “just another form of compulsion.”⁷⁵⁰ In other words, rejecting the communal cataphatic life of faith in pursuit of private inner solitude is the opposite of Christian contemplation and betrays a fundamental problem in a person’s understanding of what true contemplation is. There will be a “preliminary stage”⁷⁵¹ when the apophatic experience leads to a “befuddled and hampered”⁷⁵² cataphatic experience, and this is when one is most vulnerable to fall into all sorts of delusions like narcissistic seclusion. During this time, one will find cataphatic practice very difficult and will withdraw for interior recollection. During this time of

⁷⁴¹ Palamas, *The Triads*, 3.

⁷⁴² Merton, *Inner Experience*, 111.

⁷⁴³ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 108.

⁷⁴⁴ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 108.

⁷⁴⁵ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 111.

⁷⁴⁶ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 110.

⁷⁴⁷ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 111.

⁷⁴⁸ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 110.

⁷⁴⁹ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 97.

⁷⁵⁰ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 97.

⁷⁵¹ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 97.

⁷⁵² Merton, *Inner Experience*, 97.

withdrawal, Merton warns that one must be very careful of “eccentricity, self-will, and vain show”⁷⁵³ and to pursue “exterior simplicity and obscurity”⁷⁵⁴ as well as “meekness and obedience.”⁷⁵⁵ Eventually this period will end when one has found “the inner centre of spiritual activity”⁷⁵⁶ and thereafter enters back into the kataphic way with a new perception that is expressed from a new “solid foundation”⁷⁵⁷ in contact with their “real sources of energy, clarity, and peace.”⁷⁵⁸ Apophatic contemplation rightly done initially leads to withdrawal, which properly handled gives way to re-engagement of a different quality that is a blessing to others.

Hence, the concern that contemplative practice might lead a person to having an individualised experience of God that exists in isolation from the people of God, the means of faith, and living for the benefit of others, is completely unfounded when the practice is engaged in correctly and with respect for the Scriptures and the originating tradition, whose mothers and fathers have passed on ‘safe’ wisdom born out of the crucible of their own experience. Evangelicals can be assured that Hebrews 10:25 (“not neglecting to meet together”) is encouraged and so is the idea of submitting to a spiritual elder who is wiser and more experienced and able to guide the faith-journey, helping to keep the practitioner from falling into unhealthy spiritual self-obsession and delusion.

In sum, all four key Evangelical concerns can be alleviated when one takes a discerning look at the evidence found in the research, literature and history of the practice of the Prayer. Instead of fostering selfishness it promotes an ethical life lived in service of others. Instead of being impractical to the busy work-a-day world, it is the very thing that can help one live more meaningfully in it. Instead of being a Christian-form of Yoga or Zen, it is a thoroughly Christian psychosomatic practice. Instead of creating mavericks, it helps create engaged and helpful team-players.

⁷⁵³ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 87.

⁷⁵⁴ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 87.

⁷⁵⁵ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 87.

⁷⁵⁶ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 153.

⁷⁵⁷ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 158.

⁷⁵⁸ Merton, *Inner Experience*, 158.

Conclusion

Most Evangelicals are unlikely to object to the contents of the Prayer or to contemplation broadly defined as a loving focus on God. However, many may object to the practice of the Jesus Prayer as a psycho-physical ‘technique’ with its thought-transcending mantra-like repetition. The primary objections are expected to be fourfold, namely that the Prayer is self-centred, impractical, unchristian, and individualistic. To address these areas of objection, several empirical studies, a literature study, a neuroscience study, and a case study were consulted, and the results demonstrated that the practice produces much ‘good fruit’ in a person’s life which is the very evidence of Christian vitality. The positive effects on a person’s psychological, physical and spiritual aspects provided good evidence that practising the Prayer is a worthwhile endeavour for its wholistic impact on a practitioner’s general wellbeing. This also suggests that the argument for practicing the prayer on the basis of the evidence of experience is persuasive.

Nevertheless, tradition and Scripture cannot be ignored, but when they are examined they show that there is nothing in either that suggests the Prayer leads to narcissism, or that it is unrealistic for life outside the monastery/convent, or that it is mere syncretism with Buddhist or Hindu practice, or that it separates a person from the ordinary communal Christian life. When the practice is undertaken rightly and within the prescribed boundaries, especially the boundary of being under spiritual direction either with a person or through the approved literature, then guardrails which prevent catastrophe are in place. One might experience negative outcomes including the four dangers if they practice in a self-directed way and ignore these boundaries, but this would be an outcome that is strongly warned against by those who, approved by their ‘good fruit,’ desire to transmit the practice. Thus, a carefully nuanced approach to the practice that clearly enhances a person’s wellbeing and allows them to both transcend and include their tradition and Scripture should pose no threat to Evangelical.

Conclusion

This research set out to answer the following overall research question:

Can the Prayer establish roots to develop and flourish, and be accepted as a new, legitimate spiritual practice in Evangelicalism?

To begin answering, Chapter 1 explored the essential elements of the Jesus Prayer (invoking the Divine name, constant repetition, the plea for mercy, the quest for silence, and embodiment) grounding them in the Christian Scriptures and tracing their development in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition. In doing so the Evangelical concerns for Biblicism and Tradition were addressed and it was shown how one might demonstrate that the Prayer is biblical, did arise early on in Christian tradition, and was later officially accepted as an Orthodox Christian practice.

Chapter 2 then explored the core tenets of Evangelicalism. The Bebbington Quadrilateral was identified as the framework for understanding Evangelicals from a sociological perspective, with its elements consisting of Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, and Activism. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral was acknowledged as a good representative tool for the method Evangelicals use when conducting theological reflection, with its four parts of Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. The Five-*Solas* was seen to be the historical ground from which Evangelical soteriology developed, including: Scripture-Alone, Grace-Alone, Faith-Alone, Christ-Alone, and to God's Glory Alone. Following these core tenets, Evangelicalism's core spiritual practices were explored and shown to consist primarily of cataphatic practices especially Bible study and discursive prayer, with some openness to contemplative practice among some groupings. Finally the general attitudinal stance of Evangelicals toward Mysticism as a direct experience of God was explored. Chapter 2 showed how one might demonstrate the way the Prayer supports the Evangelical understanding of salvation and is thus thoroughly Crucicentric while also meeting the Evangelical need for Experience, relating to Conversionism.

Chapter 3 then delved further into exploring the tangible experience of practising the Prayer relying on four empirical studies, a literature study, and a case study which were all used as a basis to inform a follow-up discussion addressing four key areas of Evangelical concern: Is the Prayer ethical/other focused, practical for life outside of a monastic context, distinguishable from non-Christian Eastern practices such as Yoga and Zen, and supportive of cataphatic communal Christian practices. In this discussion it was shown how one might demonstrate that the Prayer promotes an ethical life, is perfectly suited to help with frenetic living, is not merely a form of Christian Yoga, and done properly it improves a person's engagement in Christian community. In doing this, Evangelical concerns for Experience and Activism were addressed.

Overall, the answer to the main research question is a qualified 'Yes, it depends on which Evangelical.' There are likely to be as many types of 'Evangelicalisms' as there are Evangelicals since every individual is unique and there are a variety of different streams within the tradition itself ranging from Fundamentalist to Postconservative. It is indeed possible for the Prayer to be accommodated by an Evangelical if the type of Evangelical being considered is one who is open-minded and curious such that they are willing to enter into a friendship with others to dialogue over Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer and are willing to experiment with the practice. Therefore, the introduction of the Prayer will require an accumulation of relational credibility built up through a relational journey that can be cashed out with those who are receptive and agreeable to entertaining possibilities outside of their current experience. This means they have a theological imagination that could result in helping them develop a sense of contemplation in their everyday lives, such that the interruption of the Prayer becomes a welcome addition to their daily spiritual practice.

When the nature of the practice itself is considered, this relational approach to sharing it seems appropriate. The practice transcends thoughts and images while relying on a spiritual perceptive faculty (the *nous*) that is entirely relational and experiential as opposed to being purely intellectual and rational. Indeed, the Prayer is transrational, that is beyond reason but not against it, and therefore to be experienced on the basis of trust and experimentation, not logic. While a written or verbal argument might be both interesting and necessary on the level of the mind, it cannot convey a sense of contemplation to the heart. The practice itself is about bringing the

mind into the heart, and so conveying it may include rational discussion, but that conversation will need to be enveloped by something beyond the meeting of minds. What is needed is a meeting of hearts within the context of a heartfelt friendship of trust and respect. Thus, to convey the Prayer to anyone, including an Evangelical, requires friendship. The contents of this conveyance are considered next.

The purpose of this research has been to investigate the acceptability of the Prayer among Evangelicals. With the variety of ways in which the Jesus Prayer can be practiced (chapter 1) along with the wide spectrum of views and attitudes within Evangelicalism in relation to mysticism (chapter 2), a variety of entry points into the practice of the Prayer is proposed, allowing for a progressing sense of its validity and usefulness in the life of faith.

Notwithstanding the significant nuances, subtleties, and complexities of the Prayer, which are important and eventually necessary to know, the practice of it can be summarised in two simple steps: “1. Pray, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’ 2. Repeat.”⁷⁵⁹ Adding in nuance by way of analogy, the variation in ways of practising the Prayer can be represented as a sliding scale from zero to ten where zero represents not practising at all and 10 represents a practice level akin to a hermit living in seclusion in a cave on Mt. Athos using the 14th century psycho-physical method. It is not likely that a level 10-type practice would find purchase among Evangelicals, let alone with the lay Eastern Orthodox. Rather, a reasonable expectation might be to anticipate a level two to level six-type practice, depending on the type of Evangelical being considered.

Level-2 could perhaps be described as remembering God during and through the activities of the day by silently saying ‘Lord, have mercy’ from time to time, perhaps three times per day – morning, afternoon and evening triggered by an existing habit, such as meal or break times. Level-6 could be described as sitting in silence, stillness, and solitude, in a position which is comfortable yet alert, for 20-minutes twice per day, morning and evening, every day, entraining the words ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ to the inbreath, and the words ‘have mercy on me’ to the outbreath. While this proposed scale is somewhat arbitrary, and it would be difficult to precisely

⁷⁵⁹ Matthewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer*, 33.

define each of the ten points on such a scale, it at least gives the sense that there are different levels of interruption that an Evangelical may entertain based on their existing experience and views of contemplation and mysticism. This allows for a sense of holy agitation and disruption at a level of discomfort that is challenging yet bearable. Then, as the person's experience of the Prayer validates its relevance and fruitfulness for their lives, there remains further levels to accommodate these shifting understandings and attitudes, which speaks of a growing and living metanoia in their lives, facilitated by the Prayer itself. So, the initial level (level 2), being non-offensive and executable, is simple and accessible for anyone who is been drawn to the practice through friendship, and the goal level (level 6), being complex and foreign looking, is worked toward through personal experimentation allowing for verification and authentication. An Evangelical might start at the lower limit in accommodation of their apprehensive views about contemplation and mysticism, then as their views shift over time through personal experimentation and experience, they might step up (or down) their level of practice accordingly.

While a scaled approach could potentially create an unhelpful egoic 'treadmill' on which the practitioner frantically runs trying to prove themselves by becoming more and more adept at the practice, while berating themselves for the slightest failure, it is not intended as such. It is simply meant to indicate a potential range of accommodative options to suit a wide variety Evangelicals while providing scope for an evolving practice based on personal experience. The importance being that the adherents are gifted with the extraordinary benefits of the practice elucidated in chapter 3. Whether this hypothesis would work could be tested by further research, which is now considered.

Further research would help to deepen the answer to the research questions posed in this study. A survey of Evangelicals is suggested, with measurements to establish for example, their personality-type, theological convictions, current practices, and openness to the Prayer. Following this, discussion-groups and in-depth interviews could be conducted, to further investigate understandings, motivations, and experiences. Finally, a trial with a design informed by the survey, discussion-groups, and in-depth interviews is recommended. A selection of participants from the previous measures could be recruited, along with a control group, and taught the Prayer along with the psychosomatic method, taking measurements before, during and

after the trial to establish its impact. This proposed trial should be designed taking into consideration the limits of the trials cited in chapter 3 of this study as to gain more accurate data for analysis with a specific focus on Evangelicalism. Over-and-above the empirical research suggestions, further theological reflective research should be conducted on each of the various topics in the Bebbington and Wesleyan Quadrilaterals and the Five-*Solas*. For example, a thesis focusing only on ‘Biblicism,’ ‘Scripture,’ and ‘Scripture Alone’ could be done to delve further into the complexity of hermeneutical principles used elucidating the types of interpretation issues to be encountered, adding further insight into the Prayer’s Bible support. This could have a particular focus on the different ways of interpretation addressing Evangelicals who, for example, don’t support 1 Thessalonians 5:17 being used as a proof text to support the practice of the Prayer. Similarly, all the other topics in the three methods need deeper examination where this research was only able to supply an overview.

This research closes with the quotes which were shared in the Introduction. In 1901 William James observed that “it is odd that Protestantism, especially evangelical Protestantism, should seemingly have abandoned everything methodical in this line”⁷⁶⁰ referring to mysticism and contemplative practice. Then in 1961 Karl Rahner predicted that “The Christian of the future will either be a mystic or no Christian at all.”⁷⁶¹ Finally in 1998 Richard Foster and Lynda Graybeal asserted that “this ‘prayer of the heart’ may well be one of the finest gifts Eastern Orthodoxy has to offer to all Christians. It certainly is the most borrow-able.”⁷⁶² The first two quotes produce an alarming contrast suggesting that if Evangelicals have abandoned everything in the line of that which is required to see them into the future, it seems that providing them with something in this line is necessary for their very survival. The third quote provides the solution of the Prayer as that very provision, a fine gift indeed. Notwithstanding this, even if James’ observation is overstated and Rahner’s prediction proves false, the Prayer still remains a fine gift for the vast array of physical, psychological and spiritual benefits it brings to those who would practice it wisely, humbly and rightly.

⁷⁶⁰ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 334.

⁷⁶¹ See Pekarske, “XX. Concern for the Church,” 555.

⁷⁶² Foster, *Streams*, 289.

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