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Uncreated Silence and Orthodox Christian Eldership

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Lingua fundamentum sancti silentii.

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT

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Uncreated silence exists as the unspoken speech of the Holy Spirit, which can be heard in prayer, discerned in spiritual relationships, and lived as pastoral care. This idea is explained using biblical and theological sources, the spiritual and pastoral works of those who are known as Orthodox Christian elders, as well as select studies of modern Orthodox and Catholic Christian leaders in the United States. Here is how this is accomplished.

First, by explaining the concerns of hesychastic silence and its lack of relationality through the juxtaposition of Tomáš Špidlík's 1988 criticism of hesychasm and Zacharias Zacharou's 2022 instruction on hesychasm.

Second, by proposing a Pneumatological solution to this question in the existence of an uncreated silence based on select New Testament accounts of the Holy Spirit, informed by the Pneumatology of Basil the Great, described by audiation, and experienced by Seraphim of Sarov.

Third, by presenting uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality using the work of Christos Yannaras and Max Picard.

Fourth, by demonstrating that uncreated silence is a spiritual relationality lived by elders, confessors, and those whom they guide; and by acknowledging the potential for spiritual abuse within these relationships.

Fifth, by describing the connection between uncreated silence and select spiritual relationalities found in the New Testament and among Patristic sources.

Sixth, by examining the biographical, spiritual, and pastoral works of select Orthodox and Catholic spiritual leaders in the West, and specifically in the United States, during the 20th and 21st centuries.

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Introduction

Uncreated silence exists as the unspoken speech of the Holy Spirit, which can be heard in prayer, discerned in spiritual relationships, and lived as pastoral care. This idea is explained using biblical and theological sources, the spiritual and pastoral works of those who are known as Orthodox Christian elders,¹ as well as select case studies of Orthodox and Catholic Christian spiritual leaders in the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries. Additional supporting material will be provided throughout this thesis to explain how uncreated silence is related to, but different from, the silence of hesychastic prayer² and provides an answer to an argument against it;³ how uncreated silence is an apophatic and a spiritual relationality; how uncreated silence relates to the role of Orthodox spiritual eldership, and how uncreated silence can apply to the parish context through the sacrament of confession.

Ever since Gregory Palamas developed a cohesive theological approach to the uncreated light of Mt. Tabor and further refined its connection to the centuries long monastic practice of hesychastic prayer, there has been a recurring Roman Catholic criticism that the solitude and silence

¹ An Orthodox Christian elder, known as a *geronta* in Greek and a *staretz* in Russian, is a holy person gifted with the charism of spiritual direction. Orthodox elders can be male or female and are often monastics, but not always. An Orthodox elder does not have to be a priest. Their deep spiritual guidance is available to clergy and laity. Additional details of this practice are found in the chapters to come. Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002, p. 20. "Union with God sometimes manifests itself through charismatic gifts as, for example, in that of spiritual direction exercised by the *starets* or elder. These latter are most frequently monks who, having passed many years of their life in prayer and secluded from all contact with the world, towards the end of their life throw open to all comers the door of their cell. They possess the gift of being able to penetrate to the unfathomable depths of the human conscience, of revealing sins and inner difficulties which normally remain unknown to us, of raising up overburdened souls, and of directing men not only in their spiritual course but also in all the vicissitudes of their life in the world."

² Hesychastic practice in the Orthodox Christian tradition includes the private, frequent recitation of what is known as the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' The goal of this meditation is to develop an outward quietude and an inward stillness. Additional details of this practice are found in the chapters to come. Cf. "That all Christians should Pray Unceasingly" from the *Life of St. Gregory Palamas* in Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia*, vol. 5, G.E. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, *trans., eds.* London, UK: Faber & Faber, Kindle Edition, 2023, loc. 6885. "We are enjoined to pursue such practice by Jesus the God-man in the Holy Gospel, for He says, 'But you, when you pray, enter your inner room; and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret' (Matt. 6:6). The inner room of the soul is the body; its doors are the five senses. The soul enters its inner room when the intellect does not wander hither and yonder among the things of the world, but remains within our heart. And our senses are closed and stay closed when we do not allow them to attach themselves to sensory visible things. In this way our intellect remains free from worldly attachment, and by means of secret noetic prayer it becomes united with God our Father. And then Jesus says: 'Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly' (Matt. 6:6). God who perceives what is hidden, perceives our noetic prayer and rewards it openly with great gifts; for this is true and perfect prayer, and it fills the soul with divine grace and spiritual gifts. As with aromatic oil which the longer it is enclosed in a vial the more the vial smells sweetly, so also with prayer: the more you close it up inside your heart, the more it fills the heart with divine grace."

³ In the next chapter, there will be a discussion of the arguments of certain 20th century Roman Catholic scholars who wrote against hesychastic practice because it encourages ongoing solitude, which they believe is a sin against charity because it abrogates responsibility for the pastoral care of others.

of this 'prayer of the heart' is uncharitable – meaning that the people who practice it appear to be ignoring the pastoral needs of others. While the centuries-long endeavor to discredit the theology and practice of hesychastic prayer has not diluted its use in the Eastern Christian Churches, it has afforded an opportunity (not so much to defend this ancient practice of contemplation, but) to examine an already existing yet never identified form of prayer that – instead of only focusing on the idea of one person in imageless prayer before God (like Moses) – is both silent *and* interpersonal; it is an apophatic experience of God that invites spiritual and pastoral relationality. Understanding the existence of uncreated silence allows for the development of a continuum of Orthodox Christian contemplative spirituality where the Christological experience of the uncreated light on Mt. Tabor, and its attendant hesychastic prayer, are understood in relation to the Pneumatological experience of the uncreated silence in the Upper Room and its attendant pastoral care. Explaining this makes it easier to identify that 'receiving God in silence' and 'approaching God in silence' does not necessarily equate to a total separation from others or automatically imply a lack of compassion for others.

To be clear, the hesychast rightly relies on the silent,⁴ solitary pursuit of the knowledge of the uncreated light of Transfiguration.⁵ After all, that is the approximately 1,800-year-old tradition of the Orthodox Churches. Thus, in this thesis I am neither arguing against hesychasts nor hesychastic prayer. What I am doing, however, is presenting a new approach to the interplay between divine words, divine silence, human words, human silence, still prayer, and a never-ending set of pastoral needs. Even in my own life, which has often been fixated on words, I find that I am far more intrigued by the other side of words, which is silence. There is more said there than in any human conversation anywhere ever conceived. That is why I am commending here the uncreated silence of Pentecost and its meaningful connection to both silent prayer and pastoral care, readily discernible though barely noticeable in the Orthodox tradition of eldership, which includes space for the Holy Spirit whose role within it will always remain firmly fixed on personal and interpersonal

⁴ Cf. John Chryssavgis, *Light Through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition*, Orbis Books, 2004, p. 82. "In silence, the power of the soul is confined within the body. The hesychast is not dispersed but concentrated on a single point: God. Therefore, the true definition of silence is not outward but inward: a movement from multiplicity to simplicity, from diversity to unity. 'The kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21). The hesychast realizes this truth inwardly and intensely. In this way, silence too connects with apophatic theology, which applies equally to theology as to the life of prayer. God is a mystery beyond understanding and experience. So silence is a fitting way of addressing God in prayer through an image-less, word-less attitude whereby one no longer says prayers but becomes prayer."

⁵ Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005, pp. 72-75. "In fact, vision and the transformation of vision are the heart of Transfiguration theology... The Transfiguration theophany exemplifies the awakening of the spiritual senses, in this case, the sense of spiritual vision... The Transfiguration as the revelation of God in his glory is related to the vision of God as light, an issue that takes different forms in patristic tradition... According to Ephraim the Syrian, during the Transfiguration the apostles saw the Old Testament prophets while the prophets saw the apostles. This mutual recognition of the 'old and new leaders' stressed the harmonization of the two covenants and the unity of the Church... as the visual manifestation of both natures of Christ..."

transfiguration. Along with this, I am making clear that an Orthodox elder does not constitute the center point of the search undertaken by a spiritual disciple; instead, this spiritual parent acts in a fostering role, which has as its goal the strengthening of the relationship of the disciple with the Holy Spirit. This is achieved by creating an environment for hearing and understanding where the uncreated silence is allowed to be present and discovered by the elder and the disciple separately and together.⁶ By proposing that the center of their prayerful affiliation is the divine silence of the Pneumatological presence, I am also offering a nuanced understanding of the Eastern Christian contemplative tradition in which the relationship to a personal God can be fostered for the sake of serving others. As such, this thesis is a rich synthesis of Orthodox theology and practice; it is the theorem and praxis of the ancient tradition of the passing down of the knowledge, experience, and acquisition of the Holy Spirit in the style of a master and an apprentice with the uncreated silence as the driving force. While what is known as the elder-disciple relationship is not all-encompassing of pastoral care specific to, or reductionist of, Orthodoxy generally, this tradition points to the need for training that aids the Christian in his or her spiritual journey; making sure that he or she does not end up with a type of Freudian projection of the self or a demonically induced false vision of the self. In other words, Orthodox Christian meditation has specific content: a personal God who offers transfiguration through unspoken words that come through inexplicable speech and still provides directionality; thus, there is a unique language that emerges within the triumvirate of the Holy Spirit, the guide, and the seeker, which does not always lead to solitude. It can lead to companionship. Put differently, Orthodox Christian spirituality is a distinctively personal space, which is carved from an unrelentingly loquacious communal worship; thus, its lived experience is an observable tension between sound and silence. Therefore, somewhere in between those two seemingly disparate realities, there is an identifiable need to name and describe a theology of encounter that draws them together in a synergy of word, love, and service. That is what this thesis aims to discover and connect: the *uncreated silence* of the Holy Spirit and an exploration of the deep relationship

⁶ Chapter two focuses on uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality. As such, it was also necessary to include a presentation on the problem of abuse in spiritual companionship. Cf. Msgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, former Secretary of the Congregation (now Dicastery) for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p.4. “Now that people have begun to feel able to speak more freely about the question of sexual abuse, instances of spiritual abuse in monastic and religious communities have also come to light. The founding of new communities, or a desire among members of older religious orders to return to a more authentic form of life, has sometimes given rise to unacceptable behavior on the part of superiors or founders. In some cases, this has come about as a result of psychological imbalances in these individuals, but in other cases whole communities are finding themselves in alarming situations, which seem to arise when basic generosity encounters a lack of wisdom. Men and women who had given themselves to God with all the loving enthusiasm of youth have sometimes taken a good number of years to become fully aware of the grip in which they were held and to free themselves from it, most often by leaving their community. The journey of personal, psychological, and spiritual rebuilding is, sadly, a long and painful one.”

between silence-listening, speaking-relating, and praying-acting in the context of scriptural meditation, theological reflection, and lived pastoral experience.

To responsibly and convincingly communicate all this, I had to develop a reliable methodology. Thus, I chose to approach this question first from the outside, using a type of historical theology to make sense of Orthodox Christian Pneumatology, prayer, and spiritual relationships that developed historically in the eschatological East and differently in the existential West. Then, I needed to approach the subject from within, meaning that I looked at the subject from the perspective of phenomenology's attentiveness to the lived experience of Orthodox spiritual elders and their disciples. To put this all together in objective form, I utilized a process not unlike the investigative journalism I had learned during my undergraduate years. This methodological approach, however, was not without challenges. First, this study was more unpredictable than I anticipated; in almost every text I researched, I found some new direction that made it almost inexpressible. Second, I had to constrain the ideas that stemmed from my personal experiences because they ignited this research more so than any purely academic choices. Third, I came to understand that prayer, spiritual companionship, and 'hearing God' can be hard to grasp in a systematic way. Fourth, I discovered that providing a new way of understanding divine silence can be difficult to analyze. However, its significance to Orthodox spirituality generally and for pastoral care specifically, called for a contemporary study of it. In the end, what I found was a world more concrete and definable than I originally imagined was possible. And with as much as there is to uncover and unpack in a study which heretofore has not been published, my approach to the subject matter will potentially provide new avenues for research and dialogue in the years to come.

It is important to note that the intentional choice to include Orthodox and Roman Catholic examples, and exclude Protestant and Evangelical ones, lies in their greater historical incongruities regarding contemplative prayer and the nature of the spiritual relationships that govern it. In other words, a comparison of the ecclesial foundations developed, theologies employed, and practices observed across such a broad spectrum would require a depth and quantity of analysis that it would shift the focus of this thesis too far from the theorem of uncreated silence within the praxis of Eastern Orthodox spiritual relationships. To provide justification for this, I will rely on Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Silence: A Christian History* and Urban Holmes' *A History of Christian Spirituality*.

Protestant models of eldership and prayer have their own *raison d'être*, but details provided by MacCulloch and Urban Holmes confirm that the Reformations variably dismantled the ancient Christian practices of silent prayer and spiritual eldership that marked the period from about 300 to 1100 (and continued for Orthodoxy). Explaining this shift in spirituality, MacCulloch emphatically

proposes that Jesus not only ended the silences notable in the Old Testament, but also spent far less time in silence and contemplation than the later monastic tradition encouraged.⁷

Christianity's spectacular later turn to ascetic, eremitical and monastic life has encouraged a search for precedents in the life of Jesus. One prime inspiration was to be his agonized solitary prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane ... The fact that Jesus's ordeal was solitary is not presented in the Synoptic Gospels as something that he had sought: to various degrees they stress the reproach to his disciples for not praying alongside him.⁸

MacCulloch similarly dismisses Jesus' retreats to mountains and the wilderness as reasons for ascetics (later, hesychasts) to claim silence, stillness, and solitude as major aspects of Jesus' ministry. He writes that these actions are a mere re-enactment of the mountainous ascents of Moses and Elijah. MacCulloch also makes the point that since Syria was a major stopping point on the trade routes between the Middle East and Asia, early Christian monastics would have been exposed to the "celibate communities in the Buddhist tradition or the solitary holy men of Hinduism, traditions long pre-dating Christianity."⁹ Still, the Christian religious culture that grew from Jerusalem and extended throughout the Mediterranean taught that silent prayer is a means of growing closer to God.

Eastern Christians have always been much more inclined than Westerners to stress the central importance in Christian faith and practice of *theosis*, that is, union with or likeness to God; but ascetics everywhere would eventually be drawn to this idea. An encounter with *theosis* will recur again and again as the story of silence in Christian history unfolds.¹⁰

In modern Christian history, however, there has grown an even greater distance between the apophatic and hesychastic foci of Eastern Christendom and the more service-oriented models of Western Christian spirituality.

⁷ Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History*, London, UK: Penguin Books, 2013. "The Jesus of Mark repeatedly, but not apparently consistently, commands silence on his disciples and on those who witness or experience his miracles." He also concedes the connection between Jesus and the "silent Suffering Servant of Isaiah (p. 53)."

⁸ Ibid, p. 35.

⁹ Ibid, p. 71. Cf. Christine Mangala Frost, *The Human Icon: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Orthodox Christian Beliefs*, James Clarke & Co, 2017. This work is invaluable in three ways. First, Frost explains the difference between theosis in Orthodoxy and 'Tat tvam asi' (divinization) in Vendānta. Second, she explores the meditative prayer of yoga and Orthodoxy's hesychastic prayer. Third, she devotes a chapter to Orthodox spiritual elders and Hindu holy men. As she writes in the Prologue, "This present book sets out to explore the spiritual terrain of both faiths in the hope of enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation, and with the intention of debating issues that may arise from what I envisage as 'respectful conversations' (Frost, p. 1)." There is an additionally relevant point to add here from the prologue. Frost makes a case for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. "A fortress mentality too easily develops that claims to 'safeguard Orthodox Christianity' from threatening 'outsiders' (a term that may even include other Christians). But such a hardline approach, motivated by a fervent desire to 'preserve' Orthodox Christianity, runs the risk of simply 'pickling' it... At worst, the exclusivist attitude, founded on dogmatic rigidity, and compounded by ignorance, complacency, and even arrogance, breeds not just disregard and disrespect for one's global neighbour but nurtures the 'inner Pharisee' to whom Jesus Christ directs his most severe reproofs (Frost, p. 1)." For a spiritual and pastoral approach to this subject, Cf. Dionysios Farasiotis, *The Gurus, the Young man, and Elder Paisios*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2011.

¹⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History*, London, UK: Penguin Books, 2013, p. 73.

To understand this development, it is important to focus on three points. First, that the Reformation, which MacCulloch describes as ‘protestant noise,’ led to the destruction of monasteries and caused a lack of context for silence and stillness in its spirituality.

With the passing of the monasteries, there disappeared any structured forum for either meditation or contemplation. The whole tradition of *lectio divina* no longer had a home... All this gives the lie to the old cliché about the individualism of Reformation Protestant faith. Rather its problem was the opposite, that it was too communal: it gave little place for the individual to be alone with God.¹¹

Second, this admonition against personal, private devotion even sparked a small, but long-lived pushback through a radical form of Protestantism known as the *Friends of Truth* or *Quakers*. Their founder, George Fox, was determined “to draw boundaries around the Friends’ movement... precisely because of the value he placed on the contemplative exploration of ‘inner light.’ This concept meant as much to him as it did to Hesychasts in Orthodoxy, but for Fox and the Friends it had a very different outcome.”¹² Third, even in the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which strove in part to restore the silences that monastics held in an earlier age, ultimately created the distinction that “contemplation was an activity best left to the celibate and clerical professionals...”¹³ All these factors point to an Eastern Christianity that would remain trenchant about its ‘spiritual asceticism’ and a Western Christianity that developed a modern ‘pastoral asceticism,’ which became hyper-pronounced in the American religious landscape. This is explained by Urban T. Holmes in his work titled *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*. He names key figures who were part of the ‘contemporary scene’ of spirituality, including Simone Weil and Martin Luther King. Holmes shows how these figures led a type of revolution that brought Western Christians into a faith-based paradigm of service, which tends toward the deep connection between spirituality and social work. “Dag Hammerskjöld... put it more succinctly. ‘In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action...’ The centrality of this worldly asceticism, however, is unique to our times. It seems to be a characteristic of every contemporary spiritual master.”¹⁴

Thus, in addition to profiles of Orthodox elders for whom silence is the path to God, I will provide certain examples of Orthodox and Catholic spiritual leaders from the 20th century who hold a middle ground in this question: where the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit makes known in contemplative prayer the call to pastoral care in a manner reminiscent of the period post-Pentecost. That is why also at varying points throughout this thesis, I will return to the juxtaposition of Orthodox and Roman Catholic sources in their sometimes-antagonistic relationship regarding the

¹¹ Ibid, p. 136-137.

¹² Ibid, p. 147.

¹³ Ibid, p. 152.

¹⁴ Urban Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, pp. 148-149.

theology of uncreated energies, hesychastic silence, the Taboric light, the recitation of the Jesus prayer, and the practice of eldership. Also because of their sometimes-congruent relationship regarding private devotion, contemplative prayer, the sacrament of Confession, and extensive systems of monasteries. This has been done to provide evident parameters for the organization of this research and to create additional clarity around the lived pastoral expressions of what it means to say that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit exists.

What follows next are three chapters. The first will focus on: (1) the origin of the idea of the uncreated silence, which was derived from a concerned question about the practice of hesychastic solitude¹⁵ by Tomáš Špidlík¹⁶ whose work will be brought into conversation with Zacharias Zacharou;¹⁷ (2) an Orthodox Christian Pneumatological solution to Špidlík's criticism based on the accounts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament,¹⁸ the Pneumatology of Basil of Caesarea,¹⁹ the musical concept of audiation, and the experience of Seraphim of Sarov;²⁰ and (3) an explanation of uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality using the works of Christos Yannaras²¹ and Max Picard.²² The second will focus on: (1) uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality, (2) Orthodox Christian eldership, (3) the Father-Confessor relationship and the healing aspect of the sacrament of Confession, (4) abuse in spiritual relationships, (5) relational models in the biblical accounts of Mary, Peter, Paul, and John; (6) the Patristic, monastic relational models of parent-child, doctor-patient, teacher-student, elder-disciple; and (7) the relationality of eldership in Symeon the New Theologian.²³ The third will focus on a select group of Orthodox and Catholic spiritual guides²⁴ in the

¹⁵ While hesychasm is an accepted part of Orthodox spirituality, monastics and laity may choose not to practice hesychastic prayer as a formal discipline. Also, there are relatively few saints in the Orthodox Church who are titled "Hesychast," as in St. Joseph the Hesychast, because this is often reserved for someone who claims to have seen the 'uncreated light' as did Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration.

¹⁶ A Czech cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who was also a professor of Patristic and Eastern Spiritual Theology in Rome (b. 1919 - d. 2010).

¹⁷ A Cypriot archimandrite and monk of the Orthodox Church who was a disciple of Sophrony Sakharov at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex. He is a lecturer at many universities around the world (b. 1946).

¹⁸ Unless noted, quotes from scripture are excerpted from the *Orthodox Study Bible*, St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. Quotes from *The Philokalia* are excerpted from Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia*, 4 vols., translated and edited by G.E. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, London, UK, Faber & Faber, 1979. Ibid, vol. 5, translated and edited by G.E. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. London, UK: Faber & Faber, Kindle Edition, 2023.

¹⁹ Also known as Basil the Great (ca. 330-379), he was a bishop of Caesarea known for his pastoral care and significant theological contributions. In the Orthodox Church, he is titled as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs, meaning that he is considered to have provided great leadership in early Christianity.

²⁰ A Russian ascetic, monk, and spiritual father at Sarov Monastery who became a hermit (b. 1754 – d. 1833).

²¹ A Greek philosopher, Eastern Orthodox theologian, and professor emeritus of the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (b. 1935).

²² A Swiss Catholic writer and philosopher (b. 1888 – d. 1965).

²³ A Greek monk, hesychast, and spiritual father who wrote mystical poetry and taught that people could experience the Holy Spirit directly (b. 949 – d. 1022). In the Orthodox Church, he was given the title of "Theologian," meaning that it is claimed he had a personal vision of God.

²⁴ Some of these figures and their works will be covered in brief, while others will be examined in more detail.

West generally and America specifically during the 20th and 21st centuries, including: (1) Kallistos Ware²⁵ as a spiritual father of English-speaking Orthodoxy; (2) Gavrilia Papayannis (b. 1897 – d. 1992) as a Greek Orthodox spiritual mother who travelled to dozens of countries healing people of foot and leg pain, and praying with them regardless of their background; (3) Maria Skobtsova (b. 1891 – d. 1945) as a Russian Orthodox spiritual mother who cared for refugees in France during World War II and was martyred for it; (4) Sophrony Sakharov²⁶ as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who wrote about his visions of Jesus and encouraged the broad use of the Jesus Prayer; (5) Ephraim Moraitis²⁷ as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father who opened 17 monasteries in the United States and Canada; (6) John Maximovitch²⁸ as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who was bishop in many places, including San Francisco; (7) Gerasimos Papadopoulos²⁹ as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father in Boston; (8) Seraphim Rose³⁰ who some consider to be the first spiritual father who was an American convert to the Orthodox Church; (9) monks of the Charterhouse of the Transfiguration³¹ as the only Carthusian enclave in the United States; (10) Thomas Merton³² as an American Catholic monk, spiritual guide, and writer; (11) Thomas Keating³³ as an American Catholic monk who co-founded the centering prayer movement, which is a contemporary method of contemplative prayer made accessible for lay people; and (12) Basil Pennington³⁴ as an American Catholic monk who was a co-creator of centering prayer and spent time with the Orthodox monks of Mt. Athos.³⁵

²⁵ An English monk and bishop under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (b. 1934 – d. 2022). He was a translator of Orthodox Christian books and a lecturer at Oxford University.

²⁶ A monk, ascetic, and archimandrite who started an Orthodox monastery in England under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (b. 1896 – d. 1993). He is known for his practice of hesychasm and many books, including *We Shall See Him as He Is*, a spiritual autobiography detailing his experiences of God.

²⁷ An Athonite monk and abbot (b. 1928 – d. 2019) who was a disciple of Joseph the Hesychast. He founded several monasteries, including the well-known St. Antony's in Arizona. Some claim he was spiritually abusive.

²⁸ Known as the 'wonderworker,' Maximovitch (b. 1896 – d. 1966) was a monk and an ascetic who some claim performed miracles during his lifetime and after his death.

²⁹ A monk and bishop serving in the United States under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (b. 1910 – d. 1995), Papadopoulos was a mentor to staff and students at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

³⁰ A monk in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) who started the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood in Platina, California (b. 1934 – d. 1982). He was a spiritual son to John Maximovitch and considered by some to be a fundamentalist. Rose claimed that ecumenical dialogue is a heresy and was criticized for his explanations of the Orthodox Christian aerial toll-house theory of the soul after death.

³¹ The first Carthusian monks arrived in the US in 1950 and established their foundation in Vermont.

³² He lived most of his life at the Trappist Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky (b. 1915 – d. 1968). He wrote more than 50 books on spirituality. Merton is also known for a shift in his thinking from traditional Catholic contemplation to prayer that leads to pastoral work. Near the end of his life, he fell in love with a nurse caring for him after back surgery.

³³ A former abbot at the Trappist Abbey of St. Joseph in Spencer, Massachusetts (b. 1923 – d. 2018), he was also the co-founder of Contemplative Outreach, which is an international, ecumenical network that encourages contemplative prayer, outreach, and service.

³⁴ A former abbot of the Trappist Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia (b. 1931 – d. 2005).

³⁵ Athos is in northeastern Greece and is a center of Eastern Orthodox monasticism under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Chapter 1: Toward an Understanding of Uncreated Silence

Chapter one will focus on: (1) the origin of the idea of the uncreated silence, which was derived from a question about the practice of hesychastic solitude and its lack of relationality by Tomáš Špidlík whose work will be brought into conversation with Zacharias Zacharou; (2) an Orthodox Christian Pneumatological solution to Špidlík's criticism based on the accounts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the Pneumatology of Basil of Caesarea, the musical concept of audiation, and the experience of Seraphim of Sarov; as well as (3) an explanation of uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality using the works of Christos Yannaras and Max Picard.

The Question of Hesychastic Silence and Relationship

At varying points throughout this thesis, I will return to the juxtaposition of Orthodox and Roman Catholic sources because of their sometimes-contentious and sometimes-congruous relationship when it comes to spirituality, prayer, monasticism, sacrament, and systems of spiritual companionship. This has been done to provide clearer parameters for the organization of this research and to create additional clarity around the expressions of what it means to say that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit³⁶ can be discovered in spiritual guidance and lived in pastoral work. What comes next is the explanation of the origins of this research, which stemmed from a comment and a question posed by Tomáš Špidlík in the late 1980s. This section will also feature the work of Zacharias Zacharou.

Tomáš Špidlík on Hesychasm

The origin of this research stems from the 20th century Catholic criticism that the silent, still prayer of the Christian East breeds hesychasts who ignore the pastoral needs of others. To explain this, I will rely on the writings of Tomáš Špidlík who wrote *The Spirituality of the Christian East* in 1978 and *Prayer: The Spirituality of the Christian East* in 1988, basing a specific subset of his own work on Irénée Hausherr's³⁷ 1955 tome, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*.³⁸ Špidlík's texts are encyclopedic in their succinct explanations of all things Eastern, Patristic, and spiritual for a Western, Catholic audience. What is helpful in the first Špidlík volume is that he provides clear and accessible definitions about the sources and themes in Eastern spirituality, what it means to live a

³⁶ Cf. Nikos Nissiotis, "The Importance of the Faith and Order Commission for Restoring Ecclesial Fellowship," *Sharing in One Hope*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978, 13f. "It is the operation of the Spirit that fills gaps, unites oppositions, bridges distances, links the diverse gifts of grace."

³⁷ An Alsatian Roman Catholic priest and professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. He was a specialist in Patristics and monastic spirituality (b. 1881 – d. 1978).

³⁸ Some of the rhetoric used in Hausherr, Špidlík, and others was inherited from Denis Pétau, a 17th century French Jesuit and cardinal who was known for his expertise in Patristics and his frequent use of polemics during the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

life in God, distinctions between the natural and spiritual life (i.e., questions about humans living in the image of likeness of God), Christian anthropology, spiritual cosmology, spiritual sociology, negative praxis, renunciation of the world and flesh, struggling with demons, purification of the passions, prayer, and finally, the nature, object, organ, progress and effects of contemplation using both Orthodox source material and Western scholarship on these matters. For the purposes of this research, I will restrict my use of Špidlík to the questions of hesychasm and Orthodox eldership. Following the Eastern tradition, he ties these two subjects closely together.

Špidlík begins this line of thought with the supposition that there is a fundamental need in humans to reveal their inner self to a 'discerning' (*diacritic*) parental spiritual figure, pointing out the distinction between spiritual guidance as searching for answers and the sacrament of Confession as seeking restoration.

Exagoreusis is a confession not of sins – at least this is not its primary and exclusive aim – but of 'thoughts,' to know whether they are good or bad. Many of the apophthegmata are the detailed recital of a question and answer. Everything was done in a few words. Letters of direction replied with the same conciseness.³⁹

This revealing of thoughts is done as a means of unburdening the mind and opening the heart so that the spiritual elder may help to clarify the will of God to the spiritual son or daughter and to know how to get there. Not unlike Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Špidlík posits that people can struggle with the will of God and that makes it desirable, and sometimes necessary, for each person to seek an experienced spiritual guide for clarity. Conversely, for this to take place, a gifted elder would have to open up his or her doors to listen to the people whom God sends.

Spiritual direction is an obligation of the gnostic, 'the one who knows'. It is simply the discernment of spirits put into practice. Consequently, the gift of *diakrisis* (discernment) governs all others in the area of guidance. The *diakritikos* (discerning person) can at the same time be *dioratikos*, with the gift of 'clairvoyance' or even *kardiognosis* (the reading of hearts). The gift of discernment joined to that of 'prophecy', being able to speak in the name of God, makes the perfect spiritual father.⁴⁰

In what might, at first, seem an odd way to affirm the gifts and works of Orthodox elders as explained above, Špidlík relays a story from Mohamed al-Birouni (which is also found in Hausherr) about a Muslim who respected Eastern Christianity for its system of fathers. "Christianity was originally not 'codified'. Indeed, the title 'father' was the greatest honor which could be awarded among Christians, whether it meant the 'spiritual father' or the 'abba' of a monastery, the 'Fathers'

³⁹ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications, 1986, pp. 246-247.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 284. 'Clairvoyance' here does not carry the modern American connotation of a 'psychic phenomenon' as in parapsychology. It implies a God-given depth of insight into the needs of the disciple and the knowledge of the will of God for their life.

in council, or the ‘fathers’ – priests.”⁴¹ The value of this quote lies in two directions. First, that a 10th and 11th century Islamic scholar, who has been referred to as ‘The Father of Comparative Religion,’⁴² recognized that the idea and practice of spiritual eldership in Orthodoxy is something to be admired in Christianity. Second, that al-Birouni understood this practice was a necessity in the early development of Christianity and a beneficial one for new generations of Christians who want the counsel of holy figures in the Church.

The negative turn in Špidlík’s writing regarding hesychasts relates to his questions about the interplay between common life and solitary life. He ponders that subject in terms of monastics in relation to each other, monastics in relation to the world, and elders in relation to their spiritual children; he questions the hesychast desire for solitude altogether. The basis for his consternation is two-fold: sociological (he questions whether the hesychastic elder, in particular, is avoiding his duty to others) and psychological (he questions whether the hesychastic elder is obsessed with himself). In the first of the two volumes he writes about Eastern Christian spirituality, in a chapter titled “Spiritual Sociology,” in the section subtitled the “Praises of the Common Life,” he remarks:

Their vocation was devoted exclusively to the pursuit of union with God through prayer. The question for them was merely to what degree external solitude was needed for such a goal: a psychological question. They did not consider other people evil; on the contrary, they had their own weakness, which prevented them from being at one and the same time with God and with man.⁴³

Even though he uses a reference from the Orthodox Abba Arsenius, his explanation in this section reads as reductionist of the work of Eastern Patristic sources on the life of a hesychast elder, essentially claiming that people choose the solitary life because they are enfeebled and not because he or she is *called*, even though he admits that the hope for humility, the search for a cloistered life, the desire to control the passions, and the willingness to pray for others is bound up with an interior

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 285

⁴² An indispensable volume on silence and spiritual eldership in Sufi Islam is M. Fethullah Gülen’s 2004 *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*. A whole chapter is dedicated to the concepts of Halwat and ‘Uzlat, which literally mean solitude and living alone respectively. “...within the context of Sufism [these words] denote an initiate’s going into retreat to dedicate all of his or her time worshipping God under the guidance and supervision of a spiritual master. He or she seeks purification from all false imaginations that separate him or her from the Truth, close the doors of his or her heart to all that is not God, and conversing with Him through the tongue of his or her inner faculties (Gülen, p. 16).” Alongside this concept, in a separate chapter there is treated the ‘spiritual knowledge’ of God or Ma’rifa, which “denotes skill or talent, a special ability that belongs to certain people, and knowing by certain means. According to travelers on the path of God, it is the station where knowing is united with the one who knows, where knowing becomes second nature, and where each state reveals what or who is known (Gülen, p. 146).” The language surrounding these three words or concepts would not seem unfamiliar to an Orthodox spiritual father or mother. So, this text is valuable as a point of comparison and contrast.

⁴³ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications, 1986, p. 161.

longing, which, presumably, comes from God.⁴⁴ While postulating about two differing poles of the spiritual life – “One...in the desert or behind the closed windows of a cell; the other would open its windows wide because God has created wonderful things in heaven and on earth”⁴⁵ – Špidlík remarks, “But one always presupposes that the perfect will arrive at the third phase and will then open their eyes to rediscover the wonders of the visible world.”⁴⁶ Looking past his derision of hesychastic prayer in this section, he makes a point that is relevant to this research: that there is room for a desert solitude, which then gives way to a deeply spiritual and close relationship with others in the world. In relation to his own desire to locate the anchorite within the community structure somehow, Špidlík appears to arrive at two conclusions: complete separation from the world is not tenable and that “[s]ilence is the portable cell which the man of prayer does not leave easily.”⁴⁷ In the end, Špidlík’s argument is that the call to silence is acceptable, but a life of solitude is not. This is at odds with Orthodox belief and practice. More than that, it is contrary to the proposed meaning of pastoral possibilities present in the hearing of ‘uncreated silence.’

In the second volume, Špidlík explains the many gifts of spiritual elders and highlights *kardiognosis* (the ‘reading of the heart’ of a spiritual disciple) because he wants to demonstrate that Orthodox elders are not just wisdom figures, but people who manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. He also wants to show how such gifts positively impact a spiritual disciple. In one example, he contrasts the more penitential nature of confession with the more pastoral nature of spiritual direction.

In the Christian East, by contrast, the ‘spiritual fathers’, the famous Russian starzy (elders) took little interest in the detailed confession of their penitents. They had *kardiognosis* (knowledge of the heart), a clear-sightedness that reads the person at the deepest levels. Psychologically speaking, we could say that they were more ‘maternal’ than ‘paternal’.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that Špidlík makes the distinction between confession and spiritual guidance as the difference between how he perceives mothers and fathers care for their children. In the sacramental

⁴⁴ Cf. Matthew the Poor, *The Communion of Love*, Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984, pp. 21-22. “The greatest commandment by which we may experience the providence of God, and by obedience to which we may obtain spiritual power which unveils to us the mysteries and secrets of the Bible and lights the way ahead, is that we should leave everything and follow Christ. For this commandment sums up the whole Gospel! This is the verse that St. Antony heard. It touched him deeply, and he carried it out with precise determination. Through doing so he attained a life that was in accordance with the Gospel, and understanding, knowledge, and recollection of the Bible that astonished the scholars and theologians, as we know from St. Athanasius the Great. And all this in spite of the fact that St. Antony could neither read nor write. Many of the Fathers followed the same pattern and the same marvels took place in them, for they attained the heights of knowledge of the Bible, of God, and spiritual direction, though they themselves were illiterate.”

⁴⁵ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications, 1986, p. 210.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 215

⁴⁸ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J., *Prayer: The Spirituality of the Christian East*, vol. 2, Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2005.vol. 2, p. 256. This maternal and paternal dichotomy is akin to what can be found in Kallistos Ware whose work will be covered later in the text.

scenario, Špidlík indicates that it is an occasion for the application of justice, whereas in the context of spiritual direction, he designates it as an opportunity for healing.⁴⁹ This is essentially his launching point for a whole chapter on hesychasm, which begins with an identification of five main periods of development: “the era of the Desert Fathers;” “the [S]inai school”; “the legacy of Symeon the New Theologian (b. 949);” “Athonite hesychasm;” and “the ‘philokalic movement’.”⁵⁰ He provides an etymology of the word *hesychia*, starting from its philosophical origins as a ‘state of calmness’, ‘lack of inner agitation’, ‘solitude’ or ‘solitary retreat’ to the Septuagint, which defines it in Proverbs 11:12 and 7:11 as ‘abstaining from useless words’. In Luke 14:4, it means ‘to be silent’, in Luke 23:56 it means ‘observing rest on the Sabbath’, and in Acts 21:14 and 11:18 it means ‘not inconveniencing others.’ “We may define hesychasm, then, as a form of spirituality based on *hesychia*, and state that its orientation is essentially contemplative.”⁵¹ Špidlík explains the early Christian desire to withdraw from the world into solitude and to practice varying degrees of silence for the expressed purpose of having conversations with God. After that, however, he questions the validity of the practices of the hesychasts, describing their works as a sin against charity.⁵²

But do heroic forms of silence – an almost complete break with human conversation – examples of which the *Lives* of the ‘silent saints’ give us – not sin through inverse excess? Do they not contradict the Spirit who speaks to human persons through other inspired persons? The objection becomes even more serious if we remember that the hesychasts, as it were, reduced to silence God himself – the One who speaks in psalms and in spiritual reading. They gradually simplified their prayer to ‘the prayer of silence’.⁵³

Špidlík’s criticism of hesychasm was influenced not only by Hausherr, but also by the early 20th century work of Adrian Fortescue (b. 1874 - d. 1923) – whose contributions to the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia included a description of this Eastern Christian spirituality as “an obscure speculation, with the wildest form of mystic extravagance”⁵⁴ – and Martin Jugie (b. 1878 - d. 1954), whose entries in the 1932 *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, referred to hesychasm as “false mysticism.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Cf. Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses: An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 2 (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2012), p. 190-191. “This operative role is equally made manifest in the concrete care he gives his son, who comes to him sick and seeking healing... For this reason, the role of the spiritual father takes on a fundamentally therapeutic character in his helping the person affected by these passions to be delivered from them. Thus, exercising spiritual fatherhood is quite often likened by the Fathers to a branch of medicine dealing with the soul that is analogous to medicine interacting with the body.”

⁵⁰ Cf. Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses: An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 2 (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2012), p. 319.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 321.

⁵² As will be shown throughout this thesis, uncreated silence doesn’t exclude one or the other.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 324.

⁵⁴ Adrian Fortescue (1910), “Hesychasm,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, retrieved July 8, 2022, New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm>.

⁵⁵ Martin Jugie, “Palamite (Controversy),” Preliminary Considerations, col. 1777, Peter Gilbert, *trans.* Posted at *De unione ecclesiarum* [Martin Jugie : The Palamite Controversy | De unione ecclesiarum \(wordpress.com\)](http://www.deunioneecclesiarum.com).

The reason it is important here to have a primer on Špidlík, Fortescue, and Jugie in light is because it provides a broader look into the main issues involved in the suspicion that certain Catholic scholars maintained about hesychasm and the pursuit of the Taboric light in both the pre- and post-Vatican II context. The acknowledgement of their existence also creates an opportunity to bifurcate the charge that hesychastic solitude is uncharitable from the theological debate about the uncreated light itself; this thesis is focused on the former not the latter.

At one level, Fortescue's basic description of hesychasm is accurate. He reports that it is, historically, a monastic practice that involves asceticism, prayer, and a detachment from most earthly activity; a process taken under the guidance of an elder, and a potential path to the light of God. However, he is clear in that he does not believe it is the essence of God as uncreated light.

The light seen by Hesychasts is the same as appeared at Christ's Transfiguration. This was no mere created phenomenon, but the eternal light of God Himself. It is not the Divine essence; no man can see God face to face in this world (John 1:18), but it is the Divine action or operation.⁵⁶ For in God action (*energeia, actus, operatio*) is really distinct from essence (*ousia*).⁵⁷

To achieve this state in prayer, Fortescue says, requires a type of self-induced altered state of consciousness; in a polemical statement he links "this process of auto-suggestion to that of fakirs, Sunnysis,⁵⁸ and such people all over the East is obvious."⁵⁹ His accusation that Orthodox Christian

⁵⁶ These arguments are based in the work of Barlaam whom Palamas wrote against in defense of the Light of Tabor. Cf. "Meyendorff's understanding of the controversy," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 184-185. "From 1337, Barlaam turned his attention to the hesychast monks of the Holy Mountain, and their claims to behold in their prayer the uncreated light of the Godhead, which they identified with the light of Tabor, the Mount of the Transfiguration: he denounced them as Messalians, and drew down upon himself the wrath of Palamas, who defended the monks in his set of treatises called the *Triads*. The first *Triad*, written in 1338, consisted of... against profane philosophy and its dangers... a defence of the hesychast way of prayer, the prayer of the heart... the third, a demonstration that the true way to knowledge of God is through the divine charism of spiritual perception (*noera aesthesis*). Late in 1338, Barlaam wrote his own treatises against the hesychasts, to which Palamas replied in the first half of 1339 with his second *Triad*... In the winter of 1339/40, Barlaam replied with a set of treatises called *Against the Messalians*, to which Palamas responded in early 1340 with his third *Triad*, in which he deals at length with the Orthodox doctrine of deification, his theology of the Light of Tabor as an uncreated activity (or energy) of God, and the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies."

⁵⁷ Adrian Fortescue (1910), "Hesychasm," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, retrieved July 8, 2022, New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm>.

⁵⁸ Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History*, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 113. MacCulloch takes a more affirming view of the connection between the two types of prayer. "One should not neglect a more positive influence from Islam: the mystical movement known as Sufism, with its quest for a special friendship with God, and its conviction that ecstasy provides a path to knowledge of divine truth. Sufism predates the late thirteenth-century rise of hesychasm: its final acceptance into the Islamic mainstream had taken place two hundred years before, through the writings of the great mystical philosopher al-Ghazali. There is notable similarity in the suspicion of the intellect expressed by Gregory Palamas and such earlier masters as al-Ghazali, and in the fact that both movements emphasize the recitation of the divine name."

⁵⁹ Adrian Fortescue (1910), "Hesychasm," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, retrieved July 8, 2022, New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm>.

hesychasm is a process of self-hypnosis similar to his perception of that practiced by Sufi Muslims is at first tempered by his acknowledgment that Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius (who wrote of “a mystic light that is itself half-darkness”⁶⁰), and Symeon the New Theologian (“who required a regular system of spiritual education beginning with baptism and passing through regulated exercises of penance and asceticism under the guidance of a director”⁶¹) wrote of this practice more soberly than “the grossly magic practices of the later Hesychasts”⁶² who also expressed a “strong element of the pantheism that so often accompanies mysticism in the fully developed Hesychast system.”⁶³ Fortescue’s condemnation of hesychasts and hesychastic prayer here moves from its practice to its theological and experiential expression in the uncreated light. He specifically attacks the idea of the energies of God.

This theory, fundamentally opposed to the whole conception of God in the Western Scholastic system... [illustrated a] distinction between God's essence and energy (light) by comparing them to the sun, whose rays are really distinct from its globe, although there is only one sun... This distinct energy, uncreated light that is not the essence of God, would be a kind of demiurge, something neither God nor creature; or there would be two Gods, an essence and an energy.⁶⁴

Fortescue’s insistence that the energies of God were akin to a Gnostic deity is based on his reading of Barlaam of Calabria who opposed Palamas (1296-1359) and denounced hesychasm “as superstitious and absurd... [vehemently denying] the possibility of an uncreated light that was yet not God's essence... [making a] bitter mockery of what he calls the Homphalopsychia of the monks who sit with bent heads gazing at their own person...”⁶⁵ These criticisms by Fortescue were taken seriously by Hausherr and Špidlík, as well as by Jugie who was writing much the same in the 1930s.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. This is in direct contrast to Palamas’ position. Cf. “Meyendorff’s understanding of the controversy,” in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 185-186. “For Barlaam it was simply ridiculous for the hesychast monks to claim that they had seen the uncreated light of the Godhead – and therefore God himself – with their very eyes, whereas for Gregory the monks’ prayer of the heart, in response to God’s grace that healed fallen, fractured human nature, was a prayer that involved the whole of the human being, body as well as soul, so that the idea of seeing God with our very eyes seemed not in the least ridiculous... Although Meyendorff gives no countenance to seeing the hesychast controversy as a conflict between Thomism and Palamism, there are aspects of his book that encourage a way of opposing Orthodox theology with Catholic theology in terms of opposition between Palamas and Aquinas. The chapter on the distinction between essence and energies in Part II of his book on Palamas is entitled ‘*Une théologie existentielle: essence et ‘énergie,*’ and this opposition is manifest in the way he interprets the distinction in personalist terms: God, unknown in himself, makes himself known personally through his energies in which we can participate. He quotes words Palamas addressed to Barlaam: ‘God, when he conversed with Moses, did not say: I am essence, but: I am He who is (Exod. 3:14). It is not then He who is who comes from the essence, but the essence that comes from Him who is, for He who is embraces in Himself the whole of Being.’”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Jugie wrote against the mystical theology and mysticism that lies at the heart of the elder-disciple relationship within the context of the schism between Orthodox and Catholics.

Its origins are to be found in the false mysticism which began to seep into Byzantine monasticism roughly about the time when the Byzantine Church itself broke the last links which had connected it to the Roman Church and which, for better or worse, had preserved the very weak union to which, for several centuries, people had become accustomed.⁶⁶

Like Fortescue, Jugie was specifically critical of Gregory Palamas' theology of the energies of God, which was exemplified by the uncreated light at the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. He was also generally condemnatory of the hesychastic spiritual practices engaged in by the Eastern elders who prayed the Jesus Prayer unceasingly and claimed to cherish, above all else, the silent 'prayer of the heart.'

Its more immediate occasion was the polemics between Barlaam and the Athonite hesychasts represented by Gregory Palamas. We showed how the hesychasts' defender, being provoked by the Calabrian monk's strict logic, had been led to invent a new theology concerning the essence of God and his operation, to differentiate within the divine Being a primary and a secondary element, to imagine a divine light, eternal and uncreated, but really distinct from the essence of God.⁶⁷

Jugie's polemic was reflective of both a disdain for the Orthodox Church itself and its use of "the experiential, mystical method, which claimed to arrive at the knowledge of God, and at union with him, by ascetical practices and interior illuminations of grace, and which interpreted the data of tradition according to mystical experience."⁶⁸ Norman Russell summarizes Jugie's rejection of Palamas' arguments, rejecting them as based on three things: first, the lack of a rational and systematic foundation; second, a faulty application of Patristic source material; and third, an absence of papal and (Western) conciliar authority. "Palamism as a 'system' was thus invented by Jugie as part of the armoury of weapons he could use against the Orthodox Church in order to undermine confidence in it as a reliable vehicle of salvation and so encourage conversions to Catholicism."⁶⁹

These criticisms of hesychasm reveal an essential misunderstanding of the theology of the uncreated light and the essence-energy distinction; the experience of what occurs spiritually for the

⁶⁶ Martin Jugie, "Palamite (Controverse)," Preliminary Considerations, col. 1777, Peter Gilbert, *trans.* Posted at *De unione ecclesiarum* [Martin Jugie : The Palamite Controversy | De unione ecclesiarum \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.wordpress.com).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For further information on the polemical angle of Jugie's writing see Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age*, p. 49. "There was nothing particularly unusual about this approach at the time, alien as it might appear in the light of the ecumenism prevalent (at least in the West) today. The Catholic-Counter Reformation of the sixteenth century, with its assumptions of the soteriological exclusivity of the Roman Catholic Church, had little interest in the kind of 'corporate reunion' that the Council of Florence had tried to achieve in the previous century."

Orthodox Christian engaged in hesychastic prayer and the source of the Orthodox elder's insight into the interior disposition of the disciple; and the context as to why and how the hesychastic way persists as an integral part of Orthodox doctrine and life. At the same time, the concerns of Catholic theologians like Fortescue, Jugie, and Špidlík provide an opportunity to both review what Orthodoxy says today about hesychasm and its quest for the uncreated light by use of the Jesus prayer, deep silence, and ongoing solitude, as well as, to fill a gap in the Orthodox understanding of its own spiritual theology.⁷⁰ Again, that is the point of this thesis: naming an uncreated silence attributed to the Holy Spirit, which is a shared apophatic reality that communicates the will of God, gives spiritual gifts, and provides for the pastoral care of others. Keep in mind, I am developing this idea in such a way that the search for the uncreated light of Mt. Tabor and the desire for the uncreated silence at Pentecost are not competing views of silent prayer, but, rather, an understanding of divine silence that can lead to different, though complementary, spiritual and pastoral outcomes. One is ongoing prayer in solitude and the other is ongoing prayer in relation; while also acknowledging that hesychasts are never not in solidarity with their fellow humans and that those who provide pastoral care are never not called to some measure of silence and stillness.

Zacharias Zacharou on Hesychasm

Now that there has been a brief primer on a particular Catholic point of view regarding hesychasm and, specifically, about Špidlík's essentially unanswered question – 'do heroic forms of silence ...not sin through inverse excess?' – next I will provide a brief primer on one Orthodox perspective of hesychasm, which seems to both confirm and contradict what was said about hesychasm by these specific Catholic scholars in the 20th century. To do this, I will use the 2022 book, *Hesychasm*, by Zacharias Zacharou who also begins by confirming that attention must be paid to the

⁷⁰ In the context of reflecting on the importance of John Meyendorff's research on Gregory Palamas and the theological issues involved in hesychasm, Andrew Louth succinctly expresses the role of hesychastic practice in uniting humans with God. The introduction of the uncreated silence in this thesis is meant to prove out something similar but from the perspective of hearing, understanding, and living out the will of the Holy Spirit as understood through prayer, defined by an emerging theology, and lived as pastoral practice. Cf. "Meyendorff's understanding of the controversy," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 188. "The great merit of Meyendorff's work on Palamas is to turn him from the representative of a principle to a theologian of power and originality. Hesychasm becomes a way of characterizing the whole Christian life, rooted in baptism, deepened through prayer and participation in the sacraments, and finding its fulfillment in deification. Much of Palamas' pastoral and spiritual theology was already accessible through the sermons, in which Palamas never raises such recondite matters as the distinction between God's essence and energy. Meyendorff's exploration of the fundamental structure of his thought in the *Triads* enabled him (and others) to place the pastoral and sacramental theology of the sermons in a sharper theological context. The goal of human creation, according to Palamas, was to unite the human with God. In our fallen condition, deification entailed the restoration to wholeness of fallen fractured humanity: in this process, personal prayer and asceticism, participation in the sacraments, and acts of love and care for one's fellow men and women were united."

interior life. “The vigilant man has his attention turned inwards. Through the labour of vigilance, man cultivates a luminous place in his heart, wherein the mind is attracted and finds rest. As a result, the impressions received by his sense do not leave indelible marks and wounds on his mind and heart.”⁷¹ Notice here both his use of the word ‘luminous’ in the context of cultivating the inner life through ‘vigilance’ (which is a reference to the possibility of ‘seeing’ the Taboric light in persistent hesychastic prayer) and his statement that the external vicissitudes of life do not leave lasting wounds on the mind and heart when a person concentrates on inward growth (which is a reference to the hesychast’s call to focus as little as possible on worldly matters). Connected with these statements, Zacharou recommends a flight from the world in order to maintain a higher level of attentiveness toward being in the presence of Christ.

Stillness is a work that requires the extreme tension of all the powers of man. Features of hesychastic life are freedom from cares, vigilance, remembrance of God and unceasing prayer. However, this freedom from cares cultivated hesychasm presupposes one godly care which urges the ascetic to constantly devise ways of abiding in the presence of God.⁷²

When Zacharou refers to ‘extreme tension’ he means that – if a person chooses to pursue the life of hesychasm – all his or her energy must be used to pry him or herself away from anything that causes distraction from being with God. He follows that by describing the need for ‘vigilance’ in remembering God in ‘unceasing prayer’ and fixating on ‘one godly care,’ which, for him, is silence alone with God. Doing this, he says, will make the aspiring hesychast appear to the world as mentally unstable (which accounts for some of the non-Orthodox criticisms of it). The benefit for him, though, is that the hesychast will overcome the anxieties and angers that come from worldly fixations.

Hesychia begins with fleeing from the tumult of the present world and the agitation of this life. Yet, a more subtle enemy than outward distraction, is the dissipation of the mind and heart caused by passionate attachments, worldly cares and idle, sinful thoughts. In essence, holy stillness is the victory over the causes of inner agitation.⁷³

In the above explanation of the process of solely directing the heart and mind toward God through silent prayer, Zacharou can give the impression that the hesychast is simply abandoning humanity, leaving people to their own devices, and ceasing to care for their needs. While this would be a misfeasant explanation of Christian Contemplative prayer generally and hesychastic prayer specifically, it begs Špidlík’s question: “Do they not contradict the Spirit who speaks to human persons through other inspired persons?”⁷⁴ This is why the Orthodox practice of hesychasm is tied

⁷¹ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 64.

⁷² Ibid, p. 65.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 65.

⁷⁴ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J., *Prayer: The Spirituality of the Christian East*, vol. 2, Colledgeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2005.vol. 2, p. 324.

so strongly to models of eldership, and why this thesis proposes the apophatic relationality of the uncreated silence. Further from this, Zacharou also warns that the internal battle for silence and attentiveness to the presence of God can be fraught with even more difficulty than the external world the hesychast leaves. That is why he states that a person's hesychastic effort cannot rely on a systematic pursuit of mysticism, but instead, on the hard work of building a life of virtue, living the theology of Gregory Palamas, and seeking the existential experience of the presence of Christ "to which the grace of God bears witness day by day in the Orthodox Church."⁷⁵

Following these proclamations, Zacharou repeats the definition of hesychasm as given by Gregory Palamas. He specifies that a hesychast is someone who chooses to spend their life saying the Jesus Prayer in solitude with the desire for repentance and the hope to remain in the presence of God.

Hesychasm means 'continually abiding in contact with the energy of God' through the continual invocation of the saving Name of the Lord Jesus. In other words, the hesychast undertakes the supernatural and supra-cosmic labour of perpetually keeping his mind in his heart, which burns with the 'consuming fire' of divine love.⁷⁶

Take note of how he says that that the hesychast can be in constant contact 'with the energy of God.' This is significant because of the theological debate over the work of Gregory Palamas⁷⁷ who states that the energies of God are an extension of the essence of God. But more germane to this thesis is the fact that Zacharou – in repeating the language of the tradition that the Jesus Prayer, prayed constantly and in solitude, can bring a person into closer proximity with God – maintains that the hesychastic life is simply a return to what humankind was given at creation: the calling to become a 'little God.'

The fact that man was created in the image and likeness of God not only reveals his origin, but also the magnificent purpose for which he was destined before the foundation of the

⁷⁵ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 63.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 65.

⁷⁷ Andrew Louth explains Meyendorff's view that the controversy between Palamas and his detractors was more than a disagreement between Eastern and Western theology or a debate about humanism and mysticism. Cf. "Meyendorff's understanding of the controversy," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 185. Meyendorff "tried to suggest that the difference between Barlaam and Palamas was a difference that could be traced back to their diverging interpretations of the theologian who called himself Dionysios the Areopagite, and whose works had been so influential in subsequent Christian thought, in both East and West. He interpreted Barlaam as giving a purely intellectual interpretation of Dionysios' apophatic theology: an interpretation that led to agnosticism. Whereas Gregory Palamas, he argued, interpreted Dionysios' apophatic theology quite differently, not leading to agnosticism, but rather preparing the way for an encounter with God in which there was genuine knowledge of God transcending the human intellect, a knowledge found in union with God, a union made possible through grace, grace flowing from God's union with humankind in the Incarnation." Again, there is a connectivity with what is being proposed here about uncreated silence. To paraphrase, 'it is a genuine understanding of the will of God made possible by the unutterable words of the Holy Spirit.' Uncreated silence comes as an audiation, a noetic hearing that is provided by grace.

world: that of becoming a little god by grace, with neither beginning nor end, of becoming the habitation of God.⁷⁸

The second reason this is significant is that Zacharou's statement, while consistent with the Orthodox teaching of *theosis* (union with God) and the practice of hesychastic prayer, does open itself up for the type of modern critical analysis akin to what Fortescue alleged about the 'grossly magic practices of the later Hesychasts.' To the uninitiated observer, it might appear as though a person can simply go far from city centers to incessantly pray the Jesus Prayer and become like God. Again, while such an assumption would be entirely reductionist of the theology, the tradition, and the practice of hesychastic prayer, it also elicits a question about how this person might need to be trained for such an undertaking and what they might do with this result once they achieve it. To justify hesychasm and explain his statements, Zacharou argues first that this is simply the state for which humans were created and the state to which each is called to return.

In paradise man received directly from God His breath, the first portion of the Holy Spirit. Before the fall, man was whole, having a wondrous unity of being. There was no sin, no sighing, no sickness, and certainly, no death. Endowed with a spiritual, noetic power, man delighted in the bliss of the vision of God, having his mind unceasingly turned towards his Creator and Father, all concentrated like a beam of light and united with the centre of the human being, which is the heart.⁷⁹

Take note of the first part of the statement where Zacharou explains that before the Fall, humankind received life from the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, and was given noetic ability (which, at one level, can be defined as the mystical power of listening and speaking in silence; interior words without the sound of voices), an attentiveness to God (tantamount to the vision of God), and unity with God (at the level of being). Also note the end of this description where Zacharou writes of the unceasing focus of the mind on God, which relates to both the desire for solitude as a physical mechanism for building and maintaining an uninterrupted relationship with God, and the practice of the Jesus Prayer, which provides a method of intense mental concentration on Christ. This, for Zacharou, is how humans recover⁸⁰ from the division that took place at the Fall when "...Heaven was separated from the earth, man from God... man from his neighbour... Man lost the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the world crept into his soul, polluted with luciferic energy."⁸¹ Recognize the contrast Zacharou is making here with the 'luciferic energy' and his previous statements about the 'divine energy.' He does this not only to point out the necessity of a life of repentance and prayer generally, but also to

⁷⁸ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 68.

⁸⁰ The 'recovery' in this thesis is a prayerful, discerning turn toward the 'first portion of the Holy Spirit.'

⁸¹ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 68-69.

make the case for hesychastic prayer specifically. This is also how he provides support for the idea of being born again in the Spirit,⁸² which for him means recovering spiritual giftedness and noetic perceptibility. These are “revived when the ascetic stands in pure prayer before God with his whole being, fulfilling in a perfect measure the law of the two great commandments.”⁸³

Notice the comparison of ‘pure prayer’ together with the standing before God with one’s ‘whole being’ and the call to fulfill the two great commandments: loving God completely and loving others as yourself (Mt 22:36-40). In this line of thinking, there is to be found one type of answer to Špidlík’s question: this ‘prayer of the heart’ is not only prayed for the person praying it but also for others that they may be brought to the light of the Transfiguration too. Zacharou describes this as a great sacrifice. It is reminiscent of “Christ’s descent to the lowest parts of the earth and His ascension on high poured forth the abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so too the descent of the praying mind into the heart imparts the gifts of the Spirit.”⁸⁴ Zacharou tells how this process of prayer provides some measure of peace that allows for spiritual gifts to come forth, after which humility sets in, and other virtues follow. He writes of how grace heals and unifies the interior of the person in this mode of prayer, which then pushes forward into the “one natural passion, which is divine love. Man is sanctified ‘wholly (1 Thess 5:23)’ by the word of God and ‘entreaty (1 Tim 4:5)’ ‘in His name (John 16:23-24)’.”⁸⁵ It would appear that the trajectory of praying the Jesus Prayer leads to contrition and the awareness of the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The name of the Lord was given to man by revelation and carries the energy of Him Whom he invokes. When the mind is settled in the heart by calling upon the divine Name, this energy is also transmitted to the whole man. Then, a ‘mighty wind’ blows through the soul. The heart undergoes an earthquake and is brought to contrition. But this earthquake is followed by the small breeze of the consolation of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶

There are two important points to glean from this paragraph above: first, hesychasts maintain that even though their prayer is conducted in solitude, there is not a total abandonment of the other within that prayer; and second, that even in its Christocentric nature (remember that hesychasts rely on “The Jesus Prayer”), the watchful hesychast looks to the descent of the Holy Spirit after his or her own metanoia.

In this lies the crux of the debate over hesychastic prayer for Špidlík and others: (1) even if the hesychast devotes part of his or her prayer to and for the people of God, the commitment to

⁸² The ‘born again’ in this thesis is the discernment that comes from the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit, not abandonment of the world.

⁸³ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 74-75.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 74-75.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 75.

extreme solitude means they have walked away from their responsibility toward their neighbors; (2) the constant recitation of the Jesus Prayer seems to function like a mantra intended to privately transform the hesychast into a more heavenly version of him or herself; and (3) if purification is required before the descent of the Holy Spirit, then what does that say about the importance of pastoral care either within the sacramental structure or without it. What these concerns indicate is the need for a proper and equivalent distinction that any two people called to deep, abiding, silent prayer may end up having different vocations in the aftermath of that silence: one to increasing solitude and the other to increasing pastoral care. That is what uncreated silence provides and why spiritual guidance becomes important. For a person to know more about the path they are to take in either the antecedent silence or the subsequent response to that silence, the knowledge of a spiritual elder (as the Orthodox understand it) becomes quite useful.

This training that man undertakes in order to be conformed to the word of the Lord is in no way abstract. It first consists of embracing the word that the faithful Christian receives from his spiritual father, who has taken upon himself the care for his salvation. The word of the spiritual father, becomes for the obedient ascetic a lens that enables him to understand the word of the Gospel.⁸⁷

Zacharou explains that this kind of spiritual obedience to an elder⁸⁸ is necessary in order to maintain a constancy and commitment to: praying the Jesus Prayer, mourning through repentance, allowing the mind to descend into the heart, shaking off passionate attachments, removing the masks created by the self, developing Christ-like humility, and keeping the “mind in the flames of hell”⁸⁹ because the... “sharper the spiritual pain, the more violently the mind is captivated, descends into the deep heart and becomes anchored there where the source of pain lies.”⁹⁰ This stark language is used in the hesychast tradition (and therefore in the work of Zacharou) to reinforce the underlying reason for asceticism, which is to heal from sin, develop a transparent mind, heart, and soul, readjust focus on God, love God, learn what God intends you to be, love others like yourself, and unify spiritual gifts. Since the work of mental prayer is ultimately a creative exercise completed in

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 76.

⁸⁸ This is never meant to be blind obedience because of the potential for spiritual abuse. Cf. Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 248. “The expression ‘spiritual abuse’ can seem a bit strong on account of its resonance with the term ‘sexual abuse,’ but is the victims themselves who use these terms when they speak, for instance, about violation of the conscience. It is an abuse of trust, which takes advantage of the person’s openness so as to force a way into his or deepest, most intimate thoughts and, eventually, to hold sway over his or her conscience.”

⁸⁹ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 83.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 84. This may be an unrealistic path of healing and growth at the parish level or with other types of spiritual companions.

the service of contemplating God, the “essential condition for hesychasm is man’s living experience of God and of His grace with the heart, with his whole being.”⁹¹

This living experience Zacharou writes about is the revelation of the Taboric Light. It is supposed to be the light which shines forth for those who have become pure in their heart and are given the grace to receive it. “The divine Light is the physical manifestation of Divinity, wherein God ‘mystically communes with them that are worthy.’⁹² Just as the divine Nature of the Triune Godhead is uncreated, so too its radiance is uncreated, being common to the Three Persons of the Godhead.”⁹³ This light comes when there is a presupposition of faith, an enduring focus on a relationship with God, and an acknowledgement of who Jesus is, just as in the examples of Peter, James, John, and Paul.

The Lord revealed the radiance of His Person to His three closest disciples on Tabor, only after they had confessed Him, though the mouth of Peter, as the Son of the Living God (Mt 16:16). And when the divine Light shone around Paul on the way to Damascus, he understood that the Light was God...⁹⁴

Zacharou explains this experience of spiritually heightened senses in the context of the uncreated light. “In his usual state, man cannot bear the vision of uncreated Light. This becomes possible when the soul is strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁵

The case of the Apostles in the upper room is precisely this compelling but different. Instead of experiencing the uncreated light of Christ at Transfiguration, they experience the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This was made partly possible because the Apostles had faith when Jesus said he would send ‘another.’ This part of it has never changed. What else was and is needed? A person who sees the need for change and the willingness to cooperate with the Holy Spirit through prayer, repentance, patience, and love. The response of the Spirit comes as an inner auditory revelation, an audiation (the hearing equivalent of illumination), which transfigures his or her ability to ‘hear’ God into a type of noetic hearing that makes clearer the call of God. This audiation teaches and tells and leads to action in the disciple who receives it. Zacharou quotes Palamas who writes about this interior change for a different context, but it applies, nonetheless.

...for the mind always wanders about as though blind, without possessing an accurate and assured understanding either of sensory things not immediately present to it or of transcendent intelligible realities. Rather it ascends in very truth, raised by the Spirit’s ineffable power, and with spiritual and ineffable perception it hears words too sacred to utter (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4) and sees invisible things. And it becomes entirely rapt in the miracle of

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 85.

⁹² The vision of this thesis is that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit is more ubiquitous because it comes to those authentically trying to discern.

⁹³ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*. Essex, UK: The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2022, p. 86-87.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 87-88.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

it, even when it is no longer there, and it rivals the tireless angelic choir, having become truly another angel of God upon earth...⁹⁶

This is similar to the process I am proposing with the uncreated silence, except that the unutterable words of the Holy Spirit resonate within the person who has followed the age-old advice of his or her priest, elder, parent, godparent, or other guide in the faith: 'listen to what God is telling you.'

The man who has climbed 'eternal mountains' and beholds 'supermundane things' begins to be initiated into the mystery of the knowledge of God. And whether 'in the body or out of the body', he has only one task: as another angel of God on earth, he becomes 'a ministering spirit', sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' (Heb 1:14).⁹⁷

What Zacharou means here is that God may give the hesychast people to pray for and/or people to shepherd as an elder. But when it comes to the uncreated silence as presented in this thesis, the deafening quiet of the call of the Holy Spirit leads this person to become that 'ministering spirit' and does so amid the people of God. In other words, the Spirit 'speaks,' the person is supposed to 'listen,' act accordingly, and provide pastoral care to others. Through the internal reverberation of this unutterable sound of the Holy Spirit, the person hears a soundless divine call to take care of others through word and deed. The very work of uncreated silence is to give such clarity of the will of God and such clarity of direction in how to implement it - that the receiver wants nothing more than to remain listening to the Spirit and spreading Its word to all those he or she meets. "Like the Apostles after Pentecost, man now lives as if he were 'full of sweet new wine (Cf. Acts 2:13),' given over to the sober drunkenness of divine love."⁹⁸

By providing this short review of one Catholic and one Orthodox perspective regarding hesychasm, I demonstrated that the differences of opinion regarding the unwavering pledge toward silence and stillness present an opportunity to introduce what may be called a branch of, an addendum to, or an offshoot from hesychasm. In other words, the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit – which is the same silence heard by the Apostles at Pentecost and the same unutterable words heard in the Third Heaven – starts in the quiet of the spiritual mind and heart, continues as a development of the apophatic relationship between the Holy Spirit and the person, provides illumination about the God-willed direction for that person, and strengthens their resolve to follow the path of spiritual relationality.

⁹⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, "Letter to the Most Reverend Nun Xenia" in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 59, p. 316-317, in Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*, p. 89.

⁹⁷ Zacharias Zacharou, *Hesychasm: The Bedewing Furnace of the Heart*, p. 90.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 91.

The Pneumatological Solution

Now that I have established a basic primer on the question of silence in hesychastic prayer based both on a Catholic criticism and a modern Orthodox explanation of it – through which we discovered some quite similar analysis and a significant diversion when it comes to negative and positive perceptions of the commitment to solitude – I will explain how from the New Testament, the Pneumatology of Basil the Great, the concept of audiation, an example from the life of Seraphim of Sarov, and the apophatic theology and philosophy of Christos Yannaras and Max Picard respectively – that it is possible to glean the idea of an uncreated silence.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

An uncreated silence can begin to be derived from the New Testament accounts of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-17, Jesus explains that the Spirit dwells within: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” The idea of *knowing* the Spirit and the Spirit *dwelling within* implies an intimacy of experience between the Holy Spirit and a person, as well as the Holy Spirit and a group. This dwelling, however, is not passive, it is active in that the Holy Spirit both communicates and nourishes action through noetic speech. As an example of this, in John 16:13 Jesus explains that the Spirit will not only reiterate the truth of what He spoke but also about those things which are still left unsaid.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

In explaining that the apostles and disciples ‘cannot bear’ all the things that must be said ‘now,’ Jesus implies that more inner growth and additional spiritual perspective are required of those who will be hearing these messages about what is to come and what they are to do with that information. The fulfillment of Jesus’ words can be understood as occurring first at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit *fills* each apostle individually, the apostles as a group, and the wider community.

...suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting ...And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:1-4).

This passage makes clear that the announcement of the presence of the Holy Spirit comes not just in the form of light (tongues of fire), but also in forms of sound; a deafening noise which accounts for the presence of the Holy Spirit and a silence through which the Spirit communicates directly to persons and groups. This combination of vociferation and placidity translates divine language for humans. In other words, a natural sound is carrying the mystical soundlessness of God to the Apostles, attracting crowds, ensuring relationality, enshrining universality, unhidden by sight, but still hidden in sound. Thus, the uncreated silence that is revealed at Pentecost is not an absence of words, but a silence with a presence in it; it is a type of *apophaticism of the word* or *audio-apophaticism* that is given in divine love. From the perspective of the people involved, each person receives a message and together they understand what is individually being said by each other. This silent speaking of God to and through the Apostles means that they were able to communicate in a new way. Whether it was hearing God's will, discerning spiritual gifts, speaking new languages, understanding new things, or talking with each other at greater depths, the indication is that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit was and is a new, unique experience for the individual, but specifically in relation to others; as in, for example, pastoral care and, more specifically, spiritual guidance.

Jesus alludes to these ideas after rejecting the first temptation of the devil. He "answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).'"⁹⁹ Not only is Jesus referring to the words He Himself spoke, but also the noetic words that the Holy Spirit speaks. When coupled with Matthew 13:9 – "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" – the implication also is that people must choose to listen to the words of God. Jesus reinforces this in Matthew 13:16-17: "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear, for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Jesus goes one step further in Matthew 13:19 by proclaiming that those who do not listen properly to His word and the words of the Holy Spirit will be snatched away by 'the wicked one.' Despite this ominous warning, the people of God have a certain say in these matters. For example, they can petition God to help themselves and others. In the Gospel according to Mark, the people implore Jesus to help the deaf man, which is a story about God being willing to help people to hear what they need to hear. Take note in this passage that Jesus is not only physically healing someone's ears and tongue, but also communicating that the true believer will need to hear and speak differently.

Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His

⁹⁹ In Matthew 13:13-14, there is a distinction between those who hear and understand, and those who will not hear and understand.

fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly (Mark 7:32-37).

The opened ears, the corrected tongue, and the normalized speech allow for the hearing and preaching of the words of the Word, as well as the listening and acting upon the words of the Spirit. This is particularly important in the context of the coming persecution that Jesus' disciples are to suffer. He explains that "when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Matthew 10:19-20)." Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who noetically provides words for the one who needs them in a particular moment and imparts other spiritual gifts upon them at different times for the purpose of speaking to, relating to, and helping others. Paul explains that "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)." This is reinforced in Romans 8:26-27 where the uncreated silence helps a person to complete prayers and encourages them to perform works of charity.

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Note two parts of this quote: the phrase 'groanings which cannot be uttered' bespeaks a divine word, a noetic sharing from the Spirit to the hearer. Also, the phrase 'makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God,' means that a person will be given the information about and the ability to perform pastoral works. Thus, the Holy Spirit speaks inward and effuses outward partly through the works of the people. This is corroborated in Acts 2:6-12.

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another... we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So, they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'Whatever could this mean?

The word each was given came in the form of a silent, divine communication; people heard God in a new way, were able to recognize spiritual gifts within themselves and others, caused them to speak, and to act. Just a few lines later, it is reconfirmed that the Holy Spirit will be sent to God's people, and they will prophesy, meaning that 'spiritual speaking' will be possible.

But this what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:16-18).

This last phrase that ‘they shall prophesy’ demonstrates that this noetic hearing of the Holy Spirit provides prophetic words that may not only be meant for the one receiving them, but for others as words and works, meaning that the Pneumatological message is relational, even pastoral. To put this concept into one particular perspective, the understanding of uncreated light in Orthodox Christianity is most often related to the movement from perceiving light to an illuminated darkness in silence, stillness, and solitude. The uncreated silence, however, should be understood as the movement from perceiving sound to a resounding deafness (noetic hearing), which, while received silently, is meant to be shared. Paul explains his own personal experience to the Corinthians. “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven... he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Cor 12:2-4).” Again, inexpressible words are being shared; this is the very definition of noetic speech. John, too, had an encounter with God whose “voice was like the sound of many waters... When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead (Rev 1:15, 17).”

There are three important ideas embedded in these New Testament references: human words cannot adequately describe what is happening during these times of Pneumatological silence, the silent words delivered by the Spirit do not necessarily have to remain silent within the one who receives them, and the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit provides spiritual gifts and encourages them to be brought forth as pastoral gifts from one person to another. For example, Peter’s shadow heals the sick. “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them (Acts 5:14-15).” Another example comes in the form of Peter and John exercising the gift of laying on of hands.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

Paul does the same but, in his case, it is reported that the people who received the same Chrismation immediately expressed the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Peter confirms that in Baptism and through repentance (Confession) “you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).” Notice in these examples the silent presence of the Spirit coupled with the speaking of the

people who receive the Spirit. On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and Luke needed the Holy Spirit to understand that they were talking with the Resurrected Christ.

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scripture to us (Luke 24:30-32).

The Holy Spirit gave Cleopas and Luke a spiritual sensation, a burning of the heart, that alerted them to listen differently. Finally, it is important to note here the account of Mary at the Annunciation. An important distinction in this experience is that Mary does not have the benefit of already knowing the divine presence of Jesus. So, in some sense, it is reasonable to think that the Archangel Gabriel was sent to apprise Mary of a new way of listening and responding to God. This overshadowing of the Spirit is not only about her pregnancy, but her hearing a question and answering it. "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38)." Mary 'tells' Gabriel she understands what he is communicating and will say 'yes' when the Holy Spirit speaks and acts in her. In so doing, Mary not only agrees to raise Jesus, but to mother the Christian people.

To bring to a close this New Testament introduction to the existence and action of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit, it is important to remember that (1) human words cannot adequately describe what is happening during these times of Pneumatological silence, (2) the silent words delivered by the Spirit do not necessarily have to remain silent within the one who receives them, and (3) the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit provides spiritual gifts and encourages them to be brought forth as pastoral gifts for others. In a general context, this noetic gift of the Holy Spirit can be understood as applicable both to the relationship of a priest and parishioner (meaning that it exists in the sacramental life of a parish) and to situations beyond the walls of a parish where spiritual gifts are provided to people to do works in the name of God. Looked at in a more specific way, this spiritual speaking is applicable to the Orthodox Christian elder-disciple relationship that began developing in the second century of Christianity. In this case, the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit descends to lead the elder in his or her instruction of the disciple, and onto the disciple for them to receive such spiritual guidance and act on it as provided by the Holy Spirit. To be more precise, an Orthodox Christian elder is an experienced spiritual guide who teaches another person how to 'hear' the Holy Spirit in silence and to apply what was 'said' in that silence. This is the specific spiritual gift that will be examined most closely in this thesis.

Basil on the Holy Spirit

Continuing this introductory analysis of how an uncreated silence can be the Pneumatological solution to the lack of relationality in hesychastic silence, here the work of Basil the Great will be examined. Although Basil far more often uses metaphors of light and vision to describe the illuminative work of the Holy Spirit, a Pneumatological uncreated silence can be derived from his discourse *On the Holy Spirit*. In chapter 16, paragraph 38, Basil writes: "...the Spirit of the mouth of God is the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Holy Spirit is the one who speaks after Christ's Ascension. To further understand what this means to Basil, in the same paragraph he explains, "The revelation of mysteries is indeed the peculiar function of the Spirit... All the glorious and unspeakable harmony of the highest heavens both in the service of God, and in the mutual concord of the celestial powers, can therefore only be preserved by the direction of the Spirit."¹⁰¹ Basil makes clear that the Spirit reveals and noetically explains the 'unspeakable' things of God to human believers. In chapter 19, paragraph 49, Basil states that the Holy Spirit works miracles, remits sin, heals, drives out demons, and resurrects at the Parousia. This also means the Holy Spirit 'speaks' through sacraments like Confession where the uncreated silence draws near to the confessor and to the one who confesses in an apophatic divine relationality. This is connective with Basil's comment that the Holy Spirit "attunes our souls to the spiritual beyond" and facilitates "the transmutation from our earthly and sensuous life to the heavenly conversation which takes place in us through the Spirit, then our souls are exalted to the highest pitch of admiration."¹⁰² Notice what Basil is doing here. He is saying that the Holy Spirit calls out to and transforms the believer so that he or she can be a part of the divine discussion. In other words, the human person becomes able to listen, receive, and respond to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 24, paragraph 56, Basil describes how the one who has the Holy Spirit within can know the deep things of God; "the creature receives the manifestation of ineffable things through the Spirit."¹⁰³ Then in paragraph 57 of the same chapter, Basil becomes even more explicit about the presence and effect of the one who speaks silently. "For God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba, Father, that the voice of the Spirit may become the very voice of them that have received Him." Take note here of all the references to speaking (even 'crying out') and listening, which he draws close to musical metaphors: 'unspeakable harmony,' 'attunes our souls,' and 'heavenly conversation.' He also calls the believer to discipline his or her own speech to imitate 'the voice of the Spirit.'

¹⁰⁰ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, The Fig Classic Series on Early Church Theology, Kindle Edition. Fig Books, 2013, location 635.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, locations 648-662.

¹⁰² Ibid, location 842.

¹⁰³ Ibid, locations 969-982.

To more acutely understand the relationship between Basil's view of the Holy Spirit and the proposal of an uncreated silence in this thesis, it is helpful to explore other specific characteristics that relate to divine communication. First, in chapter eight, paragraph 20, Basil clarifies how communication happens within God. Even though it takes place in the context of Jesus doing the will of the Father (ultimately to make the point that the Son and the Spirit are not lower than the Father), it is instructive about noetic transmission.

Do not then let us understand by what is called a commandment a peremptory mandate delivered by organs of speech, and giving orders to the Son, as to a subordinate, concerning what He ought to do. Let us rather, in a sense befitting the Godhead, perceive a transmission of will, like the reflexion of an object in a mirror, passing without note of time from Father to Son.¹⁰⁴

The use of the phrase 'a transmission of will' between Father and Son (which also applies to the relationship between the Father and the Spirit, as well as the Son and the Spirit) is vital because it implies a noetic exchange among the persons of the Holy Trinity and, for the purpose of this thesis, indicates that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit can be understood, in part, as a noetic transmission of the will of God to persons and groups. Whether it comes all at once or various parts communicated over time, this divine silent speaking gives direction, aids in understanding, and draws the person's likeness closer to the image of God because, what is given by the Spirit, is also a mirrored reflection of what is given by the Son. An example of this is found three paragraphs earlier in chapter eight where Basil describes how Jesus is 'sent' and 'heard.' He explains in paragraph 17, that "He calls sheep, and confesses Himself to be, to them that hear His voice and refuse to give heed to strange teaching, a shepherd. For my sheep, he says, hear my voice."¹⁰⁵ Two relevant points can be made about this quote beyond the obvious reference to calling, confessing, hearing, teaching, and voice. One is that the Holy Spirit enables a person to seek, listen, and understand the words of the Word. The other is that the Holy Spirit enables the function of proper hearing and the ability to perceive and reject false teaching.

Second, in chapter nine, paragraph 22, Basil clarifies how the Holy Spirit is distinct from Jesus. "Its proper and peculiar title is Holy Spirit, which is a name specially appropriate to everything that is incorporeal, purely immaterial, and indivisible."¹⁰⁶ These attributes of the Spirit imbue the idea of uncreated silence with its divine and eternal components, specifically its omnipresent bodiless-ness, its eternal immateriality, and its unique indivisibility from the Spirit itself. Thus, uncreated silence is an uncreated energy of God that penetrates human faculties, provides knowledge, gives words, and stirs pastoral actions. Uncreated silence offers the person a set of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, location 346.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, location 281.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, location 373.

spiritual sensations that go far beyond natural human faculties. On this point, Gregory Palamas offers a cogent perspective.

Do you not understand that the men who are united to God and deified, who fix their eyes in a divine manner on Him, do not see as we do? Miraculously, they see with a sense that exceeds the senses, and with a mind that exceeds the mind, for the power of the Spirit penetrates their human faculties, and allows them to see things which are beyond us. In speaking of a vision through the senses, then, we must add that this transcends the senses, in order to show clearly that it is not only supernatural, but goes beyond all expression.¹⁰⁷

Notice that Palamas explains how what is given by the Holy Spirit is inexplicable in human language. It transcends and exceeds what is known by natural action and/or reason. It goes beyond sense perception and causes other things that are called 'supernatural' to pale in comparison. Even though Palamas is using metaphors of light and vision here, the point he makes is also valid for an uncreated silence that occurs apophatically, exceeds human hearing, and elevates human speaking. Rather than being an absence of words, uncreated silence is an excessive presence of soundless divine utterances, which call out to the human for a wordless response expressed as a free acquiescence to the will of God, an internal acceptance of divine gifts freely given, and an outpouring of divine love toward others.

Basil explains further in paragraph 22 that the Spirit, who generously gives gifts, is the "origin of sanctification"¹⁰⁸ and illumines "every faculty in the search for truth."¹⁰⁹ This last phrase is particularly important to this thesis because – even though Basil explicitly identifies the Spirit "after the likeness of the sunbeam, whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it"¹¹⁰ only a few sentences later – his comment that the Spirit elevates every human sense perception allows for the reasonability of the development of this theological proposition, which is centered around the faculty of hearing and not hearing, which also implies a talking and not talking. What is also worth noting from this paragraph is the juxtaposition Basil creates between the Spirit whose power is "communicated only to the worthy"¹¹¹ and whose energy is distributed "according to the proportion of faith"¹¹² on the one hand and whose grace is "sufficient and full for all mankind"¹¹³ on the other. In this construct, Basil is setting at odds the freely offered gifts of the Spirit and the sinfulness of the people which, he says, alienated them from their natural, close relationship with God. He states: "Only then after a man is purified from the shame whose stain he took through the wickedness, and

¹⁰⁷ Gregory Palamas, "The Triads" in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁸ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, The Fig Classic Series on Early Church Theology, Kindle Edition. Fig Books, 2013, location 384.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

has come back again to this natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form, only thus is it possible for him to draw near to the Paraclete.”¹¹⁴ With his comment in mind, it becomes an important task to ask the question, ‘who or what will help these wicked who are in the process of being purified?’ One answer comes from Basil himself who clearly states that with “the aid of your purified eye” the Spirit will reveal “the unspeakable beauty of the archetype.”¹¹⁵ In this statement, he stands firm in his position that a person must do serious work to prepare him or herself to receive the illumination of the Spirit. But Basil offers something more. He points the reader in the direction of listening for something “unspeakable”¹¹⁶ that gets revealed as a result of the work of self-purification. While the text here can be read as simply as ‘this unspeakability is due to the awestrking nature of what is revealed by the Spirit;’ a deeper look at the passage divulges a noetic transmissibility that communicates something specific between Spirit and person. To this point, Basil goes on to write that the Spirit “makes them spiritual by fellowship with Himself”¹¹⁷ and when they “become spiritual,”¹¹⁸ they “send forth their grace to others.”¹¹⁹ By undertaking this personal catharsis, engaging in a sincere listening to the Holy Spirit in prayer, and sending forth the graces received from the Spirit, there “comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, the being made God.”¹²⁰

That is precisely the point of this thesis: the Holy Spirit speaks through Its uncreated silence to invite and to help people become spiritual by being *in a spiritual relationship* with the Spirit and calling them to respond by helping others do the same. More specifically, the proposal in this thesis is that there are two particular types of spiritual relationships in the Orthodox Christian Churches in which an individual can seek help to increase virtue and grow in the Spirit. One is in parish life where sacraments, particularly that of Confession, is available for both healing the person and restoring their relationship with God. Another is in the long-practiced elder-disciple tradition in which a deep exploration of the interior life is guided by an experienced practitioner of prayer and reflection. I will note here that I fully accept that it is possible to find uncreated silence outside the structures of the Church, but for the purposes of this thesis, I choose to focus the discussion on places, persons,

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, location 397.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

and/or experiences within the Church, which more readily reveal the presence and work of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

Having already described uncreated silence in New Testament terms, especially through the concept of hearing at Pentecost, and explaining it through the Pneumatology of Basil the Great, what comes next is an accounting of how uncreated silence works using the language of audiation, a term associated with music, and the example of Seraphim of Sarov whose experience with the Holy Spirit is instructional for a further understanding of uncreated silence.

Audiation and the Experience of Seraphim of Sarov

Uncreated silence is both somatic and asomatic. Somatic in that this gift is, at first, interpreted by the person as hearing. It is also cataphatic in that this hearing of the Holy Spirit is understood personally as discernment and shared pastorally as spiritual guidance or sacrificial service. At the same time, uncreated silence is in and of itself asomatic because it is not actually heard. It is also apophatic because it illudes a purely intellectual understanding. So, from the vantage point of sound (or, rather, the words of the Holy Spirit that are silent but can be heard), the hearing equivalent of a 'spiritual vision' could be a 'spiritual audiation.' Audiation is a concept of music theory¹²¹ that explains the human capacity for hearing sounds in the mind that are no longer present or were never present. Thus, the inverted perspective of iconography that implies a gaze from the other side of the icon could have a translatable equivalency to the 'hearing' in *theoria*, meaning that the other side of the silence given in contemplation is a Pneumatological word received in silence. Therefore, what I am proposing in this thesis is an analogy to the uncreated light at the Transfiguration called the uncreated silence, which exists as an inaudible sign of the apophatic audibility of God. From the perspective of the hearer, this uncreated silence is a deprivation of the senses such that the *nous* can receive the unheard words of the Holy Spirit. This type of apophasis, which can be found "in the sound of a gentle breeze (3 Kings 19:12)" and received as a resting gift "for about half an hour (Rev 8:1)," brings the spiritual mind and the interior sense of the disciple to a listening attentiveness in the still presence of the Holy Spirit, who is encountered between periods of prayer and silence up front and then silence and more prayer – or pastoral care – afterward. Thus, uncreated silence itself is axiomatic in that it requires some measure of silence and solitude that results in a loving relationality that provides pastoral care.

¹²¹ "Audiation...takes place when we hear and comprehend music for which the sound is no longer or may never have been present." Gordon Institute for Music Learning. "Audiation." [Audiation – GIML – The Gordon Institute for Music Learning](#), accessed 1 July 2022. For a longer treatment of this subject, see Edwin E. Gordon, *Space Audiation*, GIA Publications, 2015.

To understand this at the level of what is practiced, I will first rely on Seraphim of Sarov whose work, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*, hints at the idea of an uncreated silence though, like other sources in this thesis, does not name it as such since this is a new expression. To be clear, Seraphim speaks more in the language of light than he does in sound, but the idea of listening to the Holy Spirit is firmly present. In fact, he is emphatic that the Holy Spirit *will* communicate, and that each person must listen carefully to discern what is being ‘said.’ This comes out in his discussion with Motovilov when he makes the firm statement that in prayer people are granted a conversation with Jesus, but that prayer must come to an end when the Holy Spirit descends to dialogue. (The quotes are a bit long in this section, but this is necessary to preserve the tenor and fluidity of Seraphim’s discussion about praying, silence, and stillness before the Holy Spirit.) He asks:

Why should we then pray to Him... when He has already come to us to save us who trust in Him, and truly call on His holy Name, that humbly and lovingly we may receive Him, the Comforter, in the mansions of our souls, hungering and thirsting for His coming?¹²²

Notice how Seraphim says that people call out to the Holy Spirit when they hunger and thirst for Its presence. There is a type of longing in that language, which he explains by using the example of inviting someone over. From there Seraphim proceeds to explain what one ought to do once God has entered his or her soul as if it were a house.

Imagine that you have invited me to pay you a visit and at your invitation I come to have a talk with you. But you continue to invite me, saying: ‘Come in, please. Do come in!’ Then I should be obliged to think: ‘What is the matter with him? Is he out of his mind?’ ‘So it is with regard to our Lord God the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said: ‘Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.’ (Ps. 45[46]:10). That is, I will appear and will continue to appear to everyone who believes in Me and calls upon Me, and I will converse with Adam in Paradise, with Abraham and Jacob and other servants of Mine, with Moses and Job, and those like them.¹²³

There are three key points in this section of the text. First, the Holy Spirit will come to those who believe and call out for Its presence. Second, the person who is praying must learn how to stop praying, remain still, keep quiet, allow the Holy Spirit to descend within, and listen to its uncreated silence. Third, that this noetic speaking of the Holy Spirit happens both in life and in death; to explain this he uses Old Testament figures he says were known and still known by the Spirit, and act as exemplars of the gift of self to God. This gift of self is described in the next section first as stillness in prayer and then complete silence before the Holy Spirit.

Many explain that this stillness refers only to worldly matters: in other words, that during prayerful converse with God you must ‘be still’ with regard to worldly affairs. But I will tell you in the name of God that not only is it necessary to be dead to them at prayer, but when

¹²² Seraphim of Sarov, “The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit,” Fr. Seraphim Rose, *trans.*, vol. 1, *Little Russian Philokalia* Series. Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996, p. 84.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

by the omnipotent power of faith and prayer our Lord God the Holy Spirit condescends to visit us, and comes to us in the plenitude of His unutterable goodness, we must be dead to prayer too. 'The soul speaks and converses during prayer, but at the descent of the Holy Spirit we must remain in complete silence, in order to hear clearly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life which He will then deign to communicate.'¹²⁴

Take special note here of Seraphim's phrase 'unutterable goodness,' which, at one level, is a reference to Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12. At a second level, it is confirmation that the Holy Spirit speaks as an uncreated silence, which the human soul hears and responds to even though there are no human words to describe these words; as Seraphim says, they are 'all the words of eternal life.' Also notice Seraphim's injunction against prayer in the presence of the Holy Spirit. His point is that it makes no sense to be praying or thinking about praying at the descent of the Holy Spirit so that everything "He will then deign to communicate"¹²⁵ can be understood clearly. These last comments are particularly important to this research.

In this section what I have provided is a description of a secular music term, audiation, that describes an experience of composers who can hear music that has never been heard before and applied that to this question of uncreated silence. While there was not an attempt to draw an exact parallel, the language used in that system is helpful for understanding the ability to hear the communication of the Holy Spirit, which Seraphim of Sarov explains with detail. The next section will provide a more complete explanation of the theology that lies at the core of understanding uncreated silence.

Uncreated Silence as an Apophatic Relationality

In the section above, I proposed the existence of a silent, Pneumatologically-based relationship that is known and lived in prayerful sequences of noetic thought, speech, and action. To better understand what this means, I will place it in the context of apophatic theology. To do this, I will utilize the works of Christos Yannaras who reveals something of the infinitely unknowable and yet spiritually tangible relatability of the Holy Spirit. As I have done in previous sections, I will also employ a Catholic viewpoint, namely that of the philosopher Max Picard, who offers a compatible perspective to the theology of what I am calling apophatic relationality.

To ensure clarity in describing what apophaticism means in the context of this thesis specifically, I will provide the following points about apophatic theology more generally using a short summary of a longer work published in 2020 by Andreas Andreopoulos. First, apophaticism, the essence-energies distinction, and hesychasm are distinct though intimately related areas of study.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Second, apophatic theology and negative theology are two different ideas. Third, apophatic theology is not a nihilistic absence but rather a type of unknowing. Fourth, apophatic theology provides a framework for why and how it is impossible to know the essence of God. Fifth, apophaticism frees the human mind from rationalism. Sixth, apophaticism expands the limits of being. Seventh, apophaticism is at the heart of the sacramental life of the church. Eighth, apophaticism can provide answers to “deconstructionist postmodernists who explore the limits of language and rationality.”¹²⁶ Ninth, apophaticism (“as the silence of language and rationalism in the face of the overwhelming experience of the presence of God”¹²⁷) can be understood liturgically. A tenth point may be derived from the last two: apophaticism explains the unspoken shared experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in spiritual relationships.

Christos Yannaras

Uncreated silence is a deprivation of the physical senses such that the nous can receive the inaudible words of the Holy Spirit. This type of apophasis, which can be found “in the sound of a gentle breeze (3 Kingdoms 19:12)” and received as a resting gift “for about half an hour (Rev 8:1)” brings the spiritual mind, the interior sense of the disciple, to a relaxed attention in the presence of the Holy Spirit who is encountered between periods of prayer, silence, and service. This occurs because there “is a margin of silence that surrounds any manifestation of mystery. If we are to understand what is revealed, we need to be attuned to the margin of silence that surrounds it.”¹²⁸ That is what is needed to understand the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit, which is unknowable and, yet, affinitive. The Orthodox philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras describes this phenomenon in the context of Saint Paul’s ascent to the Third Heaven: “...the lucidity of the experience was a kind of private subjective knowledge with no possibility of being shared through language, or of being reified by commonly understood signifiers.”¹²⁹

This inexplicable ‘private subjective knowledge’ is the shared center of the relationship between Paul and God and provides a view into the apophatic relationality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. To unpack this, it is first helpful to understand that apophaticism for Yannaras is a non-conceptual understanding of God based on nihilism. More specifically, he proposes that replacing the idea of nothingness (which is usually connected to the concept of negative theology)

¹²⁶ Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos, “The Legacy of the Russian Diaspora: An Evaluation and Future Directions,” *Analogiajournal.com*. 8. The Theology of the Russian Diaspora (*analogiajournal.com*), accessed 13 June 2021.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Andrew Louth, “The apophatic in modern Orthodox theology and modern philosophy,” ch. 1 in *Christos Yannaras: Philosophy, Theology, Culture*, Andreas Andreopoulos and Demetrios Harper, eds. Routledge, 2019, Kindle Edition, pp. 11-14.

¹²⁹ Christos Yannaras, *The Effable and the Ineffable: The Linguistic Boundaries of Metaphysical Realism*. Winchester: Winchester University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21039/book2>, 2022, pp. 71-74.

with the idea of unknowing to provide a new framework for understanding Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality. Here is how Louth analyzes Yannaras on this point.

...it was in the mysterious author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* ...that Yannaras found the true tradition of Christian thought that had been misunderstood and distorted in the West, and subsequently in much of the East. Central to Dionysios' theology was the conviction that God is utterly unknowable, we can say nothing about him, we cannot capture him in our concepts, nor can we construct an ontology that applies to him.¹³⁰

For Yannaras, the attempt to reify God in both theological and philosophical terms in the West is what, in the end, limited its understanding of God in such a way that those things which were unknowable became expressed as nothingness instead of unknowability, which for Orthodoxy is still filled with infinite, though indefinable, meaning.¹³¹ Yannaras himself clarifies and expands on this by referring to Paul's experience of being taken up into the third heaven. First, it is clear Paul's first-hand testimony provides a type of certainty that he was completely aware of himself (his 'personal identity' as Yannaras puts it). In other words, he was not caught up in some type of self-induced hypnotic state. Second, Paul's statement that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it confirms that he is aware of himself, but in a new way. Even though he cannot answer the question about his physical state, his limited reasoning of mind and his attuned prayerful heart were open to the experience. For Yannaras, this is all made possible because it is fundamentally a relationality. "The experience was lived 'in Christ', i.e., as a function of a specific relationship with Christ's person. Access to the 'realm' of the uncreated resulted from a relationship, not from natural capabilities. It was a relational event."¹³² Note here Yannaras' placement of the experience of the uncreated in a relationship; this is what is true of uncreated silence. To affirm this, Yannaras explains that because Paul is lucid throughout the event, he can choose to be reverential to the "Other" involved in the scene. In other words, Paul's awareness of being 'captured' into the Third Heaven becomes verifiable. "It is signified through the sense of hearing ('he heard words')."¹³³ Essentially, Paul heard that which cannot be spoken. This is clearly related to what has been written heretofore in this thesis about uncreated silence. "Moreover, it is not appropriate to even attempt to signify

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 15-16.

¹³¹ Cf. "The apophatic and personhood," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 255. "If Yannaras took the notion of the apophatic from Lossky, and through him from Dionysios the Areopagite, he took something else from Lossky: his conviction that the unknowability of God, acknowledged by the fundamentally apophatic nature of theology, makes the knowledge of God something quite different from our knowledge of other beings: it is not a matter of putting together information drawn from various sources and building up an understanding of God, which we call theology. It is really an opening of ourselves to the mystery of the Trinity, through the perception of relatedness in the Ultimate. And yet the personal is not something beyond our experience: it comes through openness to experience of the Other. For personhood itself is beyond conceptualization."

¹³² Christos Yannaras, *The Effable and the Ineffable: The Linguistic Boundaries of Metaphysical Realism*. Winchester: Winchester University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21039/book2>, 2022, pp. 71-74.

¹³³ Ibid.

such an experience in common language—that would create an ‘intellectual idol’ divorced from the reality of the uncreated.”¹³⁴ Yannaras goes on to explain that words are an indirect form of knowledge and that silence itself – or, rather, the words that are unheard in the silence – transcend language in an enigmatic way, which is the audio equivalent of ‘seeing through a mirror darkly.’ This is why the term ‘audiation’ is so useful to this thesis; it directly applies to the existence of sounds (or words in this case) that have never been heard. Yannaras concludes:

‘As for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.’ This clearly relates to the function of language and the epistemic mode through which we experientially come to know in the context of our earthly life. The immediacy of ‘person to person’ brings with it its own language and knowledge. It is the immediacy of communion, thus presupposing a different kind of knowledge that is both articulated and shared.¹³⁵

Notice here his comment about the immediacy of communion and the different types of knowledge it produces and communicates. This directly relates to the key concept of relationality in this thesis, which involves ‘knowing’ what has been said in the silence, sharing what was ‘heard,’ and ‘responding’ to the Spirit’s call with an action. That is why the term ‘refraction’ was so helpful earlier in this chapter; it relates to the process of redirecting the unutterable sounds of the Spirit into the earthly spiritual relationship and translating the calling into human actions like prayer and pastoral care. Thus, the use of common language is not only futile but also inappropriate, because uncreated silence is not external *per se*, it is an intensely inward drawing together the experience of the Holy Spirit in silent prayer and the apophatic theology that undergirds it into a relationship that is built from it.

As such, the sound found in *uncreated silence* must become a distinguishable facet of the discussion of divine energies within the Orthodox approach to apophaticism. In chapter 27, paragraph 66, of *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil writes that “Dogma and Kerygma are two distinct things; the former is observed in silence; the latter proclaimed to all the world.”¹³⁶ This is the work of the Holy Spirit and it is found among those who have received the unutterable words of the uncreated silence, and followed Its call in all matters, especially in regard to prayer and pastoral work. The structure of this argument is congruent with the history of Orthodox theology, which goes back to the work completed by Philo of Alexandria in the first century.

For Philo God is unknowable in Himself and is only made known in His works... His essence cannot be encompassed by human conceptions. God can only be known as He relates Himself to us. Philo here utilizes a distinction... between God’s essence and His activities or energies. God is unknown in Himself, but known in His activities. The distinction is often

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, The Fig Classic Series on Early Church Theology, Kindle Edition. Fig Books, 2013, location 1135.

expressed in the form of the distinction between He who is, as God declared Himself to be in the Book of Exodus, and His powers (*dynameis*).¹³⁷

Yannaras' Heideggerian analysis of Western metaphysics (which Heidegger says leads to nihilistic atheism) creates a juxtaposition with Orthodox apophatic theology, which he explains "... consists primarily of a *stance* against knowledge and the verification of knowledge. It is a denial of 'conceptual idols', denial of the psychological props of egocentric assurance and the sentimental protection offered by conceptual certainties."¹³⁸ By this, Yannaras means at least two things. First, the Orthodox belief in the unknowability of God is a different kind of nihilism than the absence of a god in atheism. Second, that the Orthodox understanding of the unknowability of God staves off the desire to identify, categorize, and compartmentalize proposed concepts and feelings about God.

Yannaras goes on to write about how the human language is the only tool humans have for sharing their experiences of a God who personally reveals Himself.¹³⁹ The theology of apophaticism, however, clearly demonstrates that language can be transcended by images or sounds, which can never be exhausted. What is at stake for Yannaras is that apophaticism demands a denial of the ideas about divinity, spirit, sonship, fatherhood, word, and light. What he means by this is that as a person climbs higher spiritually, they grasp that imagination, conviction, speech, and even understanding can neither grasp nor name what is happening to them spiritually.

Only the unfathomable difference between our creaturely, fleeting and finite existence and God's 'true existence' can provide the measure of our existential desire. We thirst for that fullness which, since it is measured in terms of the difference between being and nothingness, can also do away with it, since it's the 'measure' or the cause of that which we call existence and of that which we call nothingness.¹⁴⁰

Yannaras explores in both philosophical and theological terms how the positivist theology of recent centuries demands descriptions of God and *reifies* Him such that God becomes something like *the highest being in the universe*, whereas certain approaches to Orthodox apophatic theology acquiesce to the unknowability of God and demand not words to define Him, but experiences of a thirst to commune with His energies (e.g., "uncreated silence"). To extrapolate, this unquenchable desire to

¹³⁷ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 18.

¹³⁸ Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, Andrew Louth, ed., Haralambos Ventis, trans., T&T Clark International, 2005, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Cf. "The apophatic and personhood," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 255. "The apophatic and the personal reflect each other, as it were, but not in a merely conceptual way: it is only the person that can make the apophatic approach to the divine mystery, for the apophatic is concerned with a personal, or existential, attitude. Lossy spoke of the 'apophatic way of Eastern theology [as] the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God'."

¹⁴⁰ Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, Andrew Louth, ed., Haralambos Ventis, trans., T&T Clark International, 2005, pp. 76-77.

know God and be with God reveals the purpose and goal of spiritual relationship, which admits to the limits of linguistic formulations and ultimately relies on the limitlessness of silent and still prayer.

This occurs in the Church, which exists only through the Holy Spirit who gives people a share in it. The Church – the centering ‘place’ where the divine and the human ‘share’ – becomes the ‘opportunity’ for all human life to be made new through the Comforter, who gives far more than some sort of self-improvement. As the Holy Spirit reveals Its divine energy as an uncreated silence, the person hears and responds to It. This interchange is vital for spiritually and pastorally fruitful human relationships that can be found between elders and disciples, fathers-confessor and parishioners, as well as for true spiritual companions of other types. It is how those who are called to pray ceaselessly and those who are called to serve endlessly derive knowledge of God’s will, reflect on it, live it, and pass it along to others for the purpose of helping them into greater union with God through faith, love, trust, and sacrifice. “God, the Holy Spirit of God, is a live-giving power and principle; he grants existence, founds our personal hypostasis as an existential answer to the call of his passionate love, and he renews our createdness building the ‘new man’ – the union of Divinity and humanity – ‘in the flesh’ of Christ.”¹⁴¹ Profoundly, Yannaras goes farther to his commitment that it is the Holy Spirit who gives life and spiritual life. He even writes that neither the teachings of Christ nor the imitation of the Last Supper is enough to bring newness to creation.

It was necessary that the life giving ‘descent’ of the Spirit of God on human flesh occur – just as the Spirit ‘descended’ on the Virgin in order for the incarnation of Christ to take place. This intervention of the Comforter which constitutes the ‘new flesh’ was experienced historically by the Church on the day of Pentecost. It is also experienced in every Eucharistic meal in the living change of bread and wine into body and blood of Christ. The same intervention is also the beginning of the participation of each of us in the Church within the event of Baptism.¹⁴²

This quote is vital to the understanding of uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality. It is quintessential that the Holy Spirit communicates with humankind and individual people, speaking to them about what they are called to do and giving them the necessary capacities to fulfill it. Yannaras demonstrates this through the events at the Annunciation, on Pentecost, at the Consecration, and Baptism. To this list should be added Confession and the renewal of life that it brings.

The public transformation of the Apostles at Pentecost, for example, was manifested by their speaking in languages understood by the different tribes of people who gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast. It is recorded that the hearers were amazed and puzzled that these simple men began to preach to them about the incredible events that they had witnessed.

They called them to be baptized in order that they themselves receive ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit’ – participate in the possibility of Pentecost, now always open. And they gathered the

¹⁴¹ Christos Yannaras, *Faith as an Ecclesial Experience*, Kindle Edition, 2020, p. 128.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 129.

‘three thousand’ who were baptized that first day to the table of the Eucharist – ‘to the breaking of bread.’ At the same time, ‘many signs and wonders were done through the apostles’ – healing of sick people, curing of those possessed, and even the raising of the dead, such as Tabitha in Joppa.¹⁴³

Notice that after the Apostles preached – they professed what they heard, saw, and experienced – they were able to share the gifts of the Spirit through the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, and Anointing. Since it is clear exorcism and resuscitation took place, it would stand to follow that Confessions were heard too. Yannaras is clear that the descent of the Holy Spirit is not about people being given magical or supernatural powers, but real spiritual gifts that are passed to others through real spiritual relationships, which are no longer driven by biology or individuality. Instead, God’s love gives life to being, harmonizes existence, and provides “‘signs’ which the Church lives unceasingly in the persons of her saints.”¹⁴⁴ This is the new life that is mentioned earlier in Yannaras’ work. It is a rebirth in the Spirit, which provides spiritual fruit for the one who receives the gift and offers pastoral fruit for the one who receives the sacrament, blessing, or spiritual counsel from that person. Thus, for Yannaras:

[Pentecost] is the foundational and constitutive event of the Church. An institution is not founded, but the ‘new creation of grace’ is born, the possibility of immortal life given by God to man. Therefore even Pentecost – the descent of the Holy Spirit – is not an event which has been completed ‘once for all time,’ but the event which always and continuously constitutes and forms the Church.¹⁴⁵

The transformation he explains here is provided through the descent of the Holy Spirit who does not change the nature of things, including people, but their mode. In other words, humans retain their created nature, but they draw their life from the love of God and communion with the Spirit.

The whole life of the faithful, every turn of his life, is a preparation for participation in or an event of participation in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the refashioning of life. This refashioning has its dynamic beginning in the act of entry into the Church, in the act by which we become members of the ecclesial body – in Baptism and Chrismation.¹⁴⁶

Notice the language here about the ‘event of the participation of the Holy Spirit;’ this is the uncreated silence I have named in this thesis. In other words, people don’t become members of the Church by accepting and adhering to a system of theories, principles, axioms, or ethics. They are, in fact, giving themselves over to God “by a bodily act: the triple immersion in and emersion from the water of Baptism, a practical, perceptible conformation to the death and resurrection of Christ... The Holy Spirit of God effects in the perceptible data of natural life the change in the mode of existence,

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 131.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 131.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 135.

the grafting of the perishable into imperishability.”¹⁴⁷ Yannaras goes on to write of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in the depths of the existence of the chrismated person who shares in the Holy Spirit by personal adoption; that person remains sealed in this unique relationship by means of the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit; and from the core of that relationship comes the realization of the gifts of the Spirit. This apophatic relationship with the Spirit forms the core of the theory and realized action of the uncreated silence. This is how real spiritual gifts are manifested, for example, in the lives of spiritual elders, fathers-confessor, and other spiritual companion.

[In] the personal otherness of each anointed person, the Church sees a new possibility for the true life of the gifts of the Spirit to be realized and revealed together with the image of Christ which frees and reestablishes life in the fullness of the mode of divine life. The Eucharist, Baptism, Chrismation, are the ways by which the continuing event of Pentecost is realized and made manifest, the descent of the Holy Spirit constitutive of the Church... There are seven specific possibilities of organic enrollment or of dynamic reenrollment of our individual life in the life of the ecclesial body. At the same time they are events which realize and reveal the Church, a charismatic constituting of the new creation which is given life by the Spirit.¹⁴⁸

These seven specific possibilities of enrollment are, of course, the sacraments, which partially account for the spiritual work completed by the fathers-confessor in the sacrament of Confession. Far more than that, though, Yannaras here reveals not only the obvious work of the Holy Spirit in people and through the Church, but also the framework for understanding the idea of an ‘inexplicable private subjective knowledge,’ which in this research is understood as occurring in the apophatic relationality of the uncreated silence. This is what can happen in real spiritual relationships, which may begin in silence and move either into more silent prayer or pastoral work.

Max Picard

Having explored the apophaticism of Christos Yannaras in the context of an ‘inexplicable private subjective knowledge,’ I will utilize a portion of the writings of the 20th century Catholic philosopher Max Picard to confirm the veracity of my claim that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit is an apophatic relationality. The reason this is important is because it demonstrates that the uncreated silence is in divine symmetry with the uncreated light and that it is more than either a psychological manifestation or a pedagogical tool. To start, it is important to think of Picard’s work as consistent with the *Philokalic* worldview even though there is no evidence that he ever specifically knew about or promoted a hesychastic way of life. What is certain, though, is that his writings are antithetical to the view of Špidlík and others who taught that ‘heroic forms of silence’ may be a ‘sin through inverse excess.’

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 135-136.

¹⁴⁸ Christos Yannaras, *Faith as an Ecclesial Experience*, Kindle Edition, 2020, location 137.

There is an original connection to be made here starting with Picard's 1934 volume, *The Flight from God*,¹⁴⁹ in which he uses the concept of 'Flight' both in the metaphorical sense of humankind fleeing from God and in the existential sense that the psychology and spirituality of modern humankind has manifested an empirical reality, which undergirds all thought and action; undermines the purpose and meaning of life; and literally bears people along from birth to death.

In every age man has been in flight from God. What distinguishes the Flight to-day from every other flight is this: once Faith was the universal, and prior to the individual; there was an objective world of Faith, while the Flight was only accomplished subjectively, within the individual man...The opposite is true to-day. The objective and external world of Faith is no more; it is Faith which has to be remade moment by moment through the individual's act of decision, that is to say, through the individual's cutting himself off from the world of Flight. For to-day it is no longer Faith which exists as an objective world, but rather the Flight...¹⁵⁰

Picard goes on to explain that the 'Flight,' which was originally internal to each person is now external, independent, structured, exists with its own laws, and overshadows the actions of individuals and of humankind itself in a way that it seems to have existed from the beginning (in fact, he juxtaposes the 'Flight' with the Word in John 1:1). "Such is the daemonic character of the system: it knows at bottom that it can only move through the power drawn from within man, changing it into an external force, changing it so much, that one no longer recognizes its origin within man."¹⁵¹ Picard writes that the 'Flight' has mass and quality; it conquers, captures, owns, feeds, assimilates, puts to sleep, and rules over people; and its goal is to destroy. Humans in the "Flight" are chaos; and when a person meets another person it is chaos meeting chaos. This is an extremely important idea to this thesis in that this 'Flight' of which Picard speaks is also an apophatic relationality that speaks in silence, but it is a non-divine, even evil, 'inexplicable private subjective knowledge.'

The result is that every person and each thing blend into every other person and thing, creating a chaotic world in which there is no clarity or stability of body, mind, and spirit personally or in common.

In the world of the Flight the father-child relationship, too, has no permanence; the child cannot rely upon the certainty of the father nor the father on the uncertainty of the child. The father-child relationship is not the unique relationship between begetter and begotten;

¹⁴⁹ In the preface, Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), the French Catholic existentialist and, ironically, the first registrar at St. Dionysius Institute in Paris, wrote, "In *The Flight from God* Picard gives us the key to his thought. The whole of our world, as opposed to the abolished world of faith, is in flight. No longer does anyone ask before whom he flees, or why he flees; no one remembers that he flees from God. Flight has taken to itself a sort of independent existence; it has become an entity. The originality of Picard's intuition, I would almost say his genius, lies in having discovered that the Flight has assumed volume, structure and quantity...Picard's metaphysics of Flight, which personally I should prefer to call perdition, is of exceptional interest in that it gives us a glimpse of the hidden and formidable meaning of a phenomenon of which sociology, Marxist or not, can give only a superficial interpretation (Max Picard, *The Flight from God*, pp. xi-xii)."

¹⁵⁰ Max Picard, *The Flight from God*, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 3.

it is only one of the many chance situations which may arise between an older and a younger person.¹⁵²

The relationship of the father and the son or the mother and the daughter in the Flight is contingent. It only exists as it is announced, useful, and efficient. In this reality, Picard writes that the father seems younger than his age and the son seems older than his age. In other words, each appears different than he should be and their relationship is dependent on the movement of the “Flight”.

In the world of Faith the father is always there, even in the absence of the child, and even if he is childless he is always the father; he is something of a father to all men and things, and he is a proper father to his own child only because he schools himself to be something of a father in every situation. For wherever the child comes to, the father has been there before him; and so every situation has something of the father about it and so every situation he can be a child; the father who is always a father helps the child to remain a child... thus showing his innocence, an innocence in which he encounters the child.¹⁵³

Even though Picard was not yet Catholic when he was writing this book, the Christian symbolism is quite clear, especially in this end part. It speaks to and about Trinitarian Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, psychology, sociology, and human development. There is also a resonance with the Orthodox understanding and practice of eldership. The spiritual father or mother is ‘always there’ for the spiritual son or daughter even when the spiritual child is not physically present; the spiritual parent continues to pray for him or her by helping to discern God’s will for them and continuing to read the meaning of their thoughts and actions. There are spiritual elders who may not have a specific disciple under their direction but are considered as such because they commit to praying unceasingly (1 Thess 5:17) for all of humankind. In this, they pray to preserve, protect, and defend the faith, dignity, and wholeness of every person. This is their Pneumatologically-based relationship with others.

The implicit theme of spiritual parenthood is carried into Picard’s 1948 book *The World of Silence*,¹⁵⁴ but, as the title reveals, he explains the world of faith (as opposed to the world of flight)

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 60.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ In the foreword to Max Picard’s *The World of Silence*, Gabriel Marcel again comments in the preface. “From the point of view of a hostile critic, of course – that is to say, from the point of view of that empirical and evolutionary tradition in philosophy, which has its roots in the last century, or even more deeply in a prolongation of the eighteenth century’s philosophy of sense-perception and associationism – Picard’s metaphysics of silence lose any possible meaning; they become merely absurd...But let us remember that the great Wilhelm von Humboldt had already affirmed in the most explicit fashion that language could not be reduced to a mere system of signs, when he said that, in his opinion, language had to be regarded as a boon immediately conferred on the human creature as such. If we accept Humboldt’s attitude, it becomes immediately possible to understand – or rather to conceive – how it may be permissible to think of the word, as such, coming forth from the fullness of silence; and how this fullness of silence confers on the word, as it were, its legitimate function...Moreover, as Heidegger has also seen very clearly, speech to-day is more and more tending to degenerate into chatter...And, given that fact, it is less and less easy for us to recognize the value of silence: its ontological quality, its depth of, or depth in, being...There is some sense in which silence –

through the context and content of silence, which he describes as an empirical, personified, structured force; it is an autonomous phenomenon, an independent whole; it is creative, formative, and positive; it is observable and observing. “There is no beginning to silence and no end: it seems to have its origins in the time when everything was still pure Being. It is like uncreated, everlasting Being.”¹⁵⁵ While there does not seem to be any evidence that Picard would have been deeply familiar with the work of Palamas, by comparing silence to ‘an uncreated, everlasting Being,’ his language seems awfully close to the idea of silence as an uncreated energy, which is the center point of this thesis. Meyendorff adds an emphasis here that appears to confirm it.

One could quote many passages to leave no doubt about Palamas’s thought on this point: ‘Neither the uncreated goodness, nor the eternal glory, nor the life and all such things are simply the superessential essence of God, for God, as cause transcends them; nevertheless we say that he is Life, Goodness and other such things... As God complete is present in each of the divine energies, each serves as his name’ (Triads II, 2, 7; cf. Triads III, 3, 6).¹⁵⁶

Thus, if one were to posit that an uncreated silence exists, it would have to be considered as an energy of God. To take this idea even further, the way in which Picard writes of this heightened sense of what silence is both within and without the person who perceives it in its true form (according to his terms, which may be a bit naïve theologically), the idea becomes relatable to the context of how Palamas writes of the heightened senses of those who seek the spiritual silences of hesychasm and adhere to the theology of apophaticism. In other words, is it possible that these people are the same ones who can perceive silence in the way Picard describes? This comports with Seraphim of Sarov too. Gabriel Marcel’s comments in the preface of the same book seem to support the possibility. While he does not specifically refer to silence in this passage, Marcel is speaking of the heightened senses that come from love. “[G]ifts of premonition and of clairvoyance can be found in mutual love and are ‘linked, precisely, to this supratemporal quality of silence’.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, the relationships between Orthodox elders and their spiritual children, priests and their parishioners, as well as other spiritual companions – who maintain deeply prayerful and spiritual relationships – benefit from heightened senses of awareness of God that come as an extension of the uncreated silence that exists at the center of it. Marcel’s language in Picard’s book is not far afield from the Eastern Patristic models presented earlier in this thesis. Given Marcel’s brief work at

in particular the silence of contemplation – unifies present, past, and future; and love, for instance expresses itself by silence more than by speech; and that very fact helps us to understand how those who love each other are, as it were, lifted up above the level of the merely temporal. The gifts of premonition and of clairvoyance which are sometimes granted to those who love each other are linked, precisely, to this supratemporal quality of silence (pp. 10-11).”

¹⁵⁵ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, Stanley Godman, trans. Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press Reprint, 2002, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974, p. 214.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos on the Orthodox understanding of spiritual senses in *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005, pp. 72-75.

the St. Dionysius Institute in Paris, it is not altogether impossible that he would have been somewhat familiar with Orthodox theology.

Picard repeatedly returns to the connection between faith and silence, acknowledging that silence comes in countless “inexpressible forms.”¹⁵⁸ He links ontology to silence: “Through this power of autonomous being, silence points to a state where only being is valid: the state of the Divine. The mark of the Divine in things is preserved by their connection with the world of silence.”¹⁵⁹ He explains that words – and the Word – are born from silence. “It is the spirit that legitimizes speech, but the silence that precedes speech is the pregnant mother who is delivered of speech by the creative activity of the spirit.”¹⁶⁰ Picard also writes of humanity’s rejection of silence. “This repudiation of silence is a factor of human guilt, and the melancholy in the world is the outward expression of that guilt. Language is surrounded by the dark rim of melancholy, no longer by the rim of silence.”¹⁶¹ He also acknowledges that “darkness and terror”¹⁶² can be present in silence when the words of humankind lack the Spirit. “For the power of the spirit in the word can overcome the demonic. The fear is taken out of silence, it is banished, by the word in which the spirit dwells – that is, in which truth and order dwell.”¹⁶³ Picard identifies how relationships are desolate because of people’s inability to embrace a holy silence. “In the modern world the individual no longer faces silence, no longer faces the community, but faces only the universal noise. The individual stands between noise and silence. He is isolated from noise and isolated from silence. He is forlorn.”¹⁶⁴ Picard’s interpretations of these issues - personal autonomy, human language, psychology, evil, relationships, faith, and more – flow through silence and into the continuum of issues that have been discussed about the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit within spiritual relationships, namely the Orthodox elder-disciple relationship, even if it was not his intention to do that in this work.¹⁶⁵

Throughout this chapter I have made the case how an answer to the question that arose from Špidlík about the depth and longevity of the silence of hesychastic prayer and its lack of

¹⁵⁸ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 24. The terminology and structure here is clearly reminiscent of the Theotokos in Orthodoxy.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 49. In Diarmaid MacCulloch’s, *Silence: A Christian History*, he explained that silence can be a bad thing when it attempts to cover up for the horrible evil that can be committed in the Church or by society as a whole. “Silences such as Christian involvement in child abuse, anti-Semitism, slave-owning, demand constant rupture. On such noise does the health of Christian society depend” (p. 216).

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 14. Gabriel Marcel writes in the preface of Picard’s book. “His utterances spring from an eschatological consciousness - from an awareness of the last things, death, judgment, hell, heaven. But what is remarkable is that the tone of this book should nevertheless be so wonderfully peaceful. The silence which he exalts in this book is that of ‘the peace that passes all understanding.’”

relationship to pastoral care, can be answered by the uncreated silence, which is a Pneumatologically-relational solution whereby the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit calls people into a close spiritual affiliation not only with It, but also each other. The more obvious expression of this deep association occurs in close-form spiritual guidance, the beginnings of which can be found in the context of a healthy, proper, sincere, loving Confession, as well as through other circumstances that may be revealed by God. What comes next is a presentation of the uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality, which takes form in elder-disciple, father-confessor, and other spiritual relationships, which are pre-figured in the New Testament, and explained by Patristic sources. Also included in this section is a brief examination of spiritual abuse in these relationships.

Chapter 2: Uncreated Silence and Relationality in Orthodox Christian Eldership

In chapter one, I utilized the criticism about unrelenting solitude in hesychastic prayer as lacking charity to provide a spiritual solution where silence and stillness can evolve into a basis for pastoral care (e.g., the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit wills a person into fostering spiritual relationships). This was accomplished by combining the presentation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the theology of Basil the Great, the language of audiation, the experience of Seraphim of Sarov, the apophatic theology of Christos Yannaras, and the philosophy of Max Picard. What follows is an explanation of uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality exemplified by the elder-disciple relationship in Orthodox monasticism and found through the father-confessor relationship in Orthodox parish life. What is also included in this chapter is a brief look at some relational models that can be gleaned from the New Testament and a small selection of eldership models in the Patristic period. What is also included in this chapter is a short discourse on the question of the abuse that has and can occur within this variety of Christian spiritual relationships. For this, I will rely on the recent work of Dom Dysmas de Lassus.

Uncreated Silence as a Spiritual Relationality

While there can be multiple forums for this spiritual relationality, there are two obvious places in the Orthodox Christian Churches where some form of this spiritual work takes place. The first is in the relationship between an elder and a disciple, or what is often known as a spiritual mother or father fostering their respective spiritual daughter or son, usually in the monastic setting. This is a situation where the one who was, at first, called to deep, contemplative prayer is then called forth by the Holy Spirit to enter a spiritually bonded personal association where he or she guides the one who seeks to listen. Another place is in the sacrament of confession between a father-confessor and a parishioner in the church setting. These are two related but quite different spaces where the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit acts to open the hearing of the one who desires to discern and grow. This is important because the reason for introducing the existence of uncreated silence came from a need (Špidlík's criticism) to explain how a commitment to solitary meditative silence does not mean being cut off from the cares of others and yet, it can still lead internally to more prayer in solitude or outwardly into various forms of pastoral care.

To explain this, I will provide a Patristic primer on Orthodox Christian eldership that includes information about how it works and how prayer manifests in the relationship. It will also contain the Patristic view of how a spiritual disciple ought to choose an elder, what it means to be a spiritual

disciple (while maintaining a psychologically and spiritually healthy relationship¹⁶⁶ with the elder), and the themes of prayer and love that are supposed to exist within that relationship. My decision to use Irénée Hausherr in this section, along with the writings of modern Orthodox elders like Ignatius Brianchaninov and Theophan the Recluse, continues the structure of juxtaposing the works of Roman Catholics and Orthodox on some of these issues. Take note of Hausherr's accuracy in reporting on eldership in the early Christian East as well as his criticism of it: "It is hard to tell which of the two triumphed more frequently in this debate of the soul – charity toward the neighbor, or humility, the sign of the love of God."¹⁶⁷

Orthodox Christian Eldership

It is important to understand the distinction between the modern terms 'spiritual director or spiritual counselor' and the ancient Eastern Christian term 'elder' (synonymously known as spiritual father or mother). From an ecclesiological standpoint, a director or counselor is someone who provides spiritual guidance by the nature and power that comes from orders (e.g., deacon, priest, bishop, or abbot) and or jurisdiction (e.g., a parish, diocese, or monastery).¹⁶⁸ The fact of their office implies a role in the work of salvation and a position of leadership related to liturgy, theology, teaching, and pastoral care. The key to understanding this concept is that 'orders' and 'jurisdiction' carry with them a spirituality that is often applied in association with the sacramental life of the institutional church.¹⁶⁹ The Orthodox term 'elder,' on the other hand, carries with it a spirituality

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Judith S. Miller, *Healing the Western Soul: A Spiritual Homecoming for Today's Seeker*, Paragon House, 2015. A psychiatrist, and professor at Columbia University, Miller argues for the reconnection of psychology and spirituality. She writes that the methods of modern psychotherapy focus largely on pathology and readily dismiss the spiritual component of a patient's life. She explains that most people with a Judeo-Christian background describe, at one time or another, some sort of spiritual experience (whether it happened early in life or late) to psychiatrists and psychotherapists who quickly encourage the patient to ignore religious experience as part of therapy. Miller's chief aims in this book are two-fold. One, to see that counselors and therapists take spirituality more seriously. Two, to give potential patients more information about the importance of spirituality in their own understanding of self. Miller gives a relatively standard definition of the spiritual path, which she describes as awakening, illumination, and union. While she focuses primarily on Western Christian categories for her discussion, Miller quotes Symeon the New Theologian for a description of how union with God "...is just as available to ordinary people as it is for those individuals who left their mark on the history of Western spirituality... Unlikely as it may sound, I know people in today's world who mostly experience life this way. This is how the Byzantine monk St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 AD) affirmed this spiritual truth ten centuries ago: 'Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God. Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without Him. Do not say that anyone can possess Him without knowing it. Do not say that God does not manifest Himself to man. Do not say that men cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age! Never is it found to be impossible my friends. On the contrary, it is entirely possible when one desires it' (p. 194)."

¹⁶⁷ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans., Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 125.

¹⁶⁸ Since the 'Spirit goes where He wills' (Cf. John 3:8), guidance can also come from unexpected sources too.

¹⁶⁹ In certain ecclesial and other non-ecclesial environments, there is a preference for the broader term 'spiritual companion.' Cf. Richard Rohr, "What is Spiritual Direction?" *Center for Action and Contemplation*

that is often applied contemplatively in association with the deeper, more personal questions of an individual seeking a concentrated and longer-term understanding of their relationship with God.

The *spiritual father* is not a rabbi who explains or applies Torah; he is neither a *mufti*, a specialist of *fatwa* (legal advice), nor a canonist who resolves a moral problem. He is a father, and to understand his role one should first study the Christian meaning of this term... The name 'father' is to be understood in a realistic, mystical sense which those who used it outside Christianity did not and could not have given it, and which we ourselves cannot give it except by internalizing the profound theology with which the ancients accepted it.¹⁷⁰

In Orthodoxy, these relationships consist of one spiritual person seeking the advice of another more highly experienced spiritual person. This stems from Matthew's expression in 10:20 – "for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of the Father who speaks in you" – which can also be used as an extremely important summation of what the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit is doing for the spiritual person and in the spiritual relationship. The spiritual relationship also includes a very human aspect; it is the seeker who initiates it because he or she has a burning question about their life; a pondering of God and/or self that desires real exploration of his or her own interior life with another, more spiritually experienced person.¹⁷¹ In return, the elder provides an answer not based on his or her own opinions but those given to him or her by God.¹⁷² This function or faculty in the spiritual elder is a "free gift... under its two-fold aspect - knowledge of the mysteries of God (which came to be called theology), and the searching of the heart (*cardiognōsis*) - all of this given 'for the benefit' (*ad utilitatem*), to enable the spiritual man to become a spiritual father."¹⁷³ This does not

(cac.org), accessed 6 July 2023. "A spiritual companion can help others explore a deeper relationship with God... [and] connect more deeply with the True Self, without judging, proselytizing, or preaching."

¹⁷⁰ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans. Cistercian Publications, 1990, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Paisios of Mount Athos. *Spiritual Counsels*, vol. 3, Holy Hesychasterion "Evangelist John the Theologian," 2016, p. 301. "People today are weary, confused and darkened by sin and egoism. This is why there is a need, more than ever before, for good and experienced Spiritual Fathers, who will approach people with simplicity and true love, who will guide them with discernment so as to bring peace to their soul. Without good Spiritual Fathers, the Churches empty, while the psychiatric wards, prisons and hospitals become busier than ever... The work of a Spiritual Father is inner therapy. There is no higher physician than an experienced Spiritual Father, one who inspires trust with his holiness, who removes from the sensitive creatures of God the thoughts brought on by the devil, one who heals souls and bodies not with medications, but with the Grace of God."

¹⁷² Cf. Elder Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios*, Sisters of the Holy Convent of Chrysopigi, eds, John Raffan, trans., Denise Harvey Publishing, 2005, p. 124. "If you are going to occupy yourself with prayer of the heart exclusively you must have a spiritual father. Prayer of the heart is impossible without a spiritual guide. There is a danger of the soul being deluded. Care is needed. Your spiritual guide will teach you how to get into the right order of prayer, because if you don't get into the right order, there's a danger of your seeing the luciferic light, of living in delusion and being plunged into darkness, and then one becomes aggressive and changes character and so on. This is the splitting of the personality. Do you see how delusion is created? If, however, you progress in prayer with the counsels of a spiritual father, you will see the true light."

¹⁷³ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans. Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 32.

mean the elder sees him or herself as a prophet.¹⁷⁴ Instead, those who are psychologically and spiritually healthy enough for this work understand they must continually strive to be virtuous, studious, patient, and close to the Holy Spirit who calls them to exercise the gift of eldership in the first place. In addition, they commit to the hard work of sacrificing their own desires and personal choices for the sake of those who come seeking spiritual assistance; and that becomes a type of personal martyrdom. The result of such an endeavor leads to a heightened level of Christian maturity and is revealed sometimes as extraordinary wisdom, theological aptitude, ability to discern and diagnose problems, knowledge of things to come, and the desire to constantly remain united to God in all things.¹⁷⁵

This theme of personal martyrdom can be found in the works of Ignatius Brianchaninov who was a spiritual father that wrote much about removing oneself from the world to pray and yet, was called back into relationship with the world as a bishop, theologian, and spiritual father. “Let us love the will of God more than everything else. Let us prefer it to everything else. Let us hate everything that is contrary to it with a righteous and God-pleasing hatred.”¹⁷⁶ Notice his first sentence about loving the will of God. While he would not write about the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit calling him out of silence and into a spiritual relationship, this is what this thesis is proposing happened in him. To this end, Ignatius writes about the relationship between a spiritual disciple and his or her elder who offers *both* his or her own life of silence *and* his or her own life as a guide – as a sacrifice for the resulting spiritual fruit that comes from *both*. He likens this process to nature, which suffers loss and death in Fall and Winter and experiences new life and growth in Spring and Summer.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Vassilios Bakoyannis, *The Spiritual Father*. Orthodox Book Centre, 2005, p. 69. In “the Orthodox Church, spiritual children do not end up as will-less beings in the hands of their spiritual father, without judgment and logic. They have their own personal opinion and judgment. They are free to disagree, and also free to be obedient to what they disagree with. This obedience does not have the purpose of overcoming logic, but has the purpose of crushing the restless ego. Your opinion may be more correct than your spiritual father’s; however, obeying him strikes a blow to your egocentricity. This can be accomplished by continuous obedience. When egocentricity is overcome, the mind is cleansed. Abiding by the occult kills logic and free-will. Abiding by the Church enlivens the mind, cleanses it, and sanctifies it.” Bakoyannis also points out: “Judas was a disciple of Christ. In other words, Christ was his spiritual father. He was with Christ for three years. Judas saw His kindness, his wisdom, and His Godly face but he received no benefit from Him. None whatsoever. Not only this, he also lost his soul. He was condemned. Christ, of course, was not responsible for this. Judas, and only Judas, was responsible (p. 89).”

¹⁷⁵ There are limits to the application of these gifts. Cf. Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 252. “If any human authority wished, even with good motive, to impose itself on someone else’s conscience, then that authority would be placing its own light above that of the other person’s *synderesis*, which is impossible. Anyone submitting to such pressure would find himself in a battle between two ‘divine’ voices. Which one should he follow? If he follows the exterior voice, which claims to speak to him in the name of God, then he must stifle that *spark of the soul*, which is the place of a mysterious but most intimate relationship with God. He would cease, in fact, to act in a human way because he would no longer be free or in control of his own actions... Nobody, then, should impose himself on another person as a spiritual director, and a spiritual companion who has been freely chosen has no authority to issue commands.”

¹⁷⁶ Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Field: Cultivating Salvation*, p. 17.

What was this teaching that I read in the garden? It was the teaching of the resurrection from the dead, a powerful teaching, a teaching illustrated by natural processes that resemble resurrection... I look at the exposed branches of the trees, and they speak to me in their mysterious language: 'We will come alive, we will be once again covered with leaves, we will become fragrant, and we will be decorated with flowers and fruits. Can you not see that the dry bones of mankind will also come alive in their allotted time?'¹⁷⁷

This is physical death and resurrection for sure, but it is also spiritual lifelessness and spiritual resuscitation too. This is the result of listening to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. Ignatius' struggle with his own ill-health and his desire to resign his commission as a military officer (which he did not want in the first place), combined with his personal experience of the garden of the Ploschanskii Hermitage when he was 22-years-old, led him to reflect on the necessity of the type of suffering that Jesus explains to His disciples in the gospel according to Matthew: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it (16:24-25)." Regarding this, he writes: "My cross is the sorrows and sufferings of this earthly life, unique for each individual person."¹⁷⁸ The acknowledgment here is that all people, not just monastics, have crosses to bear, which means they have concerns to tolerate and answers to seek from the Holy Spirit; ideas reflected in the fact that his work, *The Field*, was written for an audience wider than monastics (another work of his, *Arena*, is written specifically for monastics). The quote above is also instructive of his belief that everyone ought to have a spiritual elder to help them navigate the spiritual life. Ignatius ends this reflection with the acknowledgment that "The Cross of Christ raises the crucified disciple of Christ from the earth. The disciple of Christ who is crucified on his cross thinks only of the heights, with his mind and heart he lives only in heaven, already seeing the mysteries of the Spirit..."¹⁷⁹ As can be found in the writings of Zacharou above, Ignatius sees personal suffering¹⁸⁰ as a gateway to increasing interior freedom and sacrifice as a bridge for others to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual qualities necessary to become such a 'bridgebuilder' (an elder who provides counsel for others out of his or her abundant closeness to God) include charity¹⁸¹ and discernment

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 240.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 241. He wrote this as part of a longer reflection titled "My Cross and the Cross of Christ."

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 244.

¹⁸⁰ Ignatius also wrote about the Orthodox doctrine of, and spirituality surrounding, death, the soul's journey after death, and heaven and hell. While it is not important to discuss these teachings in detail at this point, it will become relevant to the understanding of certain debates around Orthodox spiritual fatherhood in the American context. For example, Eugene Rose, an American who converted to Orthodoxy and became a hieromonk named Seraphim, wrote a book in 1980 titled, *The Soul After Death*, which caused controversy in Orthodox theological circles in part because of his explanation of the passage of the soul through "aerial toll-houses" after death. This will be the subject of examination in a later chapter.

¹⁸¹ Hausherr sometimes associates the word "justice" with the word "charity" in the context of the decision of the spiritual father or mother choosing to take on a spiritual disciple. The contrapositive statement of this idea

(*diakrisis*) because he or she willingly gives of their time and ability to help others along the spiritual path. There is also a need for discretion, humility, patience, and 'the gift of words,' which together enables the elder to speak gently and directly, lovingly and reprovably, heartfully and honestly. Undergirding all these qualities is holiness, which involves virtuousness, prayerfulness, and attentiveness to God. This concentration on and alertness to God reveals the gift of *diakrisis* (discernment), which is understood in three directions. The first comes as the elder determines if the Holy Spirit is calling him or her to take on a spiritual son or daughter. The second involves understanding the spiritual needs of the person who has come for spiritual guidance. The third is about seeing the Spirit within the person who is seeking this mystical type of counsel. While all these take much giftedness, the last is particularly difficult. "The clear understanding of spirits often demands energetic, even violent, efforts, especially at the beginning."¹⁸² The idea here is that the so-called spiritual master or elder must understand those things that are human, divine, and diabolical (he or she understands this to mean evil that both can be seen and unseen). "There were degrees of *diakrisis*; consequently, there was a hierarchy among the spiritual fathers. The *diakriticos* could at the same time be a *dioratikos*, one who had the gift of insight, even of *kardiognōsis*, (knowledge of the heart)."¹⁸³ For those Orthodox elders whose gifts manifest as authentic and their commitment total, there are four primary acts they will employ to assist spiritual disciplines with their burdens: listening patiently, engaging in intercessory prayer for them, taking on extra spiritual disciples, and helping them struggle with metaphorical and actual demons. While both elders *and* their disciples are called to be aware of the effect of sin in their relationship,¹⁸⁴ Orthodox spiritual elders are to be familiar with the difference between a mental or emotional problem and a spiritual one even if in the Orthodox tradition they are often seen as being tied together. Hausherr makes two additional claims about the actions that Orthodox elders take on behalf of their spiritual children. First, that the spiritual parent assumes these obligations "without reservation, by the mere fact that he consents to this role."¹⁸⁵ Second, that the Biblical call to lay down your life for your friends (John 15:13) "is not an accommodating hyperbole. It is a great, magnificent, heroic truth..."¹⁸⁶

for him is that it would be unjust for the spiritual parent who has this spiritual gift *not* to provide this service for those who seek it in them.

¹⁸² Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans. Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 73.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 91.

¹⁸⁴ When the spiritual reason for the elder-disciple relationship is being unmet, the relationship between the two becomes dysfunctional and it should be discontinued.

¹⁸⁵ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans., Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 144.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 146.

What becomes clear in all this is that prayer is essential for the elder, not only because of their work for others but also for their own spiritual and mental health. “In a word, irrespective of the angle from which the religious life is viewed, it imposes, first, the obligation to pray for the one we claim to guide through it. Out of the essential need of his role, the spiritual father must be the one who prays for his spiritual children.”¹⁸⁷ The praying elder is called to work at their spiritual life even more. In other words, the spiritual elder is called to intercede before God for all his or her spiritual children.¹⁸⁸ As such, the spiritual parent must take on the burden of intercessory prayer so that the spiritual son or daughter may be released from their difficulty in prayer itself, helped in discerning God’s will, assisted in drawing closer to God in prayer, and encouraged in serving their fellow person who also has difficulties. This is the function of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit who aids its hearers in pastoral care. “Anyone who accepts being a spiritual father commits himself to sustain in spirit those who struggle, by all the means of the most intelligent and devoted charity at one’s disposal.”¹⁸⁹ The spiritual parent, in a sense, relieves his or her spiritual children from the dangers that surround them and the worries that occupy their minds by taking them into him or herself through prayer. This is an especially difficult task because the elder is still human like the disciple whom he or she helps. Hausherr provides a useful distinction about this. He writes that a medical doctor who diagnoses a patient with a disease and provides the necessary treatment for it is not likely to be suffering from that same disease at the same time as the patient. However, a spiritual doctor is potentially a more difficult and dangerous type of work because the one who fulfills this role still carries the sickness of sin and doubt as he or she tries to help their spiritual children recover from their affliction. Thus, the willful act of helping the spiritually inexperienced is partially what is meant by performing acts of sacrificial love at the behest of others. “This is a spiritual father: a man who takes his children’s peace and progress in virtue so to heart that he does not hesitate to take upon himself, as far as he can their past with their sins and the penance they require, the present with its worries of the moment, and their future with the need to discern for them the will of God.”¹⁹⁰ At the end of this same chapter, Hausherr identifies that all the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Matthew the Poor, *If You Love Me: Serving Christ and the Church in Spirit and Truth*, Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018, p. 11. “The lesson of love can never be taught simply by prearranged words and anecdotes. Rather, it is taught by truly giving yourself and communicating the love and longing for Christ to those you serve. The servant’s spiritual children will feel a contact with God’s love through the warmth of his love. They will taste the love that is handed down to them from God as an inheritance is handed down from father to son. The lesson of truthfulness and integrity cannot be taught simply by sharing a few words, reciting a few Bible verses, or singing nice songs. It is delivered through the tough and thorny task of leading spiritual children one by one over the rocky and costly pathway of life, by encouraging them, protecting them, and supporting them. The servant helps them carry their burdens and shares their losses and humiliations.”

¹⁸⁹ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans., Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 142.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 148.

qualifications of a spiritual father arise within the human beings who have been ‘spiritualized’,¹⁹¹ which is to say that he or she is free “from all false love” and able to “manifest all the gradations of human feelings in the service of divine charity.”¹⁹² Again, this is another way of saying what the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit is and does; it takes the tradition of deep meditation, repentance, and spiritual growth, and places the spiritual fruit of such things into the service of others.

This theme of a penitent relying on a spiritual guide appears in Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), who was a Russian bishop and theologian that left those roles in order to enter into silence, stillness, and solitude.¹⁹³ He explains that when a penitent gives over him or herself completely to God, he or she will become directly guided by God in order to enter into the perfection; though Theophan writes that this is very rare.

But such a path never was and never can be for everyone. It belonged and belongs to ones specially chosen by God. Others ripen under the visible guidance of experienced men. Firm in that belief that only God converts, the penitent, in order to succeed, should without fail commit himself to a father and guide. This is necessitated by the fact that we do not give ourselves totally to God – an inadequacy belonging to the majority...¹⁹⁴

There are four items to note in this statement by Theophan. The first is about the person who makes a firm decision to face his or her sins and totally commit to do the will of God. The second is about the decision to seek spiritual guidance. The third is about two different results of initial guidance: one is about a small minority of people who immediately change their way and follow God’s path, the other is about the vast majority of people who grow slowly (or not at all). The fourth is about how most people never give themselves over to God completely. What this list reveals is the multiplicity of possibilities for the human to choose interiorly. In the text, Theophan follows this with a warning that people who do not seek spiritual guidance usually end up taking the wrong path, which he says is fraught with danger and causes spiritual exhaustion. This is a key reason why Orthodox Christians are encouraged, at the very least, to commit to the guidance of a father-confessor who is their parish priest. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the ‘fog’ metaphor used by Theophan. Essentially, he posits that everyone is corrupted, and this corruption causes a spiritual haziness of one kind or another; its varying densities are related to the extensiveness of sin,

¹⁹¹ Cf. Robert Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, Ignatius, 2017, p. 23. “No prophet ever encountered God without withdrawing into solitude and silence. Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist encountered God in the great silence of the desert... It is necessary to become silence.”

¹⁹² Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans., Cistercian Publications, 1990, pp. 151-152.

¹⁹³ This is the reverse order that Brianchaninov took, indicating that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit calls people into and out of public pastoral care in whatever direction it wills.

¹⁹⁴ Theophan the Recluse, *The Path to Salvation: A Manual of Spiritual Transformation*, Seraphim Rose, trans., The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, 2006, p. 211-212.

the depth of confusion, the level of dismay, and the distance between the penitent and God, him or herself, and with those who are more experienced in the spiritual journey (the father-confessor or elder). For Theophan, walking this increasingly convoluted road is directly related to sin; thus, each person must be guided down a different, holier path. “Penitential feelings are the signs of true asceticism. Whoever runs away from them runs away from the true path.”¹⁹⁵ Finally, he too expresses the need for silence in this process and the stillness that results from it.

Here is the sign of this birth:¹⁹⁶ earnest, quiet, and unforced inner concentration before God accompanied by a feeling of reverence, fear, joy and the like. Before the spirit had to push itself within, and now it is established and stands there without leaving. The person is now happy to be there alone with God, away from all others, without paying attention to what goes on outside of him. He acquires the kingdom of God within himself, which is that *peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 14:17). Such an immersion in oneself, or immersion in God, is called mental silence or being taken up to God.¹⁹⁷

Notice here that Theophan, while focusing closely on the penitential aspect of asceticism and prayer, leads his spiritual children back to the idea of silence and stillness. For him, the inner concentration of the self on God leads to a combination of fear, respect, and constant reverence, which gives way to the establishment of the Holy Spirit within. When the Holy Spirit ‘takes this seat’ within the interior of the person, he or she experiences peace and joy, and is taken up into Him. What I am proposing in this thesis is that silence here does not necessarily have to mean hesychastic silence – it can mean the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit who breathes new spiritual life into a person and leads them in discernment.

To close out this section on Orthodox eldership, it is worth turning attention back to the Catholic sources of the original question that started this research. In chapter one, the focus was on Tomáš Špidlík. But here the focus is on Irénée Hausherr who also takes to task the role of hesychasm in the life of the Orthodox elders. He writes:

At other times, what stopped the ‘old men’ when confronted with the prospect of having to assume the role of spiritual father was the fear of temptations against humility. In the *Lives of the Saints* there is no lack of examples of flight at being confronted with a multitude of disciples. Concern for other issues and benefits of a spiritual order, especially love of silence (*hesychia*), played a role in this. It is hard to tell which of the two triumphed more frequently in this debate of the soul – charity toward the neighbor, or humility, the sign of the love of God. This would be a very interesting history to write, since the struggle takes place in the depths of even the most saintly souls.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 216.

¹⁹⁶ Notice the same symbolic birth from death, just as Ignatius discovered in the garden.

¹⁹⁷ Theophan the Recluse, *The Path to Salvation: A Manual of Spiritual Transformation*, Seraphim Rose, trans., The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, 2006, p. 314.

¹⁹⁸ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Anthony P. Gythiel, trans., Cistercian Publications, 1990, p. 125.

Hausherr specifically points out the need for a study¹⁹⁹ on the relationship between hesychasm and the charity an elder or spiritual parent shows toward others. In setting up the question as he does, however, Hausherr also implies a type of selfishness within the elder who chooses solitude before God, juxtaposing that with the efforts of those who are called to other types of pastoral work.

To repeat, that is why this research and the specific Pneumatological solution it provides, answers this charge, and provides a proper offshoot or addendum to the hesychastic tradition. The uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit may provide the divine impetus for a person to choose hesychastic prayer – for it is a legitimate and long-standing facet of Eastern Christian spirituality – or to discern in this prayer of silence, stillness, and solitude to eventually go forth in service to others; as an elder, a father-confessor, or something completely different in the spectrum of pastoral care. The idea here is that this thesis is not presenting an either-or ultimatum between the uncreated light and the uncreated silence. Instead, it is showing that there is a new way of looking at how the calling to silent prayer and/or to pastoral work within a person comes through a synergy of prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit. What comes next is a brief look at the work of a father-confessor who works at a parish under the direction of the Holy Spirit to provide healing and growth through a multiplicity of pastoral care opportunities, including and especially for the purposes of this thesis, the sacrament of Confession.

The Father-Confessor Relationship

Thus far I have utilized the criticism about unrelenting solitude in hesychastic prayer as being uncharitable to provide a spiritual solution where silent, still prayer (even in solitude) can be a source of building spiritual relationships and a potential for new opportunities of pastoral care as communicated by the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. Through the way Christianity understands the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the theology of Basil the Great, the language of audiation, and the experience of Seraphim of Sarov, it is possible to derive an understanding of the elder-disciple relationship in the Orthodox Christian tradition as one of those Pneumatologically-based relational realities, which It also encourages in the sacrament of Confession in an Orthodox Christian Parish.²⁰⁰ How can this be known? First, by what Jesus said to the Apostles, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (John 20:21-23).’” Here, the Spirit is being imparted on the Apostles who also received a specific instruction to forgive or retain sins. This gift is explained by Basil the Great as

¹⁹⁹ Hausherr’s question is an impetus behind this research.

²⁰⁰ This is one specific example, but it can be encountered elsewhere.

being undergirded by the Spirit. “But the Lord, who by His teaching bore witness to purity of life, gives to his disciples the power of now both beholding and contemplating the Spirit.”²⁰¹ He further explains that now, in the Spirit, Christians are able to understand “the deep things of God; the creature receives the manifestation of ineffable things through the Spirit.”²⁰² This is the point of this thesis. Again, I am naming the uncreated silence and defining how people hear God, discern, and help others. These statements about the Spirit and confession are cemented in chapter 16, paragraph 39, of *On the Holy Spirit*, where Basil writes specifically about the role of the Spirit as an unction to the flesh of Christ, an anointing at the Baptism of Jesus, a comforter to the Son of God during the temptations of the devil, a powerful force when Jesus expelled demons, and the speaker of truth when Christ had risen from the dead. He also states that the Holy Spirit renews humankind and breathes...

on the face of the disciples, restoring the grace, that came of the inbreathing of God, which man had lost, what did the Lord say? Receive the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever ye retain, they are retained. And is it not plain and incontestable that the ordering of the Church effected through the Spirit? For He gave, it is said, in the church, first Apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues, for this order is ordained in accordance with the division of the gifts that are of the Spirit.²⁰³

In addition to the reference to Confession, notice that Basil writes how the Holy Spirit gives to the Church apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, tongues, and other spiritual skills. Not only does this list show the many and varied gifts the Spirit provides, but also it illustrates that the Spirit provides different gifts for different times even within just one person. For example, confession and healing, prophecy and tongues, and so on. Put differently, the fact of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that one spiritual gift can be fertile ground for the development of another, not unlike what happened to the Apostles at Pentecost. What they were capable of before the descent of the Spirit is different than what they were capable of after. Thus, what I am commending in this thesis is an addendum or offshoot of hesychasm, meaning that the long history of the deep stillness and solitude of hesychastic prayer is replete with men and women being called to spiritual eldership (which is a specific kind of Pneumatologically-based relational spirituality), as well as other roles in the church (e.g., the development of monastic brotherhoods and sisterhoods, becoming bishops of dioceses, providing social care, hospital chaplaincy, writing, and more). The example of Joseph the Hesychast from the 20th century is but one example of this. Having spent years in complete solitude, he gained disciples who themselves were hesychasts and, later, founded dozens

²⁰¹ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, The Fig Classic Series on Early Church Theology, Kindle Edition. Fig Books, 2013, location 936.

²⁰² Ibid, location 982.

²⁰³ Ibid, location 662.

of monasteries around the world (including in the United States). There can be other branches, too, and this section will focus on one of them: the Pneumatologically-based relational role of the father-confessor and the parishioner in the sacrament of Confession. To be clear, other sacraments could have been explored in this section, but Confession was chosen because it is more akin than any of the other sacraments to what happens in the elder-disciple relationship. Confession is a space where far more people can speak and listen, participate and receive, repent and heal, all in a relationship with the Spirit and the priest. This is indicated in the prayer at the beginning of Confession: ‘My brother/sister, inasmuch as you have come to God, and to me, be not ashamed; for you speak not unto me, but unto God, before whom you stand.’²⁰⁴

This speaking and standing before God with the priest in an Orthodox Christian parish is an opportunity – when the sacrament is conducted in a spiritually and psychologically healthy manner²⁰⁵ – for men and women, young and old, to unburden themselves of their spiritual illnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit. “What counts is not the past, but the future; not sickness, but health; not separation from God, but reunion with Him... awareness of sin constitutes a fundamental moment of repentance, an indispensable prerequisite for spiritual progress and an essential step in the healing process.”²⁰⁶ Notice here the connection between repentance, which leads to change, builds unity with God, leads the believer-sinner to higher levels of spirituality, and ultimately to a new knowledge that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is the path of μετάνοια.

Repentance forms a way to access not only knowledge of self, but also the true knowledge of every reality, including the highest spiritual realities. He who repents is indeed purified by God of his sins and passions, and the veil that obscured his faculties of knowledge is gradually lifted. The Spirit then enlightens his intellect to the extent that he has been purified... [he attains] an existential understanding – a knowledge, inspired by the Spirit, of

²⁰⁴ Cf. A Monk of the Eastern Church (Lev Gillet), *Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2nd ed., 1978, pp. 45-46. “The priest who hears an *exomologesis* (confession) is not, as in the Latin Church, a ‘judge’. He tells the penitent: ‘Christ is here before thee, invisibly present...I am but a witness’. This is illustrated by the corporal attitude. The Penitent, instead of kneeling near a seated priest, stands in front of the book of the Gospels, or the Cross, or an ikon of Christ, while the priest stands slightly aside. The traditional Orthodox formula, of absolution is impetrative, not declarative, -- ‘Let God forgive thee’ and not ‘I forgive thee’; It might be said that, in the mystery of Penance, the avowal and the will to amend represent the ascetical element. The absolution is the mystical element of the *exomologesis*... Whatever form Penance may take, it must always be a breaking of the heart at the feet of Christ.”

²⁰⁵ Cf. Judith S. Miller, *Healing the Western Soul: A Spiritual Homecoming for Today’s Seeker*, Paragon House, 2015. To reinforce what was written about the relationship of psychology and spirituality in the footnotes at the beginning of chapter two, the value of Miller’s work lies in its exploration of the perception of spirituality in the therapeutic environment. It is also a reminder that psychological health is critical for both the spiritual father or mother and spiritual son or daughter. Finally, Miller’s book is instructive in that spiritual fathers and mothers must be able to know when a spiritual disciple needs to be referred to a psychological professional. Also, perhaps, it can be said that the psychological professional can learn when to refer a patient to a spiritual advisor.

²⁰⁶ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses*, vol. 2, Fr. Kilian Sprecher, trans. Alexander Press, 2012, pp. 74-75.

the intellect united to the heart... This reunification is one of the essential requirements for attaining to its natural and pure prayer...²⁰⁷

Larchet's understanding of what the Spirit is doing in repentance comports well with this idea of an uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit forgiving, healing, and speaking deeper spiritual realities, not just in a general sense, but specific for the one who has come to confess. This is how the reunification of the spiritual heart and mind is found within the penitent and new paths of personal and communal spiritual care can be discovered through the Holy Spirit.

These themes for Confession in Orthodoxy go back to Apostolic times. "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:14-15)."²⁰⁸ John the Theologian echoes this:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:6-10).

Notice the deep relationality expressed in both Mark and John. The Orthodox Churches teach that Confession is not merely a solitary act,²⁰⁹ but a release of grievances between people and a potential for growth in the community.²¹⁰ It is an opportunity to regain strength for a more virtuous way of living, and to rebuild an interior life that leads closer to the acquisition of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of self and others. "Through this sacrament sins committed after Baptism are forgiven and the sinner is reconciled to the Church: hence it is often called a 'Second Baptism.' The sacrament acts at the same time as a cure for the healing of the soul, since the priest gives not only absolution

²⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 82-83.

²⁰⁸ Orthodox Christians also ground the Sacrament of Confession in Matthew 3:1-8 (John the Baptist's call for repentance); Luke 15:29 (the older brother of the prodigal son who does not understand his own sin); John 13:6-10 (Peter's confusion about the washing of the feet); Acts 2:38 (Peter's call for Baptism, Chrismation, and repentance); 2 Corinthians 7:1 (Paul's teaching on cleansing from bodily defilement); Ephesians 5:11-14 (Paul's admonition to expose dark behaviors and re-enter the light); and James 5:13-18 (James' prayer of faith, which includes the forgiveness of sins).

²⁰⁹ Sins had been confessed publicly in the early Church as was the instruction in James: "Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (5:16)." While churches were still quite small and intimate (essentially populated by family members or small groups of families) this remained the case. When parishes grew in size, and not everyone was familiar with one another, the priest began hearing confessions privately.

²¹⁰ Cf. A Monk of the Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2nd ed., 1978, p. 45. "Notwithstanding a very ancient and honoured tradition, notwithstanding local regulations and an almost general practice, there is no Canon of an Ecumenical Council acknowledged as such by the Orthodox Church, which binds in duty all the faithful to use private confession, as was done in the Latin Church by the Lateran Council of 1215. On the other hand, the canons of the ancient Councils prescribing public Penance are theoretically still in force."

but spiritual advice.”²¹¹ This dual function of healing and guiding is also about finding those who are lost: “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:10-11).” Jesus reassures the Apostles that in the witnessing of this act of the vocal recitation of sins, the ordained priest is divinely assisted, “It is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11).” In other words, each person, with the aid of a father-confessor and/or spiritual elder, can be released from the bonds of the sins that were freely chosen; to learn the difference between what is holy and what is evil; and to grow closer to understanding the will of God by listening to the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates an asceticism in Confession in both the recitation of sins and the amendment of life. There is also a type of mysticism in Confession as the priest journeys with the penitent into the presence of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit who not only heals but reveals what is to be done by the confessed going forward.

The Healing Aspect of Confession

As a confessor, the priest is both a witness-companion and a basic type of spiritual father in a loving triumvirate with the Holy Spirit. Regarding this, three points about Confession will be made in this section. First, that confession applies noetic medicine to spiritual wounds. Second, that the priest must be properly disposed to this type of spiritual relationship. Third, that the one who confesses is brought up into the Holy Spirit, healed, and directed toward something personally and communally new. Thus, what follows is a closer look at the healing, restoring, and guiding aspects of Confession, which was always so closely tied to the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick that they were often written about as if they complementary aspects of one sacrament.

What we seek in Confession is much more than an external, forensic absolution; above all we desire noetic medicine for our chronic spiritual wounds. Indeed, what we bring before Christ is not just specific sins but the fact of deep sinfulness within us – the profound corruption that cannot be fully expressed in words, that seems to elude our conscious brain and will. It is of this, above all else, that we ask to be cured. And as a sacrament of healing, Confession is not simply a painful necessity, a discipline imposed on us by church authority, but an action full of joy and saving grace. Through Confession we learn that God is in full reality ‘the hope of the hopeless’ (The Liturgy of St. Basil).²¹²

The phrase ‘noetic medicine’ here implies that Confession is also about the healing of the *nous*, the reordering of the ‘spiritual mind,’ the removing of blindness from the ‘eye of the soul,’ and specifically to the ideas in this thesis, restoring hearing to the ‘ears of the heart’ through divine audiation. Ware places both a deeper description of, and a greater emphasis on, who and what are

²¹¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1997, p. 288.

²¹² Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000, p. 50.

being communicated in the sacrament of confession. Coupled with his portrayal of ‘the profound corruption’ that illudes words, the human will, and even consciousness, Ware is explaining that confession is about a deeper reckoning – perhaps even an ontological one – between the image and the likeness of God in each person (i.e., what humans were made to be and what they are). This is made possible because the Holy Spirit is present *in* the sacramental action, *in* the priest because of his ordination, and *within* the current and future spiritual state of the penitent, thus impacting both his or her spirituality and psychology.

The psychological part of confession and spiritual direction is very important, though many priests lack the proper training to attend to the mental and emotional needs of those that come to confess in front of him. Alexander Elchaninov (1881-1934), a Russian parish priest who was also considered by many to be a spiritual father, saw the importance of this when he wrote: “Every priest must be well informed about nervous and psychic diseases – this is absolutely necessary in pastoral practice.”²¹³ Keeping in mind that psychiatry was still in its infancy, Elchaninov saw how penitents sometimes needed mental assistance along with the spiritual.

Real confession, being a beneficial upheaval of the soul, frightens one by its decisive character, by the necessity of changing something, or of simply starting to reflect upon oneself. Here the priest must display firmness; he must not be afraid of disturbing this tranquility, and trying to awaken a feeling of genuine repentance.²¹⁴

While the language he uses here about ‘disturbing this tranquility’ could easily become a moment of verbal, mental, and spiritual abuse, Elchaninov’s point is that a father-confessor is not supposed to simply tell people what they want to hear. He astutely observed that genuine repentance comes with an observable change in the spirituality and the psychology of the one who confesses. Among the indicators he lists, includes a newfound sense of purity (a release from the desire to sin), lightheartedness, and joy before God. What is intended to emerge from Confession is the therapy of grace, its evisceration of spiritual illness in the penitent, and the Spirit’s granting of a return to wholeness. This is the sort of Pneumatological relationality that uncreated silence encompasses and provides in Confession: the pulling out of evil, the uprooting of spiritual illness, the assurance of divine pardon, new-found freedom, comfort, a clearer sense of the spiritual self, and the strength to understand and live the will of God, and to help others do the same. “Finding the source of grace again from which he had turned away, he can pursue his theanthropic growth in the Spirit, as far as the stature of the adult man in Christ – the archetype of his nature and the model and source of his health and holiness.”²¹⁵ Larchet’s use of the phrase ‘theanthropic growth in the Spirit’ relates to

²¹³ Alexander Elchaninov, *The Diary of a Russian Priest*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001, p. 212.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 214.

²¹⁵ Jean-Claude, Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses*, vol. 2, Fr. Kilian Sprecher, *trans.* Alexander Press, 2012, p. 46.

what has been written here about the uncreated silence, which, in absolution, means the bringing back of the penitent into the nexus of the human and divine; it is the opportunity for the person to choose not merely to exist in the world, but to live in the Holy Spirit who calls him or her into a more intimate relationship.

With this primer on Confession in place, is there something more to be said about the role of the priest? Is he, by definition, acting as a type of spiritual father or is he simply a facilitator or even a co-journeyman?²¹⁶ Ware argues that “The priest is simply a witness, bearing testimony before God of what we have to say. To vary the analogy, he is no more than ‘God’s usher,’ introducing us into the divine Presence; he is merely the receptionist in the hospital waiting room or the attendant in the operating theatre, whereas the surgeon is Christ Himself.”²¹⁷ While it appears that Ware uses a deprecatory argument by comparing the priest to a type of escort, his larger point is that God is fully and deeply present in the sacrament and it is the priest’s job not only to invite penitents into that reconciling space, but also to pray the prayers of absolution (imparted by God), and act as the witness for the penitent in life and in death.

Confession involves a joint divine-human action, in which there is found a convergence and ‘cooperation’ (*synergia*) between God’s grace and our free will. Both are necessary, but what God does is incomparably the more important. Repentance and confession, then, are not just something that we do by ourselves or with the help of the priest, but above all something that God is doing with and in both of us... It should be remembered that in Greek the same word *exomologesis* means both confession of sins and thanksgiving for gifts received.²¹⁸

Ware offers an additional comment about the part of the priest in the shared action between God and the penitent. “Entrusted with authority to bind and to loose, to withhold or to confer absolution, enjoying wide discretion as to the advice that he gives and the healing penance that he chooses, the confessor-priest has laid upon him a heavy responsibility. And yet his role is also limited.”²¹⁹

This, then, brings the discussion back to the primary role of the father-confessor in confession. Namely, as the companion and guide of the penitent into the divine presence, as the witness to the sincerity of repentance, as the benefactor of prayer, and the conveyer of absolution.

²¹⁶ Cf. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*. Mowbrays, 1979, p. 96. “If the *starets* is a priest, usually his ministry of spiritual direction is closely linked with the sacrament of confession. But a *starets* in the full sense...is more than a priest-confessor. A *starets* in the full sense cannot be appointed such by any superior authority. What happens is simply that the Holy Spirit, speaking directly to the hearts of the Christian people, makes it plain that this or that person has been blessed by God with the grace to guide and heal others. The true *starets* is in this sense a prophetic figure, not an institutional official.”

²¹⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000, p. 51.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 51.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

But it seems there is something more. Bakoyannis ties together the idea of Christ as physician and priest as participating healer.

As spiritual fathers, we must understand this fear²²⁰ and attend to it. Any inconsiderate words or actions, even thoughtless gestures, can result in our producing a bad impression, in making things more difficult for the person repenting... a good spiritual father will try to rejuvenate a half-dead soul that comes for confession (and not try to finish it off). Otherwise, the Just Judge will hold such a spiritual father responsible for his negligence, hard-heartedness, and superficiality.²²¹

It is worth noting here that Bakoyannis instructs the priest to be aware of his own psychology so that he does not hurt or otherwise discourage the penitent in his or her desire for renewal and need for confession. As was stated earlier, the priest is also responsible for understanding the mental well-being of the penitent and the state of his or her spiritual life, too.

Thus, each priest is called to cultivate his interior life to better assist parishioners by becoming conscious of his own sins and faults and working to uproot them through prayer and confession with a spiritual father. Doing this will not only prepare him to approach people in love, humility, and simplicity, but also to assist in his protection from whatever impacts may come from listening to and praying about the spiritual, physical, and mental illnesses parishioners suffer.

The question arises of how a confessor is to *avoid being adversely affected by identifying with* the negative thoughts and emotions of the person whom he confesses. The answer to this question is: By keeping his 'spiritual immune system' at a high level. And this can be achieved only by means of *daily askesis*, 'spiritual training'. *Askesis* is comprised of what I called earlier 'work on oneself.' Analyzed, this consists of certain 'bodily practices' and certain 'spiritual practices...' prostrations, control of the tongue,²²² concentration, meditation, and so on.²²³

Priests are to avoid individualism and a sense of self-sufficiency, which is why they still need to go to confession and speak with a spiritual father. Along with this comes other intellectual, psychological, and physical work that aid him in building up the virtues of faith, hope, and love for his own salvation and for the people whom he has been given to guide.

Repentance and confession constitute a way of rediscovering God and oneself. They are the way out of the impasse caused by sin. Through the forgiveness of sins in confession, the past is no longer an intolerable burden but rather an encouragement for what lies ahead. Life acquires an attitude of expectation, and not of despair. In this respect, repentance is also an eschatological act, realizing in our very midst, here and now, the promises of the age to come... God Himself is revealed before us and walks beside us...²²⁴

²²⁰ In an earlier paragraph, Bakoyannis writes of the anxiousness of the one who approaches the priest for confession.

²²¹ Vassilios Bakoyannis, *The Spiritual Father*. Orthodox Book Centre, 2005, pp. 21, 23.

²²² Notice the call to silence in this phrase.

²²³ Constantine Cavarnos, *The Priest as Spiritual Father*. Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2002, p. 44.

²²⁴ John Chryssavgis, *Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000, p. 32.

Notice how Chryssavgis ties Confession to discovery, forgiveness, encouragement, and hope for the future. In his description, there is an expectation of growth and joy not just psychologically, but spiritually. For him, this sacrament is an eschatological gift that reveals God in the present and points to the ineffable future. While Chryssavgis ties his vision of Confession to the theology and spirituality of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13), it is reasonable to commend here a different, though certainly not competitive, rendition of Confession that visualizes it in the context of Pentecost where the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the priest, and the penitent, filled with his or her desire for repentance and restoration, experiences a type of sober intoxication (Acts 2:15), which leads others onto a path of renewal. This is the work of the uncreated silence, which drew the apostles out from their enclosure and into the streets where people were gathered to see what was happening inside.

Confession, therefore, can be seen as a sacrament, a divine exchange of silent words, a specially situated spiritual relationship which allows the parishioner to repent for sins,²²⁵ grow in understanding of God's will, and seek spiritual and psychological renewal.²²⁶ At the same time, Confession reminds the priest to seek repentance for his own sins and to develop his own spiritual and psychological life. For both people, it is the Holy Spirit that gives them ears to hear. Instead of experiencing condemnation, both find a greater release from the worldly things that keep them ill-focused on their own spiritual gifts. Thus, prayer and confession are the means to repentance²²⁷ and repentance is the means of "being led from God's image to His likeness; from an unnatural to a natural and supranatural state; from darkening of the divine image, by way of purification of the heart, to illumination of the nous and thence to the endless perfection of deification, for perfection knows no bounds."²²⁸

One reason for the section has been to show how the elder-disciple relationship, which most often occurs in the monastic setting, and the father-confessor relationship, which is equally familiar in the parish context, are demonstrations of the relationality of this Pneumatologically-based

²²⁵ Cf. Ibid, p. 10. "Thus, it is Christ, as both judge and physician, who summons the penitent into the honest accounting of sin and invites the confessed into a new relationship with Him through the healing prayers of absolution. At the same time, Christ reminds the priest of his own frailties and prompts him to become more aware, again, of the spiritual gifts he received in ordination for the service of parishioners in and through the sacraments."

²²⁶ Cf. Ibid, p. 22. "Repentance is not a self-contained act: it is, as we have seen, a passing over from death to life, and a continual renewal of that life. It is a reversal of what has become the normal pattern, which is the decline from life to death. To experience this reversal is to have tasted during this life the glory and beauty of eternal life in God. The more one tastes of God, the more wants of Him, and so repentance deepens [the desire to participate with and in God, such that] ...Every manifestation of life has an eschatological dimension. Every matter of the here and now, tends toward and anticipates the 'end'. To repent is not merely to restore lost innocence, but to transcend altogether the fallen condition."

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 28.

²²⁸ Hierotheos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, *Hesychia and Theology*, Sister Pelagia Selfe, trans., Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2007, p. 128.

spirituality of uncreated silence. Another reason for this section is to explain the healing aspects of confession in order to draw out the spiritually and psychologically fruitfulness of the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the penitent, and the priest in this sacrament. A third reason for this section is to create a juxtaposition between the hearing, healing, discerning, and growing aspects of these spiritual relationships with the equally difficult acknowledgment of the abuse that has, does, and can continue to occur within the variety of Christian spiritual connections. To explain this, I will rely on the recent work of Dom Dysmas de Lassus, the Prior General of the Carthusian Order, who brings together perspectives from not only the Carthusians, but also the Benedictines, the Dominicans, and the Orthodox Churches. The reason his work holds particular significance here is that it speaks directly to the environment of this thesis. In other words, it focuses on spiritual relationships – with an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit – especially where the guide comes from the monastic environment and in which there is also a heavy concentration on the use of contemplative prayer.

Inner Captivity: Abuse in Spiritual Relationships

As was stated above, here I will concentrate on the reality of spiritual abuse because it lies at the center of the potential for problems within this proposed Pneumatologically-based, spiritually relational discernment. To be clear, this concentration on spiritual abuse is not an abrogation of the responsibility to address physical and sexual abuse in these relationships because these, too, have existed, do exist, and will likely continue to exist if more is not done to stop physical predation in monasteries and parishes. However, I want to highlight spiritual abuse because it is also the gateway to other abuses in the Christian ecclesial-spiritual context. Put simply, spiritual abuse is the bane of someone who desires help in listening to and understanding the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

Inner captivity is a strong expression, but it is accurate. Spiritual fatherhood, which ought to be a school of inner freedom, can become a kind of slavery when it seeks to impose itself in an exclusive way. This is an extraordinarily strong, and wrong, turn, since it is tantamount to taking the place of God, who is the only real master of souls.”²²⁹

Explaining spiritual abuse in the context of identifying the uncreated silence within the framework of Orthodox eldership is particularly important right now because the idea of having a spiritual elder has so-penetrated the Western convert imagination that there exists a palpable covetousness

²²⁹ Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 208.

among the newly-Christmated American Orthodox for anyone who appears to be even remotely perceptive in matters of spirituality.²³⁰ This makes them susceptible to spiritual predation.²³¹

In the preface to *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path of Healing*, Dysmas de Lassus provides the overarching detail that his research revealed cult-like behaviors at the center of this type of abuse and found them consistently in different contexts.²³² His translator, an unnamed Benedictine monk, explained that these conducts Dysmas describes are to be found in groups, which French law describes as *dérives sectaires*; people in associations who squelch freedom of thought, opinion, or religious practice in such a way that they undermine civic order, ignore laws, violate fundamental rights, and diminish the integrity of persons. They use pressure tactics to create, maintain, and exploit “in a person a state of psychological or physical subjection, depriving them to some degree of their free will, with harmful consequences for the person in question, those associated with them, or for society in general.”²³³ Thus, Dysmas’ work addresses people who have experienced or who are experiencing abuse in spiritual relationships and explains the improper behaviors that have hurt them. His text is also directed toward various types of religious figures, including priests, monks, nuns, and others who hold positions of spiritual guidance, making them more aware of the dysfunctions that can arise in these situations and providing them with a guide toward the behaviors and commitments that are necessary to create a safe, spiritually and psychologically balanced, and free environment. In addition, he writes to the Churches about addressing abuse, detailing what it means to seek forgiveness, show sympathy, change, heal, and

²³⁰ One way this can be demonstrated is through the behavior of a wide swath of American Orthodox converts during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a frenetic search to find the ‘correct’ Orthodox mindset, which most often took the form of scouring the Internet for a ‘good word’ from ‘Holy Elders.’ This almost desperate need to ‘discern’ the ‘truth’ from monks, nuns, priests, and deacons who often portrayed themselves as types of modern elders created opportunities for psychological and spiritual abuse. For example, in the case of Fr. Peter Heers, his oppositional (some use the word ‘fundamentalist’) commentaries during that period grew into a prolonged disparagement of specific Orthodox Bishops in the United States and a continued criticism of the lack of ‘orthodox belief and practice’ among the Orthodox in America. Regardless of whether one agrees with his positions, his aggressive tactics have clearly created a type of litmus test among the convert population, which adds to their doubt that they can manage themselves maturely in a spiritual relationship. Cf. Alexei Krindatch, “The ‘New Traditional’ in a Most Traditional Church: How the Pandemic Has Reshaped American Orthodox Christian Churches [Coronavirus and American Orthodox Parishes \(orthodoxreality.org\)](https://orthodoxreality.org), 2022 Part Two: What Do Lay People Think about It? [Microsoft Word - NewTraditionalLaityReportExecSummary \(orthodoxreality.org\)](https://orthodoxreality.org), accessed 1 October 2022, pp. 1-4. “...trust in the hierarchs of the Church dropped: 40% of Orthodox Church members are now less confident in the ability of their Bishops and Metropolitans to make good decisions than they were pre-pandemic, and only 20% reported an increase in confidence.”

²³¹ Two other prominent examples are mentioned later in the text.

²³² For a look at spiritual abuse in a Catholic convent, Dysmas recommends Marie-Laure Janssens, *Le Silence de la Vierge*, Bayard Adulte, 2017. For a look at abuse in Protestantism, Dysmas commends Jacques Poujol, *Abus spirituels: S’affranchir de l’emprise*, Empreinte Temps, October 2015. He also suggests the film, *Controlling Behavior and Spiritual Abuse*, by Anne and Jean-Claude Duret, who present information about abuse in the non-Christian environment.

²³³ Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 9.

build up a renewed understanding of spiritual guidance as an accompaniment without this aberrant behavior.

In chapters eight and nine of this work, Dysmas expounds on his understanding of spiritual companionship and spiritual abuse. He starts by confirming the long Christian tradition of seeking and guiding; that for almost two millennia there has been a constant theme of spiritual neophytes learning under a wise elder who is deeply experienced in the spiritual life.²³⁴ Dysmas provides his own short history of the concept of spiritual fatherhood, which he says the West recently rediscovered from the Christian East. He also acknowledges that finding a true spiritual father or mother is relatively rare because these are people who have an unreserved openness, a sincere commitment to discretion, and an unwavering respect for the freedom of the spiritual son or daughter.

The mission of such a guide will be simply to assist the action of the Holy Spirit in a soul, leaving total freedom not only for the soul being guided but above all to the Holy Spirit, whom the guide must never seek to replace. This is a delicate task, which can only be undertaken by people of great humility who accept in advance that it may turn out that other guides are more perceptive than they are. Such a guide will help a monk to become more and more docile to the inner voice, by means of which God reveals as Himself. And progressively, the guide will help the monk to stand on his own two feet.²³⁵

Notice the strong presence of the Holy Spirit here. What Dysmas describes above is not just an ideal, it is his expression of what *must* happen in the elder-disciple relationship, which is why he lists humility and a true commitment to the work of the Holy Spirit as the most important traits of one who provides spiritual guidance. This is true not only because these are sensible and meaningful in any healthy spiritual relationship, but also because they are based in the Biblical narrative about the period after Pentecost (e.g. Peter and the Apostles listening to and following the will of God, and providing for the needs of the people) and, from my perspective, reflective of the description of the Holy Spirit found in a particular Orthodox Christian prayer²³⁶ (i.e., it explains the Holy Spirit as comforting, truthful, fully present, taking care of what is needed, good, life-giving, abiding, and

²³⁴ Cf. John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers 57, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997, 2:11. "All professions, all the arts invented by human genius, certainly require a master, if they are to be practiced competently. What about this hidden and invisible discipline, then, accessible only to a heart that is perfectly pure, where a mistake doesn't simply lead to some temporal damage, easily repaired, but to loss of the soul and eternal death? Is this to be the one discipline where we can manage without a guide? Remember: we are contending here, not with visible adversaries, but with invisible enemies, who are merciless. It is combat by night and by day, a spiritual combat, not against one or two enemies, but against innumerable legions; a combat whose outcome is awe-inspiring, if we consider how persistent the adversary is, and how secret his attacks. We cannot be too diligent in following in the footsteps of the elders, nor in revealing to them the thoughts that arise in our hearts, despising the false sense of shame that would lead us to conceal them."

²³⁵ Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 205.

²³⁶ 'Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, present in all places and fillings all things, treasury of goodness and giver of life, come abide in us, cleanse us from all stain of sin, and save our souls, O Good One.'

saving). Without reducing the Holy Spirit to a manager of pastoral care or expecting pastoral caregivers to be the Holy Spirit, these traits, these words of Dysmas, set clear guidelines for knowing what makes a psychologically and spiritually healthy elder whom, he reminds his readers again and again, is called to assist the action of the Holy Spirit.

This author also sets forth a standard and reasonable description of how poor spiritual companionship operates. To summarize: in stage one, a directee shares information about their interior spiritual experiences. In stage two, the directee grows closer to God through some basic advice about prayer or discernment. In stage three, the elder, priest, nun, or spiritual director begins to insert his or her way of thinking and assert his or her particular spirituality (this is where the abuse can manifest itself openly). In stage four, the spiritual personality of the directee begins to appear and a certain spiritual autonomy develops. When this happens, the directee is communicating to the director that their own progression means he or she now only has a need for simple spiritual support; a healthy elder will recognize this positive development and give way to its flourishing. In other words, he or she will hand over the directee to the work of the Holy Spirit.

...if the director does not wish to let the soul in his care reach maturity, for fear that he might lose it, then all the elements needed to keep it in his power are at hand. It will be easy for him to suggest to such souls, seeking to follow the interior Master wherever He is leading them, that they are really following self-will, and that if they are seeking to abandon the openness brought about by the total obedience that had been promised up until this point, then it must be the Enemy who is drawing them away from that gentle path of total surrender that Jesus Himself followed.²³⁷

More than simply being delusional and dysfunctional, this kind of control is fully spiritual abuse. When the soul of the directee is imprisoned by the will of the director, the directee is neither able to maintain their own convictions nor hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The personal psychological damage done to the directee results in loneliness, psychological tension, undeserved feelings of shame and guilt, spiritual confusion, and fear of not knowing to whom they can turn. If the directee shares these feelings with the director, it can exacerbate the problem because the director will reinforce the delusion that God is giving this trial to the directee for a spiritual purpose. To illustrate how a spiritual relationship can get to this point, Dysmas turns to his concern about the renewed fascination with the idea of the Russian *staretz*.

For the vast majority of those who accompany others in the spiritual life, the need for a spirit of service and a respect for people's freedom is obvious. But we need to exercise some caution concerning the fascination some feel for the figure of the *staretz*, as found in the Russian tradition, since often what fascinates them is precisely the submission to the *staretz* in a way that is total, unconditional, and apparently, without discernment.²³⁸

²³⁷ Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 210.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 212.

This is a serious allegation and one not without merit. This Orthodox line of thinking that promotes total abandonment to the staretz came into the West partly through Russian literature, but it has taken on a life of its own among the American convert population, which tends to romanticize this kind of relationship. As I will show in chapter three, Seraphim Rose commanded and still commands a type of allegiance that bespeaks an unhealthy attachment, which makes it important to call out. The reason the controversial material about any particular spiritual elder is so important is that it shows him or her to be human and not God. To place his grave concern within the broader context of the Orthodox elder tradition, Dysmas also quotes Symeon the New Theologian's advice that if a person wants to renounce the world and pursue a spiritual life, he or she should not entrust themselves to someone who is inexperienced or struggling with vice. Instead, that person should find a healthy elder who can show them the way of the Gospel. To make this point, Dysmas refers to Ignatius Brianchaninov who explained that a fallen will cannot be helped by another fallen will. He also lists a set of unhealthy behaviors that can cause or be indicative of an unhealthy spirituality.

Too much asceticism, too much renunciation, not enough regard for the gradual way in which things progress or for the time that is needed, a lack of attentiveness to things that are necessary for the psychological life (such as a healthy self-esteem, or the feeling of being useful), a mistrust of healthy initiative and of legitimate autonomy, a lack of awareness of the essential need to be loved and recognized, or even a systematic discrediting of human qualities: long indeed is the list of those areas where a refusal to take the human conditions of life into account can have serious consequences, in the long term, for a person's human and spiritual balance.²³⁹

These tendencies can be found in some of the Orthodox Christian monastic literature so frequently read. When coupled with the universal warning that a person is clearly not a competent or capable spiritual guide if he or she tells people they are a vessel of God's words, Dysmas lays out a path to understanding the potential for problems in the Orthodox Christian elder-disciple, priest-penitent relationships. He sums this up by identifying three main themes: first, abuse occurs when spiritual companionship is based on a relationship of authority. This means that a person's conscience is being turned away from God and toward the spiritual director. This can be more easily identified in the monastic context, but it can certainly be found in the parish setting. Second, abuse occurs when total self-abandonment is demanded. While a spiritual directee is expected to open up to the spiritual director, unreserved openness or unconditional obedience to him or her means that that elder is asking to be treated like Christ. Third, abuse occurs when the language of 'the will of God' is conflated with the instructions of the director. When the director implicitly or explicitly demands that a directee complete menial tasks or ask permission for everything they do, the director has

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 227

taken from the directee their freedom and responsibility. In all these cases, the image of God is disfigured, allowing an evil to enter the spiritual relationship.

Dysmas repeatedly makes clear how important it is for spiritual seekers to intentionally search for safe and reliable spiritual direction with someone who has developed wisdom and love from the experience of patient prayer and long-term spiritual growth. He or she should also be able to healthfully apply those spiritual and psychological life lessons to the effort of bringing freedom of exploration, through and toward the Holy Spirit, to the spiritual companions he or she is helping.

Relational Models in the Biblical and Patristic Period

In the above section, which covered the possibilities for and markers of spiritual abuse, Dysmas provides three identifiers of a healthy spiritual relationship. One, the directee always has freedom in the relationship. Two, the director desires no power over the directee. Three, the director is discreet, discerning, wise, prudent, and objective. These are the qualities that can be found in certain Biblical figures and others during the Patristic period, which is the focus of this next part of the chapter. Here, it is important to note that there is scant information during this timeframe about what is today called ‘the parish context’ other than references to the roles of bishops as shepherds and fathers, and the Eucharist as the center of Christian life.²⁴⁰ Thus, the information that follows is focused on the biblical and monastic contexts.

Proposed Models from the New Testament

The point of this section is to show how certain biblical events, in addition to Pentecost, reveal the presence of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit as an apophatic and spiritual relationality and I will do this through certain aspects of the lives of Mary, Peter, John, and Paul who responded to this divine calling to prayer, spiritual relationality, and forms of pastoral care.²⁴¹ To accomplish this, I will utilize Douglas Burton-Christie’s analysis of the methodology of the desert monastics who employed an infinitely elastic hermeneutic circle of biblical and elder interpretation. In his book, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, Burton-Christie summarizes how scripture itself became the guide that defined the practices of the monastic setting in the post-Apostolic Period.

²⁴⁰ Cf. John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007.

²⁴¹ This section has not been configured as an attempt to show these figures as elders, monastics, priests, spiritual directors, or pastoral care workers in the modern sense of what those titles entail. Instead, while employing the hermeneutic defined by Burton-Christie, it is meant to demonstrate the call of the Spirit in more places than just the event of Pentecost, and to show how these figures responded in prayer, relationality, and service.

It is now possible to see... the profound way in which Scripture shaped the spirituality of the early Christian monks. This is significant... First, it sheds new light on... the depth at which Scripture permeated the experience of the early desert monks. Second, it focuses attention on [how]... the diverse, creative hermeneutical strategies at work in the desert contributed significantly to the monks' capacity to make sense of and live within the world of Scripture. Finally, it provides a new way of thinking about the meaning of the desert fathers' quest for holiness and the shape of their spirituality, suggesting that their continuous rumination upon Scripture, their desire to embody the texts in their lives, was a primary source of the compelling spirituality that emerged from the desert.²⁴²

In terms of this thesis, there are three particular items of note in Burton-Christie's findings: one, it provides a useful hermeneutic for understanding uncreated silence in the biblical context; two, it allows the concept of uncreated silence to evolve from scripture as needed in further research; three, it extrapolates models of eldership which enables a new way of looking at certain events in the lives of select biblical figures. Potentially, this can create a continuum between their experience of the apophatic relationality of the Holy Spirit and their lived spiritual relationships. This, in turn, can provide further insight into how early monastic disciples sought to hear the Holy Spirit with the help of his or her spiritual elder, and discover how, today, the depth of commitment in both an elder and a disciple, who are devoted to God and each other can yield vocational clarity in the dichotomous terms of solitude and service.

In the solitary acts of memorization, rumination, and meditation of Scripture, words penetrated the deepest recesses of the soul and penetrated new possibilities and challenges...The monks were drawn into a hermeneutical circle, in which the words of Scripture and the elder elicited from them increasingly incisive responses of moral honesty and commitment. And the words themselves were experienced as infinitely elastic, growing with the monks' own growth and struggle, drawing them ever more deeply into the mystery revealed through the words... interpretation, understood as a means to transformation and holiness, was fundamental to the desert fathers' spirituality... The ultimate expression of the desert hermeneutic was a person, one who embodied the sacred texts and who drew others out of themselves into a world of infinite possibilities.²⁴³

Note his description of this continuum as a 'hermeneutical circle' that creates an 'infinitely elastic... means to transformation and holiness' and leads 'ever more deeply into the mystery...' Burton-Christie describes it this way to demonstrate how repetitive meditative reading of Scripture, frequent prayer, and close communication with an elder, led the disciple into something more than pious behavior; it led him or her to embody the call of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit through prayer. Thus, the elder and the disciple were able to draw out others (beyond the walls of the monastery) 'into a world of infinite possibilities.' Burton-Christie's observations are important because they begin to bring into focus the idea that the unutterable words of the Holy Spirit God can

²⁴² Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. Oxford University Press, 1993, Kindle edition, Location 4596-4628.

²⁴³ Ibid, location 4628-4641.

exist in spiritual relationships, which cause an interior change and generate a movement that expands outwardly for the spiritual and pastoral benefit of others. The reality and mystery of this hidden voice of the Spirit makes it the function of an apophatic theology that is lived in spiritual relationships (i.e., elders, father-confessors, and other types of pastoral kin), which are different than purely human relationships.

The ministry of the spiritual father is already foreshadowed in the New Testament...The ministry of the elder to his spiritual children is foreshadowed also in Alexandria during the second and third centuries. The teacher's role, as understood by Saint Pantaeus, Saint Clement and Origen, was by no means limited to instruction in the narrow academic sense... The teacher was also a spiritual guide to his pupils, a living model and exemplar, providing them not only with information but with an all-embracing personal relationship.²⁴⁴

The prefiguring of these all-embracing spiritual relationships in the New Testament can be derived most readily from the scene at Pentecost when the Apostles heard the Holy Spirit and were called to evangelize, heal, and teach others how relate to each other spiritually and pastorally. Thus, what I am proposing in this section is a series of other events in the New Testament, other than just Pentecost, that indicate the presence of the uncreated silence where the Pneumatological intervention led a person from a silent witness to a public one (meaning that it was a relational act). Here, I will provide four examples from the lives of Mary, Peter, John, and Paul.

Mary as Mother

In the Orthodox Churches, Mary is the exemplar of spiritual relationships with God and for others. In the Gospel according to Luke, the Archangel Gabriel tells Mary, "Rejoice, highly favored one,²⁴⁵ the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women...Do not be afraid Mary...you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus (1:28-31)." The archangel then answers Mary's question about how it is possible that she will conceive without having 'known a man' (1:34). "... 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,²⁴⁶ and the power of the Highest will

²⁴⁴ Kallistos Ware, "The Spiritual Father in Saint John Climacus and Saint Symeon the New Theologian" in Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*. Anthony P. Gythiel, trans. Cistercian Publications, 1990, pp. viii-ix.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Averky Taushev, "The Four Gospels," vol. 1 in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, Nicholas Kotar, trans., Vitaly Permiakov, ed., Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2015, p. 6. "When the angel entered into the room where the Virgin Mary was, he called her 'full of the grace' of God (v. 28), that is, she was full of a special love and benevolence from God, a special help from God, which is always found in saints and in those who do great deeds."

²⁴⁶ Mary noetically grasps the mystical relationship with the Holy Spirit and uses those spiritual fruits to pastorally care for others. Cf. Averky Taushev, "The Four Gospels," vol. 1 in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, Nicholas Kotar, trans., Vitaly Permiakov, ed., Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2015, p. 6. "The 'power of the highest,' ...would descend upon Her like the cloud that in the past would fill the tabernacle, 'the swift cloud', as Isaiah describes it (Isa. 19:1)."

overshadow²⁴⁷ you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'... (1:35)." Thus, Mary²⁴⁸ becomes a prototype of the experience of the Pneumatological energy known as uncreated silence in that she noetically hears the mystical words of the Holy Spirit, accepts them, and in doing so, provides the highest and most essential pastoral care for Christians. This is supported in verse 35, which unveils the Holy Trinity – the 'Highest' is a reference to the Father; Mary will bear 'the Son of God;' and the Holy Spirit will descend on her – and demonstrates the consecrated nature of spiritual relationships, insofar as the Orthodox understand them. The overshadowing of the Holy Spirit here is akin to 'the cloud' covering 'the tabernacle' in Exodus 40:28²⁴⁹ and implies that a deeper, mystical apprehension comes upon and within the one who is called to authentic spiritual relationship with the Holy Spirit and humanity. Although, it should be noted that Mary's response to that call is not automatic, which is quite human. But it does come: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word' (1:38)." This consummation of obedient love simultaneously makes Mary the 'Birth-giver' to God, an earthly mother to Jesus, and the preeminent spiritual relator (also read: intercessor) for Christians everywhere.

In *The Ode of the Theotokos* (Luke 1:46-65), Mary's free choice to align her will with the call of the Holy Spirit means that she has chosen to relate to God within the most all-encompassing mystical context imaginable, involving her intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. In revealing how Mary spoke of her experiences with God, Luke's *Magnificat* exemplifies a bi-directional, sacrificial, loving relationship for God and for mankind. By giving her mind, body, soul, and spirit to the will of the Holy Spirit (represented as an angel), Mary is seen in the Eastern Christian tradition as not only providing a nurturing space for the Incarnate God who is born as a child and grows into a man, but also gifting her relationship with Jesus to the human race to aid it in its maturation of faith and inspire it toward the work of union with God (theosis).

²⁴⁷ Cf. Pablo T. Gadenz, ed., "The Gospel of Luke" in *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, Baker Academic, Kindle Edition, 2018, p. 44. "The verb overshadow (episkiazō), found in the Gospels only here and in the description of the cloud of transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34), recalls how in Moses' day the cloud 'settled down' (episkiazō in the LXX) over the tent of meeting, the precursor to the temple (Exod 40:35). Here, the verb suggests that Mary, who is about to become pregnant with Jesus, will thus become the new, living tent of meeting filled with God's holy presence. Gabriel's first announcement took place in the temple, the place of God's presence. Now in his second announcement, there is a new temple."

²⁴⁸ "...those whose hearts have been purified by holy stillness, inasmuch as they have been ineffably permeated by the light that transcends both sense and mind, see God within themselves as in a mirror (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The immediate proof of this is the Virgin, who, having kept company with quietness from the earliest age, brings the greatest benefits to us, and commends to God those in need as no one else can. She alone lived in holy quiet from such early childhood in a manner surpassing nature, and she alone of the human race bore the Word, who is the God man, without knowing man (Gregory Palamas, "On the Entry of the Theotokos into the Holy of Holies II," *The Homilies*, p. 438)."

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Orthodox Study Bible*. St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008, p. 116, footnote on Exodus 40:28. "The tabernacle was a type of the Mother of God, and the cloud was the presence of the Holy Trinity."

Aspects of Mary's spiritual relationships with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, humanity, and the local community are revealed elsewhere in the New Testament. The first takes place at the wedding in Cana²⁵⁰ just as the wine runs out. Mary says to Jesus "They have no wine (John 2:3);" literally meaning that they have run out of drink and figuratively implying that the people of God are still empty of Christ. Jesus' response in verse 4 – "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" – acts as a leading interrogative. In an understated manner of speaking, Jesus is asking Mary a series of deeper questions: What are you really asking me? Are you ready for what is about to happen to Me and to you? Do you think people really want to know what is missing in their life? Do you think the world is ready for its Messiah? To reinforce this point, Jesus immediately states, "My hour has not yet come." John gives no further information about a conversation between Jesus and Mary but Jesus' silence at this point in the text implies that if something more is to be done, then Mary must do it (i.e., the spiritual mother must act on behalf of her spiritual children). In verse five, Jesus' mother "said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'" The implication here is that Mary, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, intercedes for humanity by asking Jesus 'to have mercy on them;' telling the world to 'do as Jesus Christ says to do;' and helping the wedding party by pointing out to them that they are missing something and should find it in Jesus. By displaying these specific prayerful and personal works, John is describing Mary as a Christian called by the Holy Spirit who then comforts people through the concerns of daily life²⁵¹ and assists them in their own lack of attentiveness to the eternal life. In her divine maternity, Mary is intimately related to the Church and its becoming. In her obedience to Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her (Luke 1:35), she gave birth to the Savior, nurtured Him, educated Him, and drew all people to him in a spiritual relationship. Thus, the uncreated silence called Mary and her 'yes' meant that she would build spiritual relationships with the Apostles, disciples, and, through prayer, all those who

²⁵⁰ Note the multiplicity of relationships present in this story. Cf. Paul Nadim Tarazi, "Johannine Writings," vol. 3 in *The New Testament: An Introduction*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, p. 151. "Although Jesus is not the bridegroom at this wedding, yet he is present and his word of authority is channeled through the intermediacy of his mother, who throughout the Pauline literature is an image of the church. Understood in this manner, the pericope is about the coming of God's kingdom through the agency of his Christ. Christ and his kingdom are made present among the Gentiles through the Pauline teaching (Jesus' word) preserved and propagated by the church he established."

²⁵¹ In John 19:26-27, Jesus acknowledges the presence of Mary and the "beloved disciple" John, calling them into an even more intimate spiritual and loving relationship. "...He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." The doctrinal implication for Eastern Christians here is that Jesus is naming Mary as the mother of his disciples in every generation; simultaneously making her prayer and selfless action the model for Christian relationships. Cf. Theophylact. "The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John." Vol. IV in *Blessed Theophylact's Explanation of the New Testament*. Chrysostom Press, 2007, p. 288. "It is marvelous how calmly the Lord went about His work while hanging on the cross – caring for His mother, fulfilling prophecies, opening paradise to the thief. Again, this demonstrates His divine power. Before the crucifixion He agonized and sweated, revealing His human nature."

make recourse to her intercession (cf. Luke 2:19). John Maximovitch describes her experience in this manner: “Having previously endured suspicion in silence, Mary now also listened in silence and kept in Her heart the sayings concerning the greatness of Her Son (Luke 2:8-19).”²⁵²

Thus, when a person dwells in the Holy Spirit, they grow in spiritual sensitivity and do not speak from their own mind, but according to the promptings of what is revealed. Mary’s approach to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit bears great spiritual fruit and provides fullness in her spiritual relationships.

When a person is mindful of the Lord, obedient and humble in all things, he receives the gift of interior prayer from the Lord Himself, and such prayer continues without difficulty deep in the heart. When one attains to such perfect prayer and continually dwells in God, he acquires exceeding spiritual sensitivity. In all his conversations with others, and in all his dealings with things, he does not speak and act, as it were, from his own mind; but he speaks and acts according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.²⁵³

Sophrony of Essex draws a different, though relatable, picture of silence in Jesus before and during the uncreated light of the Transfiguration.

...the Gospel teaches us that for a whole week before His Glorious Transfiguration, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ performed no miracle, and spoke no word. In short, in all three Synoptic narratives there is a significant period of silence before the Taborian theophany takes place (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28). Indeed, the Gospel of Luke specifies that it was while the Lord was praying that His wondrous change occurred (Luke 9:29). Prayer, silence and stillness – what the Fathers refer to as *hesychia* – preceded this great Biblical event...²⁵⁴

The explanation of silence here is indicative of the two-branch theory of silence proposed in this thesis. As has been stated multiple times: deep, abiding silence, stillness, and solitude can remain a call to life-long prayer or become the impetus for specific spiritual, psychological, and spiritual care among the members of the community. The dichotomy of silence as preparation and silence as revelation is the center point of discernment: one is about receiving mystical insight and the other is about knowing what to do with it.

Peter as Father-Confessor

Peter’s faith (proclaiming “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” in Matthew 16:16), the intentionality of his actions in response to spiritual prompts (entering the tomb first in John 20:6 and diving into the sea in John 21:7), and his care for the new Christian community (explaining “...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you

²⁵² John Maximovitch, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, Fr. Seraphim Rose, trans., St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2012, p. 66.

²⁵³ Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The Way of Christ: Gospel, Spiritual Life and Renewal in Orthodoxy*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2002, p. 117.

²⁵⁴ Christopher Veniamin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation: “Theosis” in Scripture and Tradition*, Mount Thabor Publishing, 2016, pp. 189-190.

may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." in 1 Peter 2:14) identify him as a father who spiritually and pastorally guides God's people post-Pentecost. When combined with Jesus' proclamation that He will give Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19) it also becomes possible to describe Peter as a confessor of faith and a father-confessor who guides, encourages, evangelizes, teaches, and admonishes; all of which become revelatory of the coming sacramental, catechetical, formational, and ecclesiastical needs of the growing Church. In his 54th homily on the Gospel according to Matthew, John Chrysostom provides a commentary on the fact of Peter's paternal guidance of the new Church.

I would fain enquire then of those who desire to lessen the dignity of the Son, which manner of gifts were greater, those which the Father gave to Peter, or those which the Son gave him? For the Father gave Peter the revelation of the Son; but the Son gave him to sow that of the Father and that of Himself in every part of the world; and to a mortal man He entrusted the authority over all things in Heaven, giving him the keys; Who extended the Church to every part of the world and declared it to be stronger than heaven.²⁵⁵

Chrysostom makes clear that the process of the Father sending the Son and the Son pointing to the Holy Spirit enables both the consecration of the Church and the sanctification of the people. The earthly elder obeys Christ's commands, listens to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit, prays, marshals the community, and provides direction for his or her spiritual children. It is this final fact that stupefies Chrysostom. He clearly marvels at the idea that mere mortals were entrusted to shepherd God's people on earth.

Christ's choice to involve all-too-human apostles and disciples is reinforced in the restoration of Peter's relationship with Jesus.²⁵⁶ John writes of Peter and others going out to fish at night, though they do not catch anything. The next morning, Jesus appears and tells them to cast their nets on the right side. After bringing in a large haul, Jesus invites them to eat. When they are finished, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him three times and Peter responds affirmatively and emphatically. After each response, Jesus commands Peter to 'feed my lambs,' 'tend my sheep,' and

²⁵⁵ Cf. John Chrysostom, "Homilies, Volume 2" in *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West*, Members of the English Church, trans. Oxford Press, 1843, Kindle Edition, loc. 8244.

²⁵⁶ Peter breaks his relationship with Jesus who reproves and admonishes with a silent stare in the Gospel of St. Luke, which is a reminder that silence can also chasten. Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History*, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 34. "Another story of the trial is also shared by all four Evangelists: the Apostle Peter's panic-stricken denial to bystanders that he knows Jesus. Luke's version has an individual feature: after Peter has three times denied that he knows the man on trial, not only does the cock crow, as it does in all four Gospels, but Luke adds that 'the Lord turned and looked at Peter'. It is that look which sends the Apostle into the depths of bitter recollection and penitence. If this is an editorial insertion – and it certainly corresponds to a particular interest in Jesus's silence which is noticeable in Luke's Gospel – it is still a significant addition to the range of silences in the Christian story. It is one of the most eloquent silent stares in human history."

'feed my sheep' (John 21:1-14). In doing so, Jesus shows compassion, mercy, love, and forgiveness while also commanding Peter to go and do the same.²⁵⁷ This sequence is particularly illustrative when Jesus' encouragement to fish on the right side of the boat is compared to the Matthean prophecy of judgment in which the sheep (the righteous) will be at the right hand of God and the goats (the unrighteous) will be at His left hand (Matthew 25:33). This is eschatological to be sure, but it is also quite pastoral: Peter goes to confession.

The effect of Peter's formalized repentance not only enables him to father inquirers and the newly baptized, but also prepares him to receive additional charisms like healing.

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people... And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them (Acts 5:12-15).²⁵⁸

This event in Acts provides an opportunity to draw attention once again to the soundless voice of the Spirit. But in this case, it can be examined next to the idea of the shaded illumination of the Spirit and in the context of movement. Which begs the question: how does this light and/or sound proceed from the Holy Spirit to the one meant to receive it, then render additional spiritual encounters with others who benefit from the supplementary prayer or pastoral care of the one who originally received the audiation? Thinking about this process in terms of the scientific property of refraction, which is simply the redirection of a wave (light or sound) as it passes from one medium to another; it may be possible to say that the fire which descended on Peter at Pentecost passes through him as a shadow that heals. Analogously, it may be possible to say that the noise which was heard by Peter at Pentecost passes through him as a summoning of others to be healed, and in turn, for them to heed the call to help others heal. In other words, Peter was called at Pentecost to provide pastoral care to the community around him. His assent to the calling and his willingness to do the work - projects the will of the Spirit relationally such that it awakens others' spiritual senses, restores people to physical and spiritual health, and, in turn, draws them to discern their own

²⁵⁷ Peter must come back into a loving, respectful relationship with Jesus. Cf. Paul Nadim Tarazi, "Johannine Writings," vol. 3 in *The New Testament: An Introduction*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, p. 151. "For Peter, this must involve a completely new beginning, an acknowledgment that he did not truly understand what the Messiah was all about and needs to begin learning now. The Evangelist makes this clear by casting Peter's reinstatement in a story about fishing, that is, in the same way the disciples' original call by Jesus is presented in the other Gospels (Mt 4:18-19; Mk 1:16-17; Lk 5:2)."

²⁵⁸ In these passages, there is a juxtaposition of relationships that come from God and those that do not. Cf. William S. Kurtz, ed., "Acts of the Apostles" in *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, Baker Academic, Kindle Edition, 2013, p. 98. "This depiction is the first of several in Acts in which healings occur through material objects or physical proximity (see Acts 9:17; 19:11-12; 20:10). Although such healings can look like magic (see Acts 8:4-24), later narratives clarify that the power working through Christians is God's, and they are only his human instruments. By contrast, in magic the focus is on the human control and manipulations of spiritual powers (see Acts 8:9-11' 13:6-8; 19:19)."

spiritual gifts and provide for others too. While it would not be prudent to take this description and claim it as a literal process, it does provide a framework for understanding the progression of the relationality of the uncreated silence. It also presents a reminder of the apophatic nature of the relationship with the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is made clear with Peter's trance, when he saw heaven opened on the rooftop at about noon in Acts 10:10-11. "In this state, the external world with all of its impressions seems to close for the physical senses of a person, and another, invisible world becomes evident to his inner sense. The Apostle Paul describes such a state... Peter was probably on his knees in prayer."²⁵⁹

Together, these experiences show that the presence of the Holy Spirit can become so pronounced in certain individuals (e.g., spiritual elders) that mystical works flow through them, which is what Jesus explained would happen. "Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father (John 14:12)." Jesus also makes clear that these gifts will continue to be given in the generations to follow because He will "pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him (John 14:16-17)." This quote reinforces the Pneumatological basis of the uncreated silence, both in terms of a calling and the promulgation and proliferation of gifts that begins with the forgiveness and illumination of Baptism and Chrismation, is consistently renewed in Confession, and is continually sharpened in the silent, still prayer of the heart that sustains and strengthens the gifts of the Spirit.

Paul as Pastor-Shepherd

Paul's experience in Acts chapter nine reveals another interplay of light and sound. On the road to Damascus, Saul sees a flash of light and hears the voice of God. This theophany of light could be interpreted as either a Christological event as in the Transfiguration or as a Pneumatological one as what happened at Pentecost. It is more likely that this experience is more closely tied to Transfiguration because it demonstrates that Paul is no less of an Apostle than Peter, James, and John. But what is to be done with the theophany of sound in this passage? It may be possible to say this is also an uncreated silence because we need not, cannot, impose such an exclusivity on the energies of God that somehow one must only be from the Word, and one must only be from the Spirit. It may also be possible to surmise that uncreated light and uncreated silence were both found at the Transfiguration (Peter, James, and John witnessed the light while the voice of God was heard)

²⁵⁹ The English word 'trance' is translated from *ekstasis* in Greek, which means a state in which a person is outside himself. Cf. Averky Taushev, "The Acts of the Apostles," Vol. 2 in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, Nicholas Kotar, trans., Vitaly Permiakov, ed., Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2017, p. 53-54.

and Pentecost (the Apostles were bathed in the light of the tongues of fire and heard the unutterable sounds of the Spirit). An equally important part of this passage, however, is that Paul's theophanic involvement changed his orientation to the world; the apophatic relationality of his experience forever changed his relationship with God and others.²⁶⁰ Thus, Paul's work as an intercessor, confessor, evangelist, and catechist leads him to become a shepherd in many communities. In his letter to the Romans, which he wrote even before going there, Paul unequivocally offers himself to the Christian community. "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me...that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among other Gentiles (Romans 1:11-13)."²⁶¹ Notice the language here about imparting a spiritual gift to people and his hopefulness in these new spiritual relationships. In other words, Paul will give them more than instructions on growing the church in Rome. Ultimately, he will gift them his theological, spiritual, and pastoral gifts, which will manifest in the local Christian communities. Regarding this, Paul makes clear that his counsel is not something he concocted on his own; he states that it was a spiritual gift, a 'grace given him by God' (Romans 15:15) and that his deeds spring from the 'mighty signs and wonders' given 'by the power of the Spirit of God (Romans 15:18-19). Take note also of the Pneumatological element in the development of his own gifts and what gifts he will share with others. In his commentary on Romans 15, John Chrysostom further explains Paul's mystical language around his "service and priestly ministering (*leitourgian kai ierourgian*). For to me this is a priesthood, this preaching and declaring. This is the sacrifice I bring."²⁶² Chrysostom also adds clarity as to the source of Paul's ministry.

And none, he means, can say that my words are a mere boast. For of this priestly ministry of mine, the signs that I have, and the proofs of the appointment too, are many. Not the long garment (*poderes*) and the bells as they of old, nor the mitre and the turban (*kidaris*), but signs and wonders, far more awful than these. Nor can it be said that I have been entrusted indeed with the charge, but yet have not executed it. Or rather, it is not I that have executed, but Christ. Wherefore also it is in Him that I boast, not about common things, but

²⁶⁰ Paul is experiencing theosis, also known as deification or divinization. Cf. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The Way of Christ: Gospel, Spiritual Life and Renewal in Orthodoxy*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2002, p. 104. "The biblical word for it [theosis] is glorification, that is, a radiant transformation by participation in the uncreated grace of God. It is the new creation taking concrete form through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and in union with the risen Christ. Saint Paul refers to it as 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' which God shines in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). According to Saint Paul, by gazing inwardly at this light, the Christian beholds the glory of the Lord and is changed into the likeness of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). *Theosis* is involved in the whole process of spiritual growth marked by various stages from repentance to perfection."

²⁶¹ Cf. Paul Nadim Tarazi, "Paul and Mark," vol. 1 in *The New Testament: An Introduction*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999, p. 88-89. "For Paul, there is no 'experience' of God that is independent of scripture; that is to say, one may have an experience of the biblical God, but such an experience must be verified by checking and judging it against the scripture which is God's 'revelation' as *he* chose to reveal himself."

²⁶² *Homilies of John Chrysostom on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Kindle Edition, p. 595, location 8201.

about spiritual. And this is the force of, 'in things which pertain to God'. For that I have accomplished the purpose for which I was sent, and that my words are not mere boast, the miracles, and the obedience of the Gentiles show.²⁶³

In effect, Chrysostom confirms that Paul's ministry is a priestly one. His constant work to bring about conversions and expand the presence of the Christian Church around the Mediterranean basin also reveals a growing set of apostolic, evangelistic, liturgical, sacramental, catechetical, and formational needs. While Paul and the other Apostles and disciples were initially providing for all the people themselves, they quickly discovered that they needed assistance. To get the appropriate help, however, they had to learn to discern others' abilities and to properly place them in the service of the community. When the Apostles summoned many disciples and explained the need for more participants in ministry, they were warned to "...seek out from among you...men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4). Notice the reference to seeking help from people filled with the Holy Spirit and committed to prayer and work. In this case in Acts, there needed to be people who were responsible for taking care of the widows of the community without taking away from the time spent on liturgical services. The distinctiveness between roles in spiritual gifts is made even clearer as Paul and Barnabas discern senior members of the community for ordination to the priesthood. "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23-24). In these verses can also be found the practice of prayer, fasting, and consultation with an elder as part of the process for discernment. In Acts 15:6, laity participates too. They put forth seven names of men whom they believe fit the criteria for diaconate (including Stephen the first martyr) while the Apostles made the final decision and ordained them. Later, Paul expresses concern about the authenticity of the teachers themselves and the veracity of their teaching (catechesis) once he left for another city. "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17-18)."²⁶⁴

By leaving these instructions everywhere he travels, this pastor of each local church becomes the elder of many communities, whose faith, personal qualities, and specific actions were divinely gifted and understood in a manner not unlike Pentecost. "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:15). From Paul's

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 596, Kindle location 8217.

²⁶⁴ Paul, as the elder, is making a distinction between those who truly follow Christ and those who follow Him in name only. Cf. Matthew 25:33 and 21:1-14.

perspective, the commitment he must make to father Christ's people only becomes possible because he is "free from all men" yet a "servant to all" (1 Corinthians 9:19). To Paul, an elder is like a parent whose guidance helps spiritual children mature in faith. To him, this is not simply a teacher who gives information, but a caregiver working on behalf of the Spirit and exercising a type of loving parental authority within the community. This distinction can be found in other passages as the term 'teacher' is used in John 3:10, Acts 13:1, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11, and 2 Tim 1:11, while the word 'father' is used in Lk 16:24, 1 Cor 4:15, and Col 3:21. These fathers (or mothers as the spiritual case may be) are held to a higher standard by taking on a position of spiritual authority in the community.

That is why Paul encourages his disciples to imitate what he does. He lives what he speaks; for example, in 1 Cor 9:27, Paul talks of disciplining his body. He also instructs converts in Philippi to become "obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-11). The Pauline voice in Hebrews places value on confession for everyone, but especially for spiritual and pastoral elders.

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was (Hebrews 5:1-4).

Paul also models to his followers the importance of prayer. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains... (Colossians 4:2-4)." The earliest example of Christian prayer in Paul's own life comes from what he recounts about his conversion, importantly noting that he did not confer "with any human being" or even "those who were already apostles," rather, he "went away at once to Arabia" (Gal 1:15-17).²⁶⁵ This can be viewed as a time of asceticism and apophaticism for Paul, which is confirmed by his statement that it was "...by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit..." (Eph 3:3).²⁶⁶ Finally, Paul says of himself that he was given a vision of God while at prayer:

²⁶⁵ Cf. Averky Taushev, "The Epistles and the Apocalypse," vol. 3 in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, Nicholas Kotar, trans., Vitaly Permiakov, ed., Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2018, p. 56. "Only three years later did Paul go to Jerusalem 'to see Peter,' that is, only to become acquainted with the famous apostle, not to study under him."

²⁶⁶ Paul is being given divine gifts in order to relate to people in a special way; he has been to be a spiritual father to many in different communities. Cf. Averky Taushev, "The Epistles and the Apocalypse," vol. 3 in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament*, Nicholas Kotar, trans., Vitaly Permiakov, ed., Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2018, p. 68. "In chapter 3, the apostle speaks of the hiddenness of the mystery of the calling of the pagans into the Church of Christ, and how he himself was given the grace to preach this mystery of Christ to the pagans."

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Cor 12:2-4).

And here we come full circle to the unutterable words of the Holy Spirit, who tells the apostles, disciples, and servants of God everywhere and for all time what they need to be and do after their time of silent prayer. This is the theory of the uncreated silence, which I named from the experience of the Apostles at Pentecost, the theology of Basil the Great, the theory of audiation, the explanation of the encounter of the Holy Spirit described by Seraphim of Sarov, the theology of Yannaras, the philosophy of Picard, and now these biblical figures.

John as Late-Life Contemplative

For John the Apostle – also known as John the Theologian, John the Divine, and John of the Apocalypse – who started life as a fisherman and ended it as a prisoner of the Roman Empire, it is possible to say that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit called him to pastoral works for many years and then led him away to a life of silence, stillness, and solitude. It would be anachronistic to call him a hesychast, but not out of the question to call him a contemplative (in the end, at least) having eventually found himself “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day (Rev 1:10),” receiving in uncreated silence what would become the *Book of Revelation*. John Chrysostom explains him like this.

Seeing then it is no longer the fisherman the son of Zebedee, but He who knows ‘the deep things of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:10), the Holy Spirit I mean, that strikes this lyre, let us hearken accordingly. For he will say nothing to us as a man, but what he says, he will say from the depths of the Spirit, from those secret things which before they came to pass the very Angels knew not; since they too have learned by the voice of John with us....Let us then show much silence and orderly behavior... since it is at times good to hear Him (John)...He is not of this world...and He has speaking within him the Comforter, the Omnipresent...To Him then let us yield ourselves during all our life...The thunder amazes our souls...²⁶⁷

Note the language used by Chrysostom here. He writes about John knowing ‘the deep things of God;’ that the Holy Spirit strums ‘him like a lyre;’ that he only speaks from ‘the depths of the Spirit those secret things;’ that he is ‘not of this world;’ and that the Holy Spirit speaks within him. Chrysostom so exalts John’s counsel that he tells his readers to listen to John’s words in silence and stillness; notice also how Chrysostom compares John’s former life as one of the ‘Sons of Thunder’ in Mark 3:17 to his new life as the ‘thunder that amazes our souls.’

In having given up his life as a fisherman to follow Jesus, and becoming an Apostle who ends up in the cave of the apocalypse, John’s literal and metaphorical journey up a mountain is

²⁶⁷ *The Complete Works of St. John Chrysostom*, Kindle Edition, p. 4994, location 64838.

reminiscent of the hidden places where Jesus prayed.²⁶⁸ Jesus “went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there (Matthew 14:23).” “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16).” “Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).” Jesus also went to Gethsemane, a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. He “said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there’. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee...Again, a second time, He went away and prayed...So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time... (Matthew 26:36-44).” Jesus did not only go up on mountains, into the wilderness, or into gardens to separate himself for prayer, He used other methods to be temporarily separated from people and the noise of pastoral work. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed (Mark 1:35).” Jesus specifically recommended this to the Apostles. “‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while’ (Mark 6:31).” These silences mentioned are also indicative of the two-branch theory of silence proposed in this thesis. Again, the dichotomy of silence as preparation and silence as revelation provides the divergence point where one can be called from silence to pastoral work, or like in John’s case, from pastoral work into the deep, abiding solitude of still and silent prayer.

It is worth noting that the Matthean Jesus makes a suggestion for those who have nowhere else to pray. “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:6). Anna the prophetess “did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Luke 2:37).” And Mary pondered in her heart Jesus’ growth in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:51). Thus, silent, still prayer can be done in quite common spaces like at home in a quiet corner or in church in an empty pew. Sometimes, though, God provides a special set of circumstances into which people – including biblical figures -- are fully immersed in a divine silence, which brings to them a complete stillness. This can be found in Exodus where Moses “drew near to the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18-21).” It happened to Mary at the Annunciation: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you...” (Luke 1:46). A similar phenomenon happens to Luke, “As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening (Luke 9:29).” John sees God on Patmos. “His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead (Rev 1:17).” These experiences are an indicator of the apophatic relationality of the uncreated

²⁶⁸ “St. John mimics the kenosis (emptying) of God the Word, Who takes on the poverty of human existence. The very Word of God became poor, and through these lowly and poor words that St. John uses [in Revelation], the wealth of theology is made manifest, the wealth of the Kingdom of God.” Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Homilies on the Book of Revelation*, vol. 1, Bethlehem, PA: St. Nicodemus Publications, 2009.

silence of the Holy Spirit, which unfolds as intimate spiritual relationships in the world that are marked by the loving intercessory prayer of silence in solitude or the sacrificial work of pastoral care.

By utilizing the monastic methodology as understood by Burton-Christie – (1) that “the diverse, creative hermeneutical strategies at work in the desert contributed significantly to the monks’ capacity to make sense of and live within the world of Scripture;”²⁶⁹ and (2) how “the words themselves were experienced as infinitely elastic, growing with the monks’ own growth and struggle, drawing them ever more deeply into the mystery revealed through the words... interpretation, understood as a means of transformation and holiness, was fundamental to the desert fathers’ spirituality...”²⁷⁰ Here, I have shown a new way of looking at the divine experiences of certain biblical figures as having come from the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit; a relational spiritual reality, involving unutterable mystical words given for the purpose of discernment and the living reality of what follows in their earthly ministry. This divine speaking heard in silence comes to a person from the Holy Spirit, and exists between people including the elder and disciple, father and confessor, and other spiritual companions.

Models Described in the Patristic Period

The Biblical examples above point to the presence of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit in, at least, four ways. One, as an apophatic relationality experienced by a person in prayer. Two, between an elder and a disciple amid spiritual discovery and guidance. Three, between a priest and parishioner in Confession. Four, between a person and the community whom he or she is called to serve pastorally. These, and other spiritual relationships like them, are marked by loving, open, honest, God-centered dialogue and service, which unfolds from the inward calling of the Holy Spirit (reminiscent of what occurred at Pentecost) and flows outward to others who also heal, discern, grow, and serve. What follows is an exposition of specific relational models of spiritual guidance lived in the desert by what are known as the Church Fathers.

Details about these spiritual relationships begin to emerge in the *Didache*, one of the oldest non-Biblical documents written in the late first or early second century, which acts as a bridge between the Apostolic and Patristic periods. In section one, “The Two Ways,” it is written that Christians should partake of Eucharist, go to confession, and “Every day, seek out the company of the saints, that you may find rest in their word.”²⁷¹ This means that the Apostles and their disciples

²⁶⁹ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. Oxford University Press, 1993, Kindle edition, Location 4596-4628.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, Location 4628-4641.

²⁷¹ <https://legacyicons.com/content/didache.pdf>. For a more complete presentation of the *Didache*, cf. Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians*, Baker Academic, 2012.

were already engaged in providing sacraments, catechizing, and functioning as elders for the more experienced Christians. In section two, "Instructions for Catechumens," there is a teaching to pray and a warning to reject false teachers. "Whoever comes and teaches you all these things that have been taught before, receive him. But if the teacher himself turns aside and teaches a different doctrine that subverts what has been taught before, do not listen to him. If his teaching fosters righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord."²⁷² Notice here the point about proper teaching, fostering righteousness, and bringing true knowledge. This points to the effects of what an authentic elder does for others with whom he or she has a Godly relationship; it is what Paul was pointing his communities toward when he writes about not having many fathers in the faith. In section three of the *Didache*, "Life in the Community," it is taught that the community should pay close attention to whom are the real prophets and true fathers in the faith. "...not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, but only he who follows the ways of the Lord. From his behavior, then, you will know a false prophet from a true prophet."²⁷³ Again, the *Didache* is pointing out that an authentic elder is known by his or her behavior and authenticity, and the spiritual fruitfulness of his or her relationships. In the fourth section, "The Lord is Coming," it is warned that "In the last days, false prophets and corrupters will multiply, and the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. As lawlessness increases, men will hate and persecute and betray one another."²⁷⁴ Again, the idea that it is possible to identify a proper elder continues to emerge. In this case, it is because he or she is also a protection against false prophets and spiritual wolves. These lessons taught and practiced in the *Didache* emerge as living models in the Patristic Period.

Parent-Child, Doctor-Patient

In the late 3rd century, there can be found a clear example of a person who was both a spiritual son and a spiritual father. Antony the Great, who after hearing a sermon about giving everything to the poor and following Jesus (Matthew 19:21), sold his own possessions, left the city for the desert, and sought relationships with those who might help steer his spiritual life. Athanasius, who wrote his biography, explained: "Thus conducting himself, Antony was beloved by all. He subjected himself in sincerity to the good men whom he visited, and learned thoroughly where each surpassed him in zeal and discipline."²⁷⁵ There are other notable items in Athanasius'

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Athanasius, "Select Works and Letters," Volume IV of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., 1891, Kindle Edition, 2012, p. 197.

description of Antony's life that bring additional clarity to the development of eldership during the post-apostolic period. First, there were desert dwellers, who clearly pre-date Antony, who elected to live a life of asceticism and prayer but were willing to train others in their practices. Second, Antony chose to become a spiritual student because he knew he needed some basic training before entering the spiritual desert without a guide. In other words, Antony had not yet discerned what made an authentic elder, which goes back to the distinction that Paul made about there being a difference between a teacher and an elder; it is the elder with whom a disciple engages fully in prayer, mutual respect, and trust. Third, Athanasius indicates there were varying qualities that made each of these spiritual fathers unique and worthy of 'watching,' 'studying,' and 'admiring.' Fourth, Antony distinctly observes qualities or acts of graciousness, unceasing prayer, freedom from anger, loving kindness, endurance, fasting, sleeping on the ground, meekness, long suffering, and piety. It is clear from this list of abilities that not only was each father unique but also able to identify their own shortcomings as spiritual pilgrims and the specific area where they lacked when it came to providing for a spiritual seeker. In other words, while not perfect, each shared a common love of God, a desire to draw closer to Him, and a willingness to share the gifts they had been given with others who were seeking the same goal. After living this type of self-imposed novitiate, Antony embraced the eremitical life then eventually took on disciples of his own. Even though the reader does not get every intimate detail of Antony's growth into an elder himself, it is still made clear that he is not seen as a pedagogue, but an elder, a spiritual guide.

While Athanasius was preserving the detail of Antony's life, another elder was creating the first set of written guidelines for those who desired a more defined approach to their spiritual search. Pachomius the Great who lived most of his life in early 4th century Egypt, wrote instructions that were quite practical, including how a monastery should be structured and how daily life should be organized. His goal was to give strength, through clear guidance, to those who were the least disciplined. Pachomius also provides his spiritual sons and daughters with descriptions of proper and improper behavior in a form that purportedly came to him as a vision. "...the Lord in heaven showed to me the doings of the lost ones and others like them; and I saw five associations of evil ones...And again he showed me five other associations of good ones..."²⁷⁶ The zoological framework he proceeds to provide makes an easily understandable structure for comparing the behavioral traits of animals to human physical, psychological, and spiritual attributes.

Additional guiding principles for pilgrims, spiritual seekers, and monastics were spelled out with a different type of detail in *The Great Letter* composed by Macarius the Great in the 4th

²⁷⁶ Pachomius, *The Rules of Pachomius*, G.H. Schodde, trans. and ed., T&T Clark 1885 ed., Greece: Aeterna Press e-book, 2014, location 239 of 327.

century. The first part of his letter is an instruction to his spiritual disciples, helping them learn why and how they should purge themselves of their passions. The second part contains instructions on the relationship between monks and their superiors, as well as, among other things, a teaching on the humility needed to pray unceasingly (1 Thess 5:17). Macarius provides specific advice on the mutual attitudes and behaviors shared between spiritual fathers-mothers and their monastic sons-daughters. He explains that elders should labor more strenuously than those who come to them for counsel and compares their work to roles like 'teacher' and 'parent.' Macarius recommends that elders "ought to care for those under them as good teachers toward very young children who have been entrusted to them by their fathers."²⁷⁷ As such, elders should "Rebuke this one, correct that one, exhort another, according to each one's need, just as a good doctor prescribes medicine."²⁷⁸ He extends the metaphor of an elder as a doctor, encouraging the superior to listen intently to the spiritual patient, making sure not to get angry at any of his-her spiritual children, and generously bestowing on them spiritual advice both as a prescription and as a gift. "If you conduct yourselves in such a manner toward each other, those who are the elders and those who need teachers, with the latter obeying orders with joy, the former with pleasure leading the brethren to perfection, and all of you bestowing upon each other honors, you will live the angelic life here on earth."²⁷⁹ Connected to this, Macarius also elucidates the need for, and joy of, praying all the time. He is clear that elders must help those who are learning to pray, especially aiding them to purify their souls; "consoling them to imitate what they see in such advanced teachers."²⁸⁰ While in some places he talks of the need for the tough treatment of spiritual disciples in order to rid them of dysfunction and sin, when it comes to learning to pray, Macarius often encourages patience, kindness, love, and mercy for spiritual children.

Before going further, it is important to provide a corrective. For as much as the early Patristic period is defined by a widening gulf between the monastic ideal and the lay Christian experience, Basil the Great makes clear in his fourth century *Asketikon* that the calling of monks to build ascetical communities comes from the same vocational source as lay Christians called to serve at home and in a parish. From a different perspective, that also means monks are not to be seen as having an altogether different goal than lay Christians.

...it is never couched in any other way. The term 'philosophy' or 'to philosophize' as a synonym for Christian ascetic life never appears in the Small *Asketikon*. This is an obviously deliberate exclusion since it was common parlance at the time as the discourse of the two Gregorys, Socrates, and Sozemon shows. Other specialist terms, such as 'monk' are also

²⁷⁷ Pseudo-Macarius, "The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter" in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, translated by George A. Maloney, S.J. Paulist Press, 1992, p. 261-262.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 267-268.

studiously avoided. Showing little conception of 'two' ways of life for Christians, or of the later distinction between Gospel 'precepts' and 'counsels', the Small Asketikon addresses 'Christians' who mean to embrace all the implications of baptism and the commandments of the Lord in their entirety. Aspects of ascetic life are here argued from the Scriptures inductively and cohortatively.²⁸¹

This clarification Silvas provides about Basil seems to come down to the fact that all Christians, regardless of marital status, are called, as spiritual sons and daughters, to learn from the example of elders, and belong to a well-ordered Christian community (monastery or parish). To learn to live this life of a completely committed Christian, Basil explains that every believer ought to give themselves over to spiritual instruction so as to learn how to give themselves completely to God, prayer, and service.

...just as the Lord prescribed: Whoever wants to be great among you, let him be the last of all and the servant of all (cf. Matt. 20:26-7; Mark 9:35. 10:43-4). So as to persuade us the more to humility he added: Just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28; cf. Mark 10:45) and there is that saying of the Apostle: serve one another in the love of the Spirit (Gal. 5:13).²⁸²

With that instruction, however, Basil also carefully clarifies that obedience cannot be given to just anyone who expects anything.

...if we are ordered to do something opposed to the commandments of the Lord or something that appears to corrupt or adulterate it, it is time then to say: We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), and to be mindful of the Lord who says, They do not follow the voice of a stranger, but flee from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers (John 10:5). And we ought to be mindful of the Apostle, who, for our reassurance, dare to hold to account even the angels when he said: Though we ourselves or an angel from heaven should proclaim a gospel to you other than the one we have already proclaimed to you, let him be anathema (Gal. 1:18).²⁸³

Out of a further abundance of concern for the servant, student, and/or patient, Basil additionally writes of the manner in which an elder (or simply an experienced Christian) ought to help those who are new to spiritual growth and development. Essentially, the practiced Christian teacher, elder, or doctor must exemplify bodily stamina in work, demonstrate constant virtue, exude God's presence, and live according to "all the characteristics (dispositions) of love enumerated by the Apostle" in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.²⁸⁴ Here, he means that an elder must show love, which is patient, kind, not jealous, not inflated, not evil, rejoices in truth, and endures all things. Note how this scriptural passage, which is most often used (today, at least) in the context of marital love, is employed in the

²⁸¹ Anna M. Silvas, "The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great" in *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007," p. 23.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p. 336.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 335.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 382.

encouragement of spiritual fathers-mothers to treat their spiritual sons-daughters with an all-encompassing familial love. This is precisely the kind of relationality that is envisioned in this presentation of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

While the call to silence does not originate with Basil, it does become more systematized in his cenobitic (read: relational) environment. The encouraged and prescribed practice of silence among neophyte spiritual sons-daughters emerges as a vital part of their healing as spiritual patients seeking a cure from previously inflicted spiritual and psychological wounds and becomes the dominant school at which these students learn to listen and live in Spirit.

Teacher-Student, Elder-Disciple

A man whom Basil ordained a Reader, Evagrius Ponticus, focuses more on the companionable dimension of prayer and service than Macarius and others who emphasize the solitary pursuit. He adds to this tradition through his *One Hundred Fifty-Three Texts on Prayer*, which he says is an “evangelical feast”.²⁸⁵ The value of this manuscript stems from his keen observation of the human mind and his acute discernment of the spirit of the person at prayer. He explains in number three that “Prayer is communion of the intellect with God. What state, then, does the intellect need so that it can reach out to its Lord without deflection and commune with Him without intermediary?”²⁸⁶ His question here is largely rhetorical in that he wants to lead the student to a reflection on the silence that opens the mind and heart to a direct communication with the Holy Spirit. Evagrius also provides specific descriptions of what can happen during that kind of prayer. He writes to his own spiritual disciples about how tears during prayer lead to awareness and forgiveness; that patience in prayer is required; that prayer is gentleness, freedom, joy, and thankfulness; that prayer is a remedy to gloom and despondency, a relief from affliction, a release from grievances, a cure, a great exertion, a visitation of angels, an attack of demons, and an opening of the door to Christ. Prayer for Evagrius can also be a temptation to ask for what one is not supposed to obtain. “Do not pray for the fulfillment of your wishes, for they may not accord with the will of God. But pray as you have been taught, saying: Thy will be done in me (cf. Luke 22:42). Always entreat Him in this way – that His will be done. For He desires what is good and profitable for you, whereas you do not always ask for this.”²⁸⁷

Evagrius makes a distinction for his disciples between what it means to pray truly or to simply embellish an ‘outer tabernacle,’ which for him means that the person praying is merely

²⁸⁵ Evagrius the Solitary, “One Hundred Fifty-Three Texts on Prayer” in *The Philokalia*, 4 vols., translated and edited by G.E. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. Faber & Faber, 1979, vol. 1, p. 55.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 57.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 60.

seeking his own human edification. He recommends that during prayer a person must be careful to avoid personal recollections, to shun praying simply out of routine, and to deny the self the use of prolonged prayers as a disguise for egocentrism. Connected with these ideas about prayer is his explanation of the frequent attacks of the evil one who becomes jealous of the one who can truly pray to God. He explains the various attacks that his students will find during their own prayer and warns them against the stoking of sins like gluttony, avarice, materialism, listlessness, and negligence. For Evagrius, all these temptations are counteracted by true, deep, and silent prayer, which for him is higher than all other virtues. He explains, "If when praying no other joy can attract you, then truly you have found prayer (No. 153)."²⁸⁸ This is why the training that comes through the teacher-student, doctor-patient, father-son, mother-daughter relationship is so important to Evagrius. In fact, 5th century texts attributed to Neilos the Ascetic (which may have been written by Evagrius a half a century or more earlier) explain the practical reality of needing to learn the skills of prayer and eldership.

To master any art requires time and much instruction; can the art of arts alone be mastered without being learnt? No one without experience would go in for farming; nor would someone who has never been taught medicine try to practice as a doctor. The first would be condemned for making good farmland barren and weed-infested; the second, for making the sick worse instead of better. The only art which the uninstructed dare to practice because they think it the simplest of all, is that of the spiritual way. What is difficult the majority regard as easy; and what Paul says he not yet apprehended (cf. Phil. 3:12), they claim to know through and through, although they do not know even this: that they are totally ignorant.²⁸⁹

Even though this quote represents an early Christian desert monastic viewpoint, its meaning and force seem to have been applied to non-monastics and to people across the centuries. Neilos (Evagrius) is aware that many under his spiritual care assumed they had already achieved a serious level of spiritual awareness merely by apprehending it through the mind's intellectual and psychological faculties. He explains that this simply cannot be the case. This is one reason the Orthodox Christian Churches call for children to be Baptized, Chrismated, and raised with the witness, help, and instruction of parents, godparents, and other spiritual companions, as well as the guidance of a parish priest and perhaps later, the fuller shepherding of an elder. This is also why monastics go through long periods of spiritual training. In other words, it is something shared, demonstrated, and learned over a long period of time through the relationality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 71.

²⁸⁹ "Neilos the Ascetic," *The Philokalia*, 4 vols., trans. and eds. by G.E. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1979, vol. 1, p. 215.

Neilos (Evagrius) reinforces this point by outlining the necessary qualities of an elder, which makes him-her like a caretaker.

Experience shows that the task of guiding others should be undertaken by someone who is equable and has no personal advantage in view. For such a person, having tasted stillness and contemplation, and begun in some measure to be inwardly at peace, will not choose to entangle his intellect with bodily cares; he will not want to turn it away from knowledge and drag it down from the spiritual to the material.²⁹⁰

The term 'equable' here is important because it implies an unwavering serenity, meaning that the relationships that are built with spiritual disciples are best suited for an elder who is most interested in the proper spiritual development of that person and not interested in expressing a raw authority that can destroy the identity of the spiritual child. It is also important to note that Neilos (Evagrius) places near to these standards the idea that the experienced guide has 'tasted stillness and contemplation.' While Neilos (Evagrius) provides clear instruction about the work and the training that is needed for spiritual eldership, it must be noted here that there is always the possibility that an individual can be harmed by a person or persons who are not properly formed in the life of eldership. This is why the Orthodox Churches are reluctant to manufacture a process for spiritual direction and reticent to recognize someone as an elder. Spiritual fathers or mothers only become recognizable over an extended period, perhaps only after they die.

What follows is a short summary of a teaching provided by Symeon the New Theologian who speaks to the importance of spiritual relationships generally, the necessity of finding the right fit with a spiritual father or mother specifically, and the importance of dedicating oneself to learn, listen, and pray. It is important to note that even as someone who sought solitude, he still lived life as a part of spiritual relationships.

The Relationality of Eldership in Symeon the New Theologian

This 10th century monastic was a dedicated spiritual child, a serious and loving spiritual father, and a hesychast who provides copious details about all three. Symeon writes of his own search for a spiritual father and his own work as one. In hymn 37 of the *Divine Eros*, Symeon explains that he was so close to his own spiritual father (Symeon the Studite) that he benefitted from an overflow of his elder's spiritual experiences.

Following him without care, I continued on, I rejoiced with unspoken joy, O Logos, seeing him following your footsteps and often conversing with You. But I also saw You, the good Master, together with my guide and father, I had ineffable love and desire, I was beyond faith and hope, and 'Behold,' I said, 'I see the things to come, and the Kingdom of Heaven at hand, (Mt 3.2) and also the good things that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, I see

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 218.

before my eyes" (1 Cor 2.9). And having these, what more shall I hope for, or in what other things will I show my faith? For there will not be another thing greater than them.²⁹¹

There are several items in this paragraph to note. First, Symeon mentions that he followed his spiritual father without care, meaning he chose a spiritual father who was dependable and trustworthy. Second, Symeon notes that his father's devotion and apparent closeness to Jesus Christ was observable. Third, Symeon himself seems to have had a vision, which came with what he describes as 'ineffable love and desire.' Fourth, he says that this experience brought him beyond faith and hope, and into a place that is beyond all understanding. Even though there is a clear Christological component to his description, the details he puts forth are directly relevant to this research. In other words, it is a completely reasonable proposition to draw parallels between the experience of the uncreated light of Christ and the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit; one stems from Transfiguration and the other from Pentecost. The ineffability of which Symeon writes is tantamount to the unutterableness of the words of the Spirit. It is also important to grasp that Symeon's relationship with his spiritual father taught him to open up to the totality of what is possible in a relationship with God. Later, he was able to do the same for others. Thus, even for a person who was dedicated to silence, stillness, and solitude, there is still an element of relationship. This is what Špidlík and others get wrong. At the same time, I am willing to posit that there seems to be a different kind of accessibility when it comes to the uncreated silence when comparing it to what has been generally taught about the uncreated light. In other words, the search for the uncreated light will always remain more a part of a solitary journey that largely stays between the seeker and God, while uncreated silence is largely to be viewed as a spiritual journey that gives way to an outward, more communal expression. Hence, this can be described as one-trunk, two-branch theory of Christian silence. Think about it this in terms of what I am describing as the amalgamated Christological-Pneumatological experience of Saint Paul. He is literally stopped in his tracks on the road to Damascus, sees the light, hears the voice of God, and begins to relate to God and others in a new way.

This is why Symeon writes strongly about the importance of looking for a spiritual elder who has had not just an earthly birth, but a spiritual birth too. His concern was about choosing the wrong spiritual father and about rushing into a spiritual relationship without truly knowing that the person was a holy and good match.

Do not find one who is a flatterer or the slave of his belly, and strive to make him your counsellor and confederate. If you do, he may comply with your self-will and teach you what you will welcome but not what God loves, and thus you will remain an enemy [of God], unreconciled to him. And [do not choose] an inexperienced physician, lest he either plunge you into the depths of despair through excessive severity and inopportune surgery and

²⁹¹ *Divine Eros: Hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, p. 279.

cauterization [of the soul], or else through overmuch tenderness leave you in your sickness thinking you are healthy – most terrible of fates - resulting in his being the means of delivering you up to eternal punishment, a fate very different from your expectations.²⁹²

Here, Symeon demonstrates with clarity about not giving obedience to a spiritually ill or inexperienced elder who can cause terrible and lasting damage. For example, it can manifest itself as intellectual and psychological dominance or physical and sexual abuse.

Finally, Symeon explains the importance of prayer in finding a spiritual elder, being under the direction of one, and being at prayer with one. “We need great earnestness, much vigil and many prayers, so that we may not fall into the hands of deceiver, a cheat, a false apostle and false Christ, but instead meet with a teacher who is genuine, a lover of God and one who bears Christ within himself...”²⁹³ On more than just the occasion of his search for a spiritual father, Symeon reveals that he experienced the divine light. These mystical experiences began in his youth and continued all through his life. They came to him during contemplative prayer and were associated with a feeling of indescribable joy. In his writings, he spoke directly to God about ‘the pure Light of your face’ and ‘You deigned to reveal Your face to me like a formless sun.’

Although an interpretation of Christian doctrine based on the practice of prayer had been a part of Eastern theology all along, it became a major force in the determination of what was orthodox teaching through the thought of Simeon ...What ...concern[s] us is the doctrinal implication of such devotional practice: not how the Christian mystic prayed, but what his way of praying meant for Christian teaching about God and about God’s saving revelation of himself to the eyes of faith.²⁹⁴

The importance of Symeon the New Theologian to Orthodox theology and spirituality cannot be understated. The use of his work in this research is to demonstrate both the relationality of this spiritual paradigm (eldership, discipleship, spiritual eldership, prayer, and pastoral works) and the ineffability of the words of the Spirit, which bring clarity to discernment and reveal what spiritual and/or pastoral path will yield a fully integrated personal whole that gathers the people of God toward mystical engagement.

As a reminder of what has come in this thesis so far: chapter one focused on: (1) the origin of the idea of the uncreated silence, which was derived from a concerned question about the practice of hesychastic solitude by Tomáš Špidlík whose work was brought into conversation with Zacharias Zacharou; (2) an Orthodox Christian Pneumatological solution to Špidlík’s criticism based on the accounts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the Pneumatology of Basil of Caesarea, the musical concept of audiation, and the experience of Seraphim of Sarov; and (3) an explanation of

²⁹² *The Epistles of St Symeon the New Theologian*, Epistle 1, 6-13.

²⁹³ *The Epistles of St Symeon the New Theologian*, Epistle 3, 210v-211r.

²⁹⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vols., The University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 254-255.

uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality using the works of Christos Yannaras and Max Picard. The second chapter focused on: (1) uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality, (2) Orthodox Christian eldership, (3) the Father-Confessor relationship and the healing aspect of the sacrament of Confession, (4) abuse in spiritual relationships, (5) relational models in the biblical accounts of Mary, Peter, Paul, and John; (6) the Patristic, monastic relational models of parent-child, doctor-patient, teacher-student, elder-disciple; and (7) the relationality of eldership in Symeon the New Theologian.

Chapter 3: Orthodox Elders and Catholic Spiritual Leaders

In chapter three, there will be a focus on a select group of Orthodox and Catholic spiritual guides in the West generally and America specifically during the 20th and 21st centuries, including: (1) Kallistos Ware as a spiritual father of English-speaking Orthodoxy; (2) Gavriilia Papayannis as a Greek Orthodox spiritual mother who travelled to dozens of countries healing people of foot and leg pain, and praying with them regardless of their background; (3) Maria Skobtsova as a Russian Orthodox spiritual mother who cared for refugees in France during World War II and was martyred for it; Sophrony Sakharov as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who wrote about his visions of Jesus and encouraged the broad use of the Jesus Prayer; (5) Ephraim Moraitis as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father who opened 17 monasteries in the United States and Canada; (6) John Maximovitch as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who was bishop in many places, including San Francisco; (7) Gerasimos Papadopoulos as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father in Boston provided counsel to staff and students at Holy Cross School of Theology; (8) Seraphim Rose who some consider to be the first spiritual father who was an American convert to the Orthodox Church; (9) monks of the Charterhouse of the Transfiguration as the only Carthusian enclave in the United States; (10) Thomas Merton as an American Catholic monk, spiritual guide, and writer; (11) Thomas Keating as an American Catholic monk who co-founded the centering prayer movement, which is a contemporary method of contemplative prayer made accessible for lay people; and (12) Basil Pennington as an American Catholic monk who was a co-creator of centering prayer and spent time with the Orthodox monks of Mt. Athos.

Orthodoxy in the West

The only way to get a true sense of how Orthodox monastic and parochial models of relationality exist in the West (as opposed to the countries of Orthodox origin), there must first be a brief explanation of the migration of Orthodox spirituality. This all began with the work of two monks from Mount Athos named Nikodemos the Hagiorite and Makarios of Corinth who compiled texts on the subject matter from the 4th to the 15th centuries into a book titled *The Philokalia*.²⁹⁵ Published in the late 1700s, this Greek-language collection of spiritual counsels was selectively translated into Church Slavonic by Paisius Velichkovsky at the end of the 18th century. In 1857, Ignatius Brianchaninov published a Russian version of Velichkovsky's *Dobrotolubiye*, which Theophan the Recluse then turned into an expanded five-volume work in 1877. The *Philokalia* was first introduced to the English-speaking world through the 1931 R.M. French translation of *The Way of a*

²⁹⁵ Two items to note here. First, the gathering of the texts into the *Philokalia* was selective; for example, it does not include all the Church Fathers. Second, since the institutional church was disorganized at the time the *Philokalia* was collated, there is an emphasis on individual growth in the spiritual life.

Pilgrim, which was an anonymously authored diary of a Russian wanderer who carried a copy of the *Philokalia* as he traveled through central Ukraine, Russia, and Siberia, seeking advice on unceasing, interior prayer. Parts of the *Philokalia* were published in English in England in the 1950s. Then, a standardized four-volume English edition of the *Philokalia* was translated and published by G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware, and Philip Sherrard over a 16-year period beginning in the late 1970s. A fifth English-language volume was published in 2023. The importance of the translation and distribution of the *Philokalia* cannot be understated. This work presented Orthodox eldership and its attendant hesychastic spirituality to the West, which sparked curiosity about Eastern Christianity and fostered a new field of study about it.

In the early 1900s, mass migration, world wars, and improvements in communication were some of the social, cultural, political, and technological mechanisms that led to the spread of the study of Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality in the West.²⁹⁶ Chief among these reasons is the Russian Revolution.

In terms of theological thought, we can see that several of the Russian intellectuals who moved to Western Europe and America as a result of the Russian Revolution articulated some theological views that made the understanding of the depth of the Orthodox theological tradition surprisingly clear—something unprecedented in modern times. While the influence of the Russian theologians who migrated to the West is undeniable, a century after the seminal event that set in motion what may be described as an explosion in Orthodox theology...²⁹⁷

This burgeoning of theology was in many ways a fight for Orthodox identity in the West; Russian theologians were trying to preserve their theological and spiritual heritage, while working to understand the language of their Roman Catholic and Protestant counterparts and attempting to explain Eastern Christian ideas in Western terms.

We can observe here the pursuit of a spiritual identity as a general phenomenon that was based on the tradition of the land they left behind but could at the same time be articulated using robust theological and philosophical terms, so that it could make sense in the context of the tradition of the land that became their new home.²⁹⁸

This delicate balance between preserving the faith as understood and practiced in the Slavic lands of Orthodoxy while trying to make sense of it for a Western European audience (and, eventually, an

²⁹⁶ In Paris, the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute was founded in 1925 and the St. Denys Orthodox Theological Institute was started in 1944. These and other newly formed Orthodox studies programs in the United States in the dominant Roman Catholic and Protestant West allowed for both a more formalized discovery of Orthodoxy and a renewed scrutiny of it.

²⁹⁷ Andreas Andreopoulos, "The Legacy of the Russian Diaspora: An Evaluation and Future Directions," Analogiajournal.com, [8. The Theology of the Russian Diaspora \(analogiajournal.com\)](http://Analogiajournal.com), accessed 13 June 2021, p. 9.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

American one), also created the opportunity to explicate and elucidate the theology, spirituality, and practice of Orthodoxy within a new paradigm of evangelization.

...we can also add the question of the place of individual spiritualities in a globalized world and their dialogue with the surrounding culture. This is quite important because it allows us to approach the spiritual tradition of Orthodox Christianity in (at least relative) independence from the ethnic cultures that have historically been associated with it in the past and thus explore its ecumenical and apostolic dimension.²⁹⁹

This is a vital point for this research, which provides a new way of looking at the confluence of Orthodox Christian hesychastic prayer, Pneumatology, eldership, and pastoral care.

To deepen the perspective about this changing landscape, Andreopoulos also addresses how the interchange between Orthodox immigrants and converts are impacting the Orthodox landscape in the West. For example, not only are there theological and spiritual differences among the varied religious groups in Western Europe and America, but new socio-cultural, theological, and spiritual differences among Orthodox themselves. This is why Andreopoulos encourages the expanded view of an 'English-speaking Orthodoxy' to bridge the gaps present among the diasporas and the use of the language of spirituality to attract converts to Orthodoxy.

Although there is an increased interest in Orthodox spirituality at many levels in the West, theologians and churchmen have failed to take heed of another Orthodox cultural group that emerged in the West: this may be described as English Orthodox. English Orthodoxy is not another Orthodox jurisdiction. It is not a movement, institution, or administrative unit.³⁰⁰

He goes on to say that there are large and growing groups of Orthodox who speak English first and foremost. And because they live in the West, they are not bound by the linguistic and cultural traditions of their Orthodox grandparents whether they live in England, America, or elsewhere. Importantly, they...

are nurtured spiritually by Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and Antiochian traditions as they have been transplanted into the English language. Thus, a Londoner of Greek or Russian descent but born in England, and an English convert to Orthodoxy, or someone who grew up in a family of Orthodox converts, have more in common with each other than with the respective Church that represents the Orthodox jurisdiction they nominally belong to.³⁰¹

Thus, an Orthodox Christian who fits this profile could just as easily read the Greek volumes of John Zizioulas, the Russian works of Alexander Schmemmann, or the Romanian books of Dumitru Staniloae, along with the growing number of native English-speaking theologians in the West. He gives the examples of Kallistos Ware, Andrew Louth, and John Behr. The American Seraphim Rose may fit this

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁰⁰ Andreas Andreopoulos, "A Modern Orthodox Approach to Spirituality," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 11, 2011, pp. 16-17.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

category too. Ironically, many of his works, during his lifetime, were translated into Russian and other Slavic languages and were quite popular behind the Iron Curtain.

Andreopoulos also touches on the same issues that Schmemmann did decades ago. In America, as well as England, Canada, Australia, and more, the English-speaking Orthodox are looking to have all the liturgical services, hymns, and pastoral efforts conducted in English. The long-term impact of this is that the original roughly-national jurisdictions (e.g., Greek, Russian, etc.) would give way to language-centric groupings.

For this reason, their church may include icons of St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, but also of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Indeed, as an indicator of how real this group is, about half the priests who serve in the various Orthodox jurisdictions of the United Kingdom are either English converts or were born to a convert family. Either way, they are not ethnically Greek, Russian, or Arab, and they identify themselves as simply 'Orthodox Christian.'³⁰²

He explains that these types of Orthodox form deeper relational bonds from inter-personal communication, theological discussion, and spiritual exploration while paying less attention to jurisdictional lines.

Since Orthodoxy for this generation is not simply a faith that is received, but it is mostly recovered or rediscovered within a largely indifferent cultural milieu, what defines it is not its cultural aspect but its spiritual and theological aspects. Spirituality, for this reason, becomes extremely important for the Orthodox Church of the 21st century because it is only in this way that the cultural, political, and ethnic problems of the past may be transcended. Therefore, this situation has been a fertile background for the recent development of certain spiritual directions within the Orthodox Church.³⁰³

Take note of this last sentence because the reason for this research lands on that point. What I am proposing in this thesis is the introduction of the theory of uncreated silence and the practice of silent prayer, which is enriched by the presence of the Holy Spirit who leads a prayer in solitude to either deeper solitude or to wider pastoral care with the understanding that both paths are equally valid not only because they are ordained by God but also because they are both based in aspects of relationality. At the same time, the way to communicate this paradigm of spiritual-relatedness is neither through an older socio-cultural nor a complicated theological language, but through the more common language of spirituality – and shared spiritual relationships – in the Holy Spirit. This, again, is a major point in this thesis and a key component of the elder-disciple and other spiritual companion relationships. Together these believers are learning how to pray and serve each other in the presence of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit like the Apostles after Pentecost. The following vignettes of Orthodox spiritual fathers and mothers provide some evidence that illustrate these points. To be clear, the next section is not intended to be an exhaustive list of elders.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

Kallistos Ware: The Spiritual Father of English-Speaking Orthodoxy

As a monk, priest, bishop, translator, and professor, Ware spent a lifetime praying and listening to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit who showed him the various iterations of his ministry.

One could endlessly describe the contributions of Metropolitan Kallistos to the Orthodox Church... However, we shall confine ourselves to highlighting the fact that one could never calculate the number of people who have embraced or admired the history and teaching of the Orthodox Church through his classic works, *The Orthodox Church* and *The Orthodox Way*. Moreover, one could never imagine the number of people whose lives have been informed and transformed by the translation of the writings on prayer and spirituality, known to us through the *Philokalia*.³⁰⁴

In simple terms, Ware literally explained the Orthodox Church, its history, theology, sacraments, and spirituality in a way that Westerners could understand.³⁰⁵ Ironically, by helping to translate the *Philokalia* into English, one of the things he is best known for is the dissemination of information about a deeply contemplative system of prayer.³⁰⁶ Ware spent a lifetime explaining, defending, and encouraging the use of the Jesus Prayer and teaching wide swaths of Westerners the theological complexities and deeper spiritual realities of hesychia.

In a particularly illuminating discussion of the Jesus Prayer entitled *The Power of the Name* Bishop Kallistos acknowledges his own debt to the hesychast tradition: 'To achieve silence: this is of all things the hardest and the most decisive in the art of prayer... The hesychast, the person who has achieved *hesychia*, inner stillness of silence, is *par excellence* the one who listens. He listens to the voice of prayer in his own heart, and he understands that this voice is not his own but that of Another speaking within him.'³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Andreas Andreopoulos and Graham Speake, eds., *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Studies in Honour of Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016, Kindle edition, p. xi.

³⁰⁵ Cf. "An English Orthodox thinker," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 332-333. "Metropolitan Kallistos' position within English-speaking Orthodoxy is paramount, and what exactly Orthodoxy amounts to, as perceived by Orthodox in the West, owes a very great deal to him... It has been a process of translation – translation involving several dimensions. There is straightforward translation: a laborious task in which Bishop Kallistos has been deeply engaged personally, from the translation of service books such as *The Festal Menaion* and *The Lenten Triodion* to the translation of the *Philokalia*. There is another kind of translation that is more like interpretation... his book, *The Orthodox Church*, and later on his book on what it is to be Orthodox, *The Orthodox Way*, but in addition to these a host of lengthy Introductions to the translations of others... *The Art of Prayer...The Ladder of Divine Ascent...* [and] His various writings on the Jesus Prayer belong to the category, too."

³⁰⁶ Cf. "An English Orthodox thinker," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 334. "For all his deep and extensive literary and philosophical culture, and his superb education... he wants you to see, he wants you to know what it means *in practice*. His principal work on Orthodox theology, *The Orthodox Way*, presents Orthodoxy not as a collection of ideas or doctrines, but rather explores the practical working out of fundamental Orthodox beliefs; I suppose it is often regarded as a work of spirituality, rather than doctrine."

³⁰⁷ John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos, eds., *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia*, Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003, p. 25.

Notice the language Ware uses in the last sentence – ‘He listens to the voice of prayer... and understands... Another speaking within him...’ – this is the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit: the very center of this research. Another of his key contributions was to encourage rich spiritual relationships with one another and with those elders and father-confessors who carried with them the Pneumatologically-based spiritual gifts that he saw as vital to helping a person grow in the faith. He explained this by sharing information about the Orthodox tradition of eldership.

The spiritual father or *starets* is essentially a ‘charismatic’ and prophetic figure, accredited for his task by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. He is ordained, not by the hand of man, but by the hand of God. He is an expression of the Church as ‘event’ or ‘happening’, rather than of the Church as institution.³⁰⁸

Pay attention to his assertion about the direct action of the Holy Spirit, which directly relates to the key point of this thesis. Ware also makes an ecclesiological point about the prophetic nature of spiritual elders. Namely, that these wisdom figures cannot be summed up by or contained within the normal, ordinary ecclesiastical structure. To reinforce this statement, Ware explains that spiritual elders do not have to be priests, monks, or nuns. Furthermore, he makes clear his opinion that the priest in hearing confessions does not usually have the time to offer the same depth of guidance as a monastic elder due to the constraints of parish life.

Although the sacrament of confession is certainly an appropriate occasion for spiritual direction, the ministry of the starets is not identical with that of a confessor. The starets gives advice, not only at confession, but on many other occasions; indeed, while the confessor must always be a priest, the starets may be a simple monk, not in holy orders, or a nun, a layman or laywoman. The ministry of the starets is deeper, because only a very few confessor priests would claim to speak with the former’s insight and authority.³⁰⁹

In searching out this spiritual authoritativeness, Ware and others warn that a person seeking an elder cannot be blind to the realities that surround such a tradition. Daniila Myasnikova takes a strenuous stance on this issue.

...one has to think for oneself even under the vow of obedience. At first, I also supported the idea of having a spiritual father and closely following his commands. I understood obedience in a way that there is one who is responsible for everything and you are just a blind performer... Then it turned out that one should make one’s own steps toward the Kingdom of Heaven.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Kallistos Ware, *The Spiritual Father in Orthodox Christianity*, Cross Currents (Summer/Fall 1974), pp. 296-313.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Tatiana Belousova, “Hegumenia Daniila (Myasnikova): A Spiritual Father is Not a Babysitter, One Should Think for Oneself,” Pravmir.com: Orthodox Christianity and the World, December 1, 2015, <http://www.pravmir.com/hegumenia-daniila-myasnikova-a-spiritual-father-is-not-a-babysitter-one-should-think-for-oneself/>, accessed 31 January 2021.

Myasnikova also stresses the necessity of finding a father-confessor who is obedient to the teachings of the Church and is also capable of explaining the salve given to the parishioner in confession should he or she express humility in the reception of his spiritual counsel. In the end, a person seeking confession and/or general spiritual guidance must seek the help of someone who is experienced and carries with them the approbation of others inside and outside the Church; they must make sure for themselves that he or she is not a charlatan, meaning that they will be safer from spiritual abuse. Ware also explains that each person should still pray on their own, just as Seraphim of Sarov described a century earlier.

Of course, every good deed done for Christ's sake gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but prayer gives us this grace most of all, for it is always at hand, as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit ...Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.³¹¹

A commitment to personal prayer is paramount with or without an elder according to the Orthodox Churches. In the end, prayer is the key to discovering the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit and to knowing how to act on Its call. That is why Ware would remind his listeners and readers that talking to an elder can help the seeker to know their prayers and actions are authentically focused on God. "He who is travelling the path of heedfulness should not trust only his own heart..."³¹² The 20th century elder Porphyrios reinforces this idea.

There is a danger of the soul being deluded. Care is needed. Your spiritual guide will teach you how to get into the right order of prayer, because if you don't get into the right order, there's a danger of your seeing the luciferic light, of living in delusion and being plunged into darkness...If, however, you progress in prayer with the counsels of a spiritual father, you will see the true light.³¹³

Just as in the Pauline admonition, a spiritual father or mother must be wise about prayer and the person who stands in front of them. Paisios of Mount Athos writes that the distinctive work of elders.³¹⁴ Ware echoes these words by writing that people should seek spiritual guidance from those who are holy, peaceful, experienced, knowledgeable, wise, kind, compassionate, and who are clearly committed to a life of prayer and repentance. While still acknowledging that spiritual gifts can accompany elders, Ware says that the seeker should be focused on someone who helps them to

³¹¹ Seraphim of Sarov, *On Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*, p. 19-20.

³¹² *Ibid*, p. 48.

³¹³ Elder Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios*, Sisters of the Holy Convent of Chrysopigi, eds, John Raffan, trans., Denise Harvey Publishing, 2005, p. 124.

³¹⁴ Cf. Paisios of Mount Athos. *Spiritual Counsels*, vol. 3, Holy Hesychasterion "Evangelist John the Theologian," 2016, p. 301. The distinctive work of elders "is inner therapy. There is no higher physician than an experienced Spiritual Father, one who inspires trust with his holiness, who removes from the sensitive creatures of God the thoughts brought on by the devil, one who heals souls and bodies not with medications, but with the Grace of God."

find the peace of God. And that is what he was, a type of elder in his own right. Not just an academic, but a parish priest and an ecumenist, too.

His pastoral concern follows from this desire to communicate the truths perceived by the saints; truth is not just something to think about, it is the revelation of wonder and mystery, something that transforms the lives of those who come to know it. This truth is communicated through preaching, but also more tacitly in the very celebration of the mysteries... Coming to know the truth is something deeply personal: for Bishop Kallistos, pastoral concern is also expressed in his role, willingly embrace, as spiritual father to many in the UK and beyond.³¹⁵

Metropolitan Kallistos is a clear demonstration of someone who heard and heeded the uncreated silence so completely that he became a spiritual father to the English-speaking Orthodox world.

Gavrilia Papayannis and her Patients

There is a good example of prayerfulness, peacefulness, and relatedness in the pastoral care of Gavrilia Papayannis who was canonized in 2023. She was a trained chiropodist and physiotherapist who traveled the world relieving and healing foot, ankle, and leg pain, many times for the indigent. During her travel to places as diverse as America, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, India (Papayannis' work with lepers in India coincided with that of Mother Theresa, though they never met), Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and more, it is said that she used non-verbal communication to gain trust with people and never asked to be compensated for her work. Through a combination of eye-witness accounts about her life and Papayannis' own thoughts about her service, there exists a definable and rather personal eschatology, as well as an underlying Pneumatological relationality of service that sustained her and her work. To illustrate this point, nun Gavrilia included in her book this prayer that Papayannis herself wrote:

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger. I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter, I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also, thou abidest. Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me, it is thou the same, the one companion of my endless life, who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy with the unfamiliar. When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh! Grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the many.³¹⁶

Notice in this prayer her expressions of love toward the stranger and, amidst her fear of going to new places, she was heartened by her close relationship with God. There are three salient points to

³¹⁵ Cf. "To find and proclaim the truth of the gospel," in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 340.

³¹⁶ Nun Gavrilia, *The Ascetic of Love*, Helen Anthony, trans., Leros, Greece: Series Talanto, 1999, p.5.

be made here. First, Papayannis became a nun later in life but refused to enter a monastery so she could keep up her ministry with and for others. Second, she also spent long periods in silence and stillness, though she admits that hesychastic prayer was not something she knew about or set out to do. Third, her commitment to silent, still prayer; the leading of the Holy Spirit; and to serving and loving others makes her a clear example of total responsiveness to the indwelling of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. Regarding this, it should be noted that the chief objection to her canonization was that she was perceived as being ‘too ecumenical.’

Maria Skobtsova of Paris and the Refugees

Another very good example of relational prayer and sacrificial service is the life and violent death of Maria Skobtsova who was canonized in 2004. What is invaluable about her story is that she was a spiritual mother who did not have faith or exercise virtue for a good portion of her early life. Skobtsova was a Russian noblewoman who was a poet, writer, atheist, and revolutionary who married and divorced twice, had three children and spent time as a mayor in a small Russian town. Eventually she rediscovered her Orthodox roots, escaped Russia, and ended up in Paris working with refugees and the needy. Another important element of her biography is that it supports the ecclesial nuance that spiritual fathers and mothers can be at odds with the institutional church. When she became a nun later in life, Skobtsova also refused to live in a monastery, which is not a standard practice among Orthodox monastics.

A volume about Skobtsova was published in 2003, which intimately revealed her outlook on the spiritual life and her commitment to serve out of love for God and others.

Authentic, God-manly, integral *sobornoe* Christianity calls us in the Paschal song: ‘Let us embrace one another.’ In the Liturgy we say, ‘Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess...’ Let us love – meaning not only one mind, but also one activity, meaning a common life. It is necessary to build our relations to man and to the world not on human and worldly laws, but within the revelation of the divine commandment. To see in man the image of God and in the world God’s creation. It is necessary to understand that Christianity demands of us not only the mysticism of communion with God, but also the mysticism of communion with man.³¹⁷

In using lyrics from these liturgical hymns, she is not simply pointing out their beauty, but reminding her readers that they are responsible for living what they sing. As a spiritual mother, Skobtsova was concerned that her spiritual children would have a real relationship with God and a real relationship with other people. She confirms this when she writes of a common life of service; she is not merely referring to the monastic context, but the broader human context of love and service. Skobtsova emphasizes this point in the above quote. She wants to make sure that people in the Church see God

³¹⁷ Maria Skobtsova, *Essential Writing*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003, p. 83.

in the imperfect, in the sinful, in the homeless, in those whose needs are great.³¹⁸ That is why Skobtsova also calls for a ‘mysticism of communion with man.’ These sentiments, again, like Papayannis, demonstrate the clear commitment of a person in deep prayer listening to the call of the Holy Spirit and acting on the unutterable words she heard for the benefit of others in a way not too dissimilar to the Apostles after Pentecost.

It should also be noted here that there is a theological depth clearly present in Skobtsova’s own writings that clarify and personalize Orthodox eldership in such a way as to bring it into the intimate divine crossroads of an apophatic relationality.

Her theology is, it seems to me, very simple, but pursued in a dramatically radical way. In an article published in 1939 – the first item in the volume *Essential Writings* – she makes clear where she stands, and also how she sees herself as belonging to a tradition of Orthodox theology. It is called ‘The Second Gospel Commandment’ – to love one’s neighbor as oneself – and her main gravamen is how easily this commandment has been sidelined or relativized. Because it is ‘second’, it is often treated secondary, an appendix to the first commandment. She starts by pointing out how we are never encouraged to pray alone: the prayers that we say morning and night as Orthodox are all prayers in which we pray, not as ‘I’, but as ‘we’ – culminating, of course, in the Lord’s Prayer, the ‘Our Father’.³¹⁹

Essentially, Skobtsova was driven by a choice she perceived was at the heart of every life: whether to live a God-centered or self-centered existence; the God-centered life to her was essentially the relational one. “This necessity of choice always stands before each man: the warmth and coziness of his earthly home, well-protected from wind and storms, or the endless space of eternity, in which there is only one firm and unquestionable thing, and this firm and unquestionable thing is the cross.”³²⁰ Anthony Bloom explained her life as a spiritual mother in this way:

In the process she sacrificed her personal serenity. Since her life was completely interwoven with the destiny of her contemporaries, their turmoil was hers, their tragedy was hers. And yet she was not swept away by it. She was anchored in God and her feet rested on the Rock.³²¹

In the end, Skobtsova was arrested and executed by the Nazis on charges that she provided baptismal certificates to Jews and hid them in her own make-shift house and convent. In the life of

³¹⁸ Cf. “Some characteristics of her theology,” in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 119. “Sometimes St. Maria’s vision can seem relentless, even joyless, but that would be profoundly to misunderstand her. For there is no effort, no strain: the vision is of being caught up in God’s love, becoming a vehicle of his love, resting in his providence and love.”

³¹⁹ Cf. “Some characteristics of her theology,” in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 116.

³²⁰ Mother Maria Skobtsova, *Essential Writings*, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans., Orbis Books, 2003, p. 128. Her statement has elements of both apophaticism and eschatology.

³²¹ Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891-1945*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982, p. xi

Skobtsova, it is easy to witness a spiritual mother who lived the relational reality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

Sophrony of Essex and the Jesus Prayer

A modern example of an elder who was known as a hesychast comes in the life of Sophrony. “There is no doubt that Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov is numbered among the great Elders and Fathers of the 20th century. I have sometimes called him ‘the hesychast and theologian’ because he is truly distinguished by these two great spiritual gifts.”³²² The importance of Metropolitan Hierotheos’ book on Sophrony is that it offers a critical analysis of his theology and spiritual experiences, which validate the connection between silent prayer and spiritual fatherhood. Sophrony wrote a book himself in 1988, which was met with mixed reviews from traditional Orthodox circles, but widely read among Western Christians. In addition to explaining his spiritual experiences, he lays out important apophatic principles that form the basis of this new way of looking at Orthodox spirituality.

In prayer like the Gethsemane prayer we are given existential experience of the hypostasis-persona; and self-emptying is the way to make our death like Christ’s death. The more total our self-emptying, the more absolute is our spirit’s ingress into the bright realm of Eternal Divinity. And whether man speaks or is silent about his real state, he lives it as existential cognition. Now in Christ he, too, may say, ‘I am’.³²³

In these words, Sophrony points to the connection between silence, stillness, and the sacrifice of a person whose pursuit of God even seeks to commune with God’s unknowability. He describes his own experience of it.

As a young man I was much preoccupied with the mysteries of Being, and more than once felt – I saw – my thinking energy like a light. The world of mental contemplation is essentially a radiant one. Indeed, our mind is an image of the Primal Mind, which is Light. The intellect, concentrated on metaphysical problems, can lose all sense of time and material space, traveling, as it were, beyond their boundaries. In just such a situation my mind would seem to be light. This state of being is naturally accessible to man but later it became clear to me that it differs qualitatively from the event of the manifestation of God in uncreated light. ‘Lord, forgive me – I am feared to speak. Heal me, hearten me. Withdraw not from me.’ The Apostles on Mount Tabor were found worthy to enter the realm of Light proceeding from the Father, and hear His voice bearing witness to His beloved Son. But this became possible for them only after they had confessed the Divinity of Christ [Cf. Matt. 16:13 *et seq.*].³²⁴

Sophrony also includes a primer on light based on his personal experiences.

³²² Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *I Know a Man in Christ: Elder Sophrony the Hesychast and Theologian*, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2015, p. 27

³²³ Archimandrite Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, p. 220.

³²⁴ Sophrony Sakharov, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, pp. 155-156.

It has been granted to me to contemplate different kinds of light and lights – the light the artist knows when elated by the beauty of the physical world; the light of philosophical contemplation that develops into a mystical experience. Let us even include the ‘light’ of scientific knowledge which is always and inevitably a very relative value. I have been tempted by manifestations of light from hostile spirits. But in my adult years, when I returned to Christ as perfect God, the originate Light shown on me. This wondrous Light, even in the measure vouchsafed to me from on High, eclipsed all else, just as the rising sun eclipses the brightest star.³²⁵

While Sophrony uses the language of light, which is associated with Taboric Light, and not sound, his experiences are illustrative of how the Holy Spirit can provide a multiplicity of paths. For Sophrony, it was not the pastoral path, which was given to Papayannis or Skobtsova, but that of a lifelong hesychast and elder. Thus, his spiritual relationships³²⁶ were nurtured by his unending prayer, not in providing food, shelter, and/or sacraments. At the same time, it is worth noting here that there are two unique aspects of monastic life at St. John the Baptist in Essex, the monastery he founded in England. First, there are both male and female communities on the property that interact. Second, the Jesus Prayer is prayed publicly after each service from Monday through Friday. Both realities are significant in terms of helping the psychological and spiritual health at the monastery. It is also noteworthy that the Jesus Prayer is most often prayed silently and privately. It is also not frequently prayed as a joint effort between monastics and laity. Thus, as much as Sophrony was committed to silent, still prayer, his legacy is also an example of a relational flourishing that comes from the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit, meaning that it does not always call people to more solitary prayer; it provides for communal care through prayer and service.

There are examples of other Orthodox Christian elders from many places in the 20th century who are known for their commitment to the service that was born from silent prayer and the search for the will of the Holy Spirit discerned through Its uncreated silence. Some of them were born elsewhere and made their way to America, one was born there.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Cf. “Love of one’s enemies,” in Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present*, Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, Kindle Edition, 2015, p. 308. “The test of this way of love was, for the saint, love of one’s enemies. The command of Christ – ‘Love your enemies; bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matt. 5:44) – and the example of Christ – ‘when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son’ (Rom. 5.10) – teach us to love our enemies... To love the enemy, the true enemy of God, is to embrace the hell that they have brought on themselves. St. Silouan lived through the horrors of the First World War, when enmity between nations became for many a rule of life; Fr. Sophrony... [thought that to] pray for such a world was to embrace the hell human beings had brought on themselves, to enter into that hell.”

Orthodoxy in America

To get a sense of how this Orthodox theological, spiritual, and pastoral paradigm is understood in America,³²⁷ it is helpful to have some background on the various challenges that Orthodoxy faced there.

In the mid-20th century, Seraphim Rose reflected on the instability of the undertaking of Orthodoxy in America, the minimal resources available to build parishes and schools, the lack of understanding about elders, the surface-level commitment to deeper forms of prayer, and a still immature Orthodox spirituality. In this first quote Rose is referring to parish life.

...it is not possible to express oneself fully on this subject in print, because the Orthodox people are simply too immature – the idea of an ‘Orthodox community’ is very attractive, but almost no one is aware of or prepared for the difficulties and sacrifice involved in bringing it into reality, and the result is only hopeless experiments and disillusionment...³²⁸

And Rose added this about Orthodox monasteries in America.

This path, however, requires far more than just wearing robes and following various monastic practices... the awareness of Orthodox monasticism and its ABC’S remains largely, even now, an outward matter. There is still more talk of ‘elders,’ ‘hesychasm,’ and ‘prelest’ than fruitful monastic struggles themselves. Indeed, it is all too possible to accept all the outward marks of the purest and most exalted monastic tradition: absolute obedience to an elder, daily confession of thoughts, long Church services or individual rule of Jesus Prayer and prostrations, frequent reception of Holy Communion, reading with understanding of the basic texts of spiritual life, and in doing all this to feel a deep *psychological* peace and ease – and at the same time to remain *spiritually* immature.³²⁹

Rose makes similar comments about struggling Orthodox parish and monastic³³⁰ communities in the United States throughout his writing. By extension, he posits barriers that impede the emergence of

³²⁷ Cf. Alexei Krindatch, ed., *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries*. Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2016, p. vi. In 1794 a group of ten monks, from the Valaam and Konevits Monasteries in the Russian north, arrived on the island of Kodiak in Alaska. Sent to what was then Russian America, the monks built a church dedicated to Christ’s Holy Resurrection and a wooden monastery for the members of the mission near the Kodiak harbor. Their arrival marked the beginnings of organized Orthodox church life and an Orthodox monastic presence in America. Today nearly 2,000 local Orthodox Christian parishes (congregations)...have become an important part of America’s diverse ‘religious landscape’.

³²⁸ Hieromonk Damascene. *Fr. Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*. St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010, pp. 500-501

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 717.

³³⁰ Cf. Alexei Krindatch, ed., *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries*. Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2016, p. xii. As of December 2015 there are 79 Orthodox Christian monasteries on the territory of the United States of America under the jurisdiction of the various American Orthodox Churches belonging to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States. This number is nearly equally divided between monastic communities for men (40) and monastic communities for women (39). The total number of monastics (monks, nuns, and novices) residing in all American Orthodox monasteries is 573. This includes 308 in monasteries for men and 265 in monasteries for women. Most US Orthodox monasteries are small in size. 34 out of the 79 have no more than 3 monastics in residence. Only 9 American Orthodox monasteries have more than 20 monks, nuns, and novices. The largest monastery for men is St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona, which

a mature Orthodox community, which includes a paucity of serious prayer and elder-disciple relationships. Rose also writes about the need for an authentic English-speaking, American Orthodoxy, and addresses the additional challenge that Americans face in having to appropriate Orthodox spirituality and theology³³¹ through the pre-existing realities found in the churches of the traditional lands of Orthodoxy (e.g., Greek, Russian, etc.).

Alexander Schmemmann brought systematic clarity to these problems in the 1960s through a series of articles in which he explained that there are three overarching challenges for the intermingling of the diaspora with American converts in local parishes. First is a canonical one. During the mid-20th century in American Orthodoxy there was doubt about the canonical status of certain bishops, priests, and parishes. Often due to the confusion brought on by the impact of the Soviet regime on the Slavic Orthodox Churches, this problem not only impacted the view of the 'officially' named Orthodox Church of America but also the status of and participation by Americans joining other jurisdictions like the Russian Orthodox and Serbian Orthodox. Because of this it "is probable that for quite a while the parishes will remain predominantly, if not exclusively, colored by their national background."³³² In this, he was correct. Today, there is still a dominant ethnic Orthodoxy across the United States, and an American Orthodoxy has failed to take real form.

The second problem he identified was a liturgical one, which he defined as both qualitative and quantitative. His qualitative point centered on the problem of translations. For him, it would not be acceptable to force English-speaking Americans to adapt to foreign-language services because they would not be able to participate at the deeply personal level that they were meant to be able. Furthermore, it would not be sufficient to merely translate original Russian and Greek texts into English for this would not properly capture the theology and spirituality, the very poetry itself, of the liturgical experience. Quantitatively, Schmemmann remarked that American culture, because of its Protestant roots, was acclimated to attending Sunday services with only two or three of the feast days added in. As such, Americans would suffer because they would not understand the full depth

has 49 monks and novices. The largest monastery for women is Holy Protection of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery in White Haven, Pennsylvania, which has 25 nuns and novices.

³³¹ Orthodox Christians began building academic institutions and seminaries to further its own ends in mission territories like the United States. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology was founded in 1917 (starting in Connecticut and moving to Boston in 1946). St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and St. Tikhon's Theological Seminary were both founded in 1938 in New York and Pennsylvania, respectively; an Orthodox seminary existed in America as early as 1905 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which was transferred to New Jersey in 1913, and shuttered by 1923 (<https://www.svots.edu/about/our-history>). The Byzantine Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. was established in 1940 (the same year it was bequeathed to Harvard) to research Byzantine culture from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries and its interactions with late Roman, early Christian, western medieval, Slavic, and Near Eastern cultures (<https://www.doaks.org/about>). In 1948, Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Seminary was founded in Jordanville, New York.

³³² Schmemmann, Alexander. "Problems of Orthodoxy in America – Part I: The Canonical Problem." *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1964, pp. 67-85.

and breadth of the new faith they decided to join because they would not be exposed to the full slate of services. This last point is still true today.

The third problem he defined, and the most relevant to this research, is a spiritual one.

It can be formulated very simply: what does it mean to be Orthodox in America in the second half of the twentieth century and how can one truly be it? ... If faced [with this question] they would probably answer: what's the problem? Build 'bigger 'n better' churches and all kinds of 'facilities,' keep your congregation busy and happy, serve the prescribed services, constantly affirm that Orthodoxy is the true faith.³³³

For Schmemmann, the root of this spiritual crisis is secularism, which he saw as a disease specific to America. While it is safe to say that this problem has been exported globally, Schmemmann very clearly states that the antidote to this problem in the American church was not to engage in "all kinds of social and philanthropic projects...neither of these is the concern of the parish *as such*...Its function and purpose is different and purely spiritual...the essential function of the parish is precisely to root them [the people] in their 'supernatural' calling and being."³³⁴ If Schmemmann is correct about this, then the question of prayer, discernment, and the role of elders, father-confessors, and pastoral care givers is vital to the health and growth of American Orthodoxy. This, again, is a centering point for this research. What follows next is the interpretation of the lives of four specific Orthodox elders who lived in the United States during the 20th century.

Ephraim Moraitis of Arizona: Athonite

Ioannis Moraitis (1927-2019), known as Elder Ephraim, moved to Mt. Athos in 1947 to become a monk, was tonsured the next year under Joseph the Hesychast,³³⁵ and eventually ordained a priest. After Joseph died, Ephraim continued to live a life of asceticism and prayer until he was chosen abbot of the Monastery of Philotheou in 1973, where he taught new monks about hesychasm. As his spiritual reputation grew, Ephraim was also asked to revive and expand the monasteries of Xeropotamou, Konstamonitou, and Karakallou. He was also the spiritual father at St. John the Forerunner in Serres, Panagia the Directress in Portaria (Volos), and Archangel Michael, a formal metochion of Philotheou on Thasos. In 1979, Ephraim went to Canada for surgery and

³³³ Schmemmann, Alexander. "Problems of Orthodoxy in America – Part III: The Spiritual Problem." *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1965, pp. 171-193.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ For another example of a spiritual father who was also a hesychast, see the volumes about Joseph the Hesychast – *Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast* and *My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast*. Both works detail his life of silent, still prayer and the teachings he imparted to his disciples who built monasteries around the world. Joseph also encouraged prayer in them and for everyone. "Our Holy Elder Joseph was a poor hermit who lived in caves far from society, yet he became one of the Church's most influential figures of the twentieth century by kindling a revival of the Jesus prayer – a prayer he recommended for both monastics and laymen." *Elder Ephraim, My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast*, Saint Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2013, p. 17.

subsequently spent a few weeks in America learning about the spiritual lives of the Orthodox there. He returned several times to both Canada and the United States, where he eventually moved even though he did not have the support of the Greek Archdiocese of America. As a result, he initially sought help from the America-based leadership of the Russia Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, eventually returning to the auspices of the Greek Archdiocese under the Patriarch of Constantinople. During the next several decades, Ephraim established 17 monasteries throughout North America.³³⁶ While this is an astonishing feat by any measure, it should be noted here that Ephraim was considered by some to be a controversial figure. His behavior toward his spiritual children could be harsh³³⁷ and his teachings were, in some cases, thought of as fundamentalist.³³⁸ In fact, there is a derogatory term in some American Orthodox circles, which refer to his spiritual children as Ephraimites, or people who follow Ephraim like a charismatic leader and insist on a certain purity of faith. The implication is that some of them are anti-intellectual, anti-dialogue, dismissive of ecclesiastical authority, and potentially schismatic. Another addition to the point about his perceived fundamentalism is that there is some indication Ephraim met Seraphim Rose, which may have reinforced each other's strenuous objections to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, which they both believed dangerous and ought to be avoided.

To understand Ephraim in terms of his role as a spiritual father in the US, it is important to remember he was a spiritual disciple of Joseph the Hesychast on Mount Athos, living in monastic obedience to him for 12 years until Joseph's death in 1959. Regarding his time with Joseph, Ephraim commented about learning the importance of teaching people to pray. "Fifteen years ago, on the day of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, my venerable Elder, Father Joseph, passed away. He had often times said to my unworthiness: 'My son, if God leads any souls into your hands, make certain of teaching them one thing only. Prayer. Prayer will teach them everything else and will sanctify time.'³³⁹ These words written by Ephraim about Joseph speak directly to the question that

³³⁶ The following is a list of Ephraim's monasteries in the Americas. St. Anthony in Florence, AZ; Nativity of the Theotokos in Saxonburg PA; St. Kosmas Aitolos in Bolton, Ont.; Panagia Parigoritissa in Brownsburg, Quebec; St. John Chrysostomos in Pleasant Prairie, WI; Holy Protection Monastery in White Haven, PA; Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring in Dunlap, CA; St. John the Forerunner in Goldendale, WA; Holy Archangels' Monastery, Kendalia, TX; Panagia Vlahernon, Williston, FL; Annunciation Monastery, Reddick, FL; Holy Trinity Monastery, Smith Creek, MI; Panagia Prousiotissa Troy, NC; Panagia Pammakaristou, Lawsonville, NC; Holy Monastery of St. Nektarios, Roscoe, NY; Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Harvard, IL; and St. Paraskevi, Washington, TX.

³³⁷ For an examination of the contested teachings, practices, and monastic institutions established by Elder Ephraim, see "Fundamentalism and Dialectical Encounters in the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States: The Case of Elder Ephraim of Arizona," in *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: Contemporary Perspectives*, Davor Džalto and George E. Demacopoulos, eds. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022, pp. 197-222.

³³⁸ For a perspective on fundamentalism in Orthodoxy see "Fundamentalism and Conversion to *Eastern* Orthodoxy in the *West*: Reflections on the Myth of Orthodoxy," in *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: Contemporary Perspectives*, Davor Džalto and George E. Demacopoulos, eds. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022, pp. 163-192.

³³⁹ Elder Ephraim, *A Call from the Holy Mountain*, New Sarov Press, 1991, p. 1.

resides at the center of this research: that silent prayer is an impetus not only for the spiritual growth of an elder, a disciple, and the elder-disciple relationship itself, but for a host of pastoral needs that come as result of the call of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. As such, Ephraim taught his own disciples that they need to teach people to pray, especially the Jesus Prayer (it should be noted that while the Jesus Prayer is prevalent in this kind of elder-disciple relationship, it is not exclusive to it, others choose to rely on different prayer). Later in his writings, Ephraim quotes Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain and Gregory Palamas on the idea that everyone – not just monks, nuns, and priests – are to pray unceasingly. “We, too, should follow the admonition of the Saints. It is not only we that should constantly be praying, but we should also instruct all others whether they be Monks, laymen, scholars, men, women or children and encourage them to pray without ceasing.”³⁴⁰ It is important to be reminded of the fact that in many Orthodox texts from the past, there seems to be a conflation of the spiritual life of a layperson with the prayer and work of monks and nuns. In recent years, there has been greater attention paid to the fact that there are differences as to what these spiritual practices look like on a daily basis. Nonetheless, Ephraim encouraged the lay people he came across to pray the Jesus Prayer, too.

You, my brethren, that all Christians from the youngest to the eldest are under the obligation to recite the meditative prayer at all times ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’. But laymen would say: ‘We are besieged by the myriad cares and problems of this world. How can we be expected to pray without ceasing?’ My answer is this: God did not instruct us to do the impossible; He only asked us to do what is in our power to do. That is why, this may also be attained by anyone firmly seeking to save his soul. For had it been impossible, it would have been so for all laymen and there would not have been so many in the world who do attain this.³⁴¹

These explanations give some insight into the connection between silent prayer and pastoral care. In other words, the heart of this thesis is that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit calls each person to understand and live what the will of God is for them. Thus, even in this context where one hesychast (Joseph the Hesychast) trained another hesychast (Ephraim), which in and of itself reflects the apophatic relationality of the uncreated silence, there can be additional spiritual relationships in that line that produce spiritual sons and daughters who perform much pastoral work in parishes and in the community. Thus, this one trunk (silent prayer), two-branch (silent prayer and pastoral work) theory is accurate in both theory and practice.

The question remains how the sinful human heart can be cleansed that it may turn into a ‘spiritually founded altar’. The holy Fathers say that a safe and unerring way of purifying the heart, of illuminating the mind and of sanctifying the soul is through the constant application

³⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁴¹ Ibid, p. 3-4.

of the Jesus prayer...Ever since the Apostolic years the ceaseless mental prayer appears to have been the secret breathing of the body of the Church through the ages.³⁴²

Ephraim also explains how a person can know their prayer is working. “So when we sense the transformation within us, then we will understand precisely what the fruit and the goal of prayer are. Then we will understand that the kingdom of heaven is within our heart: ‘The kingdom of God is within you’.”³⁴³ Take note of what Ephraim writes about. First, he emphasizes everyone’s need for prayer, then encourages the use of the Jesus Prayer. Through this, Ephraim says, a person will be transfigured; this was his own personal experience with Joseph, as well as with the throngs he himself taught.

Silence generated stillness and tranquility within our souls, which automatically created compunction. Then divine inspirations – thoughts ignited by God’s grace – would enter our souls creating a warmth, a boiling of the heart. Frequently, the states of grace experienced in our prayer at night would last throughout the daytime. Such days would pass smoothly in complete peace, which in turn led to contemplation of God. Not only did we not speak idly, but we didn’t even let ourselves think of anything other than God. All this silence, prayer, and contemplation created mourning within our souls, but it was a good kind of mourning. No matter what we meditated on – whether it was death, God’s judgment, or our sins – the tears fell like rain.³⁴⁴

Second, despite the potentially hagiographical language present in his writing, Ephraim also demonstrates why it is important to find the right elder.

My humble hesychast Elder had two touching characteristic features: silence and tears. In the vastness of silence he could hear the whispers of grace. Death found him with his face bedewed with those tears whose sweetness we have not yet experienced. It is this luminous life of his that we, his spiritual children, have vowed to follow, each one according to his capacity and the particular constitution of his inner being.³⁴⁵

Third, read also here the idea of the elder passing a legacy to a spiritual child who then passes it to the next generation. And, in this, is Ephraim’s real contribution to American Orthodox Eldership. He was the living embodiment of the Athonite tradition of monasticism in the United States,³⁴⁶ which

³⁴² Ibid, p. 3.

³⁴³ Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1999, p. 347.

³⁴⁴ Elder Ephraim, *My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast*, Saint Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2013, p. 442.

³⁴⁵ Elder Ephraim, *A Call from the Holy Mountain*, New Sarov Press, 1991, p. 2.

³⁴⁶ For a different vision of Orthodox monasticism in the United States, the New Skete of Monasteries (NewSkete.org) in upstate New York was founded in 1966 by Byzantine Catholic Franciscan monastics who were received into the Orthodox Church of America in 1979. Today, it is a community of monks, nuns, and older married couples (and widows) who are known as the Companions of New Skete. While there are separate houses for each of these groups, they pray and participate in divine liturgy together. Their property has a retreat center, a well-known dog-training school, and a small parish for local Orthodox families. Cf. The Monks of New Skete, *In the Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living*, Bluffton, SC: MJF Books, 1999. “For our part, we understand happiness as a deep and lasting interior peace. It is one that comes only with the struggle to search out and accept the will of God in our lives, one that demands of us a faith, hope, and love upon which and through which we strive to elevate the quality of all human life. It is the same peace of which Jesus spoke, the same inner tranquility and serenity we see in him throughout his life. We think this is what

represents stability, faithfulness, commitment, discipleship, and prayerfulness. Even in the light of the accusations about his potentially personal spiritual abuse,³⁴⁷ Ephraim also brought clarity and steadfastness to the American Orthodox, more broadly speaking, in their spiritual and theological infancy. Fifth, it is important to note that in this small sample of his writing, Ephraim does not speak of the cessation of prayer at the approach of the Holy Spirit who envelops the person-at-prayer. This is a divergence from what has been presented in this thesis starting from the experience of Pentecost and the theology of Basil the Great to the experience of Seraphim of Sarov and others who are clearer about their Pneumatologically-based spiritual experiences.

John Maximovitch of San Francisco: Wonderworker

Known as the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco, John Maximovitch (1896-1966) was a bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia³⁴⁸ who served in China, France, and the United States. In an anonymously written biography, which functions as an introduction to the 1997 edition of Maximovitch's own short history of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, he is quoted as saying that he constantly read spiritual literature, even during law school. "While studying the worldly sciences,' said the Saint during his election to the episcopacy, 'I delved all the more into the study of the Science of sciences, into the study of the spiritual life'."³⁴⁹ While a bishop in Shanghai he was known to give great attention to the spiritual education of those under his care. It is also stated that "The miracle-working and clairvoyance of Saint John were well known in Shanghai."³⁵⁰ Setting aside the hagiographical statements here and to follow – as well as the paranormal connotation of the word *clairvoyance* in modern American English – the idea here is that Maximovitch had a

beings were created for, so that our lives become a knowing and loving service of God and each other in this world, which will be completed in the world to come (p. xiii)."

³⁴⁷ Cf. Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing*, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, Kindle Edition, 2023, p. 248. "By its very nature, the vow of obedience does not cover the spiritual life because it is concerned with actions rather than with someone's inner life. From this, we may establish a fundamental principle that allows no exceptions: no one has authority over another's conscience, since if anyone did claim to have such authority, he or she would be competing with God."

³⁴⁸ Of the 19 Orthodox saints in America, 18 are Slavic or related to the Slavic missions in the United States. One is important to note here. The future Saint Tikhon of Moscow (Vasily Ivanovich Bellavin, 1865–1925) is known by the title of "Enlightener of North America." After establishing the Russian Diocese of the Aleutians and North America, he built a cathedral in New York City and encouraged the translation of Orthodox Christian services, as well as books on theology, catechesis, and spirituality into English (Isabel Florence Hapgood acted as the translator). Tikhon returned to Russia in 1907 and was elected Russian Patriarch in 1917. He condemned the killing of the Czar's family in 1918 and protested the confiscation of Church property and attacks on priests who condemned the Bolsheviks.

³⁴⁹ John Maximovitch, *The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, A Short History*, Printshop of St. Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 1997, p. 8.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14. It should be noted here that Seraphim Rose's presentation of the life of John of San Francisco is considered by some to be hagiographical. Despite the potential embellishments, there are many sources that confirm the deep, abiding, and highly personalized pastoral care given by Maximovitch.

combination of serious spiritual and pastoral gifts that coincided with a deeply personal relationship with those in his care, allowing him to help each of his spiritual children discern the will of God while providing them with additional encouragement and the strength for them to follow it in prayer.

The following is written about him in Paris: 'He lives outside of our plane (of existence). It is no accident that in one of the Catholic churches a priest said, addressing the youth; 'You require proof. You say that there are no more miracles, no saints. Why do you need theoretical proof, when a living Saint walks the streets of Paris, *Saint Jean Pieds'* (Saint John the Barefoot).³⁵¹

In Dunlop's book about Maximovitch's work in getting Orthodox refugees out of Shanghai, a seminarian recounts:

One can rightly say that he belonged more to heaven than to earth. His meekness and humility were like that recorded in the lives of the greatest ascetics and desert-dwellers... Fr. John... loves us all and we him. In our eyes he was the embodiment of all Christian virtues: quiet, calm, gentle, he glowed before our eyes. We say in him no deficiency, even in the way he spoke; we quickly grew accustomed to that. He became for us so close we considered him an older brother, loved and esteemed.³⁵²

Reminiscent of Athanasius' descriptions of Antony the Great's observations of the fathers living in the desert, these statements about Maximovitch indicate his personal traits. Others commented on his spiritual traits.

Archimandrite Venyamin Garshin has recalled: 'Once [Bishop John] said to me: 'Prayer is the foundation of the success of a bishop's activity. During the course of the day, it is necessary to conduct divine services for six hours, to engage for six hours in thoughts of God [*bogomysliem*], for six hours to engage in good deeds, and for six hours to rest.' 'Vladyka³⁵³ carried out that [program] precisely'.³⁵⁴

Regarding unceasing prayer specifically, Maximovitch commented:

That does not mean that a person is supposed to pray and not do anything else. It means that a Christian is supposed to always be in a prayerful mood and to recall each moment that he is before the face of God and his soul speaks with him.³⁵⁵

Placing aside the hagiographical elements, the fact remains that Maximovitch was a serious elder to a vast array of students, refugees, parishioners, disciples, priests, and bishops regardless of the difficulty of his surroundings. To further aid an English-speaking Orthodox population in its education on such matters, Seraphim Rose not only translated many Russian Orthodox works, but

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 16.

³⁵² John B. Dunlop, *Exodus: St John Maximovitch Leads His Flock out of Shanghai*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Kindle Edition, 2018, pp. 27-28.

³⁵³ Vladyka or vladika (Russian: владыка) is an honorific title used for an Orthodox bishop in the Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian traditions.

³⁵⁴ John B. Dunlop, *Exodus: St John Maximovitch Leads His Flock out of Shanghai*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Kindle Edition, 2018, p. 78.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 78.

also developed his own manuscripts. In 1966, before he became a hieromonk, Rose wrote the work titled *Blessed John the Wonderworker* that spoke of the spiritual gifts Maximovitch exhibited throughout his life and ministry. In one example, Rose points out that Maximovitch had the gift of deep insight into the lives of his spiritual children. In another passage, Rose writes about Maximovitch's intercessions for others after his death. "Just as St. Seraphim of Sarov told his spiritual children to regard him as living after his death, and to come to his grave and tell him what was in their hearts, so our Vladika also has proved to be hearing those who revere his memory."³⁵⁶

Rose includes other details about his work among the Russian diaspora in the United States and explained his spiritual practices.

Vladika's life was governed by the standards of the spiritual life, and if this upset the routine order of things it was in order to jolt people out of their spiritual inertia and remind them that there is a higher judgment than the world's. A remarkable incident from Vladika's years in San Francisco (1963) illustrates several aspects of his holiness: his spiritual boldness based on absolute faith; his ability to see the future and to overcome by his spiritual sight the bounds of space; and the power of his prayer, which beyond all doubt worked miracles.³⁵⁷

The way Rose describes Maximovitch reveals many of the qualities of spiritual fatherhood that have been covered thus far in the text. He was a prayerful man first and foremost; he had faith, courage, intuition, and was understanding, balanced, and discerning as he listened to people and dispensed advice. In *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, which was written by Maximovitch, Rose writes in the English-language edition of the introduction:

His³⁵⁸ heart and mind were won: not because Archbishop John became for him an 'infallible expert' – for the Church of Christ does not know any such thing – but because he saw in this holy archpastor, a model of Orthodoxy, a true theologian whose theology proceeded from a holy life and from total rootedness in Orthodox tradition. When he spoke, his words could be trusted – although he carefully distinguished between the Church's teaching, which is certain, and his own personal opinions, which might be mistaken, and he bound no one to the latter. And our young convert discovered that, for all of Archbishop John's intellectual keenness and critical ability, his words much more often agreed with those of the simple Abbess³⁵⁹ than with those of the learned theologians of our time.³⁶⁰

Rose's description of the trustworthiness of Maximovitch's counsel is not only reminiscent of the gift of discernment, but also may be an insight into his own understanding of spiritual parenting. In the same book, Maximovitch writes about the spiritual motherhood of Mary, the Theotokos.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Fr. Seraphim Rose and Abbot Herman, *Blessed John the Wonderworker*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1987, p. 49.

³⁵⁷ Seraphim Rose, *Blessed John the Wonderworker*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1998, p. 59.

³⁵⁸ Here, Rose is referring to himself in the third person.

³⁵⁹ Two pages earlier, Rose recounts a time when he attended a service at a Russian convent in San Francisco. The abbess of the monastery gave a homily, which explained that it was important to follow the teachings of the church wholeheartedly and without attempting to determine what is dispensable or not.

³⁶⁰ John Maximovitch, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, translated and introduced by Seraphim Rose, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2012, p. 13.

Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labor in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life. But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable Helper. 'Joy of all who sorrow and intercessor for the offended, feeder of the hungry, consolation of travellers, harbor of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm, staff of old age, Thou art the Mother of God on high, O Most Pure One' (Sticheron of the Service to the Hodigitria). 'The hope and intercession and refuge of Christians', 'The Mother of God unceasing in prayers' (Kontakion of the Dormition), 'saving the world by Thine unceasing prayer' (Theotokion of the Third Tone). 'She day and night doth pray for us, and the scepters of kingdoms are confirmed by Her prayers' (daily Midnight Service).³⁶¹

Maximovitch reminds his readers that Mary, too, suffered the vicissitudes of the world and overcame them with a total commitment to Jesus her son, an attentiveness to prayer (which he mentions four times regarding her intercessory role before Christ on behalf of humankind), a commitment to mothering others, and possessing a love that would not be diminished. And here is where Maximovitch has greatly contributed to American Orthodox eldership. John of Shanghai and San Francisco was a man of great pastoral care. He loved and helped everyone who was given him to shepherd. Whether it was in China, France, or America, he worked daily to evangelize, to catechize, to pray, and to help. He was trusted and revered because of the love and compassion he showered on everyone. In fact, one of the things he is best known for was helping hundreds of Orthodox refugees out of China to the Philippines and eventually to San Francisco, all while acting as bishop of Shanghai, then for a short time as bishop in Paris, and ultimately in San Francisco as bishop where he built a cathedral. He did this at a time of tremendous Orthodox immigration to the US and continued to build up the Orthodox community in California and for the Russian Orthodox in the US generally.

The life of Maximovitch exemplifies that silent prayer can yield to a course of extraordinary pastoral care as given by the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit not unlike what occurred for the Apostles at Pentecost.

Gerasimos Papadopoulos of Boston: Abba

Gerasimos Papadopoulos of Abydos (1910-1995) was a titular bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate serving in the United States. He oversaw districts of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America in Boston and Pittsburgh but is most remembered as a spiritual father to the students at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, during his time as a professor and administrator.

This, in broad terms and inadequate terms, was the holy Elder as I was blessed to know him. A man truly in love with the love of God, with the peace of God, with the truth of God. A man who loved prayer, and who practiced humility and simplicity in all things. A man who

³⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 67-68.

loved nature, loved to study and wanted always to learn. A joyful yet thoughtful man who also had a sense of humor. He was truly a man of God, a saint whose passing through this life was 'a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God' (Phil 4:18).³⁶²

Take note in this text how abundantly clear it was to those around Papadopoulos that he: loved God, loved being in love with God, loved learning, studying, sacrificing, pleasing God, and had the joy of laughter while looking after those around him. In everything he did, whether it was with lay people, priests, other bishops, institutional administrators, or government officials, the bishop was known to act in moderation. While he always understood what should be done, Papadopoulos remained cognizant of the endless possibilities in God and the limitations of human situations.

What follows below is a longer description of Papadopoulos' qualities. Here, have decided to retain the vast majority of this elegy because it is both a textbook definition of an Orthodox spiritual father and a model for responding to the relationality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

But above and beyond all these things that have been related, the blessed Bishop Gerasimos was also something else: he was an *Abba* – a Father. He was a teacher to whom the young and the old would run at every difficulty with strictly theological issues. He was also the spiritual Father, the Abba, the comforter, the counselor. A whole world lived in the School and even a greater one far from it. But everyone knew that up there on the hill, a little beyond the chapel of the Holy Cross, there lived a wise and holy Elder. In his simple quarters, he prayed and studied alone and was always ready to receive all. The very certainty that there lived such a man was itself a consolation...

Innumerable people, clergyman and laymen and laywomen, placed before him, again and again, the failures they experienced in their upward spiritual journey. He in turn would share their pain, but would also share their joy wherever they had succeeded well. With or without the stole over his neck, the blessed Bishop always served as an Abba, as a spiritual Father, as a Father confessor and comforter. And everyone – indeed everyone – would leave his cell always, more or less, strengthened and renewed in spirit. This work of the Elder, the Abba, was among the most burdensome and most difficult in the life of the Church. It staggers and empties the spiritual man who has profound sacred experiences and who possesses spiritual wealth that he readily offers to those who come to him...

The blessed Bishop possessed such a spiritual life. He had it in abundance indeed, but he himself believed that it was poor, very poor. This is why until the very last hours of his life he continued to renew himself, to live with prayer and worship the truth, the mystery of Christ and of life, as he loved to remark. This was so because Bishop Gerasimos, although surrounded by the greatest universities of the world, lived with the daily prayer services as a simple monk. These nurtured him; through them he was 'rebaptized' and lived.

Early in the morning and every evening he was present, as in the old days on Mt. Athos, in the Chapel of the Holy Cross. And he loved to be the celebrant of the Divine Liturgy, as a simple priest, even more frequently than the young clergymen who loved to serve. It was

³⁶² Peter A. Chamberas, ed., *Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos: The Spiritual Elder of America*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, p. 137.

enough for the students to see him in the Chapel without fail as an old man of so many years to be silently but consciously instructed, nurtured and edified.³⁶³

Even taking into account the hagiographical elements of this description, Papadopoulos was clearly a person who lived both for silent prayer and service. In the end, he was able to do both because he seems to have embodied the authentic spiritual, psychological, intellectual, relational, and physical response to the apophatic relationality of the Holy Spirit, just as the Apostles did at Pentecost.

Whatever may be the gradual differences that exist between various elder-disciple relationships, priest-parishioner relationships, or other spiritual companion relationships, the fact remains that the Pneumatological call of Pentecost exists in these people who were called to a spiritual combination of teacher, comforter, motivator, encourager, nurturer, friend, sojourner, and an unceasing pray-er (1 Thess 5:17). What follows next is the slightly more complicated case of Seraphim Rose whose life speaks directly to the question of an American Orthodox Eldership. In Rose can be found a hieromonk whose own conversion to Orthodoxy led him into a trying to educate American converts how to listen to God in prayer and relate to each other in service to God.

Seraphim Rose of California: An American Orthodox Spiritual Father?

Seraphim Rose³⁶⁴ – a Protestant American who became Buddhist³⁶⁵ and eventually converted to Orthodoxy where he became a hieromonk in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) – was often critical of the state of Christianity in mid-20th century America, claimed the charismatic movement was a falsehood and that various forms of meditation were a deception.

The life of self-centeredness and self-satisfaction lived by most of today's 'Christians' is so all-pervading that it effectively seals them off from any understanding at all of spiritual life; and when such people do undertake 'spiritual life,' it is only as another form of self-satisfaction. This can be seen quite clearly in the totally false religious ideal both of the 'charismatic' movement and the various forms of 'Christian meditation:' all of them promise (and give very quickly) an experience of 'contentment' and 'peace.'³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Ibid, pp. 38-40.

³⁶⁴ Damascene (Christensen), who is the abbot of St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in Platina, CA, published in 2010 the third edition of a book titled *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*. Not only is this the critical edition of Rose's biography, but also it provides a view into one part of the history of American Orthodoxy. More specifically, it details the growth and changes in the Orthodox Slavic traditions of the northwestern United States for much of the 20th century. Abbot Damascene's work highlights the importance of looking at spiritual fatherhood in the Western, especially American, context. Further, *Life and Works* is a useful tool to examine the specific philosophical, theological, spiritual, and cultural questions raised by Rose that faced American converts in his time; and, to determine whether these influences still exist for current and future generations of American Orthodox.

³⁶⁵ Rose graduated *magna cum laude* in 1956 from Pomona College where he studied Chinese philosophy. He also studied under Alan Watts at the American Academy of Asian Studies before earning a master's degree in Oriental languages in 1961 from the University of California, Berkeley.

³⁶⁶ Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2004, pp. 187-188.

As a potential result of his own life choices and an exposure to Elder Ephraim, Rose excoriates American Christians for dabbling in what he calls ‘spiritual deception.’

But this is not the Christian ideal at all, which if anything may be summed up as a fierce battle and struggle. The ‘contentment’ and ‘peace’ described in these contemporary ‘spiritual’ movements are quite manifestly the product of spiritual deception, of spiritual self-satisfaction – which is the absolute death of the God-oriented spiritual life. All these forms of ‘Christian meditation’ operate solely on the psychic level and have nothing whatever in common with Christian spirituality.

From here, he proposes a different spiritual path, which involves a vision of Christian spirituality based on a long, laborious battle.

Christian spirituality is formed in the arduous struggle to acquire the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, which fully begins only with the dissolution of this temporal world, and the true Christian struggler never finds repose even in the foretastes of eternal blessedness which might be vouchsafed to him in this life...³⁶⁷

Notice how the language here of difficulty, struggle, and discontentment is coupled with a kind of longing for the ‘dissolution of this temporal world.’ While themes of repentance and anti-secularism can be found in one form or another in the annals of Orthodox spiritual instructions going back to the Patristic sources, it is important to take note that in the writings of Rose there is a palpable shift in tone that some champion as an honest, nearly brutal, recitation of facts about changes society and the Church. There are other opinions about his writings that describe it as fundamentalist and, perhaps, in the language of this research ‘anti-relational.’ Still, Rose continues this diatribe, going even further by calling the world a “satanic harvest...being reaped not merely among the pagan peoples, who have not heard of Christ, but even more among ‘Christians’ who have lost the savor of Christianity.”³⁶⁸ He repeats again his condemnation of the charismatic movement and...

‘Christian meditation’, and the ‘new religious consciousness’ of which they are a part...[as] forerunners of *the religion of the future, the religion of the last humanity, the religion of antichrist*, and their chief ‘spiritual’ function is *to make available to Christians the demonic initiation hitherto restricted to the pagan world.*³⁶⁹

After this he denounces these groups for what he calls “a genuinely demonic initiation rite,” those who think they have “successfully ‘meditated’;” and those who think they have “received the ‘Baptism of the Spirit’.”³⁷⁰

Rose, who experimented religiously, spiritually, and socially (he bemoans the Bohemian lifestyle he led for a time in San Francisco), potentially reveals in him a deep angst about that part of his life. As a result, Rose’s ongoing spiritual narrative is a condemnation of those who do the very

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

same things. At one level this could be viewed as a concerned father looking out for his children. On another level, though, it can be viewed as a condemnation, instead of an invitation, to learn the truth and live differently. Take note of how this is manifested in real terms. He calls out the charismatic movement as a falsehood, decries Christians who have lost touch with ancient Christianity, and condemns the fascination with Eastern (non-Orthodox) meditation experiences. He describes Christianity in America as self-satisfying, self-centered, sealed-off from real ascetical struggle, focused on the world, embracing misplaced religious idealism, spiritually deceived, filled with false hope, content, performing false miracles, preaching apostasy, avoiding the truth, and deceiving people into thinking that the coming of anti-Christ is Christ. Rose is clearly not concerned about what others think of his writing; to him the truth had to be told no matter the cost. On the other hand, his condemnations seem to comport with a harsher version of a Pneumatologically-based relational spirituality. While it is certainly reasonable to defend doctrine and provide a corrective for psychologically and spiritually dysfunctional and damaging behaviors, Rose seems to use intimidation and fear tactics to achieve his goals.

To understand all this more clearly, the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood in Platina, CA, published in 1987 a short volume of talks that Rose gave at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1981 for a class on world religions in the US. This book, titled *God's Revelation to the Human Heart*, highlights Rose's perspective regarding subjects like the search for truth, revelations from God, suffering, and rebirth (in and through Orthodox Christianity specifically). While there are several statements in these lectures that speak to the modern condition of humankind, as well as faith and religion in America, there is a set of passages that speak directly to his view of the role of spiritual fathers and mothers, including in evangelization. In the second chapter, Rose quotes from Acts 8:26-29 (where the Apostle Philip baptizes the Ethiopian and is taken away by the 'Spirit of Lord') and Luke 24 (in which Jesus, on the day of His resurrection, walks with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, breaks bread with them, and then vanishes). He uses these to (1) explain that spiritual gifts are manifest in the lives of the apostles and disciples (read also elders), and (2) illustrate how the hearts of those they touch are deeply changed. In the case of the Ethiopian, he "came to 'believe;' that is, his heart was melted by the truth he heard. The words of Scripture are very powerful, and when the right interpretation is given to them, something in a human being 'opens up' if his heart is ready."³⁷¹ In the case of the two disciples, they question their experiences and remembered how their hearts burned when talking on the road.

Here we see how what is called 'revelation' comes about: the heart is moved and changed by the presence of God, or by someone who is filled with His Spirit, or by just hearing the truth about Him preached. That is also how the Apostles had the power to go out to virtually

³⁷¹ Seraphim Rose, *God's Revelation to the Human Heart*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2007, p. 22.

the whole inhabited earth... in order to preach the Gospel to all peoples within the first decades after the resurrection of Christ. It is the same today, even though people have become much more insensitive and dense spiritually, much less simple, and do not respond as easily to the truth.³⁷²

Take note of the language here regarding people being moved or changed by the indwelling of the Spirit. Observe also how Rose references the Apostolic evangelization post-Pentecost. With as much zeal as Rose wrote about the problems in modern Christianity, he still maintained that authentic faith and the sincere application of one's spiritual gifts can change others. That is why he encouraged converts to seek spiritual guidance and follow the examples of the saints but cautioned against getting caught up in the alleged supernatural occurrences that are reported about some of those saints. In the preface to the first volume of the "Little Russian Philokalia" series published by his own St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood in 1978, he wrote this regarding Seraphim of Sarov:

Some are so dazzled by his visions and his all embracing love that they try... artificially to set his 'spirituality' against the 'institutionalized Church,' as if the two could be separated; still others would make him to be a 'charismatic' figure who justifies the empty ecumenical 'spirituality' of our own poor days; and a few imagine him to be a 'guru' whose experiences place him 'beyond Christianity' and all religious traditions.³⁷³

It is important to capture here Rose's serious concern about converts using the lives of the saints, in this case Seraphim of Sarov, to justify an almost Messalianistic approach to the Orthodox spiritual life. He repeatedly warned converts neither to eschew formal catechesis nor reject the sacramental life of the Church. That is why he was also adamant about proper spiritual guidance. Later, he would comment on the need for patience and sobriety among these newly formed Orthodox, many of whom wanted to quickly form mission parishes that he thought were too far from older, more established parishes and monasteries, meaning that they would be out of the regular reach of experienced guides.

Rose's correspondence with Fr. Alexy Young³⁷⁴ provides a good example of a convert priest who did seek answers to questions that ranged from the everyday externals of living an Orthodox life to the heated topics surrounding Orthodox growth and development in America and elsewhere, especially as it related to the situation of the Moscow Patriarchate, ROCOR, and the American Metropolia, which would eventually become the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Thus, these

³⁷² Ibid, p. 24.

³⁷³ Seraphim of Sarov, *St. Seraphim*, translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose, vol. 1, Little Russian Philokalia Series, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996, p. 13.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Schema-nun Theadelphi, ed., *Letters from Father Seraphim: The Twelve-year Correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young*, Richfield Springs, NY: St. Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society), p. vii. "With the publication of this volume of letters written from 1970 to 1982 by the late Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) to Fr. Alexey Young, the reader is given a partial glimpse into a relationship between a spiritual father and son, as well as a record of the growth of a working partnership between two men actively involved in English-language missionary work in the Orthodox Church."

conversations are valuable for understanding Orthodoxy as a way of life in America. Interestingly, Young comments about Rose that

...he was more concerned than ever about practical Orthodoxy – Orthodoxy of the heart, not the head – and he focused with astonishing precision on the individual personalities and souls of those that came to him. His ability to understand and prescribe exactly what each individual’s spiritual and emotional ‘psychology’ required provides an important model for pastors and spiritual fathers today.³⁷⁵

While it is clear from Young and others that Rose was a compassionate and engaged spiritual father to his fellow Americans who became Orthodox, the totality of Rose’s published works also reveals a zealotry for Orthodoxy that was taken by some as an obstreperous rant against other Christians. It was from this perspective that Rose put forth his own works in philosophy and religious studies and translated other more explicitly theological texts. Thus, what follows is a short review of two of Rose’s most read and most controversial books: *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* and *The Soul After Death*. This is important to do here because it demonstrates a tension not only between his roles as a spiritual father and as a dogmatist, but also within the construct of this thesis. In other words, what are the human bounds of the spiritual relationality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit? As is obvious even in the structure of my own writing about Rose, he was an enigmatic figure who worked hard for the American Orthodox with whom he was ‘related’ but strenuously objected to any relationship building outside the Orthodox Church.

Rose Writes *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* and *The Soul After Death*

Rose took seriously his role as a teacher and guide in the still new Orthodox convert community in America. This is nowhere clearer than in his approach to *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, which is clearly an attempt by Rose to guide his fledgling flock. However, this book is also a manifesto, a condemnation of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue as a heresy and an evil undertaking that would undermine Orthodoxy and destroy the Christian faith.

It has not yet been too carefully observed where all this is leading, but logically the path is clear. The ideology behind ecumenism...is an already well-defined heresy: the Church of Christ does not exist, no one has the Truth, the Church is only now being built. But it takes little reflection to see that the self-liquidation of Orthodoxy, of the *Church of Christ*, is simultaneously the self-liquidation of Christianity itself; that if no one is *the Church of Christ*, then the combination of all sects will not be *the Church of Christ* either, not in the sense in which Christ founded it. And if all ‘Christian’ bodies are relative to each other, then all of them together are relative to other ‘religious’ bodies, and ‘Christian’ ecumenism can only end in a syncretic world religion.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 228.

³⁷⁶ Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2004, p. xxv.

To give some sense of Seraphim's approach to this book, the subject matter itself arose from the questions that were being posed to him frequently.³⁷⁷ Thus, the first chapter is a study of the concept of God in near-Eastern religions (guest written by Basile Sakkas). The second is about Hinduism, its entrance into America and its appeal to Americans, its universalist component, and the relationship of gurus and disciples. The third is guest written by Archimandrite Nicholas Drobyazgin who recounts his experience with a Sufi Muslim who performed a miraculous act. The fourth is about the growth in interest among Christians to utilize Eastern non-Christian meditation techniques. The fifth covers America's 'new religious consciousness,' meaning its fascination with Hare Krishnas, Hindu Yogis, Tantric Yoga, Zen training, and the development of 'new Christian spiritualities.' The sixth chapter is about the spike in supposed UFO sightings seen as signs from heaven. The seventh is about the charismatic revival in Protestantism and the eighth is about the growing fascination with the end times. Essentially, Rose identified, summarized, and argued against every major trend in spirituality in the United States that grew out of America's evolving and increasing interaction with the global community. In other words, he saw that as the US was encountering other faiths and cultures, Americans were fascinated by and experimenting with religions largely unfamiliar to the white, European Protestantism that dominated the American cultural and religious landscape for close to 300 years. Given the scope and scale of World Wars I and II, it is not surprising that a new focus on multiculturalism and comparative religious dialogue grew out of this period. There was also a heightened interest in studies about and preparation for the end times. Hence, his own books focused on the 'religion of the future,' the apocalypse, and life after death. Ironically, the movement of people and ideas that Rose decries was also responsible for growth in interest in Orthodoxy.

The detail of the cultural, pastoral, and theological arguments made by Rose in this first book explains the unique challenges of spiritually fathering an individual in the American context and functions as an exploratory of the potentially broader dimension of spiritual fatherhood itself. To put that into question form: is a spiritual father only responsible for those Orthodox within his care? Does he or she have a responsibility to the larger community as well? If so, what is his or her response to the non-Orthodox? Rose unequivocally decided that he had to father specific people and the growing population of American converts but rejected the idea of relating to and dialoguing with others.

³⁷⁷ As remote as the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood was in Platina, it was located in Northern California where began many of the spiritual movements that impacted culture and religion in America at that time. For example, it is not far from the Esalen Institute, which was founded in 1962 and home to the Human Potential Movement.

In his 1980 book titled *The Soul After Death*, which received as visceral a response as *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, he sought to explain Ignatius Brianchaninov's (and to a far lesser extent John Maximovitch's) version of the doctrine of life after death with a special emphasis on the meaning of what is known as the 'aerial tollhouses.' The implicit reason for writing this book was to ensure that American Orthodox understood what was at stake in their faith journey. As a spiritual father himself, Rose sought to help his spiritual children face the problems of the day, preserve the teachings of the Church, fight false doctrines, and avoid secularism. Notice the rather catechetical approach Rose takes to eldership here. This fact of his life may also be an indication of the infancy of Orthodoxy in the lower 48 of the United States. With so many Americans converting to Orthodoxy at that time in America, perhaps it is possible to say that Rose felt an obligation to some measure of silence on his own while using lots of words to educate his fellow converts. He believed that Brianchaninov exhibited this kind of eldership, teaching not just to one person or a small group of people about the four last things, but also to the Church and even the wider culture. For Rose, the understanding of and discussion about death, judgment, heaven, and hell are at the crux of the spiritual life and therefore paramount to the elder-spiritual disciple relationship. In fact, he built this book out of the questions people had been posing to him personally, regarding: out-of-body experiences, meeting people in the afterlife, the encounter with beings of light, the Orthodox doctrine of angels, the appearance of angels and demons at death, contemporary 'experiences of heaven,' humankind's original state as well as its fall, contact with demons, the distinction between heightened spiritual senses and spiritism, how to understand the aerial toll-houses, out-of-body experiences, after-death experiences, and the differences between what Orthodox and non-Orthodox teach regarding some of these issues. The key to understanding this book and the controversy that surrounded it, relies on the question about what are known in Orthodoxy as 'aerial tollhouses,' which relate to the journey of the soul after death. Essentially, demons and angels argue over the soul and whether it should go to heaven or hell. Rose clarifies:

Anyone who is at home in the kind of Orthodox literature which describes after-death reality will normally know how to distinguish between the spiritual realities described there and the incidental details which may sometimes be expressed in symbolic or imaginative language. Thus, of course, there are no visible 'houses' or 'booths' in the air where 'taxes' are collected, and where there is mention of 'scrolls' or writing instruments whereby sins are recorded, or 'scales' by which virtues are weighed, or 'gold' by which 'debts' are paid – in all such cases we may properly understand these images to be figurative or interpretive devices used to express the spiritual reality which the soul faces at that time.

Whether the soul actually *sees* these images at the time, due to its lifelong habit of seeing spiritual reality only through bodily forms, or later, can *remember* the experience only by use of such images, or simply finds it impossible to *express* what it has experienced in any other way – this is all a very secondary question which does not seem to have been important to the Holy Fathers and writers of saints' lives who have recorded such experiences. What is

certain is that there *is* a testing by demons, who appear in a frightful but human form, accuse the newly-departed of sins and literally try to seize the subtle body of the soul, which is grasped firmly by angels; and this occurs in the air above us and can be seen by those whose eyes are open to spiritual reality.³⁷⁸

Thus, the value of *The Soul After Death* lies both in its content and in the fact that it was received both with great interest and serious derision. It must be noted that the way Rose explains the issue of the ascent of the soul after death, particularly in the context of the meaning and operation of the ‘aerial tollhouses,’ was not entirely accepted by all bishops and theologians.

Lazar Puhalo, now the retired Archbishop of Ottawa, argued that Rose’s promotion of the theology of the aerial tollhouses was a propagation of pagan ideas. Eventually, the Holy Synod of the Russian Church Abroad sided with Rose because it reasserted that Orthodox hymnology and the writings of saints and theologians are replete with references to this teaching. Namely, Antony the Great, Athanasius, Basil the New, Theodora, Cyril of Alexandria, John of the Ladder, Justin Popovic, Ignatius Brianchaninov, Theophan the Recluse, throughout the *Philokalia*, and more. In 1995, Hierotheos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, wrote a book similarly titled *Life After Death* in which he writes, “When we examine the customs houses in this theological context, the use of this teaching is not inappropriate. But if we have other conceptions, we are on the wrong path.”³⁷⁹ Hierotheos’ work on this subject is considered to provide, in part, temperate support for what Rose wrote in his book. In 2017, St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona (founded by Elder Ephraim who died in 2019) published *The Departure of the Soul According to the Orthodox Church* to provide a master reference edition to this subject because of its importance to Orthodox theology and the renewed attention it is receiving among American Orthodox. The book includes multiple hierarchical endorsements and an entry about Rose, which relays a report from the Russian Synod of Bishops that Seraphim did not commit heresy in how he wrote about the tollhouses.³⁸⁰ For this reason, the Patristics scholar Jean-Claude Larchet published in 2021 a wide-ranging synthesis of the Orthodox approach to the afterlife in his compendium *Life After Death According to the Orthodox Tradition*. As he approaches the question of the tollhouses, Larchet begins by reminding the reader that some Patristic texts are simple in that they claim the soul is carried off to heaven by angels to heaven or demons to hell based on the spiritual state of the person at death. Others, he writes, involve a complex struggle between angels and demons.

The teaching on heavenly custom houses or aerial toll-houses has recently occasioned certain criticisms. The latter remain, however, limited and ill-founded. As we have seen, this

³⁷⁸ Seraphim Rose, *The Soul After Death*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009, pp. 68-69.

³⁷⁹ Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *Life After Death*, Esther Williams, trans., Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Levadia, Greece, 2015, p. 73.

³⁸⁰ *Departure of the Soul According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church: A Patristic Anthology*, St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2017, p. 280.

teaching is widely attested from Christianity's origins down to our own time by a great variety of patristic, hagiographic, and liturgical texts. These criticisms are, however, a warning against possible shifts in its understanding and use...³⁸¹

In addition to the clarifications made on this subject matter, the most important item that emerges from the debate over this book is that strong spiritual relationships matter. In other words, the subtext of Rose's writing is that taking the sacraments, engaging in catechesis, and listening to the guidance of an elder or father-confessor is necessary to create a sober and balanced understanding of Orthodox doctrine regarding the afterlife. In the context of this thesis, however, this work highlights the grave importance of maintaining spiritually healthy and psychologically sound spiritual relationships that create mature spaces where prayer and service can exist and flourish in a manner communicated by the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit.

As a companion to this earlier work Rose translated and introduced Archbishop Averky's *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity* (published posthumously in 1985), which is a more sober and balanced work. In the introduction, Seraphim provides catechetical material about Orthodox eschatology and the Book of Revelation. He believed that American converts needed a type of sobriety in thinking about these subjects and expressed concern about the impact of the growth of American congregationalist and evangelical theologies, modes of thinking, and types of worship; the increasingly eclectic approach to faith taken by American Christians; the serious nature of antagonistic atheism and secularism, and the addiction to occultism in the US. The author of the book, Archbishop Averky, who was the rector of Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, New York (1952-1976); Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) Archbishop of Syracuse, New York (1953-1976); and the Abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York (1960-1976), was seen by Rose as an ascetic, scholar, and spiritual father.

It is such a man, a true Holy Father of these latter times, filled with the Christian apocalyptic expectation of Christ's Second Coming and with the sober Orthodox spirit of preparedness for it, who is the author of the following commentary on the culminating book of the New Testament Scriptures, the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian... Archbishop Averky...An unblemished teacher of the Orthodox moral and spiritual life, he is also an unrivalled theological and Patristic guide for us. There are few saints left in our pitiful times. But even if we do not see about us now such upright and righteous ones as he, his teaching remains with us and can be our guiding beacon in the even darker days ahead which he foresaw, when the Church may have to go into the wilderness, like the Woman of the Apocalypse (ch. 12) – the Church of the last times.³⁸²

³⁸¹ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Life After Death According to the Orthodox Tradition*, Printshop of Saint Job of Pachaev, 2021, pp. 76-79.

³⁸² Averky Taushev, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, translated, edited, and introduced by Seraphim Rose, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1998, p. 22-23.

In this passage it is possible to see Rose's view of spiritual fatherhood, describing Averky as having a burning heart for God, which keeps him soberly fixed on the end of days. It, perhaps, also indicates a bit of sycophantism on his part.

While Rose was a zealot for a pure Orthodoxy in America, it is also easy to see in Rose a man of his own time and place trying to figure out how Orthodoxy relates to the 'new world.' It is also true that Rose's life is only one kind of embodiment of the question of spiritual relationships through Americans and for Americans; the net impact of his writings on the American convert population in this respect cannot be denied. Thus, his example achieves both a theoretical and a practical attempt to define what an authentic expression of eldership can mean at various stages in a mission land. In some ways, Rose is a typical American in that he questioned the religion of his youth, rebelled against it by finding the flaws in it, and converted to Buddhism in an act of rebellion against it (because of his high intelligence and propensity for languages he was also able to learn Chinese and encounter Buddhism and the Asian community in Northern California more authentically). After regretting the lifestyle he was living in San Francisco and searching for yet another direction, he found Eastern Christianity (and proceeded to learn and speak Russian with such great ease and fluency that the Russians whom he encountered in San Francisco churches often thought he was Russian). When he finally settled into his new-found faith, he proceeded to rail against everything he experienced before and everything else that everyone in America might encounter religiously or spiritually. And that may be his greatest gift to Orthodox eldership in America: his experience, his fervency, and his erudition created an initial set of expectations that American converts will continue to refer to for generations to come. At the same time, when applying the standards set out by this thesis about the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit as an apophatic relationality, it is possible only to say that while Rose fulfills the idea that copious pastoral work can be derived from silence and solitude, his argumentativeness seems less likely to fit with what one would expect from a Pneumatologically-based spirituality.

Since 2022 was the 40th anniversary of Rose's death, it is worth noting that even with the volume of material written about him, there is still room to explore the theme of his spiritual fatherhood further. Given his well-documented asceticism (the monastery he built in Platina, CA, did not have electricity, running water, or a telephone), fasting, praying (including copious amounts of intercessory prayer), tireless missionary and pastoral work, teaching (including the development of the Orthodox Word magazine), and writing, Rose's role as an elder in America is still not completely solidified. What is for certain, however, is that Seraphim Rose will forever be tied to American Orthodoxy. Since his death, there has not been a figure to emerge on the American Orthodox landscape such as him. His importance is not only for the convert in the pew, but also for the

academic. It would be interesting to dissect Seraphim's works in terms of where his thinking could take the next generation of scholars in eschatology, religious dialogue, hesychasm, apophaticism, and an English-language Orthodoxy.

Catholic Models in America

So far in chapter three, there has been a close look at the establishment of Orthodoxy in the West and certain spiritual elders who have had an impact in that general environment, including Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Gavriilia Papayannis, Maria Skobtsova, and Sophrony Sakharov of Essex. There was also a review of Orthodoxy's entrance into America and select spiritual elders who have been prominent there, including Ephraim Moraitis of Arizona, John Maximovitch of San Francisco, Gerasimos Papadopoulos of Boston, and Seraphim Rose of California. Now there will be a contrasting review of three Catholic spiritual leaders in America, including Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and Basil Penington. The intentional choice to include and compare a small number of Catholic examples and exclude Protestant and Evangelical ones lies in the greater differences in the theologies, spiritualities, and structures that govern these other ecclesial groups. In other words, the foundations for, the vocabularies used, and the practices observed would require a depth, breadth, and quantity of analysis that would fundamentally shift the focus of this thesis too far from the theorem of uncreated silence within the praxis of Eastern Orthodox eldership.

Catholic Spiritual Leaders in America

In advance of providing a contrasting view of three Catholic spiritual leaders in America in the 20th century – Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and Basil Penington – I am going to briefly return to the criticism leveled by Špidlík and others against silence and solitude in prayer.

Carthusian Silence in the US

Tomáš Špidlík's criticism of the Orthodox Christian practice of hesychasm ("But do heroic forms of silence – an almost complete break with human conversation – examples of which the Lives of the 'silent saints' give us – not sin through inverse excess?")³⁸³ was the original reason for this research, which gave birth to the theory of the uncreated silence that allows for a one-trunk, two-branch theory of contemplative prayer (one that leads to deeper solitude and one that leads to pastoral work). The experience of the Apostles at Pentecost provides the biblical basis for this idea. The irony in this penultimate section of the penultimate chapter of this thesis lies in the fact that

³⁸³ Tomáš Špidlík, S.J., *Prayer: The Spirituality of the Christian East*, vol. 2, Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2005.vol. 2, p. 324.

Špidlík's commentary on Eastern Christian hesychasts does not comport with at least one type of Catholic monasticism whose fathers, brothers, and sisters have lived this practice in their own way for almost one thousand years.

Bruno of Cologne, who had been the chancellor of the Diocese of Reims and a reluctant counselor to Pope Urban II, founded the Carthusian Order in 1084 to be completely focused on building a brotherhood of contemplative spiritual fathers who teach and foster silent prayer within the confines of their monasteries. The manner of their practice is reminiscent of Orthodox hesychastic practice, so much so that it begs the question of whether additional research is warranted to explore what impact, if any, Orthodox spiritual fatherhood, hesychasm, and apophaticism may have had on the founders of the Order. The statutes of the Carthusians confirm that the "founding Fathers of our type of monastic life were followers of a star from the East, the example, namely, of those early Eastern monks, who...thronged to the deserts to lead lives of solitude and poverty of spirit."³⁸⁴ Their novice conferences also make reference to Eastern Christian texts, hesychasm, and the Jesus prayer.

In the last conference we reflected on the importance of sustaining the presence of God throughout the day...This is the common heritage of all monastic spirituality, but it has been particularly developed by the Eastern tradition, above all in the hesychast tradition...hesychastic spirituality is the spirituality of the person whose unique preoccupation is union with God in love.³⁸⁵

Their commitment to a type of hesychastic system with spiritual elders is reinforced in this same 1993 volume by another lecturer who covers the role of elders in the training and growth of new members. He literally refers to the new life of silence and prayer of a novice as embryonic.

...the author [of the first novice conference] speaks of the tradition of the spiritual parent who can 'support, affirm, give a certain visible and concrete reality to the teaching and action of the Master within. He can remove...the more or less hidden obstacles to that action'. The spiritual parent does this 'not so much by his teaching nor even by his example...but rather by prayer. The father, in the image of Christ, must take upon himself the trials, the imperfections and even the sins of those he guides; he must expiate them and hold them before God in prayer. In a word, the Father Master is worth what his love is worth'. To put this another way, the poverty of the spiritual parent creates a space in which not only Christ may dwell but in which the novice may dwell in Christ. The prayer of the spiritual parent, male or female, is the womb in which the novice begins new life as an embryo.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Anonymous Carthusian Monk, *Statutes of the Carthusian Order*, 1.3.1, Transfiguration.chartreau.org, Statutes of the Carthusian Order - Book 1 (chartreux.org), accessed 1 February 2022.

³⁸⁵ Anonymous Carthusian Monk, *The Way of Silent Love: Carthusian Novice Conferences*. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1993, pp. 14-15

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. xi-xii.

Notice is comment that a 'Father Master is worth what his love is worth.' This is a point on which this thesis rests. The idea that the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit calls people today (and in every generation since Pentecost) to enter into spiritual relationships for the purpose of prayer and/or prayer attached to pastoral work.

When Pope Urban II refused Bruno's request to leave Italy (after being commanded to go to Rome to consult with his former student) so he could return to the Grande Chartreuse, the order's motherhouse north of Grenoble, France, Bruno founded a second Carthusian house in 1091 in Calabria. From there, he wrote to his spiritual sons (Carthusian nuns were added in 1145).

...what benefits and divine exultation the silence and solitude of the desert hold in store for those who love it, only those who have experienced it can know. For here men of strong will can enter into themselves and remain there as much as they like, diligently cultivating the seeds of virtue, and eating the fruits of paradise with joy. Here, they can acquire the eye that wounds the bridegroom with love by the limpidity of its gaze, and whose purity allows them to see God Himself. Here they can observe a busy leisure and rest in quiet activity. Here also, God crowns His athletes for their stern struggle with the hoped-for reward: a peace unknown to the world, and joy in the Holy Spirit.³⁸⁷

Again, take note of the language of love in the prayer itself for God and for those in relationship together in the monastery. This is the apophatic relationality of the uncreated silence. In short, the Carthusians are the Catholic antithesis of Špidlík's criticism.

The reason I bring up the Carthusians in a section about modern Catholic spiritual leaders in America during the 20th century is that their Order built *The Charterhouse of the Transfiguration* in Vermont in November 1950. As the first and only Carthusian monastery in America, it provides a Catholic example of not only silence and solitude in prayer, but also a long tradition of spiritual eldership. That makes this Order a type of bridge between the Orthodox and Catholic worlds.

Thomas Merton: Contemplation in Action

Outside the Carthusian tradition, shifting models of contemplative prayer in the Catholic Church, which stemmed partly from its own interpretation of the Social Gospel, the Charismatic Renewal, and the growth in social issues, piqued the interest of the Trappist Monk Thomas Merton. While the totality of his *corpus* equates to far more than this, Merton himself acknowledged a shift in his own thinking about contemplative prayer, which for him had to become less closed off from the socio-cultural and political matters of the world and more engaged in a serious pastoral response. In 1962, he famously wrote an article for *Blackfriars* stating that "What is needed now is the Christian who manifests the truth of the Gospel in social action, with or without explanation."³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Anonymous Carthusian Monk. *Early Carthusian Writings: St. Bruno, Bl. Guigo, and Guigo II*. Gracewing, 2009, p. 16.

³⁸⁸ Thomas Merton, "Christian Action in World Crisis," *Black Friars*, June 1962, vol. 43, Issue 504, p. 260.

That same year, he also wrote a piece for *Commonweal* about nuclear proliferation where he admits that “...the furious speed with which our technological world is plunging toward disaster is evidence that no one is any longer fully in control—and this includes the political leaders.”³⁸⁹ In other words, he had come to believe that individuals were incapable of taking care of themselves or others while governments were out of control, and technological growth had outstripped society’s ability to respond to it ethically, morally, and spiritually. In some ways, this is not unlike what Picard wrote about ‘the flight from God’ having taken on a life of its own – a personification of perdition. Although, it must be noted that Merton and Picard see two completely different ways of dealing with it. This is how Merton describes the phenomenon in greater detail.

The present world crisis is not merely a political and economic conflict. It goes deeper than ideologies. It is a crisis of man's spirit. It is a great religious and moral upheaval of the human race, and we do not really know half the causes of this upheaval. We cannot pretend to have a full understanding of what is going on in ourselves and in our society...³⁹⁰

Take note here how Merton starts this passage by writing that the problems of modernity are a crisis of ‘spirit’ and ends it by tying together ‘beliefs and politics.’ While at one level Merton is simply saying that people cannot be so compartmentalized that their values do not comport with their work in the world, at another level Merton is tying together faith with service in the socio-cultural and political spheres. He writes that “the moral evil in the world is due to man's alienation from the deepest truth, from the springs of spiritual life within himself, to his alienation from God.”³⁹¹ Merton goes on to discuss that the problem of faith and spirituality in the modern age is very different from what Christians of other centuries faced.

We... live in an irreligious world in which the Christian message has been repeated over and over until it has come to seem empty of all intelligible content to those whose ears close to the word of God even before it is uttered. In their minds Christianity is no longer identified with newness and change, but only with the static preservation of outworn structures ... It is not enough to announce the familiar message that no longer seems to be news. Not enough to teach, to explain, convince.³⁹²

After this Merton calls for ‘Christian truth in action,’ which for him does not mean profound theological statements or deep spiritual reflections. Instead, he calls again for Christians to manifest ‘the Gospel in social action.’

What is wanted now is therefore not simply the Christian who takes an inner complacency in the words and example of Christ, but who seeks to follow Christ perfectly, not only in his own personal life, not only in prayer and penance, but also in his political commitments and in all his social responsibilities...³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Thomas Merton, “Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility” in *Commonweal*, 6 February 1962.

³⁹⁰ Thomas Merton, “Christian Action in World Crisis,” *Black Friars*, June 1962, vol. 43, Issue 504, pp. 259-261.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

He explains that the mid-20th century is a time of ‘momentous choice,’ that Christians of his era are faced with the ‘heroic task’ of working for unity, peace, and political action. He decries the privacy of Christian belief and demands ‘louder Christians’ who will sacrifice themselves without concern for their own comfortable life.

It is crucially important for Christians today to adopt a genuinely Christian position and support it with everything they have got. This means an unremitting fight for justice in every sphere - in labour, in race relations, in the 'third world' and above all in international affairs. This means...closing the gap between our interior intentions and our exterior acts. Our social actions must conform to our deepest religious principles. Beliefs and politics can no longer be kept isolated from one another.³⁹⁴

In this passage, Merton outlines six truths about the modern Christian. First, that he or she suffers a crisis of spirit. Second, that the evil in the world today arises out of an alienation from truth, the internal spiritual life, and God. Third, the Christian message is stale and forgotten. Fourth, that the Christian message today must come from the framework of social responsibility. Fifth, that contemplatives, by lack of social action, may suffer from an “inner complacency.” Sixth, that Christians are called to fight for justice everywhere. In his book *Contemplation and Action*, Merton provides some nuance to his thought found in the article, but also seems to add to the tension by juxtaposing two poles of prayer and public productivity.

Far from being irrelevant, prayer, meditation and contemplation are of the utmost importance in America today. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that the official contemplative life as it is lived in our monasteries needs a great deal of rethinking because it is still too closely identified with patterns of thought that were accepted five hundred years ago but which are completely strange to modern man...If our prayer is the expression of a deep and grace-inspired desire for newness of life – and not the mere blind attachment to what has always been familiar and ‘safe’ – God will act in us and through us to renew the Church...³⁹⁵

While he never addresses them specifically, Merton seems here to be in agreement with how Hausherr and Špidlík regard the idea of spiritual fathers being involved primarily in deep, silent prayer. At this stage in his life, Merton seems to have been struggling with his own vocation to the contemplative life in a monastery³⁹⁶ and developed a desire to effect socio-political change in the world. What this means for this thesis is that Merton was concerning himself with the questions of relationality and pastoral work more and more as his life wore on. Thus, the call of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit in his life led him first to prayer in solitude and then, second, to pastoral care. For Merton, though, this looks a lot like what Ware was doing. In other words, his voluminous

³⁹⁴ Thomas Merton, “Christian Action in World Crisis,” *Black Friars*, June 1962, vol. 43, Issue 504, pp. 259-261.

³⁹⁵ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, pp. 160-161.

³⁹⁶ For more information about Merton’s relationship: Cf. *Mark William Shaw, Beneath the Mask of Holiness: Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair that Set Him Free*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009.

writing touched people all over the world. And he spent a lifetime corresponding with people of other faiths. The meaning of this is that he was a man of dialogue too. This seems like an event not unlike what occurred at Pentecost. On these points did the American Orthodox monk Seraphim Rose draft a letter to Thomas Merton the same year.

You speak of 'Christian action,' 'the Christian who manifests the truth of the Gospel in social action,' 'not only in prayer and penance, but also in his political commitments and in all his social responsibilities'. Well, I certainly will say nothing against that; if Christian truth does not shine through in all that one does, to that extent one is failing to be a Christian, and if one is called to a political vocation, one's action in that area too must be Christian. But, if I am not mistaken, your words imply something more than that; namely, that now more than ever before we need Christians working in the social and political sphere, to realize there the truth of the Gospel. But why if Christ's Kingdom is not of this world?... I by no means advocate a practice of Christianity in isolation; all Christianity even that of the hermit is a 'social Christianity,' but that is only as context, not as end...the end of the Church is the transformation of men, not society...a Christian society is not an end in itself, but simply a result of the fact that Christian men live in society.³⁹⁷

Notice how Rose bifurcates Christian people and the idea of working toward a society that reflects Christian values. This is important because it shows that Rose's drafted response to Merton lies in the juxtaposition of their directionality and relationality. In other words, while Merton was in a hermitage for years and went outward from there,³⁹⁸ Rose spent a good portion of his early life outside of a monastery and then went deep inside. At one level that explains again the one-trunk, two-branch theory of uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit: silent prayer can generate more silent prayer, or it can encourage new pastoral work, just like is found at Pentecost. In these two monks, the directionality looks different and that is reasonable. What seems less reasonable is Rose using asceticism to completely turn off any idea of dialogue with others, hence his work on *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. For Rose, Merton's model of Catholic eldership looks like a betrayal of the pure asceticism for which Rose is known. For Merton, his own eldership was informed by a new understanding of God's call in that moment of American and Catholic history.

³⁹⁷ Seraphim Rose, "A Letter to Thomas Merton." *Orthodox Christian Information Center* reprint from 1962. <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/merton.aspx?print=ok>, accessed 6 June 2020. A reference to this letter is made in Abbot Damascene's *The Life and Works of Fr. Seraphim Rose* where Damascene suggests it was merely a draft. The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University acknowledges Abbot Damascene's account of the letter and notes that there is no evidence it was received by Thomas Merton. Nonetheless, the draft letter is valuable in that it provides perspective on what would become a larger debate about Christianity into the 21st century.

³⁹⁸ For more information about the circumstances of Merton's death: Cf. Hugh Turley and David Martin, *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton: An Investigation*, McCabe Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2019.

Thomas Keating: Centering Prayer

The Trappist monk Thomas Keating is best known for developing, along with M. Basil Pennington and William Meninger, what they called Centering Prayer, which is a less strenuous, but still introspective meditative prayer that assists people in their understanding of God's will for their life and the service that they are meant to fulfill within the community. As with Merton, this is the type of spiritual eldership that seeks to unlock an inherent relationality in the prayer of silence and stillness. This is a particularly poignant example in that the basis for this modified form of contemplation they created was based in part on a re-reading of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which follows on from the tradition of solitary prayer most readily identified with the life of Moses and his Sinai ascent. However, the work of Keating, Pennington, and Meninger changed the understanding of how contemplative prayer could look for hundreds of thousands of American Catholics in the post Vatican II era. Keating's 1994 book titled *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* explains his interaction with a Zen Buddhist master, his interest in the Transcendental Meditation techniques found in Hinduism, and his encounters with priests who were burned out from the intense social activism of the 1960s. It should be noted here that in the introduction of the 2019 edition of the same work, Keating, who was formerly the abbot of St. Joseph's Trappist Monastery in Spencer, MA, and the founder of Contemplative Outreach, remarks, "For some time I had wanted to put together a Christian contemplative retreat that would be comparable to a Zen sesshin, with a significant amount of time spent in silent meditation, an experiment that had not been done before in the Christian tradition as far as I was aware."³⁹⁹ In this sentence it is not entirely clear if he was unaware of Orthodox Christian hesychasm or that he meant no one in Christianity had before sought the influence of modes of meditation from the Hindu and Buddhist East.

In the preface of the 2001 edition of his book, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form*, M. Basil Pennington also explains the multiplicity of varied source material for the development of Centering Prayer and the multiple avenues in which it is used (including Alcoholics Anonymous and homeless ministry).

It has not surprised me to see Centering Prayer rapidly find its place in the American Church. Centering Prayer is very much in the spirit of the renewal called forth by the Second Vatican Council. It looks to the Gospels...And to the spirit and aims of our living tradition. If this way of prayer does not go back to Jesus himself and to the Jewish tradition (and I believe it does), it certainly is found in the writings of our earliest spiritual fathers, East and West, Greek and Latin. And it has brought that tradition to today in a simple and practical way that responds to the signs of the times. Charismatic renewal opened us to seek the immediate experience of God. Methods of meditation, coming to us from Eastern Traditions,⁴⁰⁰ opened

³⁹⁹ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer*, Crossroads, 2009, p. xx.

⁴⁰⁰ Here Pennington means the non-Christian East.

us to seek an experience of the Power within. The time was certainly ripe for us to refine our own authentic tradition of contemplative prayer.⁴⁰¹

Notice how Pennington conjoins Centering Prayer with that of the biblical and Patristic periods, the Gospels, the 'Jewish tradition,' the Fathers of East and West, the Charismatic Renewal, methods of meditations in Buddhism and Hinduism, and an experience of the 'Power within.' He makes clear that the purpose of this was to untie prayer and reflection from the more rationalistic concepts of spirituality in the post-Tridentine Catholic Church. The fact of Centering Prayer as an experimentation with other non-Catholic modalities of prayer coupled with its rejection of Medieval Catholic paradigms of spirituality demonstrates a desire to offer Roman Catholics a more relational type of silent prayer. As such, the Centering Prayer founders sought new ways to teach meditative prayer.

In response to the pragmatism of our times, we first set forth the tradition in three simple 'rules.' Even these have been somewhat altered in later usage: Sit relaxed and quiet. (1) Be in faith and love to God who dwells in the center of your being. (2) Take up a love word and let it be gently present supporting your being to God in faith-filled love. (3) Whenever you become aware of anything, simply, gently return to the Lord with the use of your prayer word. After twenty minutes let the Our Father (or some other prayer) pray itself. More briefly, we might put it this way: Be with God within. Use a word to stay. Use the word to return.

Regarding the process itself, take note of the relationality it tries to convey. Notice how it is intended to be therapeutic for the one who prays it and an opportunity to 'return to the Lord'. After a period of about 20 minutes of silence, the intention is to let go and let the silence 'pray itself.' This is not too far from what is understood about praying the Jesus Prayer. Pennington then goes on to explain that Keating went to yet another source to further refine Centering Prayer.

In dialogue with the behavioral sciences of our days, he placed the traditional teaching in the context of the whole 'spiritual journey' and taught the prayer in four guidelines: (1) Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (2) Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (3) When you become aware of anything, return ever so gently to God, using the sacred word. (4) At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.⁴⁰²

While the focus on silence and a love word can be likened to the use of the Jesus Prayer, this type of methodology seems to pull from multiple sources and seeks to help the person spiritually, psychologically, and even physically. While the development of Centering Prayer seems to have come from non-Biblical, non-theological, and non-Christian sources, and embraces the broader

⁴⁰¹ M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form*, Image Reprint, 2001, p. xiv.

⁴⁰² *Ibid*, p. xvi.

spiritual movements in the post-Social Gospel Christianity of late 20th century America, Pennington makes clear in chapter nine of his book that Centering Prayer is meant to emulate the experience of Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration.

If we persevere in this prayer, the enlightening will come. And not only will we come to see the Lord in his glory, but we will even be enveloped in the glory of the Divine, the Taboric Light, and have impressed upon us the very words, or, rather, the fullness of the Word of the Father...*Lectio* is very important in the life of one who centers. It is this meeting with the Lord in his revealed word that motivates us to seek him at the center. Conversely, the experience of God in the center, the cloud of unknowing, awakens in us a desire to know him more intimately, to seek him and knowledge about him in the Revelation. It is a self-enlivening cycle.⁴⁰³

Keating also emphasizes that Centering Prayer is the heir to the Desert Fathers and the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysios, but also informed by, among other groups, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The original monks intuited that a structured lifestyle was not enough for growth in prayer. There had to be added an interior practice... [Centering Prayer] is based primarily on *The Cloud of Unknowing*, but I have incorporated elements... that resonate with... St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal... I lean heavily on the teaching of St. John of the Cross... Throughout the centuries the apophatic tradition has been treated with more or less discretion, sometimes going too far one way, sometimes too far in the opposite direction. We cannot indiscriminately trust any of the spiritual masters... Looking at the tradition, we have to know how to read the Fathers and to bring them into critical relationship with later writers and with modern psychology...The continuing work of the Spirit developing the teaching of the Church on contemplative prayer and the mystical life must now be integrated into this scriptural model revived by the [Catholic] Charismatic Renewal.⁴⁰⁴

While Merton, Keating, and Pennington pushed Catholics away from the austerity of traditional Catholic contemplative prayer, their proposals about eldership and the deep prayer of silence, allowed room for Catholics in the 20th century to begin to understand how to find new ways to hear the inaudible audibility of the uncreated silence Holy Spirit and its intentional relationality. In other words, their moves away from the models found in cloistered life allowed them to provide a type of pastoral care for others, which involved new pathways for discovering the Holy Spirit in silent, still prayer.

Basil Pennington: A Western Monk Goes to Mt. Athos

The Trappist Monk M. Basil Pennington, who is best known for his work in the Catholic Centering Prayer movement, spent time during the 1970s on Mount Athos. His book, *The Monks of Mount Athos: A Western Monk's Extraordinary Spiritual Journey on Eastern Holy Ground*, is a private

⁴⁰³ Ibid, pp. 138-139.

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer*, Crossroads, 2009, pp. 150-155.

journal that reports his experiences, recounts his conversations, and explores the theological, spiritual, and practical differences between Eastern Christian and Western Christian monastic practice. For him, it seems not to have been merely a learning experience but an opportunity to build spiritual relationships among Catholic and Orthodox monks.

While it was not intended, my visit on the Holy Mountain seems to have been a healing thing, a step, however small, in the coming together in love of the separated sister Churches. By this frank and humble sharing, perhaps the healing can be furthered. Mount Athos is the heart of Orthodoxy. Many writers have previously tried to present it to the West. But I do not think that ever before has one from the West been able to so experience it. As a monk who has long lived the monastic life and was allowed to live within the Athonite community for an unprecedented period of time, I have been able to acquire a specially intimate acquaintance with life on the Holy Mountain.⁴⁰⁵

It is possible to interpret Pennington's request, and subsequent visit, to Athos as a response to an experience of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit; a Pneumatological call to reach out in love in order to better understand his counterparts in the Orthodox Church. By allowing such a visit, monks from the East enabled an opportunity to better understand their counterparts in the Catholic Church, too. Archimandrite Dionysios wrote about the time Basil spent with him and the other monks on Athos:

It is a divine gift for someone to be able to use, which means to sacrifice, his time. We human beings are afraid to sacrifice a glance, a word, a thought, a visit, a sojourn, and act of communication, a meeting, a reference, an expectation, indeed an 'eager learning (Romans 8:19' for the Holy Spirit or for the other person emerging out of the abyss (Psalm 41:7) of his own being. We calculate the time for everything myopically, regardless of what is in our interest eternally. Yet Father Basil, in this aforementioned quest of his, did not hesitate to leave his writings; the monasteries he had all over the world; his spiritual children and his disciples; his lectures and books; his serene life at Spencer Abbey, where he had gathered together the stones with his own hands like St. Pachomius, laid foundations and raised up the monastery together with his disciple monks, showing it forth as the largest and most dynamic Roman Catholic community in America, in order to come to the Holy Mountain for such a long period of time. He aimed to cast off every interior impediment in order to seize (Matt. 11:12) any heavenly message.⁴⁰⁶

This quote is rather indicative, again, of what it is meant by the calling of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit. These kinds of relational spiritualities that emerge from Pneumatological apophatic experiences lead to a person to act in a new way. Notice here the language used by Dionysios: he is explaining how Basil went deep inside of prayer to discover that the Holy Spirit was calling him to Mt. Athos, laying aside every activity that had occupied his time as a monk, an abbot, a writer, a speaker, a teacher, and a retreat director. Then, while there, opened his interior mind and heart to

⁴⁰⁵ M. Basil Pennington, *The Monks of Mount Athos: A Western Monk's Extraordinary Spiritual Journey on Eastern Holy Ground*, Nashville, TN: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003, p. xxxvi.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. xiii.

further silent speaking of the Holy Spirit to build a bridge between two communities, two monasteries, two Churches that have been out of communion with each other for centuries. These prayers and actions are not entirely different than what happened at Pentecost. In other words, the divine audiation was heard, understood, and acted upon. Just as Seraphim of Sarov told his spiritual son, Basil stopped praying and started following the ineffable words of the Holy Spirit.

What Pennington expresses in the whole book reflects Dionysios' sentiments and reflects this thesis at multiple levels. First, that each monk in his own monastery (before coming together) experienced a relationship with God and his fellow monks. Second, he is saying that when they came together on Athos, they built a relationship together in the Spirit. Third, when Pennington attended Orthodox services, he built a spiritual relationship with the other monks present. Fourth, when returning to the US, he was able to share his spiritual relationship with the monks on Athos with the monks in his own monastery. Fifth, they in turn shared with others. Finally, when Pennington published his book, he was able to share his experiences with even more people. As simple as all that may sound, it is a clear example of listening to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit urging Pennington to go forward in a relationship, and then relating it to others as a form of pastoral work. And all of it comes from sharing in an apophatic relationality both with the Holy Spirit and with the other monks spiritually. To be clear, this kind of listening, understanding, and taking action through the unspoken words of the Spirit is what this thesis is about. What comes next is a concluding statement about what has been written, what has been learned, and what comes next.

Conclusion – The Relational World of Uncreated Silence

First, a summary of what has been presented. In chapter one, I focused on: (1) the origin of the idea of the uncreated silence, which was derived from a concerned question about the practice of hesychastic solitude by Tomáš Špidlík whose work was brought into conversation with Zacharias Zacharou; (2) an Orthodox Christian Pneumatological solution to Špidlík's criticism based on the accounts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the Pneumatology of Basil of Caesarea, the musical concept of audiation, and the experience of Seraphim of Sarov; and (3) an explanation of uncreated silence as an apophatic relationality using the works of Christos Yannaras and Max Picard.

In chapter two, I focused on: (1) uncreated silence as a spiritual relationality, (2) Orthodox Christian eldership, (3) the Father-Confessor relationship and the healing aspect of the sacrament of Confession, (4) abuse in spiritual relationships, (5) relational models in the biblical accounts of Mary, Peter, Paul, and John; (6) the Patristic, monastic relational models of parent-child, doctor-patient, teacher-student, elder-disciple; and (7) the relationality of eldership in Symeon the New Theologian.

In chapter three, I focused on a select group of Orthodox and Catholic spiritual guides in the West generally and America specifically during the 20th and 21st centuries, including: (1) Kallistos Ware as a spiritual father of English-speaking Orthodoxy; (2) Gavrilia Papayannis as a Greek Orthodox spiritual mother who travelled to dozens of countries healing people of foot and leg pain, and praying with them regardless of their background; (3) Maria Skobtsova as a Russian Orthodox spiritual mother who cared for refugees in France during World War II and was martyred for it; (4) Sophrony Sakharov as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who wrote about his visions of Jesus and encouraged the broad use of the Jesus Prayer; (5) Ephraim Moraitis as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father who opened 17 monasteries in the United States and Canada; (6) John Maximovitch as a Russian Orthodox spiritual father who was bishop in many places, including San Francisco; (7) Gerasimos Papadopoulos as a Greek Orthodox spiritual father in Boston; (8) Seraphim Rose who some consider to be the first spiritual father who was an American convert to the Orthodox Church; (9) monks of the Charterhouse of the Transfiguration as the only Carthusian enclave in the United States; (10) Thomas Merton as an American Catholic monk, spiritual guide, and writer; (11) Thomas Keating as an American Catholic monk who co-founded the centering prayer movement, which is a contemporary method of contemplative prayer made accessible for lay people; and (12) Basil Pennington as an American Catholic monk who was a co-creator of centering prayer and spent time with the Orthodox monks of Mt. Athos.

Second, a summary of what has been learned. In the end, I have made an original contribution to Orthodox theology by discerning, naming, and defining uncreated silence as an energy of God that is primarily related to the spiritual sense of hearing. I have proposed a new

aspect of mystical prayer by explaining how the Holy Spirit ‘speaks’ with a person or people and devised a new way of thinking about discernment. I have shown the experience of uncreated silence is related to the environment of spiritual guidance, which is partly identifiable with the Orthodox elder-disciple tradition. I have also shown it as an aspect of the sacrament of Confession. But I have also testified that it can and does happen elsewhere. I explained that uncreated silence offers a chance to create ministerial environments that are psychologically healthy, spiritually edifying, and relationship building. I demonstrated through the examples of elders and religious leaders that these were people who learned, listened, changed, and helped others in the process. I even gave examples of spiritual elders who seemed to have helped people in one way and then damaged them in another. I wrote about uncreated silence in a manner employing language that may not be expected; for example, by introducing the word *audiation* as a means of thinking about the speech of the Holy Spirit. I also wrote about uncreated silence using language that would be expected. For example, using the pneumatology of Basil the Great. In each section, I continually tried to explain how all these elements fit by cross referencing theologians, spiritual leaders, and my own thinking on the subject. In all this, I never lost site of the need to provide a solution to an accusation about the lack of charity in hesychasm while simultaneously defending hesychastic prayer and offering a new aspect of it. In other words, I offered a new development in the understanding of silent prayer as a question and provided a solution in *uncreated silence* as a possibility for a diversity of directionality in discernment. As such, I have allowed this thesis to be heavily informed by the experience of prayer, the desirable necessity of spiritual relationships, Pneumatology, apophatic theology, and spiritual theology.

I admit that this question and the proposed hypothesis regarding Pneumatologically-based spirituality and the apophatic relationality therein could have been pursued from many different angles, ranging from a study of every aspect of spiritual fatherhood to the differences between spiritual fatherhood and motherhood, the experience of the spiritual disciple, or a thesis only about prayer or apophatic theology. It could have included a comparison of Greek and Slavic differences. It could have built a stark contrast with secular models of self-help, and it could have simply promoted the long tradition of hesychastic silence as the ‘pure’ mode by which all Orthodox should view spirituality. It could have been brought into a conversation with the history of the Great Schism, the Reformation, the Renaissance, or a long study of hesychia and psychology. It could have contrasted silence with the Pentecostal speaking in tongues. Whatever it could have been, it is not a subject that is easily exhausted. On the contrary, this will become a source of research for generations to come in that I have presented something that is not only new, but also in need of further exploration and refinement. Nevertheless, there should be enough in the present study to substantiate the

differences between a purely hesychastic understanding of Orthodox prayer and eldership, which is based in the uncreated light of the Transfiguration, and a broader understanding of prayer and spiritual relationships based in the uncreated silence of Pentecost. This is especially evident in how this concept of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit as an apophatic relationality provides a strong connection between the development of theology, the practice of eldership, the influence of spirituality, and the acts of prayer and pastoral work. At the same time, there is great value in this proposal for the many religious who are committed to working with the spiritual, psychological, intellectual, relational, physical, and even socio-political and cultural needs of Christians and non-Christians all over the world. It seems that in our present age, these activities are a type of precursor to the deeper spiritual work each Christian is called to do. At best, this theory can situate people in a new paradigm of greater stability in Christian spiritual relationships, taking better care of their basic psychological and spiritual needs so as to lead them toward a greater sense of Christian stability. At least, the theory of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit simply proves that silent prayer in solitude is neither a sin of inverse access nor a chosen ignorance towards the needs of others. In fact, it is the opportunity for the openness of the Holy Spirit to lead a person from prayer to more prayer; or prayer that leads to more pastoral work. Put another way, this thesis is the formalized description of the one trunk (silence), two-branch (more prayer or greater pastoral works) theory of silence that reflects the experience and lessons of Pentecost. This becomes even more applicable when I consider the situation of Orthodoxy in the West, especially in the United States, where it is still immature.

Regarding the American context, it was made clear in this study that Orthodox elders have existed there, but few and far between. Moriatis, Papadopoulos, and Maximovitch were elders from Orthodox countries who came to America to serve, while Rose was a convert to Orthodoxy who became what some consider to be the first American-born, convert spiritual elder. The challenge with examining his life in this regard is how to interpret his apparent fundamentalism given his background, his relationship with Elder Ephraim, and his demands against any and all forms of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, as well as his insistence on extreme forms of asceticism. This is why I specifically chose to highlight the controversies surrounding his two most widely read books: *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* and *The Soul After Death*. These forays into some of the more important existential issues facing Christians in America in the mid-20th century seem not thus far left behind. In an ever-globalized world, it is getting clearer that forces of fundamentalism and progressivism are fighting it out and Christians of all stripes are confused about how to deal with it. For my part, I choose the deepening of an understanding of prayer and spirituality.

Therefore, the criticisms of Špidlík and others regarding hesychastic silence cannot be supported whether from the Biblical, Patristic, theological, or spiritual perspectives. This is especially true when the hesychastic paradigm of the search for the uncreated light of Christ in the Transfiguration is placed in closer proximity to the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost. It is also confirmed here that to pray with silence and stillness properly, consistently, and continuously, it takes both the guidance of an elder who also has prayed this way and the practitioner's willingness to be transfigured by the experience. In a manner, this study was a descent from assumptions held about eldership and prayer, and an ascent based on a new understanding and experience of lived faith and the truths derived from an academic process that demanded a deconstruction of Orthodox eldership into a theology, spirituality, and ministry, which gave way to a type of dialogue – for the sake of answering a question asked decades ago that was never sufficiently answered. Thus, the questions asked and answered here affirmed that an apophatic relationality lies at the center of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual relationality that people hold with each other. What comes to mind here are some of the famous Christian spiritual relationships of all time like Symeon and Symeon, Seraphim and Motovilov, Bruno and the Carthusians; even the illusive relationship that can be found between Seraphim Rose and Thomas Merton. Each of these examples reveals the connection between the role of silence, in their own lives and the lives of those they touched, and the discovery of the limitless possibilities of the spiritual relationality of the uncreated silence of the Holy Spirit either by continuing in solitary prayer or going forward into deep pastoral work.

Third, a summary of what comes next. My initial thought here is about whether there will be an affirmation or a declination of the idea of uncreated silence and its application in prayer and spiritual companionship. It seems logical, at least from an Orthodox perspective, to support and verify such a theological development, not so much in terms of it being a contemporary advancement, but as a naturally occurring spiritual reality that both answers a criticism and provides a new way of looking at the call to and meaning of pastoral work. Regarding this, here I offer a simple question from an article in *The Word Magazine*: "Where is that beautiful silence? 'Seek and ye shall find.'"⁴⁰⁷ Uncreated silence *is* that beautiful silence.

Thus, my secondary thought is about how the development of uncreated silence will impact further study of apophatic theology. There is so much more to open up here by using Yannaras to judge Picard. Another intriguing possibility is a volume on Picard and Pseudo-Dionysios, given Picard's descriptions of the many worlds of silence and his use of the metaphor regarding flight from

⁴⁰⁷ Joseph J. Allen, "Silence that Screams," *The Word Magazine*. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, April 1969.

God. There is also much ground to be gained for ecumenical dialogue by (1) comparing hesychasm and Carthusian spirituality, (2) comparing Symeon the New Theologian and Bruno of Cologne, and (3) contrasting Merton and Rose, especially given the 1,700-year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. What further can be learned about spiritual relationships and the prayer that lies at the center of them? What more can come from uncreated silence? In the end, while Špidlík's criticism was a vital question for the 20th century, uncreated silence is a dynamic solution for the 21st. That is why questions of spiritual companionship and prayer will be fertile ground for additional research in the simultaneously Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and American contexts.

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