

NEOEVANGELISM: AN ANCIENT PRACTICE REDISCOVERED

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INTRODUCTION

For many Episcopalians and members of other mainline churches, “evangelism” is a word that can end a conversation abruptly. It is a well-known but loaded word. A certain angst emerges from its close ties to evangelicalism and evangelical denominations, which have different practices from the Episcopal Church. Trouble also arises for some Episcopalians who believe that faith is a private matter and who feel that personal devotion and worship are something that one can practice as one sees fit. What and how people worship is not a topic for discussion, and so they shy away from evangelism. Perhaps Episcopalians’ opinion of evangelism is best surmised by what the current Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said at the 2016 Evangelism Matters Conference: “Episcopalians need not take Excedrin before saying the word evangelism.”¹ His encouragement is noteworthy.

In this thesis, I will review some of the historical factors from the 18th century forward that influence the views regarding evangelism held by many of today’s Episcopalians and others. Such factors include the rise and fall of colonialism and the rise of individualism, which shaped the way people living in the twentieth-century viewed religion. As a result, for instance, for the many who were born in Christian nations, church membership was no longer a birthright but rather became an individual choice. As more people lived outside the church and seemed to get on successfully, the old arguments for God and church, like God shows special protection and blessings for his

¹ Michael Curry, “Sermon for Conference Eucharist: Tell the Love of Jesus and Say, ‘He Died for All,’” YouTube LLC, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9Br9E05LYA> (July 19, 2017).

followers, weakened. The church responded with new ones, but they were challenged by philosophers and social commentators.

I will also examine the different philosophical arguments and their responses by religious leaders. For example, at first, the responses to the philosophical and social challenges were addressed by preachers and evangelists, charismatic leaders who often filled tents and even stadiums with people wondering about Christianity. Their sermons and addresses were informed by theological study that examined the biblical and historical nature and key features of evangelism.

Despite the efforts of preachers and evangelists, the decline in Christianity's importance in America and Europe continued. Toward the end of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first, theologians, including William J. Abraham, David Gortner, Elaine Heath, and Bryan Stone, began to propose new approaches to evangelism.

I will recap their arguments, explaining the way their new concepts state that evangelism could stand on its own. These scholars and others argue that previous views conflated evangelism, conversion, and church growth and clouded the importance of evangelism by itself. Although the three are related and influence each other, evangelism is a separate activity with a separate purpose, namely, evangelism can be a part of a Christian's formation, helping them to mature and reach new heights of spiritual growth.

In this new light, evangelism can be discernably identifiable, and its new focus is the evangelists. While intersecting at some point with the conversion process, the work of evangelism is more about people sharing their stories of encounters with God and the

Holy² and less about converting another person. Additionally, while the influence of the evangelists on non-Christians may be an essential step along the conversion journey, the real and powerful impact of sharing one's faith story begins to emerge. Once separated from conversion, evangelism becomes a spiritual discipline. By it, Christians may grow in faith and devotion to God, and it may become a pinnacle of spiritual growth and faith formation.

I will also explore the major motivations twentieth-century evangelists used. The separation of evangelism from conversion and church growth brings the motivation of evangelists into focus. In the nineteenth century and earlier, evangelists sought to win souls for God, stealing them away from Satan or the materialistic world. Later, the motivation was an appeal to duty: "Go and make more Christians" was the evangelist's job. The seemingly coercive nature of such evangelical actions became unappealing for many and has been ineffective in reversing the decline. As a result, a more subtle motivation emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, namely, with evangelists acting as examples of Christ's love for non-Christians. Christians went into the world to change people's mindset not coercively through arguments or verbal appeals but rather by showing them the Good News through Christian acts. Even so, these different motivations did not stop the decline in numbers of Christians in America, nor did they increase the number of Christians actively evangelizing. The motivational piece was not working.

² For an explanation of the concept "God and the Holy," see Appendix A.

In a highly individualistic society, coercive approaches to evangelism and mere appeals to duty do not seem to inspire many Christians, and especially Episcopalians, to acts of evangelism. My findings will show that when such Christians are given the opportunity to share their experiences of God and the Holy, it not only validates their experiences, unlocking their spirituality but also motivates them to share those experiences with others, including non-Christians. In this thesis, I will explain the evangelistic method that focuses on the individual's experience of God and the Holy, invigorating Christians to evangelism. Evangelism can be an experience that may inspire ordinary Episcopalians toward personal spiritual growth and faith formation. Along with others from similar denominations, they may change their private mindset about faith and unlock their spirituality.

In his address to the 2016 Evangelism Matters Conference, Bishop Curry stated that evangelism “is something deeply old. It’s a call to go back to who we are.”³ Instead of tweaking current approaches to evangelism, a careful exegesis of the biblical stories found in Acts might reveal a different form of evangelism. In chapters 9 and 10 in the Acts of the Apostles, both Paul and Peter had experiences of God and the Holy. Each of them—one on the road to Damascus and the other on a rooftop in Joppa—had an encounter that led them to evangelism. Christian history also reveals other figures who had encounters that invigorated them to evangelism. These biblical and historical accounts show how today’s Christians can be propelled by experiences of God and the Holy into acts of evangelism. The result is a step away from the traditional twentieth-century understanding of evangelism with its conflation with conversion and church

³ Curry, “Tell the Love of Jesus and Say, ‘He Died for All.’”

growth. It also affirms, however, evangelism as a spiritual practice, leading to faith formation at a high level. It may also reconnect the Church to an old form of evangelism drawing on experiences shared person to person that could help invigorate today's Christians, including Episcopalians, to evangelize. Evangelism thus becomes highly relational and individualistic done by ordinary Christians.

This new form of evangelism builds on the recent scholarly focus on evangelist and responds to individualism through the personal experience of the individual, which is a highly valued truth in today's culture.

Influences Shaping the Paper and Project

My personal story shapes my interest and influences the work of this thesis. I am a person who has had several mystical experiences. For instance, when I was a pre-teen, I stood outside one summer's night, I stretched out my arms, and a voice quietly said, "Jesus." I turned around to see who spoke and even poked around in some bushes, but I was alone. I did not think much of the experience until years later when I was exploring my call to the priesthood. That late-night encounter helped me see where God was at work in my life, which fit with other experiences of mine, creating stepping stones that helped me to ordination.

I also heard a voice at another time. In seminary, the voice returned as I quietly sat alone in my home and gave me a gentle affirmation that I was on the right path and was qualified to be a priest. At other times, I have been brought to tears in prayer. The tears were not the result of a release at the remembering of a repressed experience but rather something ineffable. In one instance, while another person prayed with me, tears

fell from my cheeks, splashing on our clasped hands. At other times, they also came about as I read scripture passages that spoke to me deeply and touched my soul.

I have also had prayers answered in profound ways that I cannot fully explain. Once, during a difficult time in my ministry, I asked God for a sign of support. Later that day, I began an impromptu conversation with a cashier at a department store (not something I typically did). I was hundreds of miles from my home and never had met the woman before, but our brief encounter answered both our prayers. She was worried about her twenty-one-year-old son, who had just left for seminary—the same one that I had attended. I reassured her that, even though he was far away and living in a city for the first time, he was in good hands. I interpreted our interaction as a divine assurance that I was on the right path, whatever it might be.

Today I am a priest who strongly believes that evangelism is a spiritual discipline that Episcopalians desperately need. In the dozen places where I have worked in ministry, I have regularly encountered people who have had experiences of God and the Holy. For example, one Sunday morning at the coffee hour after a church service at which I had preached about spiritual practices, a woman in her sixties approached me. In a hushed tone, she told me that she had had an experience of the Holy while walking in nature that changed her understanding of God. She then asked me if I had read Ilia Delio's work, and I said that I had. She smiled and then described her encounter. I asked her if she had spoken to anyone else at the church about it. She said she had mentioned it once or twice, people had looked at her strangely, and so she never brought it up again. She then spoke to me about the author, mentioning that she had gone to a few of her lectures.

Conversations with the woman and with others have been the seeds from which emerged the project for this thesis.

Another aspect of my ministry influenced the work of this paper. As a teacher, I have seen the power of education to help students learn and transform their lives. I have taught religion to hundreds of high school students and overtime seen them go through a process that involves several steps. The students begin a semester with a heightened anxiousness. Those who are unfamiliar with or suspicious of religion are notably more defensive than others. Over the next few weeks, however, the students become comfortable with each other and the material, because they feel the class is a safe place to challenge their assumption about religion. Most but not all of them overcome their defensiveness. As they learn more about the religious topics covered, most begin to think differently and with more sophistication. The process of change that works in the classroom should also work with adult participants learning about mystical experiences.

Additionally, the places where I conducted my project workshop influenced the results of the project. I was known to the leaders of the five churches whom I approached about hosting workshops. Only two of them, however, could recruit enough people to form a workshop group. The difference seemed partly to be due to the attitude and enthusiasm of the clergy who were recruiting participants. For example, in addition to her ministry at the church, one was also a spiritual director. The other two, who served together, knew of several people from the congregation who would be good fits for the workshop. These clergy had a good sense regarding which of their parishioners were more open to the topic of mystical experiences. At the churches that did not form groups, the priests made a general appeal to the congregation, but only one or two people

expressed interest or some people were interested but did not want to make time. The other factor influencing the recruitment was the way in which the workshops were advertised. At the two churches that formed groups, the workshop was advertised as a study of mystical experiences, including their own. At the two churches that did not, the description stated the workshop would teach about mystical experiences and those attending were not required to have had a mystical experience.

Finally, during the recruitment phase for one group, one of churches hired me. Although no one expressly stated it, my arrival as senior pastor likely influenced his or her decision to join. Additionally, clergy support and their familiarity with the congregations seemed to make the workshops more successful.

The effects of these influences were several. My personal experience made me hopeful that the workshop would have a positive outcome. It also gave me confidence in preparing interesting content and trying to foster an awareness of the process of spiritual change. Both influenced my perception of the workshop's material. In addition, the participants had either an affinity for the material or a familiarity with the instructor that helped lower anxiety and defensiveness. From a social sciences point of view, these influences represented biases, and my recognition of them was necessary in bracketing my work as a researcher.⁴

⁴ I use the terms "biases" and "bracketing" in a social science context. Both April Morgan in *Investigating Our Experience in the World: A Primer on Qualitative Inquiry* and John Creswell in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* explain that a researcher should bracket out or explain his or her biases and personal experiences upfront when examining other peoples' experiences.

Structure of the Thesis

In this study, I will explore the possibility of spiritual change and its effect on evangelism. It starts with a review of the antireligious arguments of philosophers and cultural commentators that create the lens through which present-day cultural tenets are understood. I then evaluate the theologies of evangelism, starting with the nineteenth century. Beginning with an exegesis of two mystical experiences from the Acts of the Apostles, I identify the features of mystical experiences. I then explore the facets of change and relate them to spiritual change. I comprehensively describe the workshop's development, people, and content. Finally, I examine the workshops through four separate analyses. The paper ends with a discussion of outcomes and ways forward.

In Chapter One, the story of evangelism takes on a vivid image through the work of the evangelist Billy Graham. Through his many crusades all over the world, Graham brought tens of thousands to Christ. Despite his and others' efforts, however, Christianity has steadily declined in America and Western Europe, and powerful forces are still undermining the efforts of the great evangelists of the last century. Some scholars claim the cause of the decline has been in part due to the anti-Christian views, which started with the Enlightenment, argued by some philosophers and other social commentators. At the chapter's conclusion, I will begin to argue for a new form of evangelism that addresses contemporary criticism of Christianity, not with biblical verse but with the experiences of early church leaders.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the theology of evangelism. To understand evangelism, one must know that it is not the same thing as conversion. After reviewing the process by which contemporary theologians have separated the two, I explore the history of the

theology of evangelism over the last 150 years. Because evangelism has been closely tied to biblical scripture, I also examines four theological veins of evangelistic motivation through the use of the Bible. Many biblical verses illustrate concepts of evangelism that may well motivate Christians to evangelize. For instance, Bishop Curry used the Parable of the Sower as an example of a motivation for evangelism.⁵ The four veins explored in this chapter capture the broadest range of biblically-based evangelism. After a critique of each vein, I end the chapter by arguing for a different approach.

In Chapter Three, I explore the new approach to evangelism. Regardless of people's motivation for evangelism, it is still a religious experience. I start with an examination of the nature of religious experience and then establish mystical experiences as a classification of religious experience. I argue for a broad understanding of the experience of God and the Holy. Medieval writers focused on mysticism as a process, moving from simple experiences that illuminate God's presence and work in the world to the unification of the soul and the divine. One downside to this process is that it may cheapen the value of many mystical experiences in favor of the unitive experience. Regardless of intensity and type, all mystical experiences have the potential to motivate people to change their mindset and behavior.

Once the importance of mystical experiences has been established, a reevaluation of biblical material produces a new and exciting avenue for evangelism. The Damascus Road experience is not simply about a change of heart for Paul but is also a catalyst through which he evangelizes the Gentiles. The same holds true for Peter. Peter's vision on the rooftop in Joppa is not simply about a change of mindset about food laws. Instead,

⁵ Curry, "Tell the Love of Jesus and Say, 'He Died for All.'"

it is his validation and motivation to evangelize, starting at Cornelius's house. If Peter has had a mystical experience, then perhaps his letters show a mystical theology that points the Church toward a new mystical understanding of itself—as building blocks and a royal priesthood, for example. Both men's experiences demonstrate a motivation for evangelism not employed by many evangelist today.

I end Chapter Three by following the thread of mystical experience and evangelism through history. Mysticism has never been on the forefront of Christian thinking. Some argue that its uncontrollability unsettles Church leaders who value orthodoxy and that its esoteric nature makes it untrustworthy. Orthodoxy aside, however, mystical experiences show God at work in real, tangible ways with which many Christians can easily identify. What is also remarkable is the variety of experiences. While some avenues (e.g. the classic American revival meeting) lend themselves to mystical experiences, no single type of encounter defines the experience God and the Holy. The stories of mystical experiences told as personal accounts and cherished by many for centuries are sources of inspiration for other Christians to follow in their footsteps.

In Chapter Four, I identify the features of spiritual change. Mystical experiences and evangelism may be good partners, but if people's view of evangelism remains as it is, few will become involved with it. For evangelism to occur, people must change their mindsets. After a review of the complexities of change I go on to identify the principles of spiritual change as outlined by the sixteenth-century Spanish Discalced Carmelites and mystics Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross, and other mystics. Next, I merge the two,

ending with a discussion of how changing people's stories or their experiences of God and the Holy changes their identity and their concept of themselves as evangelists.

Chapter Five outlines the workshop's development, people, and process. It explains the nuts and bolts of the workshop and illustrates its goals in action. The workshop seeks to show people undergoing spiritual change that led them to evangelize. Through a combination of short lectures, discussions in twos or threes, and plenary sessions, the workshop gives participants the opportunity to examine and even change their mindsets about their mystical experiences and evangelism.

In Chapter Six, I analyze the data drawn from the workshops, using written transcripts of the workshops, surveys, and email responses of the participants. From the available social science analytical tools, four different analytical methods are used, including Kirkpatrick's learning program evaluation method, grounded theory and phenomenological analyses, and a mixed-method approach. Kirkpatrick's method looks at the overall success of the workshop and applies four levels of assessments to determine the kind and degree of change that the workshop has produced. Grounded theory approach names the process of change, using both a diagram of the process and a descriptive analysis of the workshops' transcripts. Using the technique of memoing, the analysis produces a four-step process of change that has a wider application as a theory explaining spiritual change. The phenomenological analysis investigates two moments of change that occurred during the workshop, using significant statements and formulated meanings. Several themes emerge from the analysis that explain the way in which change works when participants speak about sharing their experience with each other and with non-participants. The themes successfully describe who evangelizes and who does not.

They also give insight regarding the reactions of the non-participants who listened to the participants. Finally, a mixed-method study confirms the breadth of diversity of the participants' mystical experiences.

I conclude the thesis with a discussion of outcomes, an identification of questions needing further exploration, and a statement about neoevangelism. The layers of research produced several important outcomes. Most importantly, Episcopalians can indeed evangelize but need tools that work for them. Sharing mystical experiences is a biblically-based approach that seems appropriate for today's highly individualized culture. While my workshops produced positive results, additional testing is needed and many questions are still to be answered. We need to find out if it is a sustainable practice or something participants will do only once. Neoevangelism seems to be a promising way for Episcopalians in today's culture to share their faith. It may be the right catalyst for our time. At the least it can show Episcopalians and others a way to connect to the deep and ancient roots of evangelism referred to by Bishop Curry.

CHAPTER ONE

Evangelism and Culture in Twenty-First-Century America

Eyewitness to an Altar Call

The July/August 2005 issue of The Episcopal New Yorker published my article about Billy Graham's June 2005 crusade in Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens, New York. The article attempts to translate the crusade into language understandable to Episcopalians. Leading up to the crusade, I was trained by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association as a supervisor of altar call counselors. I reported on my experiences during the altar call while I stood just below Graham in an area where people were coming forward to respond to his call to accept Christ as Savior. From my vantage point, I had a clear view of what was happening and, moments after I took my spot, was surrounded by thousands of people.

The article mentions an interaction between a counselor named Joseph and me. He had been standing near me when Graham alerted those who had come forward that there were counselors available to give them material and guide them through the next steps. "With wonderment and happiness," Joseph spoke to me about his conversation with "an Italian-American, just like him." He said that "he was surprised by how much the man wanted to open up to him and was elated by what he had just experienced." He wondered "how he had been matched with a man of such similar experiences in a sea of people."

The purpose of my article is to show Episcopalians the similarities between Episcopal theology and milieu and that of the crusade. My experience, however, also showed me evangelism at work. In his Saturday night message, “The End of the World,” Graham drew on the story of Noah and spoke about the imminent end of the world—“not the earth but the world system.”⁶ In his soft-spoken tone, he expressed an urgency similar to that used by Jonathan Edwards in his eighteenth-century evangelism sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Graham sparked a fire in his listeners, stating, “You come to this crusade expecting to live many more years, but you don’t know. This may be the last day of your life.”⁷ His pitch for souls continued with a call to act immediately because “we are going to die” and “we are going to be divided. Some are going to be eternally lost and some eternally saved.”⁸ His call action was to confess Christ as Savior.

Graham informed the thousands of people who had responded to his message just below the stage about the gift that the counselors were prepared to provide. Like all the counselors, Joseph had in his hands a set of material for the “inquirer” nearest him. He gave his inquirer a copy of the Gospel of John, along with a pamphlet that explained how sin had created a gap between humans and God. Further, in order for humans to reestablish a relationship with God, there was a debt to be paid; Christ had paid that debt on the cross. Based on classic atonement theology, the pamphlet also explained that, to become Christian, one had to acknowledge his or her sinfulness and Christ’s saving act.

6 Billy Graham, “The End of the World (Part 1),” (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 2005), <https://billygraham.org/audio/the-end-of-the-world-part-1-2/> (September 12, 2016).

7 Graham, “The End of the World (Part 1).”

8 Graham, “The End of the World (Part 1).”

Over the course of three days, thousands of people heard Graham’s message. Official figures estimated that more than 242,000 people had come to the crusade. “An average of nearly 2,800 individuals responded at each meeting to Graham’s invitation to come forward and make a commitment to Christ.”⁹ His work saved more than 10,000 souls over three days. He started each message with a prayer as tens of thousands of people quietly prayed in silence in the heart of one of America’s largest cities.

Over the course of his career, Graham’s numbers are even more impressive. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association states, “Graham has preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—nearly 215 million people in more than 185 countries and territories.”¹⁰ It also notes, “Hundreds of millions more have been reached through television, video, film, and webcasts.”¹¹ His charisma and the skills of his organization let him touch the lives of several generations of people throughout the world.

Why did Graham come to New York City when he was in his mid-eighties? What was his motivation? He based his work on one of the classic biblical evangelism statements of the New Testament. His profile on the Association’s website states, “Evangelist Billy Graham took Christ literally when He said in Mark 16:15, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’” In that verse, Graham received a commandment from Jesus to evangelize.

9 DEMOSS, “242,000 Gather in New York for Billy Graham’s Final Crusade,” (DEMOSS, Atlanta, GA, 2005), <https://demoss.com/newsrooms/bgea/news/242000-gather-in-new-york-for-billy-grahams-final-crusade> (September 12, 2016).

10 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. “Billy Graham Profile,” (Charlotte, NC: BGEA, n.d.), <https://billygraham.org/about/biographies/billygraham> (September 13, 2016).

11 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Before critiquing Graham's work, three important statements need to be highlighted. Like other great evangelists, Graham affirmed the personhood and personal nature of God, who actively interacts with people. He stated that God cares for people and seeks ways to draw people closer to Him. Graham also noted that God, however, does not coerce people into following him. He affirmed that God respects people's autonomy, giving them the choice to follow Him or not. Lastly, Graham's organization works relied on local Christians to become counselors, like Joseph. It trained counselors, teaching them the appropriate way to interact with people. Without his training, Joseph would not have known what to say and how to act with the person he met. His training was critical for him to grow as an evangelist, laying the foundation for his own spiritual growth.

Building on evangelistic approaches emerging from Graham's work, two additional themes emerge. Graham's evangelism affirms the interaction of a personal god with people. Graham calls upon his listener to self-examination through which people realize their dissatisfaction with life they can only escape from through God's saving action. God saves them personally. The process Graham describes is rooted in his interaction with God during a time when he attended a revival. Graham's evangelism is also founded in proclamation. Graham's proclamation is fueled by his experience with God. While the method of proclamation used in my workshop is different than Graham's approach, both tap into the same source, namely, the encounter of God and the Holy.

An Emerging Portrait of the Churchless or “Nones”

In spite of all of Mr. Graham’s work and the efforts of the other great American evangelists of the twentieth century, Christianity has not been growing in America. Most denominations have experienced declines. Ones with numerical increases are usually the result of transfers.¹² In addition, a new category in the measurement of religiosity has emerged, called the churchless or the “nones.”¹³ Research illustrates a significant shift in the state of Christianity in America over the last century that has accelerated since 1945.

Several researchers clearly illustrate the picture of American religiosity. In their book *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, George Barna and David Kinnaman examine the trends in religion and secular culture and the rise of the churchless. The Pew Research Center and the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College have also studied the current picture of religion in the United States and made their own conclusions about the “nones.” In *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones*, Elizabeth Drescher adds more color to the religious landscape emerging today through a careful study of the “nones” in the United States.

First, a significant shift in religion has been underway in America for many years. The Barna Group’s research illustrates a rise of the number of people who are churchless, defined as those not attending a religious service other than for a wedding or a funeral in

12 George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Austin, TX: Tyndale, 2014), 9. See also Michael Lipka, “10 Facts About Religion in America,” (Pew Research Center, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/27/10-facts-about-religion-in-america> (November 5, 2017).

13 Researchers use different terms to describe those who are unaffiliated with a religious organization. The two main names for this group are churchless or “Nones.” Churchless is used more by Christian religious researchers and “Nones” by secular researchers. The term “Nones” results from the answer to the question regarding religious affiliation that this group answers by marking the box next to “Nones.”

the last six months. Barna and Kinnaman report, “In the early 1990s, about three out of ten adults were churchless.” By 2014, the number was 43%.¹⁴ In the Barna studies, the churchless include two groups: the dechurched, who were once but are no longer active in church, and the purely unchurched, who do not attend and have never attended a church.¹⁵ While there have always been those who do not participate in religion, the current trend shows either a new openness and comfort toward identifying as religiously unaffiliated or an increasing affinity toward no religious affiliation.

The Pew Research Center confirms the Barna Group’s measurements. The Center’s findings, however, do not paint as dire a picture. A survey conducted in 2014 found “the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining while the numbers of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing.”¹⁶ Moreover, its research states the changes are occurring across the country, with respect to ethnicity, race, and ages, although the trend is more pronounced among young adults.¹⁷ But an analysis of the study concludes, “Among the roughly three-quarters of U.S. adults who do claim a religion, there has been no discernible drop in most measures of religious commitment,” meaning, in 2014 of the 187.3 million American adults who describe themselves as religiously affiliated, 65.5% indicate religion is very important, which was a 1% increase from 2007.¹⁸ Does this indicate that the floor has been found? Will the

14 Barna and Kinnaman, 9.

15 Barna and Kinnaman, vii.

16 Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life. “America’s Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow,” (Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape> (September 14, 2016).

17 Ibid.

18 Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life. “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious,” (Pew Research Center, November 3, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious> (September 14, 2016).

declines continue, or have the declines in church attendance and religiosity stabilized? It is too soon to make firm statements regarding the trend's continuation or stoppage.

In support of the Barna and Pew findings, a 2013 survey conducted by the Center for Inquiry,¹⁹ which partnered with the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College,²⁰ finds “thirty-three percent of [a national sample of four-year college and university students] answered ‘none’ to the question ‘What is your religion, if any?’”²¹ Principal investigator Barry Kosmin finds that among four-year college students who claimed no religious belief—those he defined as secular—more than 75 percent did not believe in God or did not know whether there is a God.²² Kosmin concludes that the views of the secular group indicate a strengthening and hardening of views. Although Kosmin's conclusions represent a narrow portion of the population, his results further support the trend seen by other researchers.

So who are these churchless or “Nones”? Drescher is among the researchers who have explored who the churchless and “Nones” are. Her findings are surprising: “Nones, it turns out, are everywhere...[and] are pretty much *everyone* as well.”²³ So one's neighbors, friends, and family are likely to include “Nones.” She observes, “All Nones

19 The stated mission of the Center for Inquiry, which is based in Amherst, NY, is “to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values.” Center for Inquiry. (Amherst, NY: Center for Inquiry, n.d.), <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/about> (September 23, 2016).

20 The purpose of the ISSSC is to “advance the understanding of the role of secular values and the process of secularization in contemporary society and culture.” Trinity College Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, (Hartford, CT: Trinity College, n.d.), <http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/centers/ISSSC/Pages/default.aspx> (September 23, 2016).

21 Barry A. Kosmin. “American Secular Identity, Twenty-First-Century Style: Secular College Students in 2013” (Council for Secular Humanism, May 16, 2014), <http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/articles/5283> (September 14, 2016).

22 Barry A. Kosmin. “American Secular Identity, Twenty-First-Century Style: Secular College Students in 2013.”

23 Elizabeth Drescher, *Choose Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.

are not the same—very often by wide margins.”²⁴ Drescher categorizes the “Nones” whom she interviewed as follows: Atheist, Weak (or Soft) Agnostic, Strong (or Hard) Agnostic, Secular Humanist, Humanist, Secular, Spiritual, Spiritual-But-Not-Religious, Neopagan, Nothing-in-Particular, All of the Above, None/None of the Above.²⁵ The group of people identified as churchless or “Nones” is neither cohesive nor based on a single or few beliefs. The only commonality they share is a distaste for organized religion.

Since the churchless or “Nones” self-identify in different ways, it is difficult to create a clear picture. They do not make cohesive, clear statements of affinity or beliefs, as if each has carved out an identity that includes a rejection of organized religion to one degree or another. While millions of individuals reject religion, they are all doing so at the same time in history. The problem for the evangelist is not simply that some people no longer attend church and need to be reengaged. The evangelistic response, therefore, needs to be both diverse and individualistic. No one set of doctrine can reach these individuals. The “Nones” and the churchless need to be reached individually through shared experiences that meet their own experiences. The rapid, pervasive growth of the churchless and “Nones” resulting from systemic changes in American culture creates new challenges to the motivations and theology of evangelism and suggests that the approaches used over the last century do not attract the religiously unaffiliated.

24 Drescher, 21.

25 Drescher, 28–29.

From the Enlightenment to Postmodern Culture

The current American culture, with its focus on individualism and secularism, is an outgrowth of a series of philosophical movements that started with the Age of Reason or Enlightenment. Each new way of thinking developed as a reaction to the previous age's understanding and sought to correct its deficiencies. To get a clear understanding of the present culture, one must review previous cultural attitudes and mindsets. In his book *Culture and the Death of God*, Postmodern critic Terry Eagleton explores "the crisis occasioned by [God's] apparent disappearance" and argues that culture has been "the most resourceful of proxies" that plugged "the gap where God had once been."²⁶ Starting with "Enlightenment Reason" and ending with "Modernist art," he explains how each age's concepts have succeeded or failed in replacing God.²⁷ Through his argument, he also demonstrates how each age influences current culture.

The Enlightenment affected religion, faith, and theology. Quoting Jonathan Israel, professor of Modern European History at Princeton, Eagleton posits that "theological debate lay at the heart of the early Enlightenment." He also notes that "the Enlightenment may have been troubled by the question of faith, but it was not especially anti-religious."²⁸ The Enlightenment was not challenging God but rather clericalism and its power. Eagleton observes, "Radical objections to Christianity came to a head in a hostility to the role of the church in politics."²⁹ An example of this reaction is the First Amendment to the United States Constitution which prohibits the Congress from making

26 Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), viii-ix.

27 Eagleton, viii.

28 Eagleton, 5.

29 Eagleton, 6.

laws “respecting an establishment of religion.” The Enlightenment’s “assault on religion” turned out to be “a political rather than theological affair.”³⁰ In part, the limiting of religion and faith in the political arena, and as a consequence public life, began with Enlightenment Reason, which allowed the growth of the secular society began.

Other writers echo what Eagleton claims. In *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*, Brad Kallenberg approaches the cultural shift in philosophical terms, writing, “Since the mid-seventeenth century, modern philosophy has advocated three doctrines,” namely, “generic individualism,” “representationalism,” and “propositionalism.”³¹ These philosophical approaches are foundation pieces of the secular society. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor asks, “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable” and adds for “European peasants in 1500...the Christian God was the ultimate guarantee that good would triumph or at least hold the plentiful forces of darkness at bay.”³² But Taylor acknowledges that the answer was not so simple, stating, “The story of what happened in the secularization of Western Christendom is so broad and so multi-faceted.”³³ For my purposes, I will stay with a narrow description of the rise of the secular society through the lens of philosophical arguments.

Eagleton identifies the Idealist and Romantics as followers of Enlightenment thinkers. Taylor explains the practical aspects of the move from the freedoms emerging

30 Eagleton, 12.

41 Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 16.

42 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007) p. 25–26.

43 Taylor, 29.

out of the Enlightenment to Idealism thinking: “Reforming governments saw religion as a very good source of discipline, and churches as handy instruments...[and] societies emerge from human agency, through contract; but God has given us the model we should follow.”³⁴ Idealist and Romantics also reworked faith to correct some of the errors of Enlightenment Reason made with its focus on rationalism. Eagleton states, “For a range of thinkers from Herder to Hölderlin, rationalism is in danger of bleaching the world of inherent value. The problem is how to restore that value without excessive recourse to the very religious notions that rationalism itself is busily undermining.”³⁵

The Idealist and Romantic corrective to Rationalism’s undermining of world and its value was to elevate nature and liberty. Eagleton states that the Idealist and Romantic philosophers argued for a reconnection between humans and the world, which had been lost in Enlightenment thinking. In “*Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads*,” the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth writes, “Poetry is the image of man and nature....[the poet] considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.”³⁶ Without such a connection, human identity was in jeopardy. Eagleton concludes that, with Idealist and Romantic thinking, humans “can nestle in the bosom of Nature without fear of being locked into some soulless determinism, assured that the self is securely founded—but founded on a principle which is the very essence of liberty.”³⁷ But liberty needed an anchor to prevent “some unsettling political consequences.”³⁸

34 Taylor, 216-217.

35 Eagleton, 47.

46 William Wordsworth, *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, vol. 3, Nowell Charles Smith ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1908) p. 491–492

37 Eagleton, 48.

38 Eagleton, 56.

Idealists and Romantics feared that absolute freedom and liberty would result in chaos and social disorder.

Their solution was myth. Eagleton observes that for Philosophy to “become a force in the streets and taverns...it must give birth to a ‘mythology of reason’” and become a new form of religion, folding the populace and intellectuals into a single project.”³⁹ The end result, he argues, is that “Culture in the sense of certain cherished icons and insights [myths] would be steadily diffused throughout culture in the sense of a whole form of life.”⁴⁰ Thus, building upon Enlightenment Reason, the Idealist and Romantics argued for nature and freedom, using myth to create a culture for humans of all classes to flourish. Eagleton notes, “The man of culture can turn his hand to anything he chooses, bringing to bear on any specific task a sense of unbounded possibility.”⁴¹ Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, with its case for living close to the land without excess, is illustrative of the Romantic myth making. Taylor summarizes the period: “The ethic of authenticity originates in the Romantic period,” which he also calls “expressive individualism.”⁴² But Idealist and Romantic thinking still had its challenges.

Idealism and Romanticism had to give way to Modernism. Eagleton observes, “The Idealist and Romantic project to reach the masses through mythology was never able to escape a certain sterile intellectualism.”⁴³ Taylor adds, “The general understanding of the human predicament before modernity placed [humans] in an order where we were not at the top,” among the other higher things were “Ideas.”⁴⁴ “Thus,

39 Eagleton, 57–58.

40 Eagleton, 61.

41 Eagleton, 76.

42 Taylor, 299.

43 Eagleton, 120.

54 Taylor, 18.

Modernism attempted to solve the problem created by the previous modes of thinking and in doing so created the necessary conditions for God's departure. First, Early Modernists were troubled by church hierarchy. In part, the clergy had knowledge the laity did not understand, and the reformers wanted that knowledge taught to the people so that "all the faithful [could] live up to the demands of the Gospel...to the point, where on the Protestant side, there was in principle a denial of any hierarchy of vocation."⁴⁵ Without a hierarchy special religious knowledge, including salvation limited to the few, religious knowledge was no longer for the clergy elites and the monastic privileged.

With the foundational shifts completed by the Early Modernists, twentieth-century Modernists were able to overcome the "sterile intellectualism" that remained in the Idealists and Romantics.⁴⁶ The means to solve the problem came about with the "advent of the twentieth-century industry" that brought the "dreams and desires of the populace en masse."⁴⁷ The mythology of culture could be delivered in "the shape of cinema, television, advertising and the popular press."⁴⁸ For example, a dark moment of the mythology of culture can be seen in the rise of Nazism⁴⁹ and its use of mass media to sway the German populace. On the other hand, John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech challenging America to go the moon can be seen as a positive example of creating

45 Taylor, 104. In "Secularization: The Inherited Model," Bryan Wilson explains the process described by Taylor and Eagleton as "the secularization model" that refers to "the shift in the location of decision making in groups from elites claiming special access to supernatural ordinances to elites legitimating their authority by reference to other bases of power" (12).

56 Eagleton, 120.

47 Eagleton.

48 Eagleton.

59 In *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence*, Walter Wink agrees: "The collapse of the god-archetype for so many in our time has meant that the central thrust of life-energies in the self has been bereft of symbols of expression, and so has unconsciously been projected on more or less suitable human personalities—messianic figures in politics, movies, sports, entertainment, and therapy. The most catastrophic recoil of the gods in our time was Nazism (118).

mythology of culture. Both are examples of the ascent of humanity through myth-making that allows culture to become a surrogate for religion. With Culture's ability to create sweeping and seductive myths, the stage was set for God's exit from the language and thinking of the populace, in addition to the intellectuals and elites.

While the groundwork for God's exit was being prepared by the work the Idealists and Romantics, some problems, however, persisted. The challenge for "some Enlightenment savants" who thought "religion is an error" was that the many surrogates who filled God's shoes were still filling his shoes. Thus surrogacy means "the Supreme Being is not quite dead."⁵⁰ But philosophers had one more card to deal. Eagleton observes, "What Nietzsche recognizes is that you can get rid of God only if you also do away with innate meaning."⁵¹ He continues, "Abolishing given meaning involves destroying the idea of depth, which in turn means rooting out beings like God who take shelter there."⁵² Yet a culture with no meaning may quickly devolve into chaos. After reviewing the writings regarding the risks and rewards of culture without meaning in the works of Nietzsche, Freud, and others, Eagleton points to Freud's thinking to conclude that "Culture is a sickeningly unstable affair."⁵³ Even so, the press to eliminate God from human experience continued with the tools of Culture.

On the cover of Time Magazine on April 8, 1966, the question "Is God Dead?" is laid out in blood-red over a black background. In a Modernist sense, the question is tragic, because, whereas God had been removed, the Supreme Being's presence was not

50 Eagleton, 151.

51 Eagleton, 153.

52 Eagleton.

53 Eagleton, 173.

eliminated. Many ideals of Modernism still found their roots in theology.⁵⁴ In Modernist thinking, God's death means that a relevant, morally directed narrative that existed to guide humanity to a greater purpose and flourishing no longer applies. If the Modernist asks if God is dead, then who is in charge? An angst results because for the Modernist "God is not exactly dead, but he has turned his hinderparts to humanity, who can now sense his unbearable presence only in his ominous absence."⁵⁵ But the cover of Time Magazine was describing a new mode of thinking that developed in the second half of the twentieth-century known as Postmodernism.⁵⁶

The death of God, or simply his absence, creates several challenges for evangelism. When Billy Graham tells his audience that death may be lurking just around the corner with God's judgment not far behind, a Modernist may ask how God can judge when he has not prevented bad things in the world. The Postmodernist, even when listening to Graham, can assuredly state, at a philosophical depth not previously held, that God and his presumed judgment do not exist. In addition, the modern evangelist's argument for religion faces stumbling-blocks. Charles Taylor explains them: 1. It offends against reason. 2. It is authoritarian. 3. It poses impossible challenges of theodicy. 4. It threatens the order of mutual benefit.⁵⁷ God's absence and the meaninglessness and non-foundationalism present an opportunity for the evangelist. The removal of foundations raises the importance of the individual. The postmodern individual does not look to

54 Eagleton, 156.

55 Eagleton, 181.

67 Gary Aylesworth in "Postmodernism" from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online edition notes that Postmodernism did not enter the philosophical lexicon until 1979 but then explains its development in the 1950s and 1960s, pointing to May 1968 as a watershed moment in the movement's development. While explaining its development, Aylesworth cites the use of postmodern concepts by several scholars starting in the 1950s and expanding throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

68 Taylor, 305.

institutions for meaning but instead looks to experiences for a life purpose. Through experiences, the postmodern evangelist can create a connection to others.

The Features of the Postmodern Culture

Postmodernism has several other qualities that impact evangelism and make necessary a new motivation and theology of evangelism. A central aspect of Postmodern thinking is the overcoming of the meaninglessness that has arisen from the writings of Nietzsche and others.⁵⁸ From this tenet develop Postmodern arguments against foundational truths and the parallel development of non-foundationalism. In Postmodern thinking, truths no longer provide a bedrock for common beliefs. Since there are no common core beliefs that are unassailable, the role of the individual rises to the apex of cultural understanding. Consumerism and personal technology has been fueling the rise of the individual. Capitalism has fortified the power of the individual and in turn has returned meaning to human existence.

Postmodernism does not argue that meaninglessness be overcome but rather that it be embraced as fact. Eagleton summarizes the Postmodern philosophic argument:

“For postmodernism...there is no fragmentation, since unity was an illusion all along; no false consciousness, because no unequivocal truth; no shaking of the foundations, since there were none to be dislodged. It is not as though truth, identity and foundations are tormentingly elusive, simply that they never were.”⁵⁹

58 Gary Aylesworth, "Postmodernism" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring 2015) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/> (September 19, 2016). Eagleton also states, "Postmodernism is in many ways a postscript to Nietzsche" (185).

59 Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, 186.

Without identity and foundation, humans are able to be molded into whoever they want to be and whatever the culture sees fit, which capitalism does well.

As Postmodernists deconstruct the foundations that were the bedrock of human society, humans were set free to find their own way and to be fully individual. Once freed from the constraints of institutions such as religion, humans were unleashed to chase after whatever they desired and to improve themselves. In *The Impulse Society: America in the Age of Instant Gratification*, journalist Paul Roberts writes about the current culture: “What had begun as crude quests for identity and self-actualization was now industrialized and professionalized into full-scale social agenda.”⁶⁰ As the Me Generation became disengaged from tradition, followed soon afterward by “the economic individualism of efficient markets,” Roberts notes, “individuals we were to be encouraged, both subtly and overtly, to see our interests as distinct from those of the larger society—and, increasingly, to put our interests above those of the larger society.”⁶¹ When tied to the capitalism, so much “raw individual capacity” was supplied by the consumer economy so that “when it comes to the pursuit of the perfect self, it’s almost impossible *not* to go too far.”⁶² “Self-interest” becomes “a hallmark at *all* levels of society.”⁶³ As market efficiencies increased so, too did individualism, which Eagleton calls “the advent of Man the Eternal Consumer.”⁶⁴

The molding of humans by the culture through capitalism is the ultimate expression of individualism. In *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a*

60 Paul Roberts, *The Impulse Society: America in the Age of Instant Gratification* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 56.

61 Roberts.

62 Roberts, 65.

63 Roberts, 79.

64 Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, 190.

Consumer Culture, Georgetown University professor Vincent J. Miller writes that the consumer culture “constructs every person as the author of his or her own identity, expressed aesthetically through the consumption and display of commodities.”⁶⁵ Roberts affirms Miller’s position: “The incremental erosion of our traditional attachments is no accident. It is the implicit objective of the consumer economy, which strives to replace those attachments with a product or service.”⁶⁶ The ultimate marriage of the consumer economy and individualism occurred at the same time as the rise of technology.

Before addressing the rise of technology, I must note what some social scientists and religious studies scholars see several needs for social groups in a culture of high-individualism. Wilson states, “The very rationalization of society’s operation and its dessicating effect on everyday life may provide their own inducement for individuals privately” to pursue such activities as religion.⁶⁷ Kallenberg sees the continued desire for social groups as a byproduct of consumerism: “Being a consumer has everything to do with the way we live with one another,” driven by “desperation,” “curiosity,” or “friendship.”⁶⁸ Eagleton also agrees with the social aspect of religion as posited by Emile Durkheim “who saw religion primarily as the symbolic cement of social existence”⁶⁹

I now return to the influence of technology on individualism. Valued so highly in today’s culture, it could not be more profound. In *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection*, award-winning author Michael Harris

65 Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 29.

66 Paul Roberts, *The Impulse Society*, 81.

78 Wilson, 20.

79 Kallenberg, 60–61.

80 Eagleton, 146.

writes, “Our fate is instantly and comprehensively reimagined by online technology.”⁷⁰ He adds, “The Internet and its cronies are indiscriminate game changers. They don’t just enrich our experiences; they *become* our experiences”⁷¹ and in new ways become communities. The result has immense ramifications. Roberts states, “More and more of our personal consumption is aimed at finding or creating enclaves of self-reflecting utility—places, products, experiences, networks, and people that reinforce our self-image and aspirations by emphasizing what we like and filtering out what we don’t.”⁷² Online these enclaves are molded to the individual in ways never before seen in history. Harris observes that technology is not simply changing our lives but changing our brains as well.⁷³ Technology, especially smart phones and the internet, are today’s ultimate expression of individualism that reaches all humans.

Technology and the consumer economy pump up individualism. The two combine in ways that allow individuals to express themselves in robust and fruitful ways. Individualism’s quest for the perfection of the self is unbridled because there are no foundational tenets or beliefs to check an individual’s self-expression. There is no God to judge what is right or wrong. There is only the culture that affirms people’s desire for consuming, and when they tire of it, they may escape into the private realms of religion, among others.

In the face of the technology-infused, supercharged-consumer-economy individualism, the evangelism of Dennis Bennett, Billy Graham, Aimee Semple

70 Michael Harris, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (New York: Penguin 2015), 13.

71 Harris, 20.

72 Roberts, *The Impulse Society*, 117.

73 Harris, *The End of Absence*, 38.

McPherson, J. Edwin Orr, Charles Parham, Norman Vincent Peale, Oral Roberts, and Billy Sunday confronts a serious challenge. They says to be careful because God will judge you. The Postmodern individual is not worried, however, because the individual is his or her own God. Moreover, the traditional motivations for evangelism suffer under the weight of a culture that believes not only that there is no God but also that life has no fundamental meaning but only goals that are whatever people conceive them to be. What is the point of evangelism when the culture believes that what alone matters is one's individual experiences? If one no longer has to rely on cultural foundations, one is free to embrace one's experience and value it above all others. The way to evangelism must, therefore, emerge from individual experience.

The Need for Neoevangelism

This thesis argues for a new approach: neoevangelism. In one sense it is not new. After reviewing the current theologies of evangelism, I will build upon Elaine Heath's book *The Mystical Way of Evangelism* to develop a new theological approach that is based on biblical accounts of evangelism as found in the Acts of the Apostles and elsewhere in Christian history that point to a theology of mystical experience. I will argue that mystical experiences are varied but that all have value because they provide inspiration to mission and ministry, particularly evangelism. In positing a value to all mystical experiences, I move away from the traditional Western understanding of Christian mysticism, with its three-step process first formalized by Pseudo-Dionysius that teaches mystical experience is a progression of activities that culminate with union.⁷⁴ The

⁷⁴ See 25. David Perrin "Mysticism" in *The Blackwell Companion to Spirituality* ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: John Wiley, 2005) 446.

combination of mystical experience and evangelism has been a powerful force in the church from its very founding. I therefore use the prefix “neo” to demarcate both the sense of new and the revival of a previous practice of evangelism found both in the Bible and church history.⁷⁵

As a part of this thesis, I conducted a workshop series that brought together two groups people with self-identified mystical experiences to test whether such mystical experiences provided sufficient motivation and were theologically sound. The three-session workshop, four and a half hours in length, taught participants about the mystical experiences in Acts of the Apostles and in church history, the mystical experience, and the mystical experience continuum. Through a narrative-story approach, the participants learned from and practiced with each other and then spoke with someone outside the group about their experience. In doing so, the workshop became an evangelism practicum. In the end, the workshop answered the question whether those with mystical experiences can be motivated to share their personal experiences of God and the Holy with others. It demonstrated that new approaches to evangelism are available and that, with practice and teaching, individuals can and do evangelize in today’s culture.

75 "neo-, comb. form." OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. <http://0-www.oed.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/view/Entry/126016?redirectedFrom=neo> (September 23, 2016).

CHAPTER TWO

Toward a Theology of Neoevangelism

Separating Conversion from Evangelism

It is necessary to identify the difference between evangelism and conversion despite how closely aligned the two may be. Some people in the Church conflate the two, but conversion is not evangelism, and evangelism is not conversion. In their book *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations*, for example, Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley write, “The goal of evangelism is not the development of nominal Christians but of devoted Christians who become disciples who make other disciples and whose lives are enriched by their relationships with God.”⁷⁶ Payne and Hamilton merge the actions of the evangelist and the converted.

So what is the difference between the two? Conversion is the activity of one who hears or listens to the evangelist. It is what happens to one who becomes a Christian. In *Understanding Religious Conversion* Lewis Rambo writes that conversion is “a total transformation of the person by the power of God.”⁷⁷ He adds, “Conversion is personal and communal, private and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and to confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process.”⁷⁸ In *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*, Peter Stromberg

76 Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 16.

77 Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xii.

78 Rambo, 176.

observes that conversion is “a combination of historical events and the person’s immediate and subsequent reactions to those events.”⁷⁹ Through her research outlined in *When God Talks Back*, Tanya Luhrmann confirms Rambo’s “process” of conversion, writing, “Many Christians come to their religion slowly, carefully, and deliberately.”⁸⁰ And, in *The Call to Conversion*, Jim Wallis explains that conversion is “both a moment and a process of transformation that deepens and extends through the whole of our lives.”⁸¹ While some Christians may reduce conversion to a single moment when a profound interaction with God or the Holy occurs, many contemporary scholars argue for a longer view, indicating a process of conversion that may last for some time. Thus conversion may continue and take longer than one conversation with an evangelist.

Many scholars believe that the process of conversion has to involve a crisis.⁸² Within his model of conversion, Rambo describes two types of “crises that call into question one’s fundamental orientation to life, and crises that in and of themselves are rather mild but are the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back.”⁸³ What causes this type of crisis? Rambo states, “Death, suffering, and other painful experiences can challenge one’s interpretation of life, calling everything into question.”⁸⁴ Such events fall into his first type of crisis. The second type is not as dramatic. He writes, “Other events that appear to be rather insignificant may also eventually serve as triggers—crises in

79 Peter Stromberg, *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.

80 T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), xiii.

81 James Wallis, *The Call to Conversion: Why Faith is Always Personal but Never Private*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 8.

82 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 44.

83 Rambo, 46.

84 Rambo.

retrospect.”⁸⁵ In both cases, the crisis is not caused by the evangelist. In their preaching, however, great evangelists like Jonathan Edwards and Billy Graham have attempted to create a crisis for nonbelievers listening to their messages.⁸⁶ Rambo concludes:

What makes any voluntary conversion process possible is a complex confluence of the “right” potential convert coming into contact, under proper circumstances at the proper time, with the “right” advocate and religious option. Trajectories of potential converts and available advocates do not often meet in such a way that the conversion process can germinate, take root, and flourish.⁸⁷

If Rambo is correct, then the evangelist’s conversation with the nonbeliever may be the central act of conversion, but, equally, the evangelist may also help lead to the crisis that brings a person to the Christian faith. The timing could also be wrong so that the evangelistic conversation has no impact. Additionally, their meeting may join the evangelist and nonbeliever near the outset or the very end of the conversion process. If the process of conversion is correct, then evangelism cannot be considered to be the singular, pivotal act of conversion. Instead, evangelism may be an aspect of the conversion process by which God leads a person to faith.

Evangelism in Historical Context

Since evangelism is not the complete act of conversion, is it necessary? To understand evangelism’s importance, it is necessary to explore the motivation of the evangelist in an historical context. In the nascent church, evangelism was essential.

85 Rambo.

86 Both in Jonathan Edwards’s sermon “Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God” and in Billy Graham’s 2005 crusade sermons, they built their messages to create a crisis in the mind and heart of the listeners. Both stated that a person does not know when he or she will die. It might be later that day. As a result, their souls are at risk of missing out on salvation and being condemned to hell.

87 Rambo, 87.

Michael Green writes, “The enthusiasm to evangelize which marked the early Christians is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religion.”⁸⁸ In the apostolic-age church, evangelism was practiced not as a mandate arising from the formula in Matthew 28:16-20, but as a response to the good news about the kingdom of God.⁸⁹ Green notes that the response developed from three motives “common to the Christian evangelists of these first two centuries.”⁹⁰ Early Christians evangelized “because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ”⁹¹ They also felt a responsibility to “live lives consistent with their profession” of faith.⁹² In addition, they had a sincere desire to save others by becoming, as Paul was, “Christ’s ambassador, God’s watchman.”⁹³ These motives show that the early evangelists went out into the world because of their experiences of God and the Holy that compelled them to be ambassadors of the Good News.

In the fourth century, a profound change occurred in Western society and culture that affected the motivation for evangelism. When the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity, it suddenly became the official religion of a wide swath of the world, recognizing the change that was already underway. Once it had aligned itself with the Empire, however, evangelism had to change because people living under the Empire’s rule were supposed to follow Christianity. William Abraham explains, “Not surprisingly, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire...the

88 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 273.

89 Green, 80.

90 Green, 273.

91 Green, 274.

92 Green, 282.

93 Green, 292.

work of evangelism became eroded.”⁹⁴ Later, Christianity safely existed in the Holy Roman Empire and much of the rest of Europe for centuries.⁹⁵ In *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, Darrell Guder writes, “When Charlemagne, in the eighth century, divided the Holy Roman Empire into parishes, he set up a system in which everybody lived within the hearing range of church bells.”⁹⁶ Everyone lived under the shadow of the steeples of Christ, and tolling bells called people to church services. There was no escaping the influence of Christianity. The culture was Christian, and so was everyone who lived in it. The necessity to evangelize, therefore, was diminished.

In 1935, however, a change was identified. Darrell Guder observes that Karl Barth wrote in that year: “Christendom in the form we have known it until now is at an end.”⁹⁷ By the early twenty-first century, the decline first stated by Barth became an accepted fact. In his book *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Bryan Stone explains, “The church that once was at the center of Western civilization and could presume for itself a privileged voice has increasingly found that center unraveling and itself in a sort of diaspora at the margins.”⁹⁸ The age when Christianity stood at the center of civilization is drawing to a close for most of the Western world. The end of Christendom, however, does not mean the end of Christianity. In fact, the diaspora of Christianity means the importance of evangelism has reemerged.

94 Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey Warner, eds. *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 21.

95 Bryan Stone (in *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*), Darrell Guder (in *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*), Diana Butler Bass (in *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*), and other scholars have written about the end of Christendom, the post-Christian culture, and the decline of Constantinian influences.

96 Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 110.

97 Eagleton, 7.

98 Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 10.

The Development of Evangelism

In the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, Christians in Western countries responded to the decline in their religion.⁹⁹ They used several ways to bring back those who left the church and engage those unfamiliar with Christianity. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the two Great Awakenings in America increased the numbers and influence of Christians. One method that Christians used to increase numbers and influence involved shaming nonbelievers. In the nineteenth century, the term “backslider” became a popular way to call out those living in Christendom but not following its precepts.¹⁰⁰ An examination of the usage of “backslider” in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows the term was used most frequently in the 1840s and the 1860s, but from the 1860s until the twentieth century its usage has decreased.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, “evangelism,” which found its way into literature at the same time as “backslider,” has significantly increased over time.¹⁰² In fact, the word “evangelism” was most frequently used in the last decade of the twentieth century.

112 In *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775*, John Howard Smith writes that in the early eighteenth-century, “church attendance and membership among white colonists appear to shrink dramatically” (2). In *Churching of America, 1776-2005*, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark graph the percentage of religious adherence in 1776 at 17 percent, increasing significantly after the First and Second Great Awakenings (23). In a guest blogpost “Religious decline in America? The Answer Depends on Your Timeframe,” Elesha Coffman analyzes the measurements of religiosity in the United States from 1940-2014.

100 “backslider, n.” OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2016. <http://0-www.oed.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/view/Entry/14452?redirectedFrom=backslider#eid> (November 22, 2016). The term “backslider” is also found in the nineteenth-century work by psychologist William James in *The Varieties of Religion*. In that work James speaks about the ways in which converts fall away from their faith after the flame of initial conversion wears away. (See Lecture X. Conversion-Conclusion.)

101 “backslider.” Google Books Ngram Viewer, n.d. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=backslider&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cbackslider%3B%2Cc0 (November 22, 2016).

102 “evangelism.” Google Books Ngram Viewer, n.d. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=evangelism&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cevangelism%3B%2Cc0. (November 22, 2016).

The rise of the utilization of the term “evangelism” was coupled with a shift in the theology of evangelism as well. Guder explains that the evangelism emerging from the medieval period focused entirely on personal salvation and its benefits to the believer.¹⁰³ William Abraham observes that during the same period “revival meetings” were “institutionalized” in the Protestant tradition in America to convert individuals.¹⁰⁴ For example, in “How to Preach the Gospel,” Charles G. Finney, states, “Sinners ought to be made to feel that they have something to do, and that is to *repent*...And they must do it now, or they are in danger of eternal death.”¹⁰⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon’s nineteenth-century book *The Soulwinner* represents another example of the theology of personal salvation from that period. He writes, “Soulwinning is the chief business of the Christian.”¹⁰⁶ Spurgeon’s focus on the individual built on the theology of evangelism of his predecessor Jonathan Edwards. Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, and others continued with the theme of personal salvation into the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ Stone links the theology of personal salvation to the Enlightenment understanding of the individual, writing that evangelism becomes “an attempt to lead individuals into a private decision to ‘have a personal relationship with Jesus’ or join the church, much as one might join any other club or association.”¹⁰⁸ As the Enlightenment concept of individual increased, so too did the usage of evangelism, which continued to focus on personal salvation.

103 Guder, *Called to Witness*, 95.

104 William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 93.

117 Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 6th ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 191.

106 C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1995), 9.

119 See, as examples, Dwight Moody’s sermons “Christ Seeking Sinners” and “Sinners Seeking Christ” as well as Elijah Brown’s *The Real Billy Sunday: The Live and Work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday* page 136.

108 Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 138.

The increase in the usage of evangelism and the emphasis on the salvation of the individual are responses to what was happening to Christianity. As the close of Christendom became more apparent and the numbers of people uninvolved in religion increased, Christians reacted by focusing on reaching out to the nonbelievers around them. The desire to evangelize others, however, was not due simply to self-preservation of the Church. Christians read the Bible and discovered a call to evangelism. Edwards, Spurgeon, and Graham justified their actions through specific biblical verses that motivated them to evangelize and called on others to do the same.

Biblical Concepts of Evangelism

The great evangelists and scholars of the theology of evangelism find their motivation in a wide variety of biblical verses from both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The texts include direct statements, narrative discourse, and parables. Central to each verse is the message of sharing God's message to the world. As such, they become motivation for evangelism and the foundation of different theologies of evangelism.

The biblical links to evangelism are critical to evangelism. The evangelist must tell a story or make an argument in order to share the Good News. To do so, of course, a person uses language. Stromberg explains, "Language always shapes the reality it describes."¹⁰⁹ Without biblical foundation, the language used for evangelism may become misguided and misappropriated. A person could describe an interaction with God or the Holy that had nothing to do with Christianity. The Bible gives structure to the

¹⁰⁹ Stromberg, 2.

evangelist's work, providing motivation based on context and story that allows for the evangelist to be clear about why evangelism occurs. Its rich language and imagery are fertile ground for the motivation to evangelize and develop a robust theology of evangelism.

Soulwinning (Proverbs 11:13)

Spurgeon drew biblical support for his motivation for evangelism from the Old Testament. His concept of soulwinning emerges from Proverbs: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise."¹¹⁰ He argues that the central motivation for evangelism comes from the benefit that an evangelist will receive for his work. By following Christ's example, a person develops the attributes of "holy living" becoming "full of soul blessings" and the "pursuit of the believer ought always to be soulwinning" because a natural outgrowth of bearing fruit is to influence and produce "the best results in others."¹¹¹ Winning souls produces many benefits. Spurgeon writes that winning souls gives unequaled "enjoyment, usefulness, honor, and lasting recompense," adding the person "will be wise...For you there will be a crown glittering with many stars, which you will cast at Jesus' feet in the day of His appearing."¹¹² For Spurgeon, the Christian life should sustain the work of evangelism because the way the person leads his or her life must be ethically and morally congruent with biblical teachings and by it, a person reaps many rewards.

110 Spurgeon, 193.

111 Spurgeon, 195–196, 201.

125 Spurgeon, 208–209.

Spurgeon understands winning in typical fashion. He compares soulwinning to military campaigns, a warrior's work, and a race.¹¹³ He writes: "If you are going to win souls, you must throw your soul into your work, just as a warrior must throw his soul into a battle, or victory will not be yours."¹¹⁴ In a final push to inspire his readers to evangelize, he pleads, "If you love the Lord, get a passion for souls."¹¹⁵ In Spurgeon's understanding of evangelism, a person enters a competition or battle against Satan. The battle continues with each interaction that the Christian has with a nonbeliever. The system created by soulwinning is aggressive and vigorous.

The evangelism spotlighted by Spurgeon that grew in the nineteenth century created an evangelism of competition that gave the evangelist certain privileges. As a person won more victories over Satan and saved more souls for God, that person would receive wisdom and blessings. Evangelism of competition, however, created several complications. When added by others to colonialism, the competitive spirit led to coercion and manipulation of the people living in the colonies of the great Western powers of the nineteenth century. Stone notes, "Within a Constantinian social imagination, practitioners of evangelism are tempted to identify the victory of Christ with the expansion and growth of a church fused with the world in the form of a Christianized nation or empire." As nations and empires grew, so too did Christendom. Evangelists won more souls for Christ, but there were costs.¹¹⁶ In her work *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemporary Vision for Christian Outreach*, Elaine Heath criticizes

113 Spurgeon, 206–207.

114 Spurgeon, 207.

115 Spurgeon, 214.

116 Stone, 124.

evangelism of soul-winning, its competitiveness, and its linkage to power: “Real evangelism is not colonialism, nationalism, or imperialism.”¹¹⁷

Go and Make Disciples (Mark 16:15–16 and Matthew 28:19–20)

In the middle of the twentieth century, evangelist Billy Graham found his motivation for evangelism in a different section of the Bible. As mentioned in the opening chapter, one passage from the Gospel of Mark motivated him to evangelize. In Mark 16:15-16, Jesus commissioned the disciples for their post-resurrection work: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.” Graham focused on the words “go” and “proclaim” found in verse 15. He went into the world and announced the Good News to as many people as he could, which over the course of his life was hundreds of thousands of individuals. Graham and others read the passage in Mark as a commandment, making evangelism a duty for Christians.

Another set of verses affirms the concept of evangelism by commandment. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” In *The Mandate to Make Disciples*, produced by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association for pastors and leaders working with the association after the 2005 crusade, identifies the verses from Matthew as a “scriptural mandate” for disciples

117 Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 13.

of Jesus.¹¹⁸ The evangelism mandate in Matthew eliminates the condemnation portion of the Marcan verses and replaces it with a structured process. The evangelist goes into the world, makes disciples, baptizes, and teaches them.

Others have also identified the evangelism by Matthean mandate as the primary motivation for evangelism.¹¹⁹ In *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, Bishop Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley state that the verses from the Gospel of Matthew are “central to the life and work of the Christian Church.”¹²⁰ They also claim these verses, commonly known as the Great Commission, “provide the basis for Christian evangelism.”¹²¹

The instructions found in Mark are not enough for Matthean evangelism. In its mandate is a second instruction that goes beyond going into the world. More is needed than to go into the world and proclaim the Good News. The evangelist must also make disciples. In Matthew, evangelism extends to discipleship. Abraham explains, “Lamenting the gross inadequacy of recording decisions without any serious follow-up and instruction, some have insisted that the essence of evangelism lies in making disciples.”¹²² *The Mandate to Make Disciples* confirms Abraham’s premise: “The goal of evangelism must be more than just delivering new believers. Following through to yield disciples must be an integral element.”¹²³ Payne and Beazley also agree with Abraham,

118 Billy Graham Evangelical Association, *The Mandate to Make Disciples: Follow-up Discipleship Seminar* (N.p. n.d.), 9.

119 It must be acknowledged that John 20:21 is another post-resurrection verse in which Jesus sent his disciples into the world. The Johannine mission is one of forgiveness (20:22) instead of proclamation or making of disciples.

120 Payne and Beazley, 14.

121 Payne and Beazley, 15.

122 Abraham, 94.

123 Billy Graham Evangelical Association, 9.

writing, “The goal of evangelism is not the development of nominal Christians but of devoted Christians who become disciples who make other disciples.”¹²⁴ The problem with their approaches is that they conflate conversion and evangelism.

There is another problem with the use of the Great Commission. George Hunsberger, David Bosch, and Lesslie Newbigin question its use because it tended to create a “triumphant style of mission [and evangelism] that accorded all too easily with the political and economic expansion of the European powers.” The combination of going into the world and the action of making disciples represents a broader view that parallels evangelism motivated by competition and its risk of coercion. Since most conversions are not usually directly the result of an interaction with an evangelist, the making of disciples is problematic. As previously noted, conversion is both an event and a process. The evangelist’s control of the process, therefore, potentially eliminates the autonomy and self-authority of the convert’s coming to faith. True conversion is at risk. While the evangelism of commandment motivated many people to go and make disciples, the forcefulness of the acts of evangelism and making disciples created problems. The American evangelists of the last three hundred years, who drew on the verses from Proverbs, Matthew, and Mark, shaped the nation in profound ways, significantly growing Christianity. The issues of conflation and coercion illustrate why these approaches have lost favor with some evangelists today.

124 Payne and Beazley, 16.

Witness (Acts 1:8)

Thus far, the examination of biblical verses has shown that some evangelists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries based their motivation for evangelism on biblical verses that referred to competition or a commandment issued by Jesus. But there are still other biblically-based evangelistic motivations. One such motivation is witness. Abraham describes the evangelistic concept of witness: “The crux of this view is the sharing of one’s faith or testimony on a one-to-one basis with an unbeliever.”¹²⁵ That means a person speaks with a nonbeliever about why they are a Christian, but Abraham notes, “There is a strong tendency to make experience the essential content of what is shared,”¹²⁶ as opposed to making God or the Kingdom of God the focus of the conversation. Abraham’s approach initially looks promising as a means to evangelize in today’s highly-individualistic culture.

In the opening chapter of Acts of the Apostles, Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” It states the Lucan version of evangelism. Through their identification with Jesus, the disciples become evangelists but, unlike the Marcan and Matthean verses, become witnesses of Jesus’s works only when they receive power through the Holy Spirit to go into the world. The verse in Acts does not command the readers to go but rather to wait until the Holy Spirit gives them the power for evangelism. Only then do they go.

125 Abraham, 94.
139 Abraham.

An initial reaction to evangelism motivated by witness may be similar to the Marcan and Matthean commandments to “go and proclaim” and “go and make disciples” respectively. Some scholars, however, interpret the call in Acts to evangelism differently. The difficulty with the Marcan and Matthean approaches is that many see them as commandments to be obeyed. In his chapter “Is There Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?” in *The Study of Evangelism*, George Hunsberger explains, “The presence of a command is thought to supply sufficient motivation for evangelism, and settling the issue of motivation is taken to be an adequate rationale.”¹²⁷ Citing Lesslie Newbigin, however, Hunsberger interprets the call to witness in Acts not as a commandment, writing, “Jesus’ statement that ‘you shall be my witnesses’ is not so much a command as it is a promise, a promise linked to the coming Spirit.”¹²⁸ Hunsberger draws on the work of Darrell Guder for further explanation. He states that in Acts the disciples’ “very identity will be transformed into that of witnesses.”¹²⁹ In *When the Members are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People*, the former Evangelism Officer for the Episcopal Church A. Wayne Schwab agrees with Hunsberger and Guder regarding witness as an useful way of evangelism: “Our Mission in every arena of daily life is to witness in deed and word to the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. These arenas are our homes, our workplaces, our communities, the wider world, our leisure, and our church life.”¹³⁰ The evangelists’ identities change, and the new identities impact all aspects of their lives. The competition and mandate are removed from the

127 Hunsberger, 60.

128 Hunsberger.

129 Hunsberger, 60–61.

143 A. Wayne Schwab, *When the Members are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People* (Essex, New York: Member Mission Press, 2013), loc. 361.

process of evangelism, and thus the evangelism of witness attempts to clean out the coercion and power problems. The witness approach looks promising, but an obstacle remains.

Even though evangelism of witness omits the troubling power dynamics of the Marcan and Matthean motivations, Abraham issues a caution about the witness approach to evangelism: “There is a constant temptation to broaden witness to embrace anything done to bear witness; hence it is easily extended to cover acts of love, mercy, and justice carried out by the individual Christian or by the church.”¹³¹ Once broadened the concept of witness may lose its force as a means to actively evangelize nonbelievers. Witness becomes much more than merely a telling the story of Jesus to others. Guder observes an additional issue: “The biblical witness to God’s action is...interpreted as both the testimony to God’s mission and its implementation through those whom God calls and equips to be agents, signs, and foretastes of his desired restoration of all creation to wholeness.”¹³² What if a corrupt organization or, worse, a nation implements witness? Guder explains that when the evangelistic witnesses do their work “in partnership with colonialism,” or when the churches that send these witnesses are themselves showing “signs of decline within their own cultures,” or when nations themselves commit horrifying acts of violence as in World War I, evangelism of witness is undermined because it becomes tainted by wider problems.¹³³ When the Christian message joins with oppressive actions, corrupt institutions, or warring nations, the understanding of evangelism deteriorates.

143 Abraham, 94.

132 Guder, 22.

133 Guder, 23.

The same holds true when the focus moves from institutions to the individual. If a person “witnesses” to someone else about the way of Jesus and states what it is to live a Christian life, then the person’s life should also exhibit the way of Jesus. Words and actions should support each other, just as institutional witness does. As a result, the evangelist is freed from the institution and its potential wrongs but must also carry the burden of witness in both word and personal action.

Unfortunately, Christians have not fared much better than their institutions. In *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons identify six broad themes that describe the negative perceptions and opinions of Christianity by nonbelieving young adults (ages 16 to 29 in 2007).¹³⁴ The first theme is “hypocritical,” meaning “saying one thing and doing another.”¹³⁵ The authors state that the term “hypocritical” has become fused to young people’s experience with Christianity.¹³⁶ Kinnaman and Lyons also observe, “When it came to nonreligious factors—the *substance* of people’s daily choices, actions, and attitudes—there are few meaningful gaps between born-again Christians and non-born-again.¹³⁷ They add, “In virtually every study we conduct...born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavior evidence of transformed lives.”¹³⁸ The authors admit, “There are some areas of distinction, but in practical terms these differences are not very large.”¹³⁹ Thus, based on this research born-again-Christian evangelists, who use

134 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 29.

135 Kinnaman and Lyons.

136 Kinnaman and Lyons, 42.

137 Kinnaman and Lyons, 46.

138 Kinnaman and Lyons, 47.

139 Kinnaman and Lyons.

a witness-based approach, fall short of the word and action requirement of witness evangelism. Since Christians' lifestyles support the view that young adult nonbelievers have regarding them, witness evangelism may have little or no impact.

Moreover, if born-again Christians, who are considered those most adhering to biblical rules and regulations, are perceived as hypocritical because they are not following the precepts they emphasize, then other Christians, who do not typically adhere to biblical edicts as closely, also face the same challenges when using witness of evangelism. In *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched...and How to Connect with Them*, Barna and Kinnaman expand upon their previous findings. They explore similarities and differences between Christians and non-Christians, and their results further erode the witness of evangelism. Their research which goes beyond perceptions and opinions to habits and actions indicates that "unchurched adults are very much like church adults...except they don't attend church."¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the incongruences between word and action may apply to all Christians, not just one group. The challenge to an evangelism of witness is not in its theory but in its execution and the response to it by nonbelievers. If witness is tied to an appeal to morality or social actions, then it does not fully meet the challenges of today's culture. If the evangelist can point only to how he or she lives and the actions of other Christians, then witness is insufficient.

Some scholars have tweaked the concept of evangelism of witness, attempting to overcome its problems. In his chapter "Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today," David J. Bosch states, "Evangelism is invitation,"¹⁴¹ by which people

140 Barna and Kinnaman, 43.

141 Chilcote and Warner, 12.

are encouraged to “become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life in the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴² He explains that non-Christians “should turn to God because they are drawn to him by his love.”¹⁴³ The only way people will discover God is when “the community that evangelizes—the church—is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and has a winsome lifestyle.”¹⁴⁴ Guder agrees with Bosch, stating, “God’s gospel is to be made known to all people as an invitation to healing and to enlistment in the service of God as part of his witnessing people.”¹⁴⁵ Stone adds, “To be made Christians is to be made witnesses. The fellowship, disciplines, practices, and social patterns by which we are made witnesses are themselves the very signs of God’s mercy and judgment and a living invitation to a ‘watching world.’”¹⁴⁶

The challenges that evangelism of invitation faces, however, are the same as evangelism of witness. As the culture becomes more comfortable in its atheistic clothing, it feels less obliged to check in with the church. Thus, even if the church is an evangelizing community and manifests the best of Christianity, the rest of the world is not watching. Furthermore, since so few Christian institutions and people display the radiance of God and lead a “winsome lifestyle,” non-Christians do not see much difference between themselves and their Christian neighbors. So how do Christians gain the attention of non-Christians?

157 Chilcote and Warner, 9.

143 Chilcote and Warner, 12.

144 Chilcote and Warner.

145 Guder, 75.

146 Stone, 27.

Joy and Gratitude (Acts 13:52 and Matthew 25:14–30)

Some scholars have answered the challenges of today's culture by purposing a motivation for evangelism based on the emotional reactions of the evangelist. Green observes that the early Christians evangelized "because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁷ Stone also looks to the Apostolic-Age Church to identify an emotional response for evangelism. Referring to the disciples' joyful reaction to the spread of "word of the Lord" at the end of Acts 13, he writes, "Joy is hardly a piece of nontheological or amoral trivia in the story of the early church; it not only fuels the witness of the disciples in the world but serves as one of the central and manifest expressions of their life together."¹⁴⁸ He continues, "Joy is both the experiential prerequisite for Christian evangelism and its content."¹⁴⁹ Applying the early church's joy to today's, he states, "We can affirm just as confidently today that a church that confesses itself to be 'apostolic' but lives without joy has failed to live up to its confession and is unable to evangelize."¹⁵⁰ While it may be necessary for some churches, over the course of the history of Christianity joy has been but one of many motivations for evangelism. It is a wonderful reason to share the Gospel, but if it is not coupled with a transformed life, it may not be enough on its own.

Gratitude is another powerful emotional motivation to evangelism. In *Transforming Evangelism*, David Gortner states, "In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), Jesus helps us see that evangelism born of gratitude is freely public."¹⁵¹ The

162 Green, 274.

148 Stone, 103.

149 Stone.

150 Stone.

151 David Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism*, Transformations, The Episcopal Church in the 21st Century Series, James Lemler, series ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 2008), 64.

parable described a manager, who, before he went on a journey, entrusted three of his servants with talents or money. After a long time, the manager returned and requested an accounting from the three. He rewarded the servants who by putting their talents to good use have gained more. In light of evangelism, Gortner interprets the parable: “Jesus orients us toward a habit of *free public exchange of the gifts of the kingdom*, unhindered by personal or corporate shame, anxiety, or biases.”¹⁵² Gortner explains specifically the motivation of an evangelism of gratitude: “Our generosity with the gifts of God, which we share and trade liberally in our communities, will never return to us empty. God’s love propels us to action—or else that love never reaches fulfillment.”¹⁵³ The feeling of gratitude emerges from transformative experiences, and, in delightful giving, the feeling “returns...abundantly” as the evangelist is nurtured and strengthened by listening for and sharing good news.”¹⁵⁴

When the evangelist motivated by gratitude speaks to a nonbeliever, he or she is not attempting to win over that person or make that person a believer. Gratitude for a God-given gift spurs the person to speak about what he or she has received. The focus is not on the reaction of the nonbeliever. The assumption is that, if the Holy Spirit has moved the nonbeliever to the last step of conversion, then the interaction with the evangelist will lead to conversion. If not, the interaction is but one step along the journey to conversion. The standard for this type of evangelism is the evangelist’s action. Like the last servant’s report, the manager’s wrath resulted from the servant’s inaction. The

152 Gortner.

153 Gortner, 65.

169 Gortner, 2.

evangelistic credit goes to the one who, filled with gratitude, shares the message to nonbelievers.

Evangelism motivated by gratitude is active and Spirit led. It is positive and encourages evangelists to grow and deepen their spiritual lives. In many cases, such emotion is the right motivation for evangelism. The challenge of both joy and gratitude, however, is they are not the only reaction to experiences of God and the Holy. In some cases, evangelists experience something completely different that elicits other emotions, reactions, and responses. They are not more or less important than gratitude but rather are substantially different. For example, in the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the narrator commented about the women's reaction to their divine encounter: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."¹⁵⁵ At a later time, the woman clearly regained their courage and spoke about their encounter with "a young man, dressed in a white robe."¹⁵⁶ While eventually they may have felt gratitude and wonder at their experience, on Easter morning, they reacted with fear and also amazement or bewilderment. These emotions seem to contradict each other, which may create confusion as well as curiosity and a desire to make sense of the experience. Perhaps equally or even more than joy and gratitude, the urge or need to understand experiences of God and the Holy may better motivate Christians to evangelize.

170 Mark 16:8.
171 Mark: 16:5.

Conclusion

Barna and Kinnaman suggest that a new theology of evangelism is needed. The new approach, however, must not be plucked from the air but instead based on a solid foundation of Christian belief. Even though existing theologies seem to have reached a ceiling or limit, the building blocks on which they stand are still needed. Evangelism needs a biblical undergirding. The Bible is a key, if not the only key, building block for Christians, and the biblical story remains a central component for Christian evangelists in sharing the Good News.

In addition, evangelism is not conversion. Evangelism is the act of somebody who shares the ways in which God has acted in his or her life, the community, and the world. On the other hand, conversion is a process or a revealing of God and the Holy in a person's life, community, and world. For most people, it takes time. As Stromberg observes, "Conversion, then, is not a one-time transformation of self or character but rather a process that somehow enables a person to act differently."¹⁵⁷ If Stromberg's claim is valid, then both the evangelist and the evangelistic message play a critical if not the only role. The length of conversion, however, does not negate the importance of evangelism in that process. Moreover, like Christianity freed from Constantinian influences, evangelism unhooked from conversion allows the evangelist to act in response to the Good News without worrying about wins or losses. Evangelism remains a response to God's actions, which, with every sharing of the Good News, becomes alive and real again to the evangelist.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Stromberg, 31.

¹⁷³ Gortner, 2, 166–167.

Furthermore, evangelism is more important today than perhaps at any other time since the early church. The post-Constantinian civic-Church relationship has changed. While still a strong influence on American culture, Christianity no longer retains an unquestioned place of privilege. Twenty-first century America is pluralistic, with a variety of religious and nonreligious aspects influencing the culture. The good news is that the shift allows the Church, its people, and its evangelists to be themselves without bending to the demands of the culture. Christianity has not, however, as some claim, returned to the Apostolic Age. Unlike the twentieth-first century, first-century culture was religious on a state and personal level,¹⁵⁹ and Paul's speech at the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens gives evidence to the religiosity of the period (Acts 17:16-34). Today's culture is secular with strong atheistic currents, and at times antagonistic toward established religions. In contrast to previous centuries, today's challenges are unique in Christian history. Although the work of the evangelist must be different that of previous generations, it still remains vital to the spiritual health of Christians, the Church, and Christianity.

Evangelism needs a return and a reorientation. It needs the theology of neo-evangelism. By drawing on the experiences of the earliest evangelists, neo-evangelism will give the evangelist of today biblical tools to share the Good News with nonbelievers who see many Christians as hypocrites. Neo-evangelism takes the best of the early church and brings it forward for a new generation. It starts with the foundational mystical experiences not only of Paul but also of Peter and follows the thread of mystical

174 Green, 29-69.

experience through history, showing the ways in which mystics have been some of the most productive and effective evangelists in history.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mystical Experience and Evangelism

While the term “mysticism” was not used until a century later, Bernard McGinn in *The Foundations of Mysticism, The Presence of God*, observes that Teresa of Ávila first used the term “mystical theology” in the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁰ McGinn adds, “There have been mystical elements present in the Christian religion from its origins” and the Hellenistic scholar and theologian Origen first formally wrote about mysticism in the third century.¹⁶¹ Perrin writes:

It was an anonymous Christian mystic who wrote in the sixth century under the pseudonym of Dionysius Areopagite, the convert and apostle of Paul mentioned in Acts 17:34, who would draw on these various ideas and articulate a language of mysticism that was to be the foundation for the future of mysticism up until our own times.¹⁶²

Mysticism, therefore, has had a firm, if small, footing in the areas of Christian theology and practice. Perrin concludes, “Mysticism is alive and well in our own times.”¹⁶³

Models of Religious Experience

Scholars categorize mystical experiences as a part of wider phenomena called religious experiences. In *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, Ann Taves observes that for over a hundred years scholars have debated the nature and character of religious experiences, trying to determine if they are *sui generis*, or if they may be grouped under a

160 Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), xiii.

161 McGinn, xvi.

162 Perrin, 446.

163 Perrin, 444.

wider understanding of the concept.¹⁶⁴ The central aspect of the debate has concerned “whether there are uniquely religious (or mystical or spiritual) experiences, emotions, acts, or objects.”¹⁶⁵ Two models have been used to make such a determination. The *sui generis* model states that religious experiences are unique. Taves claims that those following the first model “argued that scholars should privilege the views of believers...and should not try to explain their experiences in biological, psychological, or sociological terms.”¹⁶⁶ Taves argues for an ascription model that allows for a variety of viewpoints to explore religious experiences, including biological, psychological, sociological, historical, and ethnographic data.¹⁶⁷ The ascription model argues that “religious or mystical or spiritual or sacred ‘things’ are created when religious significance is assigned to them.”¹⁶⁸ Under the ascriptive understanding, the naming of an event as religious is not the exclusive domain of believers.

A deeper study of the argument between the two models is beyond the scope of this thesis. Taves’s ascription model, however, in which she changes the lexicon to “experiences deemed religious,” “allows for many conversations partners that bring important insights into the nature and character of religious experience.”¹⁶⁹ The ascription model allows religious things to be understood more broadly and without the formal structures that have been layered onto the mystical experience.¹⁷⁰ These two changes are critical. In *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, Carole Dale Spencer states, “No

164 Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3–15.

165 Taves, 17.

166 Taves, 3.

167 Taves, 13.

168 Taves.

169 Taves.

170 Taves, 40.

scholar as yet has come up with a satisfactory definition or criteria of mystical experience and there is no consensus on the nature of mystical experience.”¹⁷¹ Both McGinn and Perrin agree with Dale Spencer.¹⁷² Since no firm definition exists for mystical experiences, more scholarly input from a variety of perspectives will aid in generating a working definition and allow for a comprehensive understanding of such experiences.

The Qualities and Results of the Mystical Experience

If mystical experience has no one definition, perhaps it is best expressed in terms of its qualities and results. Religious thinkers, psychologists, philosophers, anthropologists, neuroscientists, and sociologists have all weighed in regarding different aspects of the mystical experience. They help create a picture of what the common qualities of encounters with God and the Holy are. The picture that emerges, however, will be edifying if the examination is of experiences that can be identified as real to the person having them.

The qualities and results of the mystical experience were the foundation of one workshop activity that produced robust discussions. Rather than defining the mystical experience to participants, they were instructed to place colored dots next to common traits listed on a board. I derived the traits from the descriptions of mysticism created by nineteenth-century American psychologist and philosopher William James, the twentieth-century Christian philosopher and writer Evelyn Underhill, and others.

The first question to consider, therefore, is whether one can have a mystical experience or whether it is only one’s imagination or a result of a mental illness.

171 Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007), 28.
172 See Perrin, 442 and McGinn, xv.

Stromberg acknowledges the challenge of understanding experiences outside normal ones. He notes that it is “difficult for [people] to reason or even talk about a view of human life that contravenes elements of this consensus. This means that those aspects of human experience that belie the common-sense view will seem particularly threatening and mysterious.”¹⁷³ Experiences outside the normal functions of life, however, do seem to provide people with deeper understanding of the world and themselves and occur in a wide range of people. In *Investigating Our Experiences of the World*, political science professor April Morgan states, “Pre-reflective consciousness (or direct experience) can be thought of as a foundation for all human knowledge.”¹⁷⁴ Moreover, it appears the brain is wired for mystical experiences. In *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist*, Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman observe, “Our research supports the idea that our brain is built in such a way that we can have occasional mystical experiences, but we suspect that the more intensely you meditate or pray, the more likely you are to experience a mystical or transcendental state.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, even though it may be difficult to discuss or conceive, the mystical experience may serve as a taproot to knowledge and the brain has the capacity for them.

If such experiences do happen and feel real to a wide range of people and seem to allow people to learn and grow, consideration regarding the qualities and results of mystical experiences is next. William James states, “the range of mystical experience is

173 Stromberg, 123.

174 April L. Morgan, *Investigating Our Experience in the World: A Primer on Qualitative Inquiry* (Knoxville, TN.: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 3.

175 Andrew Newberg, and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 114.

very wide.”¹⁷⁶ He argues, “One may say truly, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness.”¹⁷⁷ His research has shown that people who had mystical experiences were astonished by their suddenness.¹⁷⁸ James acknowledges four facets of the mystical experience. First is ineffability, meaning “it defies expression, that no adequate report of its content can be given in words.”¹⁷⁹ Second, mystical experiences have a noetic quality. James notes, “They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.”¹⁸⁰ Third, “Mystical states cannot be sustained for long.”¹⁸¹ Fourth, the experiences include a sense of passivity.¹⁸² The way to the experience may be influenced by ritual or prayer, but experience is not caused by the prayer. In this sense, it is not activated by the person. Additionally, the result of the experience may significantly change someone. James states, “Mystical conditions may, therefore, render the soul more energetic in the lines which their inspiration favors.”¹⁸³

Evelyn Underhill also adds insight to mystical experiences. These experiences are a part of a psychological process that she calls the “Mystic Way.”¹⁸⁴ For Underhill, the Way is a process similar to the ancient and traditional understanding of the development of the mystical experience first stated by the Christian philosopher Origen. Underhill was

176 William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 281. See also McGinn, xvii.

177 James, 279

178 James, 148.

179 James, 279.

180 James, 280. See also Perrin, 451.

181 James.

182 James.

183 James, 305.

184 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed., rev. (N.p., 1930), 129.

not the first to look at the mysticism in such a manner. Perrin notes, “This ‘ladder’ approach to mysticism was...the preoccupation of the Christian West for many centuries.”¹⁸⁵ McGinn agrees, “Mysticism is always a process or a way of life.”¹⁸⁶

Underhill’s five phases include an awakening to Divine Reality, an self-awareness of finiteness and imperfection, a purgation or detachment from the “things of sense,” a purification of the self, and finally union.¹⁸⁷ Underhill characterizes mystical experiences as steps along the way, but the qualities of the experiences have similarities to James’s descriptions. In the first stage, the experience is often “abrupt and well-marked [and] is accompanied by intense feelings of joy and exaltation.”¹⁸⁸ Later stages such as purgation and purification, however, include the pain associated with spiritual cleansing and humbleness. Underhill also describes these later phases as “a harsh difficult path” and a “spiritual crucifixion” or “great desolation.”¹⁸⁹ The primary qualities of the fifth stage are “a state of equilibrium, of purely spiritual life; characterized by peaceful joy, by enhanced powers, by intense certitude.”¹⁹⁰ Additionally, like James, Underhill observes, “Not spiritual marriage, but divine fecundity is to be [the contemplative or mystic’s] final state.”¹⁹¹ She eloquently states, “To go up alone into the mountain and come back as an ambassador to the world...[is] the true ideal of Christian Mysticism in its highest development.”¹⁹²

185 Perrin, 185.

186 McGinn, xvi.

187 Underhill, 130–131.

188 Underhill, 130.

189 Underhill.

190 Underhill, 131.

191 Underhill, 132.

192 Underhill, 133. McGinn explains that Underhill’s view is embedded in an Anglican tradition, which also includes William Ralph Inge and Kenneth Escot Kirk. These three argued that mysticism “involved an affirmation of the goodness of the world and of the continuity between nature and spirit, as well as the recognition that the mystic life finds its true expression in active love of neighbor” (273-275). Perrin also

In the last hundred years, more writers have expanded on James' four facets of mysticism. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Trappist monk Thomas Merton adds to James' ineffability via contemplation, writing, "Contemplation is always beyond our own knowledge, beyond our own light, beyond systems, beyond explanations, beyond discourse, beyond dialogue, beyond our own self."¹⁹³ In *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, Roman Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson also writes, "Such an act [of loving self-surrender] does not make everything clear; God does not spare us bewilderment."¹⁹⁴ In *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice*, religious historian and theologian Philip Sheldrake speaks to mysticism's noetic quality: "Mysticism therefore seems to offer an essentially noncognitive connection with the very depths of human existence,"¹⁹⁵ but with respect to its impact, he goes further than James: "A true Christian understanding of mysticism involves transformation of life in both a religious and social sense and not merely altered consciousness."¹⁹⁶

The mystical concept of ambassadorship described by Underhill has been expanded upon in recent times. In *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, Discalced Carmelite nun Edith Stein, who was killed at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942, writes, "God dwells in the soul....There he will remain in profound peace, as in 'the place of his rest,' until

writes that the mystical experience "is not to be locked up within the confines of a monastic cell, or be reserved for subtle expression in academic treatises or even romantic poetry. Rather, mysticism expresses the deepest aspects of our humanity and the truth about the way that God is alive in the world" (444).

201 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 2.

202 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 45.

203 Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 107.

204 Sheldrake, 110.

the Lord decides to transform his faith into vision.”¹⁹⁷ Johnson connects Stein’s idea of vision to social justice and transformation: “This glimpse into the mystery of God ever greater, even nearer, logically flows into a path of discipleship comprised of love of God and love of neighbor.”¹⁹⁸ Merton agrees, “Go into the desert not to escape other men but in order to find them in God.”¹⁹⁹ In *Experiences of God*, Jürgen Moltmann pushes further the connection of mysticism and social justice: “The place of mystical experience is in very truth the cell—the prison cell.”²⁰⁰ Philip Sheldrake adds, “The mystical journey leads the believer through union, which now becomes a new point of departure, to a renewed practice of everyday discipleship and social engagement.”²⁰¹

In addition to the writings of James, Underhill and other religious thinkers, other writers give form to the qualities and results of the mystical experience. Rambo states that, in relation to conversion, mystical experiences vary in nature but are “profoundly disturbing.”²⁰² In *The Wondering Brain*, Kelly Bulkeley observes that mystical experiences occur when “normal functions” change and “reassemble in novel conjunctions” or combinations.²⁰³ Like James, Bulkeley notes, “Mystical experiences are difficult to talk about, as they generate a painful tension between the grandeur of divine revelation and the pathetic inadequacy of common words.”²⁰⁴ He also states that passivity and loss of volition are common to the mystical states.²⁰⁵

205 Edith Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein: Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, Edith Stein Werke, Bd. II (Louvain, Nauwelaerts/Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 407.

206 Johnson, 44.

207 Merton, 53.

208 Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 73.

209 Sheldrake, 103.

202 Rambo, 48.

203 Kelly Bulkeley, *The Wondering Brain: Thinking about Religion with and Beyond Cognitive Neuroscience* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 155.

204 Bulkeley, 171.

205 Bulkeley, 177.

Luhrmann also identifies several features of the mystical experience. Along with James, she observes, “These moments are not deliberately chosen behaviors...but overwhelming experiences that just seem to happen.”²⁰⁶ She also notes that they are rare, in terms of the number of times an event happens to someone, but unlike others her research of Evangelical Protestants narrows the experience to “powerful instants of happy emotional collapse that demonstrate to the congregant...that they had personally experienced the absolute certainty of God’s love.”²⁰⁷ Luhrmann states that these experiences are “associated with confident knowledge,” which has been identified by others as a common feature.²⁰⁸ Additionally, “These events happened in many different sensory modalities,” meaning that mystical experiences involve sight, sound, and other perceptions.²⁰⁹

In *Silence: A User’s Guide*, Anglican solitary Maggie Ross echoes what others have noted. She soberly states, “So-called mystical phenomena over which much ink has been spilt are related in a specific and liminal way to the suspension of the self-consciousness and its dynamic.”²¹⁰ Ross draws similar conclusions to the findings of Newberg and Waldman, James, Rambo, Bulkeley, and Luhrmann. The events happen to people in a way that creates an experience that is unlike everyday circumstances. But Ross also cautions, “*The divine may be in the experience, but the experience is not the divine.*”²¹¹ She argues for a lower view of the importance of the experience, especially if it diminishes a person’s focus on God. She states that in its highest form the mystical

206 Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 126.

207 Luhrmann,

208 Luhrmann, 127

209 Luhrmann, 139.

210 Maggie Ross, *Silence: A User’s Guide—Volume 1: Process* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 53.

211 Ross, 54.

experience is not experience. She argues, “It can be seen that the most profound ‘experience’ of ‘union’ with God cannot be experience, that is interpretation but is rather a relinquishing of experience.”²¹² For Ross, mystical experiences are not important in and of themselves. The connection with God is what matters most.

Synthesis

The descriptors that James, Underhill, and others use produced a rich list for my participants. Many marked words like “extremely important,” “short-lived,” “sudden,” and “unexpected” to describe their experiences. Many did not mark words like “dynamic,” “immediacy,” and “transiency.” Several people placed colored dots on “none of the above.” The diversity of participants’ responses also affirms the challenge of defining the mystical experience. Even so, identifying qualities and results excited participants, and they spoke freely about their experiences.

The researchers, philosophers, psychologists, and religious practitioners may see mystical experiences differently, but their conclusions align. The experience is not caused by the person, although prayer and meditation may help it occur. Experiences happen rarely and are short-lived, but they are still powerful and potentially life-changing. The event is difficult to explain but leaves the person with a strong sense of knowing what happened is real, important, and memorable. Additionally, after the event, one feels a deepening sense of significance to one’s life. For some, entire lives are changed and worldviews are turned askew. In short, these intense, powerful though

²¹² Ross, 54.

sudden and short-lived mystical experiences can radically alter a person's life, often for the better and in a way that invigorates the person for new work.

The unique qualities and results of the experience of God and the Holy are central parts of the question I seek to answer in this thesis. The mystical experience can motivate an average Christian to evangelize. The answer as to why begins in the Bible. Whereas the Hebrew Scriptures illustrate numerous mystical experiences, two specific events in the Acts of the Apostles affirm that mystical experiences can provide motivation for evangelism. Without the experiences of Paul and Peter, Christianity would not have left Israel and may instead have withered and faded into obscurity.

The Mystical Experience of Paul

For nearly a century, Paul has been considered a mystic. Although it is not a central aspect of the Pauline doctrine and nor a focus of many scholars, Paul's mystical experiences stand at the core of his doctrine. Additionally, without his experiences, he would not have changed his worldview. Put simply, his experiences were life-changing.

Paul's most significant mystical experience and life turning-point occurred on the road to Damascus. He had a plan to arrest those "who belonged to the Way."²¹³ As he traveled to Damascus, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him."²¹⁴ A voice called him by name and asked him a question. He answered the voice by asking who is speaking. The voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."²¹⁵ The encounter left Paul blind for the next three days.

213 Acts 9:2.

214 Acts 9:4.

215 Acts 9:5.

The qualities and results of mystical experiences confirm that Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was mystical. The experience occurred suddenly. He did not cause it, but rather it happened to him. The event was brief. His belief in it never wavered. In his subsequent writings, Paul did not question the truth of what happened to him. If anything, he became more convinced of the experience.

One important feature of the mystical experience, however, seems unaccounted for—ineffability. Luke's description of Paul's experience on the Damascus is detailed, specific, and clear, and it is repeated two more times in the book.²¹⁶ James's understanding of ineffability, however, does not mean silence but rather an incompleteness of expression. While the account in Acts may seem complete, Paul's own description seems to affirm the ineffability of the experience. In *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*, Bart Ehrman observes that Paul "is much more reticent than the book of Acts to describe what happened at the time" of his encounter with Jesus.²¹⁷ The mystical nature of Paul's experience therefore seems to meet all of James' measures.

The results of his experience are clear. He accepted the experience as true and real. He then met Ananias, who healed him, and Paul presumably learned more about the Way from him and others. Paul's worldview and life radically changed, following a new plan. Rambo summarizes the result of Paul's experience: "The mystical experience convinced him [Saul] that his commitment to persecution was untenable. He felt compelled to change allegiance. Saul the persecutor of Christians became Paul, the

216 Acts 22 and 26.

217 Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112.

leading proclaimer of Christianity.”²¹⁸ The experience invigorated him so much that he became the founder of many Christian communities, traveling thousands of miles in his activity for Christ.

The invigorating action of the mystical experience is essential. Paul’s experience was important to him, but if he did nothing beyond thinking about it, what then? In chapter four of *Interior Castles*, her guide for spiritual development, Spanish mystic Teresa of Ávila asks her readers, “Do you imagine that [Paul] shut himself up with his visions so as to enjoy those Divine favors and pursue no other occupation?” She answers her question: “You know very well that, so far as we can learn, he took not a day’s rest.”²¹⁹ Underhill affirms Teresa’s teaching: “We see St. Paul, abruptly enslaved by the First and Only Fair, not hiding himself to enjoy the vision of Reality, but going out single-handed to organize the Catholic Church.”²²⁰ She summarizes the impact of Paul’s mystical experience, writing, “The real witness of St. Paul’s ecstatic life in God is the train of Christian churches by which his journeyings are marked.”²²¹ Without Paul’s mystical experience and his willingness to learn from Ananias and the other disciples in Damascus, he would have continued to persecute the followers of the Way and would never have founded so many churches. His encounter with Jesus was a continual source of inspiration and motivation to share him with others.²²²

218 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 49.

219 Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, chapter 4, section 7.

220 Underhill, 320.

221 Underhill, 321.

222 See also Gortner’s discussion of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) in which he writes, “In God’s economy, talents and gifts multiply as they are publicly exchanged. The only loss is in retreat from God’s invitation...” (64–65).

Pauline Mystical Theology

In the early twentieth century, interest in Paul's identity as a mystic grew. Underhill writes, "The Christian religion, by its very nature, had a profoundly mystical side."²²³ By pointing to the John and Paul, she explains, "Putting the personality of its Founder outside the limits of the present discussion, St. Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel are obvious instances of mystics of the first rank among its earliest missionaries."²²⁴ Although Underhill first states that Paul was a mystic, when Albert Schweitzer argued that Paul was a mystic, it profoundly changed the way people saw Paul. In *Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters*, Daniel Marguerat observes, "This affirmation is not new but when it was first put forward in 1930 by Schweitzer in his book *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, it caused a scandal."²²⁵ Schweitzer, however, thoroughly explores the mysticism that rises from Paul's mystical experience. In doing so, he crafts a detailed Pauline mystical theology that centers on "being in Christ" and develops from the biblical verses from his letters to the Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians.²²⁶

Many scholars have underexamined the prominence of Paul's mystical writing. More has been made of Paul's explanation of God's righteousness. In *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, James Dunn states, "Paul's 'in Christ' language is much more pervasive

223 Underhill, 337.

224 Underhill.

225 Daniel Marguerat, *Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 163.

226 Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3. The "utterances of Pauline mysticism" include Gal. 2:19–20, 3:26–28, 4:6, 5:24–25, 6:14, 2 Cor. 5:17, Rom. 6:10–11, 7:4, 8:1–2, 8:9–11, 12:4–5, and Phil. 3:1–11.

in his writings than his talk of ‘God’s righteousness.’”²²⁷ Dunn refers to Galatians 2:20, in which Paul writes, “And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Schweitzer explains his mystical theology:

The fundamental thought of Pauline mysticism runs thus: I am in Christ; in Him I know myself as a being who is raised above this sensuous, sinful, and transient world and already belongs to the transcendent; in Him I am assured of resurrection; in Him I am a Child of God.²²⁸

Schweitzer’s progression shows the way in which God encounters the Christian. At the heart of Paul’s mystical theology is the working of the kingdom of God. Marguerat states, “The Kingdom will not come as an invasion of God into history; the Kingdom is born in the believer’s innermost self.”²²⁹ Dunn expands on Marguerat’s view, stating, “Christ is being conceived as a kind of atmosphere in which Christians lived.”²³⁰

The mystical theology of Paul is neither a theoretical nor a reason-based view. It is experiential and embodied. It brings together Jesus’s proclamation that the kingdom of God has drawn near through the indwelling of Christ in the believer. Embodying the kingdom of God, the believer then goes out into the world motivated to share the kingdom to others. Encouraging others to allow Christ to enter into them is the hallmark of Pauline mystical evangelism.

227 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 391.

228 Schweitzer, 3.

229 Marguerat, 361.

230 Dunn, 391.

The Mystical Experience of Peter

Peter was the most prominent of the twelve disciples. He was a member of the inner circle that witnessed the transfiguration. He was the one who attempted to walk on water and was proclaimed to be the rock by Jesus. Peter was also the last person to speak with Jesus in the New Testament²³¹ and was the first disciple to enter tomb after the resurrection, finding it empty.²³² Peter's position as first disciple in the Gospels turned him into the first leader in Acts. In *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, Markus Bockmuehl states, "Throughout the first half of Acts it appears that Peter is the main human protagonist, the prince of the apostles."²³³ Peter addressed the crowd at Pentecost and performed the first healing.²³⁴ Peter was also the first apostle to have a mystical experience that led to evangelism.

His mystical encounter shaped him and reoriented his ministry. In the second half of Acts 9, Peter traveled to Lydda and Joppa and performed two miracles. As Chapter 10 begins, he was staying at the home of Simon the tanner. While waiting for a midday meal, Peter went to the roof to pray.²³⁵ He fell into a trance. He saw the heavens open, a sheet descended, and on it were all kinds of animals. Peter heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." He questioned the voice, responding, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice answered him, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." The vision happened three times.

231 John 21:15–22.

232 John 20:6–7.

233 Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 27.

234 Acts 2:14–33, Acts 3:1–10.

235 Acts 10:9–16.

Afterwards, Peter was “greatly puzzled” and thought about it.²³⁶ At the same time, men sent by the centurion of the Italian cohort Cornelius arrived, asking for Peter. The Spirit told Peter to go with these men, and he did. When Peter arrived at Cornelius’s home, he began to realize the importance of his vision, announcing to all those gathered, “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.”²³⁷ After seeing that the Holy Spirit at work in the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’s home, Peter invited them to be baptized.²³⁸

Peter’s divine encounter on the rooftop in Joppa has all the qualities of a mystical experience. As with Paul, it came upon Peter suddenly, but, unlike Paul, Peter was praying, fell into a trance, and had a vision. The account, however, does not state that Peter had been asking God for a vision. Peter went to pray; the mystical experience happened to him. It lasted only for a short time and did not reoccur. The experience was also difficult for Peter to comprehend.

In addition, the encounter produced the appropriate results. Peter was confused by what happened but trusted its veracity and acted because of it. Underhill explains that when a mystic attains an “irresistible trance,” he “declares that his rapture or ecstasy includes a moment—often a very short, and always an indescribable moment—in which he enjoys a supreme knowledge of or participation in Divine Reality.”²³⁹ When Cornelius’s men invited him to come to Caesarea, Peter did not hesitate, because he

236 Acts 10:17–19.

237 Acts 10:28.

238 Acts 10:47–48.

239 Underhill, 276.

trusted what he had experienced. His worldview also changed in a crucial way. The dietary laws were an important dividing line between Jews and Gentiles. For Peter to suspend his adherence to them was no small matter. Without the vision, Peter might not have gone with the men to Cornelius's home. Even if he had, he would not have trusted what he was seeing when he witnessed the Holy Spirit among them.

The impact of Peter's vision changed the entire shape of his life. It allowed him to accept what he witnessed in Caesarea, opened the door for Paul's missionary work, and allowed the growth of the Gentile church. In *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle*, Martin Hengel explains, "The highpoint of the legends of Peter, which are assembled and artfully described by Luke, is the conversion of the God-fearing centurion Cornelius."²⁴⁰ After Peter's report to the Jerusalem council in Chapter 11, Peter's role as head of the Jerusalem church transferred to James.²⁴¹ Peter gave up his leadership to become a missionary and evangelist to the Gentiles. Additionally, Peter's vision was necessary for Paul. In *The Salvation of the Gentiles*, Dom Jacques Dupont writes, "In the order of events within Acts the honor of having opened the gates of the Church to the Gentiles belongs to Peter. Once those gates are opened, Paul will be able to do the rest."²⁴² Bockmuehl rightly concludes, "As the pioneer and representative of faith in the Messiah's kingdom ministry, Peter is entrusted with opening access to that kingdom."²⁴³ Without his rooftop experience, he would likely have remained as head of the church in

240 Martin Hengel, *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 90.

241 See Acts 15 and 22. Bockmuehl also states that James the brother of Jesus is "undeniably" the head of the Jerusalem church (28).

242 Dom Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles*, Trans. John R. Keating (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 25.

243 Bockmuehl, 76.

Jerusalem, Paul might have been stymied in his work with the Gentiles, and the Church might have faltered.

Petrine Mystical Theology

Although Paul's identity as a mystic and his mystical theology have gained acceptance over the last hundred years, a mystic Peter has largely been underexplored, nor have his writings been extensively examined for mystical theology. Schweitzer defines mystical theology as "whenever thought makes the ultimate effort to conceive the relation of the personality to the universal."²⁴⁴ His definition builds on the understanding mystical theology of the medieval tradition but is more focused on the intellect than union of soul with God.²⁴⁵ Peter's mystical teaching (particularly in 1 Peter) seems to meet the level of mystical theology expressed by Schweitzer and complements the idea of Paul as a mystic and his mysticism in evangelism.

There is debate surrounding the authorship of 1 Peter, concerning which there are three schools of thought. The first position is that Peter did not write the letter; it is fully pseudonymous. M. Eugene Boring writes, "Most critical scholars interpret the document as a letter...written in Peter's name in order to claim that its teaching represented the apostolic faith."²⁴⁶ Ehrman explains that "Peter himself was an Aramaic-speaking lower-class fisherman from rural Galilee" and would not "gone to school to learn to read and write."²⁴⁷ Second, Peter did not write the letter, but Silvanus wrote it in his name.²⁴⁸

252 Schweitzer, 3.

253 F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingston, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Third Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1128.

246 M. Eugene Boring, "The First Letter of Peter," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39–4-395.

247 Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 76.

248 Boring, 394.

Third, Peter wrote the letter or oversaw its composition. Bockmuehl explains, “While there are indeed weighty reasons to doubt Peter’s sole literary authorship of this letter [1 Peter], the conventional arguments for a fully pseudonymous composition (after his death, unconnected with his ministry or even with the envisaged readership) do not merit the wide acceptance they have received and should be shelved.”²⁴⁹ There is no way to be certain about the authorship, but regardless, as Raymond Brown concludes, “1 Peter is one of the most attractive and pastorally rich writings in the NT, and it deserves careful attention.”²⁵⁰

While Brown’s conclusion regarding the pastoral nature of 1 Peter is correct, the letter’s deep mystical theology is also clear. Given Peter’s powerful mystical experience on the rooftop and his other encounters with Jesus, Peter’s authorship and personal oversight carry weight. Additionally, Schweitzer’s groundbreaking text on Paul’s mysticism lists a dozen mystical “utterances” from several letters to create the foundation of Pauline mysticism.²⁵¹ There are, however, six to eight mystical sayings in 1 Peter that create Peter’s theology.²⁵² In one letter, Peter creates his own mystical theology drawn from his mystical experience. A close examination of the mystical sayings is beyond the scope of this thesis, but two are worth exploring because of their close relationship to evangelism.

249 Bockmuehl, 126.

250 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 706.

251 Schweitzer, 3–4.

252 The Petrine mystical sayings include 1 Peter 1:3–5, 1:14–15, 1:23, 2:2, 2:5, 2:9, 4:14, and 5:5b.

The two sayings find their basis in Peter's rooftop experience and his subsequent evangelistic work at Cornelius's home. The first saying in 1 Peter 1:3-5 explains the first aspect of Petrine mysticism's tie to evangelism. Peter states:

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Theologically, the verses speak to a mysticism of rebirth and resurrection. God has given believers a "living hope" that has come about through Jesus's resurrection, and through "new birth" they gain an inheritance and salvation.

The second saying, in 1 Peter 2:5a, expands on the concept of "living hope": "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house." To ground the sophisticated metaphor Christologically and biblically, the author states in Verse 4 that Jesus was the first "living stone." Then, in Verses 6-8, he quotes three Old Testament verses that refer to the importance of stones, which Jesus had also included in the gospels.²⁵³ In four verses, Peter creates a mysticism of deification that is more robust theologically and scripturally grounded than Paul's "in Christ" mysticism.

Why do these two mystical sayings matter? Drawing on Schweitzer's view of mystical theology, these two sayings seek to give "clarity regarding the relation of God and the world."²⁵⁴ The "living" aspect of hope and the stone is not meant to be an inner spirituality. The letter's focus calls the reader to an external, evangelistic orientation. The author states that God has called them to "proclaim" God's "mighty acts" and "conduct"

253 See Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:18, Luke 20:14, and Acts 4:11.
262 Schweitzer, 2.

themselves so that the Gentiles may see their “honorable deeds and glorify God and silence the foolish.”²⁵⁵ After giving instructions regarding marital and communal living in the beginning of Chapter 3, Peter states, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.”²⁵⁶ Limiting the view and scope of the letter to pastoral concerns misreads the underlying mystical and evangelistic nature of the letter. The “living” aspect of the two passages creates an active, externally-focused, evangelistic orientation. Additionally, it calls on believers not simply to endure sufferings but to remain hopeful because suffering has an evangelistic purpose by which salvation is secured.

In a critical step away from Paul’s mystical theology, the mystical theology of Peter is not individualistic but rather has a communal aspect to it. Unlike the individualistic nature of the Pauline “in Christ,” Petrine mystical theology focuses on community. When Peter calls his follower to be “living stones,” he is speaking about togetherness of the community. As spiritual stones, believers are to “let [themselves] be built into a spiritual house.” Because the form of the verb “build” is passive, the actor who builds is obviously not an individual. Although the subject is not named, it is presumed to be either God or the community. Second, the phrase “spiritual stones” is plural, but they are built into a single “spiritual house.” The sweep of the mystical theology of Peter brings together individuals who must work together to become holy²⁵⁷ and as a holy people are to evangelize.²⁵⁸ They do so to bring living hope to others and

255 1 Peter 2:9, 2:12, 2:15.

256 1 Peter 3:15b.

257 1 Peter 1:15–16

258 The explanation of Petrine mysticism needs further development. The potential for exciting understandings of a mystical theology within a community and for the individual is considerable. This thesis would benefit from a more thorough discussion of Petrine mystical evangelism.

bring the others with them to become living stones with which they can create a spiritual house.

Mystical Evangelism in Action

The mystical experiences of both Paul and Peter have profound implications. First, they make them mystics who develop significant mystical theologies. Second, their experiences motivate their evangelistic activities. As the founders of the Christian Church, they would have been special, and their experiences would have allowed them to be especially active evangelistically. An examination of history is therefore needed to determine if evangelism motivated by mystical experience goes beyond the Apostolic Age. I will first discuss five prominent Christians that effectively evangelizing after their mystical experiences follows. I will then give additional examples of Americans who had experiences that moved them to evangelize.

I chose these historical figures for several reasons. Their context fit. They were not from one period but rather from across the whole span of Christian history. Their mystical experiences were diverse. Martin of Tours had a vision. Catherine of Siena prayed her way to a spiritual pinnacle. John Wesley and Hannah Whitall Smith had experiences when they went to a religious meeting. Others had equally varied encounters. Importantly, they were all Christians. None of their experiences was a conversion. They were what the Quaker Quietism movement called “second blessings.” Their experiences deepened or realigned their relationship with God and sent them into the world to spread the Good News. I selected these people with an eye toward gender. Since both men and women participated in the workshop including mystical experiences of both men and women was a must.

Martin of Tours

Martin of Tours lived in the fourth century and has been called a mystic.²⁵⁹ Even though as “a young boy he aspired to the service of God,”²⁶⁰ his father, who was a soldier, forced his son into military service at the age of fifteen. While a soldier, Martin had a mystical experience. One extremely cold winter’s day Martin was “at the gate of the city of Amiens” when he saw a “poor man destitute of clothing.”²⁶¹ Martin was wearing only his cloak because he had already given his other clothes to people in need. In an account about Martin’s life, Suplitius Serverus writes, “Taking, therefore his cloak with which he was girt, he divided his cloak into two equal parts, and gave one part to the poor man, while he again clothed himself with the remainder.”²⁶² Serverus continues, “In the following night, when Martin had resigned himself to sleep, he had a vision of Christ arrayed in that part of his cloak with which he had clothed the poor man.” In his vision, he heard Jesus say, “Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me in his robe.”²⁶³ Soon after, he was baptized and after two years left military service.

Later in his life, Martin, who had desired a life of hermit, instead became bishop of Tours. During his episcopacy, he was known as a “holy man and healer” and was “active in evangelizing the countryside, replacing pagan shrines with churches.”²⁶⁴ For instance, in a medieval hagiographic story, which is nonetheless edifying, Martin demolished an ancient pagan temple and was about to chop down a tree standing next to

259 Christopher Donaldson, *Martin of Tours: Parish Priest, Mystic, and Exorcist* (London: Routledge, 1980), 5.

260 Suplitius Serverus, *Saint Martin of Tours* (London: Aeterna Press, 2015), 5.

261 Serverus, 7.

262 Serverus.

263 Serverus.

264 *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Martin, St.”

it.²⁶⁵ The chief pagan priest and others protested Martin's felling of the tree. After he told them there was nothing sacred about the tree, the villagers still objected and challenged Martin to test God. He agreed. Just before the tree was to fall, the pagan priest and the others bound Martin and positioned him where they agreed the tree would fall. As the tree began to fall on him, Martin held up his hand making the sign of salvation. The tree spun away from him, and Martin lived.²⁶⁶ Serverus concludes, "The well-known result was that on that day salvation came to that region."²⁶⁷

Catherine of Siena

A fourteenth-century Italian mystic, Catherine of Siena was born "the same year that the black death began its sweep across Europe."²⁶⁸ When she was seven years old, she "dedicated her virginity to God," and by the time she was fifteen, she had "decided to join the Third Order of St. Dominic."²⁶⁹ With the permission of her parents, starting at age seventeen, Catherine spent three years in solitude, fasting and praying until she reached "a spiritual climax."²⁷⁰ Andrea Janelle Dickens explains, "Catherine experienced a mystical espousal to Christ on the last day of Carnival."²⁷¹ Her vision led to a transformation in her life. She left her "very private spirituality" for "public and church-focused" actions, including writing letters to people from religious leaders to prostitutes.

265 Serverus, 24.

266 Ibid., 24–25.

267 Ibid., 25.

268 Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 150.

269 Shawn Madigan, ed., *Mystics, Visionaries, and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 209.

270 Dickens, 151.

271 Dickens.

Many of Catherine's more than 200 letters that have survived capture her earnest evangelism. For example, in 1377, she pleads to Niera to accept Christ: "I long to see you so clothed in the garment of divine charity."²⁷² Catherine states that following the pleasures of the world will lead to misery.²⁷³ She continues, "I want you with a true holy diligence to *strip your heart and affection* of this perverse love and *clothe it in love* for Christ crucified."²⁷⁴ Catherine encourages Niera to discover a spiritual espousal like her own. Another example is her letter to Piero Gambacorta from late 1374. In it, she writes, "I long to see your *love and desire purified, freed from the world's wicked delights* and disordered pleasures, for these things cut the soul off from God."²⁷⁵ She makes her evangelistic plea: "By recognizing how God's goodness is *at work in you*, you will be bound and united with the chain of charity, gentle and pleasant beyond all other gentleness!"²⁷⁶ To another person she writes, "*Sleep no longer* in the death of mortal sin....*Pick up the shovel* of holy fear of God and *let the hand of love guide it*."²⁷⁷ To yet another she pleads, "I beg you, for love of Christ crucified, *be compassionate, not cruel, to your soul*."²⁷⁸ In letter after letter, Catherine ties her mystical views to evangelism to bring people to the Christian faith.

272 Suzanne Noffke, trans., *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 303.

273 Noffke, 304.

274 Noffke.

275 Noffke, 60.

276 Noffke, 62.

277 Noffke, 146.

278 Noffke, 35.

John Wesley

One May evening in 1738, John Wesley, son of an Anglican rector, had a mystical experience. In his journal, he wrote:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.²⁷⁹

Until his mystical experience, which caused strong emotions in Wesley, he had not considered evangelism something that he should do. He writes, "I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church."²⁸⁰ After his experience, he completely changed this view. Soon after he explains, "I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people." Wesley continued his evangelism throughout the rest of his life, drawing on his experience for inspiration and motivation.

Hannah Whitall Smith

Hannah Whitall Smith was a nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century lay preacher, author, and evangelist in the Quaker tradition's Holiness movement. Carole Dale Spencer notes, "She is one of the most striking and complex personalities in the nineteenth

²⁷⁹ John Wesley, *Journal of John Wesley* (N.p., n.d.), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xvi.html> (January 3, 2017).
²⁸⁰ Wesley, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iii.i.html>.

century Quaker evangelism, and one of the most articulate exponents of holiness in the Victorian era.”²⁸¹ Her most significant work, *My Spiritual Autobiography, or How I Discovered the Unselfishness of God*, details her mystical experience.

In many ways, her experience parallels the experiences noted above. It came upon her unexpectedly and suddenly, was short-lived, and had an immense impact on her. One significant difference in her experience came when she was mourning the loss of her five-year-old daughter. She writes, “I could not endure to think that my darling had gone out alone into a Godless universe; and yet, no matter on which side I turned, there seemed no ray of light.”²⁸² At that time noonday religious meetings had grown in popularity in urban areas. With little interest, Hannah happened on one and while there encountered God. She writes, “Then suddenly something happened to me. What it was or how it came I had no idea, but somehow an inner eye seemed to be opened in my soul, and I seemed to see that after all God was a fact.”²⁸³ She determined that “God was making Himself manifest as an actual existence, and my soul leaped up in an irresistible cry to know him.”²⁸⁴

The experience changed her life forever. Spencer observes, “Almost immediately she became an ‘evangelist.’”²⁸⁵ Her mission was to change the vision that most people held about God. She wanted every person to “discover that He is not the selfish Being we are so often apt to think Him, but is instead really and fundamentally unselfish, caring not

281 Spencer, 183.

282 Hannah Whitall Smith, *My Spiritual Autobiography or How I Discovered the Unselfishness of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company), 172.

283 Whitall Smith, 172-173.

284 Whitall Smith, 173.

285 Spencer, 188.

at all for Himself, but only and always for us.”²⁸⁶ In addition to writing, Smith spent the rest of her life preaching in the America and Britain.

Additional Experiences

These individuals are not the only ones who engaged in evangelism after their experience. Perhaps anyone who has written about their experience can be viewed as an evangelist, but some people acted with evangelical intent. In *American Personal Religious Accounts, 1600 – 1980: Toward an Inner History of America’s Faiths*, Jon Alexander describes the lives and spiritual experiences of more than eighty Americans. The following Christians are not only major Christian figures in American history, but they also illustrate the connection between experiences of God and the Holy and evangelism. The context of their lives informs their divine encounters and their evangelism.

In the seventeenth-century, the Colonial leaders tried Ann Hutchinson on charges of religious and political sedition, which led to her excommunication and banishment from the Colony of Massachusetts.²⁸⁷ During questioning, Ann explained that she had changed her view of the covenant of grace because of an “immediate revelation” during which God’s “own spirit” spoke to her soul and caused her to conclude, “Having seen him which is invisible I fear not what man can do unto me.”²⁸⁸ Not afraid of the consequences, Hutchinson spoke about her experience in order to change others’ minds. A century later, Catherine Hammer’s series of mystical experiences helped grow the

²⁸⁶ Smith, 10.

²⁸⁷ Jon Alexander, *American Personal Religious Accounts, 1600 – 1980: Toward an Inner History of America’s Faiths* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 61.

²⁸⁸ Alexander, 62–63.

Ephrata Cloister in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.²⁸⁹ In the nineteenth-century, former slaves Amanda Berry Smith and Josiah Henson became evangelists and preachers as a result of their experiences of God and the Holy.²⁹⁰ Experiences of God and the Holy during or immediately following revival meetings led, among others, James B. Finlay, William Capers, and Billy Graham to pursue evangelistic activities.²⁹¹ Finally, Bill Wilson's experience of the God helped him become sober and establish Alcoholics Anonymous. He explained, "The real significance of my experience in the Cathedral burst upon me. For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted God. There had been a humble willingness to have him with me – and He came."²⁹² In his own way, Bill Wilson's efforts to help others end their addiction to alcohol also had led many people to God.

Conclusions

Mystical experiences are intense encounters with God and the Holy that change people. They are not a uniquely separate classification of religious experience that may only be interpreted by religious thinkers. They are rather experiences open to evaluation and scholarly interpretation. Although no firm definition exists, the qualities and results of mystical experiences have been investigated and made identifiable. The results from such encounters with God and the Holy have been a motivation to evangelize. In the first century, Paul and Peter used their mystical experiences as motivations for evangelism and subsequently developed rich theologies. Paul's "in Christ" theology is an expression of the nearness of the kingdom of God that individuals experience internally and then

²⁸⁹ Alexander, 91–94.

²⁹⁰ Alexander, 127–128, 206–213.

²⁹¹ Alexander, 109–111, 125–126, 315–317.

²⁹² Alexander, 325.

encourage others to discover for themselves. Peter's "living hope" and "living stones" motivate the evangelist to share a hope that Christ first established to bring believers together, building a "spiritual house." Further, history demonstrates that the mystical experience as motivation for evangelism was not limited to the first century. Martin of Tours, Catherine of Siena, John Wesley, Hannah Whitall Smith and the others mentioned are just some who have had mystical experiences and were motivated to evangelize because of their encounters.

I must add one additional point. When looking at spiritual and mystical encounters, the starting point is experience. In *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, Harvey Egan states, "According to [Rahner], God's self-communication, grace, is at the heart of human existence....[and] God's self-communication to *all* persons is experiential."²⁹³ Rahner points beyond denominational and religion to common experiences of God and the Holy. When looking to broad experiences of the divine, obvious problems arise in expression, interpretation, and understanding. One benefit, however, is ecumenical. Experiences of God and the Holy are not bound by doctrine, denomination, or religion. Schweitzer adds that intellectual mysticism is found beyond Christians to among others "the Brahmans and in Buddhism."²⁹⁴ If Rahner and Schweitzer are right, experiences of God and the Holy may happen to anyone.

Now that mystical experiences and evangelism have been linked, the next questions are: (1) What are the complexities that stymie spiritual change? (2) How can people change their minds? (3) What happens after people change mindsets? These

²⁹³ Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 33 & 55.

²⁹⁴ Schweitzer, 2.

questions matter not just to the change seen in Church founders but also to ordinary modern-day Christians.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Possibilities of Spiritual Change

Introduction

If it is true that mystical experiences are a natural occurrence in the brain and can happen to many people, as Newberg and Waldman claim, and if about half of all Americans have had a mystical experience, as reported by Pew Research Center,²⁹⁵ then why are there not more written accounts of them? Several possibilities seem reasonable. People may not understand such encounters and be reluctant to speak about them. They may also not know what to do about them. Whatever the case, one question remains: Is it possible to change people's minds about their experiences so they are able to share their divine encounters with others?

Mystical experiences are powerful events that affect people in different ways. Their responses are based on several factors that involve the challenges that change presents. It is difficult to change the way many people think, even when something as powerful as a mystical experience occurs. It is even harder to change people's behavior. In *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds*, psychologist Howard Gardner states, "Changes in faith are intensely personal experiences," and adds, "Minds, of course, are hard to change." He also is not looking at a change of taste but rather "changes of behavior."²⁹⁶

303 Heimlich, Russell, "Mystical Experiences," Fact Tank Blog (Pew Research Center, 2009) www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2009/12/29/mystical-experiences (December 13, 2017).

296 Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2006), 1, 5, 187.

The way in which people can change their minds is central to some professions more than others. In *Second-Order Change in Psychotherapy*, J. Scott Fraser and Andrew D. Solovey explain, “Change is at the heart of psychotherapy.”²⁹⁷ When people seek a psychotherapist for counseling to help them cope with their lives better, they participate because they want to change. Fraser and Solovey state, however, that “little agreement in the field exists on precisely what is important to change.”²⁹⁸ Mental health professionals struggle to agree on the “nature of change at the theoretical level,” even while agreeing that psychotherapy ultimately works.²⁹⁹

Another area that focuses on the concepts of changing minds is organizational leadership. Many leadership authors write about the complexities of change. In *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge writes, “Whenever there is resistance to change, you can count on there being one or more ‘hidden’ balancing processes.”³⁰⁰ In order to effect change in large organizations, Senge examines complex life systems. He explains that “nature loves a balance” and that, to remain in balance, “living systems seek homeostasis.”³⁰¹ The same holds true with organizations. Senge writes, “What makes balancing processes so difficult in management is that the goals are often implicit, and no one recognizes that the balancing

297 J. Scott Fraser and Andrew D. Solovey, *Second-Order Change in Psychotherapy: The Golden Thread That Unifies Effective Treatments* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007), 19.

298 Fraser and Solovey.

299 Fraser and Solovey.

300 Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art of Practicing of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 88.

301 Senge, 84.

process exists at all.”³⁰² The challenge for leaders is that they are often “unwittingly caught in balancing processes” that stymie effective change.³⁰³

A change in mindset is also linked to mental capacity and development. In *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey write, “The change challenges today’s leaders and their subordinates face are not, for the most part, a problem of will. The problem is the inability to close the gap between what we genuinely, even passionately, want and what we are actually able to do.”³⁰⁴ They argue, “Closing the gap is a central learning problem of the twenty-first century.”³⁰⁵ Because of the advancements of brain research in the last thirty years, people have a greater knowledge about mental development and change. For instance, instead of mental capacity stopping at early adulthood, the brain has the “phenomenal capacity” to “keep adapting throughout life.”³⁰⁶ For Kegan and Laskow Lahey, the complexity of change emerges from people’s ability to grow across three plateaus of brain growth.³⁰⁷ They believe change can happen, but it is more of a question of mental development than will. As people’s thinking becomes more sophisticated, they are able to handle more change.

To summarize, people may constantly and readily make changes, but to change people’s minds so that their actions and behaviors also change is difficult. Therapists help patients create change in their lives, but it remains unclear how catalysts to change work.

302 Senge, 85.

303 Senge, 86.

304 Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2009), 2.

305 Kegan and Laskow Lahey.

306 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 13.

307 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 16–20.

In addition, leaders often face several obstacles to change. They must overcome powerful forces of human nature, such as the propensity of systems to maintain homeostasis.

Leaders must also teach their subordinates how to think more sophisticatedly to allow for more possibilities and change. Further, as they work for change in their organizations and with their people, leaders must avoid the temptation to push too quickly and thereby misidentify the obstacles to change. The complexities that surround changing people's minds and behaviors are not limited neither to mental health nor to organizational systems. Similar challenges are found with spiritual matters.

The Complexities of Spiritual Change

In a religious context, change may happen in several ways. One obvious type of change involves religious conversion. People who previously had no interest in religion become adherents. After a single event or series of events, they begin to practice again. Less frequently, people who have no experience with formal religion become converts. Either way, the change of conversion can be best measured in contrast, by an increase in activities associated with religion (e.g., worship service attendance or prayer). Post-conversion experiences involve a deepening of religious devotion or belief, and mystical experiences are frequently contributing factors in these changes. The people in this category are already adherents and actively participate in religious practices. Examples of the second type of change are the early church leaders Paul and Peter. After their encounter with God, such people find themselves changed by the experience. Without guidance, however, many of these people become stymied, unsure how to translate their encounter into action.

Spiritual change resulting from mystical experiences requires a complex and challenging change in mindset. Some changes are hindered by a desire to protect the memory, fear of what people will say, a lack of understanding of the event, or fear of what it means. These are but a few of the many reasons people resist change after a mystical experience. The problem, however, is that the experience has an intention and is supposed to cause an outward action. People are not meant to act the same after an encounter with God and the Holy. Over the centuries, many who guide people after their mystical experiences often admonish their students because they do not act. The teachers are critical because their students often desire for the encounter to continue or happen again. When it does not, the students become frustrated or stymied, and they remain unchanged.

The challenges of spiritual change arise in other ways as well. After a series of requests by her spiritual director, Teresa of Ávila wrote *Life*, in which she describes her spiritual experiences and shows the challenges of spiritual change. In chapter eleven, she notes that those who seek God's perfect love struggle to retain the change created: "No sooner is some little point of etiquette concerning our status brought up than we forget we have already offered it to God; and we desire to take it right back out of His hands, so to speak, after having made Him, as it seemed, the Lord of our wills. So it is with everything else."³⁰⁸ Her lesson is that change does not happen all at once, and even after people change there is still a temptation to revert back to their old ways. In a sense, when

308 Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987), 111.

people take one step forward in their spiritual lives, they are likely to take a step backward just as quickly.

Another challenge of change involves spiritual development. After people have experiences of God and the Holy, they are often in a state of intimacy with and feel a closeness to God. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish Discalced Carmelite priest and mystic John of the Cross writes his famous mystical poem “The Dark Night” and creates a commentary for use by those who studied under him. In the first chapter of Book One of the commentary, he explains, “After [the soul] has been resolutely converted to his service, like a loving mother who warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food, and carries and caresses it in her arms.”³⁰⁹ The intimacy, however, does not remain. Further spiritual development must occur. He writes:

But as the child grows older, the mother withholds her caresses and hides her tender love; she rubs bitter aloes on her sweet breast and sets the child down from her arms, letting it walk on its own feet so that it may put aside the habits of childhood and grow accustomed to greater and more important things.³¹⁰

John of the Cross uses the example of nursing and weaning to show the challenge of spiritual development. Many people who first experience an encounter with God and the Holy do not want it to end and prefer to remain in a state of initial spiritual development. They do not understand that the mystical experience is only a beginning, the onset of a deepening spiritual life.

At times, the challenge of spiritual change, however, results from something other than ignorance. Resistance to spiritual change may be due to a strong desire to retain

309 Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 361.

310 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez.

childlike spiritual activity. St. John of the Cross writes, “Those who are always attached to [things of the senses] and the knowledge the spirit can abstract from them are the work of a child. Those who are always attached to them, and never become detached, will never stop being like a little child.”³¹¹ People who desire only to remain in a childlike relationship with God tend to resist growth and change.

Furthermore, although spiritual change may occur, the process behind it is not always comprehensible. In chapter six of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the late fourteenth-century anonymous author, who gives guidance to the reader in the way of spiritual growth through prayer and discipline, explains the challenges to contemplative prayer and spiritual change: “But in the real contemplative work you must set all this [God’s majesty and kindness for contemplative insights] aside and cover it with a cloud of forgetting. Then let your loving desire, gracious and devout, step bravely and joyfully beyond it and reach out to pierce the darkness above.”³¹² The darkness of the cloud of unknowing illustrates the lack of understanding that mystics have regarding the process of spiritual change. The best advice is to let go of all thought and enter darkness in the hope of deepening people’s spiritual life and creating change.

One final challenge that many face is that spiritual change takes work. People want their change to happen quickly and effortlessly. In chapter thirty-five of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which outlines the habits a beginner should develop, the author states, “Beginners and those a little advanced who do not make the effort to ponder God’s word

311 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 208.

312 William Johnston, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 55.

should not be surprised if they are unable to pray. Experience bears it out.”³¹³ The author stresses that people who desire to grow and change must read the Bible to learn the ways in which they need to change. The author advises, “For beginners and those a little advanced in contemplation, reading or hearing the word of God must precede pondering it and without time given to serious reflection there will be no genuine prayer.”³¹⁴ Spiritual change comes over time and emerges from the habits of spiritual practices.

Despite the complexities of change in the spiritual life, change may still happen. People can grow spiritually and develop their spiritual lives. Underhill writes, “To go up alone into the mountain and come back as an ambassador to the world, has ever been the method of humanity’s best friends. This systole-and-diastole motion of retreat as the preliminary to a return remains the true ideal of Christian Mysticism in its highest development.”³¹⁵ The purpose of the mystical experience is to create ambassadors of God. People who make an outward change in behavior often see surprising growth on many levels. They can become enthusiastic and highly motivated toward evangelism.

Spiritual Change and Contemporary Concepts

When examining contemporary writers writing about change, four connections to spiritual change appear. Each provides avenues that release people, uplift them, change their mindset, and allow them to grow spiritually.

Change provides stability from which new behavior develops. Fraser and Solovey write that when facing a problem people “often resolve life difficulties by assimilating or

313 Johnston, 93.

314 Johnston.

315 Underhill, 133.

accommodating them into their familiar repertoire.”³¹⁶ People will use what has worked in the past to solve a current problem and will do so repeatedly. Fraser and Solovey argue, “Instead of creating improvement, the attempted and failed solution makes the problem worse.”³¹⁷ They describe such failed actions as “first-order change.”³¹⁸ In the spiritual life, this cycle of failure is described as a desert or purgative experience. The mystical experience that has provided such joy does not recur or, if it does, does not last. People pray for it to reoccur, but when it does not, they pray more fervently and more often. They either continue to pray the same prayer or give up altogether. Commonly, when first-order actions do not work, they regard what is happening as being in the desert or purgation.

Fraser and Solovey argue that the key to change is “second-order change.”³¹⁹ These solutions feel “strange, weird, out of the blue, [and] paradoxical.”³²⁰ To reach a second-order change, the therapist must understand “the pattern of the problem.”³²¹ It is much the same in the spiritual life. After Teresa of Ávila changed her spiritual director, she experienced her rapture. In chapter twenty-four of *Life*, she writes, “At that time they transferred my confessor to another place, I felt his transfer very keenly, for I thought I would return to my wretchedness.... My soul was left as though in a desert, very disconsolate and fearful.”³²² Yet the shift to a new confessor allowed her to make a second-order change. She writes, “This Father [her new confessor] began to lead me to

316 Fraser and Solovey, 23.

317 Fraser and Solovey.

318 Fraser and Solovey, 26.

319 Fraser and Solovey.

320 Fraser and Solovey.

321 Fraser and Solovey, 51.

322 Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 211.

greater perfection.”³²³ Using another second-order change option, Teresa’s confessor challenged her assumptions.³²⁴ She continues, “He told me that to please God completely I must leave nothing undone.”³²⁵ In doing so, God “redirected the first-order solutions”³²⁶ that she had been using. She had been praying and singing hymns but had let go of her thoughts of wretchedness. Then her second-order change happened. She writes, “One day, having spent a long time in prayer and begging the Lord to help me please Him in all things, I began the hymn; while saying it, a rapture came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself.”³²⁷ The result of her rapture was a change that sent her into action. “From that day on I was very courageous in abandoning all for God, as one who had wanted from that moment—for it doesn’t seem to me it was otherwise—to change completely.”³²⁸

Change is also about overcoming defensiveness and resulting anxiety. In *Immunity to Change*, Kegan and Laskow Lahey explain another reason why change is difficult. They write, “It is change that leaves us feeling defenseless before the dangers we ‘know’ to be present that causes us anxiety.”³²⁹ The feelings that arise when change occurs are a part of “a self-protection system.”³³⁰ But in protecting people from perceived dangers, there occurs “a false belief that many things are impossible.”³³¹ In spiritual terms, protection from change limits the possibilities of growth and the possibility of activities such as evangelism. Paul’s life prior to his conversion illustrates the limitation

323 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez.

324 Fraser and Solovey, 52.

325 Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 211.

326 Fraser and Solovey, 52.

327 Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 211.

328 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 212.

329 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 50.

330 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 50.

331 Kegan and Laskow Lahey.

of the protection system, and his actions after his experience on the road to Damascus demonstrate the possibility of change.

The followers of the Way threatened Saul's beliefs that he had learned as a rabbi in the Jewish tradition. Jesus and his followers undermined Saul's concept of God and the Messiah. As he described to King Agrippa, "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth."³³² His actions, however, went well beyond denouncing Jesus's name: "I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death."³³³ Saul's emotional state pushed him to take further actions. He said, "I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities." Saul knew the fledgling Christian religion was a threat to his belief system. His anxiety grew, and he became more violent. Without God's Damascene intervention, Saul would have continued to kill in the name of religion and his sins would have mounted, ostracizing him from the Jewish tradition that he loved. His moment of change saved him.

Another key factor to change is learning. Kegan and Laskow Lahey state that, as mental capacity increases to a new level, a "different way of knowing the world" opens up to people.³³⁴ Before his encounter on the Damascus Road, Saul was at the second level of the adult mind. At this level, people are "able to step back from the social environment to generate an internal 'seat of judgment' or personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations."³³⁵ After his encounter, Saul

332 Acts 26:9.

333 Acts 26:10b.

334 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 15.

335 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 17.

began the process of growth to the third level of the adult mind, the “self-transforming mind.”³³⁶ Kegan and Laskow Lahey explain that part of the self-transforming mind involves people’s ability to “step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology or personal authority.”³³⁷ Key to the development of the mind to the third level is knowing. They write, “If one is not to be forever captive of one’s own theory, system, script, framework, or ideology, one needs to develop an even more complex way of knowing that permits one to *look at*, rather than choicelessly *through*, one’s own framework.”³³⁸

In the case of Saul, whose name changed to Paul, his knowing came after his encounter. Paul’s new knowledge was the result of a two-step process. First, he went to Damascus where he met with Ananias who healed him and began to teach him. Ananias said to him, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and hear his own voice.”³³⁹ After his first experience, Paul’s growth took time. He explained his mental development in the letter to the Galatians: “I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once to Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.”³⁴⁰ It took Paul three years to acquire a “self-transforming mind,” after which he went to visit Cephas (Peter).³⁴¹ Paul needed time to assimilate his new knowledge and understand that his mystical experience had transformed him. He needed time to mature in his new Christian faith.

336 Kegan and Laskow Lahey.

337 Kegan and Laskow Lahey.

338 Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 53.

339 Acts 22:14.

340 Galatians 1:17

341 Galatians 1:18

Gardner lists seven factors that could be at work when people change their minds.³⁴² They are reason, research, resonance, redescriptions, rewards, real-world events, and resistances.³⁴³ Gardner explains that, in looking at the religious events that change minds, they become “of enormous moment.”³⁴⁴ Gardner admits that “nearly all of us need to have some core beliefs,”³⁴⁵ but he explains the risk of strong sets of belief: “The appeal of a strong set of beliefs shared by all around one is clear; but especially in a pluralistic society, the costs involved in cutting oneself off from all other perspectives are patent.” Acknowledging the potential difficulties in religious change, Gardner argues for the use of four of his seven factors in changing spiritual mindsets, namely, “*reason, resistance, resonance, and the realities of daily experience.*”³⁴⁶

These four factors came into play in Peter’s mystical experience and subsequent visit to Cornelius’s house. Peter’s mystical experience changed his belief system and the ways he expressed it. Divine interaction called into question his understanding and practice of Jewish dietary laws. At first, he resisted the change the voice that was speaking to him insisted of him: “But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.’”³⁴⁷ Gardner explains that the resistance to change occurs because “we develop strong views and perspectives that are resistant to change.”³⁴⁸ As soon as his encounter had ended, Peter was “greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen.”³⁴⁹ and tried to apply reason to what happened.

342 Gardner, 14–17.

343 Gardner.

344 Gardner, 187.

345 Gardner, 189.

346 Gardner.

347 Acts 10:9–16.

348 Gardner, 17–18.

349 Acts 10:17.

Gardner writes that reason “involves identifying of relevant factors, weighing each in turn, and making an overall assessment.”³⁵⁰ Peter began to accept the vision when the men from Cornelius’s house were asking for him. At the urging of the Spirit, Peter went with the men only to discover the Holy Spirit at work among the Gentiles gathered with Cornelius.³⁵¹ When Cornelius explained to Peter his mystical experience, Peter discovered that his own experience resonates with Cornelius’s. Gardner notes, “A view, idea, or perspective resonates to the extent that it feels right to an individual, seems to fit the current situation, and convinces the person that further considerations are superfluous.”³⁵² Finally, Peter’s change of mind, which involved the acceptance of the Gentiles, came about because of the realities he saw. Peter proclaimed, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”³⁵³ Gardner explains, “Sometimes, an event occurs in the broader society that affects many individuals, not just those who are contemplating a mind change.”³⁵⁴ Peter’s change of mind about dietary laws allowed him to see and accept a greater change at work in the lives of strangers. His mystical experience was a catalyst for changing his mind, but the four change factors made the change occur.

Change, Story, and Identity

Finally, change has an effect on people’s personal stories and identities. There are many reasons why people change and act on those changes, but the way people interpret and express their actions supports these changes. Paul’s and Peter’s mystical experiences

350 Gardner, 15.

351 Acts 10:24–48.

352 Gardner, 15.

353 Acts 10:47.

354 Gardner, 17.

changed their mindsets, actions, and stories. The Acts of the Apostles includes three stories about each of their experiences. In his letters, Paul tells the story of the divine encounter that justified and affirmed his actions. A change of mind is not complete without a change of story, and the stories that people tell speak to their identities.

Stories are central to the human experience. In *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, narrative psychologist Dan P. McAdams writes, “Human beings are storytellers by nature.”³⁵⁵ But the importance of stories does not stop at a predisposition. McAdams continues, “When it comes to human lives, storytelling is sense-making.”³⁵⁶ People explain the world and their role in it through stories. He also explains that the way people find out who other people are, and how they can relate to each other, is through the stories they tell.³⁵⁷ McAdams concludes, “More than anything else, stories give us our identities.”³⁵⁸ Stories and identities, therefore, are central to explaining changes of mindsets and the actions that follow them.

When people experience God or the Holy, it changes them and their stories and identities. In her memoir *Living with a Wild God: A Nonbeliever’s Search for the Truth About Everything*, author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich writes about her encounter with the Holy: “I wandered off and was leaning on a fence, staring at the woods in the pale later summer sunlight, feeling nothing but impatience for the passage of time. And then it happened. Something peeled off the visible world, taking with it all

355 Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76.

356 McAdams.

357 McAdams.

358 McAdams.

meaning, inference, association, labels, and words.”³⁵⁹ Ehrenreich struggled to make sense of her “experience in Lone Pine.” She knew it had changed her but was unsure how. Although she was an avowed atheist, her experience kept drawing her back to the concept of God.

Later in life, Ehrenreich began to feel more comfortable in naming the Other that she had encountered. She writes, “I came to think of it as the Presence, what scientist call an ‘emergent quality,’ something greater than the sum of all the parts.”³⁶⁰ At the end of her memoir, she concludes, “This is what appears to be the purpose of my mind, and no doubt yours as well, its designated function beyond all the mundane calculations: to condense all the chaos and mystery of the world into a palpable One or Others.”³⁶¹

Ehrenreich uses her memoir to express her mystical experience and the change of mindset that it caused in her. While she is not a believer in the same way as a Christian, neither is she an atheist. Her identity has changed. Through the words of her memoir, she tells her story, and through her storytelling she expresses her change of mind and new identity.

The way of the storyteller is words and language, which are key to explaining experiences. In *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*, Religious Studies professor Brad Kallenberg explains, “Language cannot be pried off the world of experience and analyzed in isolation because the conceptual language we think and speak determines the shape of the world we inhabit.”³⁶² Language is therefore key to

359 Barbara Ehrenreich, *Living with a Wild God: A Nonbeliever’s Search for the Truth about Everything* (New York: Hatchette Book Group, 2014), 47.

360 Ehrenreich, 221.

361 Ehrenreich, 237.

362 Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 29.

storytelling and is essential to change and identity. Stromberg explains the role that language plays in the change of mind that occurs in religious conversions: “It is through the use of language in the conversion narrative that the processes of increased commitment and self-transformation take place.”³⁶³

When a change of mind happens on the level of a mystical experience, people struggle to understand and explain it. Ehrenreich explains that she could not make sense of what happened. She writes, “I had no rubric under which to store [her mystical experiences].”³⁶⁴ She looked to science fiction, then science, then several religions, attempting to locate the appropriate words to explain her experiences, but nothing seemed to fit. It was not until many years later that she discovered language that gave reference to her encounter with God.³⁶⁵ Ehrenreich’s struggle is not much different than Peter’s puzzlement after his rooftop encounter. The difference is that Peter had language to frame it that allowed him to understand and explain it. Ehrenreich took many years to understand what Peter knew in a day.

Language is therefore necessary for a change of mindset to become complete. Kallenberg writes, “At its core, learning a language involves a whole new way of behaving.”³⁶⁶ The use of words allows not just for conceptualization of ideas but for actions as well. For example, when people understand what the word “hammer” is, they can begin to understand what it is used for. Once they understand its use, then they can have an experience of it and strike a nail. Then they can tell others about the hammer and

363 Stromberg, ix. See also Perrin, 451.

364 Ehrenreich, 51.

365 Ehrenreich, 136–137, 196–197, 202, 212–215.

366 Kallenberg, 88.

its uses. When people change their minds, they demonstrate it through their actions and language. Once their actions and language change, so does their identity. In the case of mystical experiences, people can completely change their lives, which include their stories, behaviors, and identities.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Newberg and Waldman, 4.

CHAPTER FIVE

Personal Encounters and Public Sharing

Project Summary

In the previous chapter, I identified the complexities of spiritual change, the specific challenges in that change, and the facets of changing people's spiritual mindset, behaviors, and identities. It is now time to address the uniting of mystical experiences, mindset change, and evangelism in the context of the current church. The early church writers highlighted their leaders' encounters with God and the Holy. Their experiences changed and motivated them to share their experiences with the Gentiles. Across Christian history, writers have illustrated similar experiences of mystics and others who were changed and moved to evangelism. Their divine encounters changed their mindsets, behaviors, and identities and inspired them to evangelize, but can they do the same for average Christians living now?

I created a workshop to test the possibility of changing the negative mindset and resistant behavior that many Christians, especially those from mainline churches, have toward sharing their mystical experiences with other people. The workshop created opportunities for participants to demonstrate how much they were willing to change. Each session measured how much participants had changed their mindsets and behavior. Participants completed activities outside the classroom with the purpose of demonstrating their ability to change. The sequence, number, and length of the sessions were designed to teach essential material, followed by discussion that was recorded to provide data for in-depth analysis.

The participants were similar in many ways. They were all members of Episcopal parishes whose clergy had identified them as people who had had a mystical experience (although it turned out that several had not had any such encounter with God or the Holy). Their socioeconomic backgrounds were typical of Episcopalians in the twenty-first century: they were college-educated, middle-income or higher, Caucasian, and middle-aged or older. At two different churches, separate groups were formed. In total, thirteen people participated, and eleven finished all three sessions of the workshop. If they were not members of the host congregation, then they were members of an Episcopal parish in another area.

Using logic modeling, I crafted the workshop to bring about changes in mindset and behavior. Before the first workshop session, participants completed informed consent forms, along with a survey that assessed their spiritual knowledge, experience, basic mental health, and tendencies toward absorption. Each session had a teaching segment that included the study of scripture, historical review of mystics who had evangelized, and a theological survey of mystic experiences. The teaching portions gave the students an understanding of mystical experiences, evangelism, and the intersection of the two. Participants also spent time in twos and threes as well as in larger groups discussing their mystical experiences. The process of teaching and discussion allowed opportunities to identify areas of resistance to change and how and when changes occurred.

The intended outcome of the workshop drew on the participants' sense of wonder and brought about a different mindset and behavior toward their mystical experience and evangelism. Kelley Bulkeley observes that moments of wonder "forcibly propel us outside that normal range of experience, shattering our preconceptions, disclosing new

possibilities, and revealing previously unknown dimensions of reality.”³⁶⁸ In addition, “The passion of wonder stimulates curiosity and questioning” and “precedes reflective thought.”³⁶⁹ Moments of wonder, including mystical experiences, encourage thinking and curiosity, explaining why people often remember them so clearly. People want to understand them and make sense of them, but the experiences are difficult to comprehend because they are “out of the normal range of experience.”³⁷⁰ The wonder about mystical experiences provides the initial motivation for people to want to learn more about them in a workshop setting.

A workshop can motivate participants to evangelize about their mystical experiences by allowing them to share their stories with others, affirming their divine encounters, and showing them a way they can give new purpose to their experiences. The key to attracting participants to attend the workshop was tapping into their wonder about what had happened to them. By doing so, their initial resistances were lowered, encouraging them to share similar experiences with others. Once they had affirmed the value of their stories, they were able to identify themselves as people who shared experiences of God and the Holy.

Project Development

The design of the project followed program logic model principles. The model provided a step-by-step approach to define “the theory and assumptions underlying a program,”³⁷¹ in this case the workshop. The program planning template provided clarity

368 Bulkeley, 17.

369 Bulkeley, 52.

370 Bulkeley, 17.

371 W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *Logic Model Development Guide: Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action* (Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004), 1.

regarding the assumptions, strategies, influential factors, issues, community needs and assets, and desired results. The program implementation worksheet helped to define the necessary resources, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, and impacts of the workshop.

The template provided useful information. It laid the groundwork for the strategy to draw on the mystical experiences of Peter and Paul as well as others in Christian history as examples of evangelism invigorated by mystical experiences. It gave perspective to the assumptions, including the lack of Episcopal evangelism training programs and the usefulness of a formal training program based on mystical experiences. The influential factors are the lack of training programs and the attitude that Episcopalians have toward evangelism, as well as the resistance to the word “evangelism.” Other factors were the new Presiding Bishop’s enthusiasm for evangelism and the tension within the Episcopal Church between top-down desire and bottom-up resistance. The issues and needs facing evangelism in the Church are a rejection of the traditional modes of evangelism and the need for an alternative approach acceptable to Episcopalians. The community assets that exist are the prevalence of mystical experiences and a renewed interest in evangelism in the Church. These assets allow for the desired results of the workshop, which are the creation of a practical training program that has been tested and evaluated for effectiveness, the determination of the capabilities of Episcopalians to accept and engage in evangelism, and the determination if mystical experiences motivate people to evangelize.

The program implementation worksheet allowed for the progressive development of the workshop using its required resources. The resources included two host churches,

sixteen to twenty participants (half with mystical experiences and half without), biblical and historical sources, questions based on the Appreciative Inquiry language, and three to five priests open to hosting the workshop. The workshops required securing locations and preparing invitations and content materials that the host priest could use to recruit participants. The activities would lead to two groups from different churches that would participate in three sessions. The participants would learn about mystical experiences in the Bible and in church history, identifying how divine encounters had led to evangelism. They would also tell the stories of their mystical experiences and encouraged each other to speak with a person outside the group about their mystical experiences. The short-term outcomes included the participants' positive attitude toward their mystical experiences and evangelism, a willingness and comfort to speak about their encounters with God and the Holy, and an increased awareness of the purposes of mystical experiences. The workshop would also successfully identify people who were likely to engage in evangelism. Host parishes became more open to evangelism, and their parishioners more likely to engage in evangelism. Workshop participants also wanted to help others understand mystical experiences and their ties to evangelism. The host parishes were also open to holding another workshop.

Recruitment

The solicitation of host clergy was easy. The five clergy at four churches asked to host the workshops at their churches eagerly agreed. All the parishes were located in Westchester County, New York, just north of New York City. Two were large Episcopal parishes with more than 1500 members, and the other two had fewer than 200. The priests from one of the small churches felt it was best for them to ask people who had had

mystical experiences, to join the workshop and quickly gathered six people. The priest at the other small church agreed to solicit participants without preconditions. He placed an advertisement in the Sunday bulletin over several weeks and spoke about the workshop during announcements. The invitation sought people who were interested in learning about mystical experiences and evangelism. No one signed on. When asked why his parishioners had not expressed interest, the priest said that his people were too busy. The senior priest at one of the large churches also invited parishioners to take part in the workshop without preconditions. That church's workshop was advertised and announced to the congregation over several Sundays, but only two people expressed interest. He then approached a midweek study group, asking if they would like to participate, but they did not, saying that their faith was a private matter. At the other large parish, the clergy person most engaged in spiritual direction in the congregation created a list of ten people who she knew had had mystical experiences. Of them, eight agreed to participate. One backed out, however, saying the starting time of the workshop conflicted with his work schedule. At the smaller parish, six people participated in the workshop, four from the host church and two from a church in an adjacent town. One did not complete the workshop.

The Participants

James is in his late fifties and unmarried. He works in real estate sales. He was raised Roman Catholic and, although he has attended the host Episcopal parish and worshipped nearly every week, has not become an Episcopalian. He recently worked as the chair of his parish's bicentennial celebration. He stepped up when no one else would and did an excellent job. James reports that he is not too happy and finds life pretty

routine and dull. At times, he struggles to stay focused. He will attend, for example, a teaching series at church but will dropout after a session or two. He considers himself moderately spiritual.

Mary is a high-powered lawyer in her forties with two children in grade school. After a few years raising her children, she has gone back to work as a grant writer for a women's shelter. She is very bright and inquisitive. She was raised Roman Catholic but has worshipped at the host parish nearly every week for between five and ten years. She considers herself a strong Episcopalian. She indicates that she is pretty happy and finds life exciting. She does not know if there are miracles but believes in life after death. She considers herself moderately spiritual.

Sarah is in her forties with three children in high school. She is a writer and editor by profession. She was not raised in a religious tradition but has been a member of the host church for between five to ten years, worshipping every week but otherwise not engaged in parish. She comes to services without her family. She does not know if she is a strong Episcopalian. She says she is pretty happy and finds life exciting. She believes in life after death but finds miracles too complicated to affirm. She considers herself very spiritual.

Barbara is a woman in her sixties who was raised Episcopalian. She is married, but her husband is not a churchgoer. She works part-time as a bookkeeper. She is pleasant and curious and wants to understand faith. She has been a member of the host church for two years and has attended services weekly. She transferred from another local church to attend services with her elderly father. Barbara considers herself a strong

Episcopalian. She feels pretty happy, and her life is exciting. Barbara believes in miracles and life after death. She considers herself very spiritual.

John is in his late-fifties and works as a chef. He was raised Roman Catholic, has recently been attending an Episcopal church, but does not consider himself an Episcopalian. He attends services several times a year but seems unsettled about his faith. In recent years, he has completed several religious retreats that he found emotionally and spiritually moving and is searching for similar events to regain the feelings he had at them. He is very happy and finds life exciting. He believes in miracles and life after death. He considers himself very spiritual.

Sharon is a woman in her late fifties. Her youngest daughter recently graduated from an Ivy League college. She is a lawyer and passionate about issues of social justice and immigration. She works pro bono with the undocumented, helping them stay in the United States. She was raised Jewish but in the last year has become a Christian. She attends services nearly every week and strongly identifies as an Episcopalian. She is pretty happy and finds life exciting. She believes in miracles and life after death. She considers herself very spiritual. Sharon attended only the first session and did not complete the workshop.

The larger host parish had seven people attending the workshop, all from the host congregation.

Donna is in her seventies who grew up Protestant. Her children are grown, and her husband oversees a local soup kitchen. She has attended services weekly at the host church for fifteen years. Among the many things she does for her church, she helps with the altar guild and makes meals for people when they are sick. Donna considers herself

somewhat strongly affiliated with the Episcopal Church. She is very happy, and life is exciting for her. Donna believes in miracles but does not know if there is life after death. She considers herself moderately spiritual.

Pamela is a divorced and in her early sixties. She works as a parish administrator. She also has a daughter living and working in New York City. Pamela is thoughtful and expresses herself with little hesitation. She was raised Protestant and has attended the host church for more than twenty years. She attends services two or three times a month. She is a strong Episcopalian. She is pretty happy and finds life routine. She believes in miracles and life after death. She considers herself very spiritual.

Allison is a woman in her late fifties and has two daughters in their late twenties and two step daughters in their forties. Her husband recently died. She has a master's degree in comparative religion. She is gentle and kind. She was raised Protestant and has been a member of the host parish for more than twenty years. She attends services several times a year. She does not think of herself as a strong Episcopalian. She feels pretty happy, and life for her is at times exciting and other times routine. She thinks that miracles probably do not exist. She does not know if there is life after death. She considers herself very spiritual.

Gary is in his early sixties who was raised Protestant. He is married but does not have children. He taught science at a local private school for many years. He is intellectual and well-read in many areas. He has been attending services at his parish nearly every week for fifteen years. He is a lifelong and strong Episcopalian. He is pretty happy, and life is exciting for him. He thinks that miracles probably exist and there is life after death. He is moderately spiritual.

Brenda is in her mid-fifties and retired. She is married to Gary, and they have no children. She is quiet, thoughtful, and inquisitive. She was raised Protestant. She has been a member of the host parish for fifteen years and has attended services nearly every week. She feels somewhat strongly tied to the Episcopal Church. She is pretty happy, and life is exciting for her. She believes in miracles and life after death. She considers herself moderately spiritual.

Margaret is in her late fifties. She is the director of development for a local nonprofit organization. She has been married for more than thirty years and has three children in their twenties. She was raised Protestant. She has attended services at her parish regularly for more than twenty years. She also participates in a weekly Bible study and a monthly women's prayer group. She is a strong Episcopalian. She is very happy, and life is exciting for her. She believes in miracles and life after death. She considers herself very spiritual.

Charles is in his late seventies and never married. He also is a retired airline executive. He was raised Protestant, has been a member of the host parish for more than twenty years, and has attended services weekly. He strongly identifies as Episcopalian. He regularly volunteers at a local food pantry. He also supports a family in central America, traveling to visit them several times a year. He is pretty happy, and life is exciting for him most of the time. He believes in miracles and life after death. He considers himself moderately spiritual.

Session One: Workshop

The first session's learning objectives included defining the mystical experience, naming some of the biblical figures who have had such experiences, identifying the qualities of the biblical figures' experiences that relate to the participants, describing experiences to others, and listing the common features of the group's experiences.

At the start of the session, participants completed two surveys to establish a baseline. They completed an eleven question developed using question from the General Social Survey.³⁷² The first questions classified gender and age-range. The participants then answered questions about their religious upbringing, length of membership at their current churches, frequency of service attendance, and how strongly they identified themselves with the Episcopal Church. The survey measured participants' happiness and feeling toward life. The participants also identified their belief in miracles and life-after-death and the degree which they consider themselves a spiritual person. The Tellegen Absorption Survey measured the participants' absorption ability. The thirty-four questions are scored in the affirmative. The participants with scores at or near thirty-four are have a high degree of absorption and those with a low degree have a score near zero.

After the completion of the consent form and surveys, the session began with introductions and a brief description of the workshop. Following the beginning activities, there was a lecture entitled "Discovering the Mystical Experience: Looking to the Bible for Help." It involved reading about the mystical experiences of Peter and Paul. Then the group exegeted Acts 9 and 10, outlining the events and naming the mystical qualities of

380 Tom W. Smith, Peter Marsden, Michael Hout, and Jibum Kim. General Social Surveys (1972-2016) www.gssdataexplorer.norc.org.

both experiences. Both workshops overlapped when the participants identified similarities and differences. All significant conversations were recorded electronically and later transcribed to electronic files.

They noted commonalities and differences between the two men. Both were on a journey of their choosing, following their own goals. They were trying to please God. Both heard a voice that instructed them to follow a difference course. Mary stated, “They both have a voice telling them to do something they don’t really to do.” The encounters caused dramatic stops and reversals of plans, perceptions, and realities that set them straight, retaught them, and broadened their understanding of God and God’s plan. Barbara concluded, “I feel like it’s less tested overall, just set straight. That’s wrong. What you think is wrong. This is the right—they needed a big voice from the sky to tell them because they were not tested as much as set straight.”

The group named matching differences. Only Paul was physically changed. He was blinded. Peter was in a trance as he prayed. Peter saw things and heard the voice of God, but Paul (then Saul) was blinded and heard the voice of Jesus. The two men’s responses were different. Peter asked more questions, saw the vision three times, and did not understand what happened. Paul did. Peter still needed prodding by the Holy Spirit to make him leave with the men for Cornelius’s house. Mary said, “It says that Peter goes into a trance. So to me, that’s a very internal kind of a thing. Whereas Saul was knocked off his horse or whatever and there’s lightning, everyone saw, everyone heard the voice, like it’s a kind of a very noticeable occurrence. And whereas this is something that happened internally for Peter.” Both groups identified the internal and the external natures of the two events.

After studying the Bible passages, the participants were asked to break into groups of two or three. They completed the activity called “Crafting of one’s mystical experience in light of the accounts in Acts.” Each participant took turns interviewing each other, taking notes on what the other person said. They based their conversation on the following questions:

Can you think of a time when you had an experience like Peter or Paul?

If so, tell your interview partner about it in as much detail as you can.

What was that experience like for you?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

After all those in the smaller group had taken turns, they returned to the larger group. Then they all gave a summary of the story they had heard. As a group, they responded to the question, “What was it like to hear your partner’s story?” The participants were surprised and excited by what they had heard. James said, “I could understand, and I experienced what’s she’s done before. It’s definitely exceptional—it’s binding.” Sarah said, “I found it pretty amazing in a lot of ways, awe-inspiring and also very comforting. Because we ended up having something similar and it just made it familiar.” Barbara added, “There was some measure of relief there for me because I always feel a little bit awkward about this thing that happened to me. I always felt faintly ridiculous. The language isn’t adequate for the task. So actually speaking to somebody who could fill in the blanks because they felt the same sort of thing happen to them. That was a nice experience.” Barbara best summarized the interviewing experience, saying, “It was—like I was—I could see this. I could envision this happening, and the overall feeling that he must have been feeling was ‘why did it happen?’”

Session One: Homework

At the end of the first session, participants received a homework assignment. At home, they had to write down and send the instructor their mystical experience in five sentences or less. Although each response was personal, commonalities emerged.

Donna wrote:

I felt guilty after my mother's death, having lost patience and been short with her once or twice during her long illness. On the Maundy Thursday watch after her death, I was sitting in the darkened church, silently beating myself up on more time, when a voice (Jesus?) said to me, "You're only human." I felt tremendous peace and comfort and was more able to let go of my guilt and forgive myself.

James pointed to mystical experience in connection with death and grief as well. His experience involved the death of his father, but he did not provide any details in writing. Instead he wrote about doubt.

Like Donna's and James's, Barbara's mystical experiences intertwined with the memory of her parents. She wrote, "Even though both of my parents have passed, I still feel their presence especially during my time in need. My mom, the woman who taught me the love of gardening, is there for me when I'm in need of love that only a mother can provide. She will show up as a flower that somehow blooms in my garden in the coldest months. I find that I just need to talk to them."

Although Pamela did not express an encounter with God or the Holy, she did write about her interpretation of mystical experiences:

If the definition of a holy or mystical experience is one that involves a sensory quality (seeing light, hearing voices, feeling warmth, etc.), then I have never had one. I do, however, feel the presence of God in my life almost daily. Working in the parish office of an Episcopal church for the

past fifteen years, I begin each day by praying at the altar for God to allow me to be a blessing in the life of another person. Many, many times this prayer has been answered. I often feel that God has placed me here and that I have an important role to fulfill.

Margaret had similar experiences to Pamela's. For her, "God is very real and present in my daily life through answered prayers and a feeling of connectedness."

Allison indicated multiple spiritual experiences. Hers were "not dramatic but gentle, warm, and comforting, usually in solitude, where I lose my preoccupation with myself, and my worries and concerns melt away into an all-encompassing peace and happiness."

Gary's experiences were similar to Allison's solitary experiences, but he wrote of having only one. He observed, "I once had a close feeling of God's presence while out for a nighttime walk among the quiet farms with animals resting in the fields and the stars shining in the sky...the feeling was comforting."

As with Gary, Brenda's encounter happened many years ago, but she does not remember anything specific, except that she "felt close to God."

Sarah and Mary, however, had powerful, brief, and life-changing experiences.

Sarah wrote that while she was on vacation with her family, she hit an emotional bottom:

As I watched my young children playing on the beach, I realized I felt nothing. Nothing at all. I was done, totally out of gas, no hope. And so I prayed. It was a really ugly, desperate prayer. I'm not sure why I prayed because I didn't really believe in anything at the time, but I did it anyway. I prayed for a sign, a chink of hope...and I got an instant answer. A strange answer, and a funny answer. And that was that...I suddenly had faith, and it happened in a flash.

Although the circumstances were much different, Mary's experience was equally sudden.

Hers occurred the day of her child was baptized. She wrote:

I was thinking about the fact that she had been baptized in the same church I had been baptized in. And then, all of a sudden, I was *not* sitting in the room, I had a different viewpoint (like a bird's-eye view—but not exactly), from where I could see backwards and forwards in time, and I could “see” (or maybe “feel”?) all the mothers and daughters I was descended from—and I had a sense of each of them as individuals who were present in that moment—and I could also see *forward* in time too, to all the daughters and mothers that would be descended from my daughter and me...The “message” I felt I had to take from it was something like “you matter, having this baby matters, you are part of something bigger than yourself, beyond your normal understanding.”

Sharon's also described her experience, but hers would be considered a conversion experience. She wrote, “It was so much richer an experience than words. It was out of body and happened two years ago while I was watching Christmas Mass at the Vatican on TV (for the music—I was Jewish) while in my kitchen drinking a cup of tea. I can remember every detail as if it happened yesterday. It was of a different time. At first, I thought I was losing my mind.” Sharon is one of those whose mystical experience led her to Christianity. Her calling has developed into one of social justice, seeking to help “refugees, disaster relief victims, modern-day slaves, etc.”

Charles's experience came during the night. He wrote, “About ten years ago, I suddenly woke from a deep sleep and jerked bolt upright. A light of indescribable brightness was all around me and enveloping me. A voice spoke—something to the effect, but not really clear—‘ Charles, what are you doing for me now?’ I could not even try to sleep I was so ‘awe’—fully shaken.”

The participants' experiences are varied, robust encounters with God and the Holy. Some fit the conventional understanding of mystical experiences, and others do not. All of them, however, point to the immanence of God, the movement of the Holy among people, and the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

Session Two: Workshop

The learning objectives for the second workshop included naming the tendency toward the private and internal nature of the mystical experience, defining the qualities and results of the mystical experience, identifying useful metaphors to describe experiences of God and the Holy, and further honing of the sharing of mystical experience.

The sessions for the second workshop began with a review of the previous session and the plan for the current session. The instructor then led a conversation exploring the private nature of mystical experiences. Titled "The Mystical Experience Treasure Box," the mini-lecture explained the ways people who have had an encounter with God and the Holy often keep it to themselves. They hesitate to speak about it because they do not want to be thought of as weird or crazy. They then store the memory away in a treasure box where it is safe, comfortable, and idle. One example of protecting mystical experiences is Catherine of Siena, who kept silent about her experience for years. The lecture concluded by noting that result of protecting the memory is stunted spiritual growth.

A group exercise followed the mini-lecture. The first step was citing Carole Dale Spencer's statement that "No scholar as yet has come up with a satisfactory definition or

criteria of mystical experience, and there is no consensus on the nature of mystical experience.” Participants then learned about the qualities and results of mystical experience as described by Kelly Bulkeley, Carole Spencer Dale, William James, Tanya Luhrmann, Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, Lewis Rambo, Richard Rohr, Maggie Ross, and Evelyn Underhill. They were then asked to identify the qualities and results that best matched their own encounters. They used colored stickers to make their selections. The way they ranked the qualities were “unexpected,” “normal functions reassembled in novel conjunctions,” “none of the above,” “short-lived,” “suddenness,” “ineffability,” “passivity,” “suspension of space and time,” “suspension of the self-consciousness,” and “emotional collapse.” Words not selected included “immediacy,” “transiency,” “rare,” and “dynamic.”

The participants also chose phrases that matched the results of their experiences. The way in which they ranked the results included “life becomes more meaningful and rich,” “extremely important,” “deepening sense of significance,” “conviction of knowing,” and “entire life changed.” The phrase not included was “worldview skewed.” I must also note the descriptors chosen did not skew by gender. The women and men picked similarly.

The next activity was titled “Mystical Experience Metaphor Activity.” It involved a discussion based on the traditional teaching of the progression of the contemplative and spiritual life—namely, illuminative, purgative, and unitive experiences. The metaphors discussed were a pie-shape with three pieces and an arrow moving from the illuminative portion, to the purgative, and to the unitive. The arrow demonstrated the movement from one experience of the divine to another. The next metaphor was the Celtic triple spiral,

which illustrated the same progression as the pie-shape but allowed for deeper experiences within each area. The last metaphor was a continuum that represented the spiritual life, which emphasized the importance of each of the three phases and did not give priority to any one of them. The participants in both groups struggled to understand mystical experiences through the use of these metaphors. They liked the idea of a metaphor but rejected the idea of progression from one to another. They also dismissed the concept that the unitive stage is most important.

The last activity of the second workshop was a return to sharing of experiences. In groups of two or three, participants shared with each other their five-sentence descriptions of their mystical experiences. The session ended before the group could gather to discuss what they had learned.

The most critical step in the workshop came next. Each participant was asked to share his or her story with a person outside the workshop group. After sharing, the participant asked, "Have you ever experienced something similar?" If so, then the participant would ask the person to share it. If not, the participant would ask, "Can you see how the experience has shaped my faith?" The conversation ended with the following statement: "I wanted you to know how my experience has shaped my faith and why my faith is so important to me."

Session Three: Workshop

The third session continued the exploration of metaphors and developed further the idea of mystical experience as a foundation of mission. The learning objectives included deepening understandings of the metaphors of the mystical experience, citing

several people who used mystical experiences as a motivation for evangelism, and sharing with others private encounters with God and the Holy.

Metaphors are symbols used to heighten meaning. With respect to mystical experiences, metaphors place images around experiences that are hard to explain to others. The participants found the discussion of metaphors energizing and exciting. The images used in the third session were informed by the ineffectiveness of the second sessions' metaphors. The second group's participants had asked for different images. They had not seen the mystical experiences needing to progress to other steps. They had wanted an image that showed more of a gradual unfolding. The images presented at the last workshop had included a rose, a set of three trees formed from spirals, and a spiral staircase that gave the illusion of steps going up and down.

The participants picked different images. Allison's reaction summed up the group's conversation. She said, "The rose is perfect. It has a center, which I like, and I think the petals as leading inward and deep to the center, which is hidden and mysterious. The other petals are like parts of the ego, which drop away as one gets closer to the center. Also, the rose is beautiful, and I think beauty is so important to experiences of the Divine."

Next, the participants learned about mystical experience in action. The teaching centered on two principles. First, people can attain mystical experiences. Newberg and Waldman state that the brain is built in such a way that people can have occasional mystical experiences. They also suspect that the more intensely people meditate or pray,

the more likely they are to experience a mystical or transcendental state.³⁷³ Second, mystical experiences have purpose. Solitude aids in the attainment of an encounter with God and the Holy, but people are meant neither to remain in that state nor to try to return repeatedly to the encounter. Underhill writes, “Having established the communion, re-ordered their inner lives upon transcendental levels—being united with their Source not merely in temporary ecstasies, but in virtue of a permanent condition of the soul, they were impelled to abandon their solitude; and resumed, in some way, their contact with the world.”³⁷⁴ She also writes, “To go up to alone into the mountain and come back as an ambassador to the world, has ever been the method of humanity’s best friends. This systole-and-diastole motion of retreat as the preliminary to a return remains the true ideal of Christian Mysticism in its highest development.”³⁷⁵

The example used to illustrate the concept of retreat and return was the life-cycle of the dandelion. One seed germinates, grows into a plant, and buds into a flower. After the bloom, the bud turns into a ball of seeds. While beautiful, the bloom is not the final purpose of the flower; rather, its seeds are the last step. The example of the dandelion also led to a discussion of evangelism. The bloom represented the mystical experience. The ball of seeds symbolizes the activity of evangelism.

The participants learned about two people who had mystical experiences that motivated them to evangelize. I chose these two figures because their divine encounters were relatively ordinary and because one was a man and the other a woman, thereby helping them all participants identify with them. They first looked at the Aldersgate

373 Newberg and Waldman, 14.

374 Underhill, 133.

375 Underhill.

Street experience of the Anglican cleric and theologian John Wesley. During his experience, his “heart strangely warmed.” But he was surprised that he did not feel joy: “This cannot be faith; for where is the joy?”³⁷⁶ The participants whose mystical experiences did not link to feelings of joy identified with John Wesley’s encounter.

The other person was Hannah Whitall Smith, whose experience occurred soon after the death of her daughter. She was depressed, and life held little interest for her. She wandered into a noonday religious meeting when she encountered God. When it happened, her soul leaped “in an irresistible cry to know Him.”³⁷⁷ Several participants identified with her because her experience came at a low point in her life.

In the last segment of the session, the participants reported on the conversations that they had had with another person about their mystical experience. All but two of them completed the activity. The following are the reports from several participants.

Mary spoke with her husband William about her experience after her child’s birth. She had never spoken to him about it before. With a bit of disbelief, she reported:

I tried to explain the thing that I wrote to you to my husband which I had never done before. I had this *sort of weird*--I don't know, *vision* at some point. And *I couldn't really explain* what it was at the time. And still couldn't. But interestingly when I was talking to William about it last night, he had a kind of take on it. Which when I heard it, I was like, “Hah that's kind of yeah! That's kind of what was weird—you know, that's what it was about it.” He had a *much more sort of religious view of it* than I had had. I had said to you I don't even know if this has to do with God but he was like “oh no, that's what”—I had this kind of weird feeling about the past and the future and all being kind of present in the moment, and William was like, “Well, isn't that what when people talk about God and they say, Well, if God has always existed then how did God come into existence? So maybe God's sense of time is different than our sense of time,” and I was like yes! *That's exactly what I'm trying to say.* That I

376 John Wesley, “I Felt My Heart Strangely Warmed.”

377 Hannah Whitall Smith, 173.

didn't...I wouldn't have put it in those words, but now that you say it, that's it. It was like *I got a sense of a different view of time*. That could have been God's view of time, for a second and then it was gone.

After the interaction, she asked William if something like that had ever happened to him. She said, "I got, 'No.'" Even though he said that she felt affirmed and their relationship opened up in new ways. She remarked:

He was very affirming. In fact, to the point where I was like really? I think he's more...he's got more of a...he's got a different kind of faith than me. He's more willing to believe things like that whereas I always have my eyebrow raised, even for something that involved me. I'm a bit more of a skeptic, and so, he was very willing to believe it and also view it as happened something to do with the divine.

Mary was not the only one surprised by what happened after sharing their experience. Barbara also remarked on her experience of sharing with an old friend. She said, "I spoke to a friend of mine who I have known or she's known me for many, many, many, many years. And we consider ourselves in this club because we've both lost our parents. So we're like in the orphan club—we're like 'we're orphans.'" She explained her experiences of speaking to her dead parents: "I shared my experience with a flower in the winter coming up when I needed some guidance and what not, and I said, "Has it ever happened to you?" And she kind of looked at me at first and I was like, "Okay I just maybe--this wasn't the right thing. I'm not going to know her forever now." Her apprehensiveness grew as her friend did not respond immediately. She continued, "But she did say and she went on to explain this experience she had while driving and then we got into this whole conversation almost like what we've been talking about. And I shared with her what we did last week and before, or the time before and she was fascinated." Barbara concluded, "I've known her for 38 years, and it opened up a whole new branch of

our friendship. Which was just wonderful, so I thank you for that. I was so happy to reach out to her and talk about this to her.”

Unlike Barbara’s and Mary’s conversations, others did not have such compelling experiences. Sarah spoke with her thirteen-year-old daughter about her experience. She said:

So yeah, I tried it on my daughter yesterday and she's a tough critic. I said to her, “I want to tell you this thing, Franny. You're going to listen to this.” She said, “Okay.” She's a very good listener. And then I finish and she says, “*That's crazy, pretty much.*” And I said to her, “Has anything ever happened to you like that?” And she said, “*Well, I don't believe in God, so I don't know if I'd know if it had.*” Which I thought was really interesting for a thirteen-year-old.

In the past, she had shared her experience with others and has found that not everyone has received it positively. She said, “The people I would think would actually understand because they are religious have not got it—don’t get—religion is in a box and woo-woo does not fit in that and ‘don't even try that on me because that's not’—that's a whole other category of being, I think.” She is cautious about sharing her experience.

Gary was less sure of the impact of sharing. Although he had not shared his experience with another person, once he had heard how powerful some of the sharing experiences were for others, he spoke up:

It also reminds me that although *I didn't do the homework assignment I should have done it*. In this particular case, on a couple of occasions, *I have shared those kinds of experience*. Usually if the context is right, at a Bible study or something like that. And it always does reinforce my experience, but it doesn’t necessarily, particularly if whoever is reading, maybe the session has an agenda they want to get through, it doesn’t always lead to extensive discussion.

Even though he had his doubts, Gary did think sharing was valuable. He has struggled, however, to find the right opening to begin a conversation. But when the situation aligned, he acknowledged its importance: “Or you just maybe, you didn’t realize those were spiritual experiences that actually were like many people say, ‘Oh yeah, something like that has happened to me, too, but I never really put it in that category.’” Gary’s insight shows the importance of sharing. When people share their mystical experiences, they may discover that others have had them as well.

Assessment of the Workshops

The two workshops successfully brought together people who had wondered about their mystical experiences. They were curious to learn more about them and their significance and wanted to discover the purpose behind them. The development of the story of mystical experiences from the early days of the church to more recent times allowed the participants to frame their encounters with God and the Holy. The introduction of evangelism through the telling of their mystical experiences gave them a new tool to help add to their experience.

Sharing with each other increased their comfort and confidence. Finding others who have had similar experiences was a relief to some participants and confirmed that they were not weird or crazy. They quickly bonded with the others because they were linked by powerful memories that re-emerged when they told their stories to each other. This sharing and bonding gave them confidence to speak about their experiences with co-workers, acquaintances, friends, and family members.

Most participants met the learning objectives. They learned a wealth of information about mystics and mysticism and learned that the growth of the spiritual life involves risk and courage. They also discovered why changing their mindsets regarding sharing their experiences is also critical to growth. It takes courage to share their encounters with God and the Holy, but doing so allowed them to deepen their relationships with those around them.

The ability to share and the steps in learning were not discernible on a gender basis. Although there were fewer women than men (four compared to nine), all participants were able to share with another person in the group. The men, however, did not have the same success with the second homework assignment and did not complete it. These discrepancies may be due to the type of experiences the men had had. Their experiences tended toward extremes and were either too subtle or overwhelming. As a result, they did not or could not share them with others. The sample size, however, is too small to make a conclusion based on gender.

The workshops proved that Episcopalians can indeed evangelize with enthusiasm. If the experiences of the participants are evidence, a primary explanation why Episcopalians are not initially motivated to evangelize is that they may lack the language to share their faith. Once given that language to express themselves, however, those who have had mystical experiences can evangelize effectively.

CHAPTER SIX

Spiritual Change and Evangelism

Introduction

The workshops produced a large amount of information for analysis. The data were broad and deep and provided substantial, measurable support to the claims made at the end of the previous chapter. They showed the ways in which people changed their mindset and behavior, resulting in their ability to evangelize their experiences of God and the Holy. Powerful stories of their workshop experiences emerged from the analysis. Many participants showed a willingness to pursue their spiritual growth in new exciting and refreshing ways.

The analysis of the data examined the workshop at multiple levels. In the broadest sense, Donald and James Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation of training programs helped in examining the effectiveness of the workshop.³⁷⁸ At the next level of detailed data analysis, a grounded theory study identified a set of explanations that explained why the workshop's processes generated evangelical actions. A phenomenological study analyzed several specific moments of change in the workshop process. Finally, a mixed-methods approach verified the diversity of participants' experiences of God and the Holy. These four levels of inquiry developed a rich portrait of spiritual change and engagement of evangelism. Each step aided the understanding of the process of change that participants may have experienced in the workshop.

378 Donald L. Kirkpatrick and James D. Kirkpatrick, *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, 3rd ed. (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006).

Workshop Evaluation

The evaluation of a workshop is similar to the appraisal of training programs used in business environments. In their book *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, Donald and James Kirkpatrick note, “The reason for evaluating is to determine the effectiveness of a training program.”³⁷⁹ To assess the effectiveness of a program, they suggest a four-level process. The levels are reaction, learning, behavior, and results.³⁸⁰ Each level explores a progressively more significant aspect of change.

The first level of evaluation explores the reaction of the participants. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick state the importance of a positive reaction to the program: “[A] positive reaction may not insure learning, but [a] negative reaction almost certainly reduces the possibility of it occurring.”³⁸¹ The second level, learning, “can be defined as the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the program.”³⁸² The authors add, “Without learning, no change in behavior will occur.”³⁸³ Evaluating a participant’s behavior determines “the extent to which change in behavior has occurred because the participant attended the training program.”³⁸⁴ Finally, an effective workshop produces results that meet the workshop objectives. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick call these results “final results.”³⁸⁵ The workshop’s strength is in its ability to produce lasting results that lead to new actions by the participants.

379 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 3.

380 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 21.

381 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 22.

382 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick.

383 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 50.

384 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 22.

385 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 25.

To measure the effectiveness of the workshop, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's four levels were applied to evaluate the experiences of the participants. Most participants' experience met two or three levels, but Donna touched all four levels and illustrated the effectiveness of the workshop best.

Nervousness, anxiety, and resistance are the natural feelings that many people have when doing something new. Given the difficulty to change what people believe, as Howard Gardner notes, those feelings were likely heightened by the workshop's exploration of deeply personal, spiritual experiences. Donna's experience confirmed the premise. In her post-workshop survey, she wrote, "Initially, I was nervous about attending the workshop. Although I thought I already knew most of the attendees, I really didn't know what to expect." Once the first session began, however, she wrote, "Once the workshop began, I felt comfortable and safe among fellow Christians. Everyone was open with their thoughts and experiences." As outlined by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, her experience was positive and allowed her to advance to the second level.

Donna's learning was both experience- and instructionally-based. She explained:

I know that *my experience was real*, but never thought of it in terms of Peter or Paul, or compared it with their experiences. While mine was inconsequential compared to theirs, it was similar in that it was *unexpected, just happened to me, and had an important effect on me*. The workshop brought that home to me that *my experience had opened the door to my spiritual life*.

She also pointed to one of the lectures in the second session from which she had learned more about her experience of God. She wrote:

I loved the excerpt from Hannah Whitall Smith's book, *The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered It*. In reading the excerpt, I realized, as I had not before, that my experience was one of forgiveness. It gave me peace

and comfort at the time, but means much more to me now as I have reflected on it further.

Her comments show the way in which the workshop presented opportunities for learning on multiple levels. She learned about her own experience as she learned about the experiences of both Peter and Paul in Acts as well as the life of a nineteenth-century woman grieving the loss of her child. Because the workshop used different historical figures with varied experiences, it gave Donna deeper insight into her experience. Her learning opened the door for her to change her behavior.

The second take-home assignment asked the participants to share their experience of God and the Holy with another person. Donna took what she learned and made a behavioral change. About her experience of God and the Holy, she stated, “It’s kind of a closed thing. I haven’t really talked about it at all.” After the second session of the workshop, however, she shared it with a friend. She said:

I did tell a friend about mine....*It brings it all back*, and I became a little emotional, a little teary-eyed, and more than the experience I was telling her. She wanted to make me feel better about my guilt...because I told her it had come out of guilt....*She talked about her situation* and she was trying to make me feel better about it all. So, we didn’t really get into it...which was fine.

Three things occurred when Donna told another person of her experience. First, she relived the experience. Speaking about it brought back feelings that she originally had had. She developed new emotions, and, when she remembered and told about them, she became vulnerable. In a sense, new emotions emerged. Second, the conversation took on a life of its own. The listener interpreted the story for herself and reacted to it, which shows the unreliability of evangelism to produce an immediate conversion. Third, Donna discovered that sharing her experience in an intimate setting was not nearly as difficult as she had originally thought.

What was the final result for Donna as a participant in the workshop? She not only met the main objective of the workshop but also became an evangelist. A few weeks after the workshop, she sent the instructor an email in which she described an additional time when she shared her mystical experience:

After dinner was finished, I started. Everyone was riveted. When I finished, my new step-grandson [21-years-old and a student at Holy Cross] said he was really glad I shared that. He went on to say that he has had lots of doubts lately, which I told him was perfectly normal, but *he was very interested in my experience*. My daughter told everyone that I had been very patient with my mother during her illness but saw the experience as *forgiveness*. Peter, my son-in-law [of 6 months] told a story about his grandfather who had visited him after his death... There was a little more conversation, then Peter summed it all up by telling the kids always remember that they are never alone, that the Holy Spirit is always with them and can always be turned to for help. It was a *wonderful experience*, and I thank you for the workshop because I don't think I ever would have talked about my experience but for that!

Donna's workshop experience hit the mark at all four levels. She had a positive reaction. She learned about her experience and that of others. She changed her behavior in the workshop and reinforced this change by continuing to act because of what she learned. For Donna, the workshop was effective and significant.

Experiences of God and the Holy vary widely and happen for different reasons. Sarah's experience of the workshop paralleled Donna's. Sarah had hit bottom, but while on vacation with her family, she had an experience of the Holy: "As I watched my children playing on the beach, I realized I felt nothing." She prayed "a really ugly, desperate prayer" and "got an instant answer...and I suddenly had faith." In the workshop sessions, Sarah shared with others and completed the assignments, speaking to her daughter about her experience. By the end of the workshop, she had changed her attitude. She commented:

But you've actually made me *realize* that the thing itself is *bulletproof*. I just accept that it *happened*; where I actually don't [care] what anybody else thinks about it or says to me about it...it really doesn't matter. And maybe actually, given that it did happen, I should talk about it. It might help somebody else to open up.

For her part, Sarah became more involved in her parish's leadership and attends services regularly since the workshop.

Most participants met the first two levels of the workshop. Many met the third level, and a few others met the fourth. As an example, the participants in the second group gave positive reactions in answering the closing question: "Any other closing thoughts or other thoughts that you want to add about this experience so far?" One woman said, "I'm glad I'm here." Another echoed, "Me, too. I like this group of people." Still another woman said, "Yeah, me too." Then a woman led a closing prayer in which she said, "Heavenly Father, thank you for gathering together this very special group. Showing us how you work in each of our lives....Let us go forth and seek out your message in everything we do." The participants in the first workshop did not have the opportunity during the first session to react to their experience. Several of them, however, gave unsolicited, positive reactions via email. One woman wrote, "Great session today and great to meet you." Another added, "Thanks for this morning; I enjoyed it." Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick note that positive reactions are essential "because the interest, attention, and motivation of participants have much to do with the learning that occurs."³⁸⁶

With respect to what the participants learned, specific measurements were not employed. Even so, indications that people had learned something emerged. Kirkpatrick

386 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 40.

and Kirkpatrick state, “Learning has taken place when one or more of the following: Attitudes are changed. Knowledge is increased. Skill is improved.”³⁸⁷ Different participants met one or more aspects of learning. A woman who had not had a mystical experience indicated her attitude had changed because of what she learned. She said:

I entered the concept with a predisposition thereof that—this won’t sound nice—if this mystical experience, if the discussion thereof is an *indulgence* that I am *suspicious* of, but that was the beginning. *Now*, I think, ‘*Okay, cool*, I can read about this. I could take the time to read about [mystical experience].

Gary, another person who had not had an experience, commented that he discovered “a new way of thinking about how God might be involved in people’s lives. I mean it’s something I sort of thought about before, but you may be giving me a more concrete experience of others’ ways.”

Another woman, who had had a remarkable mystical experience, demonstrated a new skill. She said:

The process of talking about it is what helps you *understand* it. Understand what you might actually be feeling. And so, my brief experience talking about this weird thing, actually, it does what it felt like to me. It felt like hearing myself talking about it *clarified* something about it for me.

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick are correct about learning and behavior. They note, “The person must know what to do and how to do it.”³⁸⁸ One participant said, “I talked about my experience—several times—and it didn’t kill me, so perhaps my future evolution will involve talking more candidly.” Another wrote that the workshop “provided a basis in which to start a conversation with others....While it was a little

387 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 22.

388 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 23.

intimidating at first, it became an opportunity to dive into a deeper relationship.”

Affirming what others stated, another person wrote, “Hearing others’ experience strengthens my faith.” Finally, Charles illustrated the tie between behavior and learning best when he stated, “First of all, I have learned that it was ‘safe’ to share my experiences with others—also to think, read, pray more about it.”

As Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick note, identifying the final result is difficult. While Donna’s correspondence about her experience was a superb illustration, what others did after the program was less clear. No objective measure was given to the participants after the program, but some information has emerged. For some time before the workshop, several of the participants had stopped regularly attending Sunday services, but they have since changed, feeling that because a priest had affirmed their experiences, it was okay to come back. One woman summed up her experience, writing, “The workshop was definitely a highlight of my life at [the church] over the past few years....The workshop definitely motivated me to come back to church.” Three others have joined the church’s lay leadership team, providing significant help to their parish.

Not all participants, however, indicated that they would share their experiences with others again or return to church. One person said that she would not be sharing, stating, “I have never had any mystical experience. Having written that, this does not mean that I distrust or disdain the narrations of mystical experiences of other people. Nor does this mean that I think God loves me different, or less for that matter, than those people who have had these experiences.” Even though she had not had an experience, her statement illustrated her change in attitude toward those who had had one. Importantly, she realized that the absence of an experience did not impact her faith.

Others showed a different result. A woman who thought she had had an experience but couldn't remember any specifics wrote, "The workshop has caused me to consider spiritual experiences which I might have had and to search for places where I may have written them down. I don't think that I did. If I have one in the future, I will write about it." Another participant, who did not fully express his experience of God and the Holy, tentatively commented about what he anticipated doing because of his participation: "Perhaps not immediately but probable in subtle, unexpected ways it will impact me. It made me more inclined to become more knowledgeable about scripture." What he learned about mystical experiences did not take him to evangelism, although it may in the future. Nevertheless, even for someone who participated minimally, the workshop caused behavioral change, even if not directly related to the workshop's main objective of evangelism.

Donna's participation in the workshop validated the four levels of evaluation that Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick espoused. Most of the other participants met two or more levels, even if they had not personally had an experience of God and the Holy. Thus, the workshop's evaluation showed that it had the potential to change not just people's attitudes toward evangelism but also their behavior. Episcopalians can evangelize.

Understanding the Process

While Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation determined that change did indeed occur, a grounded theory analysis explains the process of change in the workshop. Grounded theory "focuses on a process or an action that has distinct steps or

phases that occur over time.”³⁸⁹ The primary tools include coding and memoing, from which the formulation and sketch of the process appear.³⁹⁰ Line-by-line coding of the eighty-eight pages of workshop transcriptions and surveys, followed by axial coding and memoing, allowed the central phenomena and causal conditions to emerge that gave rise to participants’ ability to change.³⁹¹ Tied to several concepts discussed previously in Chapter Four, four central steps or concepts became clear in the process of change that occurred in the workshop.

1. Change occurred by lowering anxiety and overcoming defensiveness. The sequence of learning and sharing lowered the participants’ anxiety and made them less defensive. Kegan and Lahey note, “It is the feeling that we are without defenses in the presence of what we see as danger that causes anxiety.”³⁹² The process of the workshop sought to recognize Kegan and Lahey’s premise by introducing participants to others who had had similar experiences and by referring to those examples as they spoke about their own experiences.

2. The participants had a natural resistance to several aspects of the workshop: their belief that faith is a private matter; their concern that they would be judged poorly because of their experiences; their belief that Episcopalians do not evangelize but rather others do; and their uncertainty about what had happened to them. Sharing in pairs and group discussions helped them lower their resistance, and many participants became more confident and let go of much of their resistance.

389 John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 86

390 Creswell.

391 Creswell.

392 Kegan and Lahey, 49.

3. The participants' thinking became more sophisticated. As they learned more about mystical experiences and mysticism, they became more curious. What they had been wondering about their experience turned into purpose. When they learned about respected historical figures who had used their mystical experiences to help them evangelize, most of the participants wanted to do the same. Because their thinking became more sophisticated, they changed their behaviors and attitudes.

4. The Participants exhibited second-order change. The key attribute of highly ordered change is the ability of people to act differently and experience different results rather than to expect different outcomes without acting differently. The workshop allowed people to move away from "failed solution patterns"³⁹³ that had not worked in the past and to discover new options that let them re-engage their spiritual growth.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the workshop's movement from anxiety and defensiveness and from resistance to sophisticated thinking and second-order change. The movement is repeated in two major steps and also in minor interactions between participants. When people successfully met a step, they moved to the next one. If not, they did not successfully complete the session homework assignment and, upon returning to the next session, were anxious and defensive. Resistance had to be overcome again. Generally, they overcame resistance, and their thinking became more sophisticated, although second-order change did not necessarily happen. In those cases, participants returned to the final session defensive and resistant. Those who exhibited second-order change were not anxious, defensive, or resistant at the next workshop.

393 Fraser and Solovey, 272.

For example, Donna admitted her anxiousness at the beginning of session one. She then became more comfortable when she realized the workshop was a safe place. As her anxiety lessened, she overcame her resistance. During the lecture about Paul and Peter, she began to identify her experience with that of the two men. She made connections between their experience and hers and concluded how her experience was similar and different. Having deepened her understanding of her experience, she gained the confidence to share it with others. She thus achieved a second-order change. Several

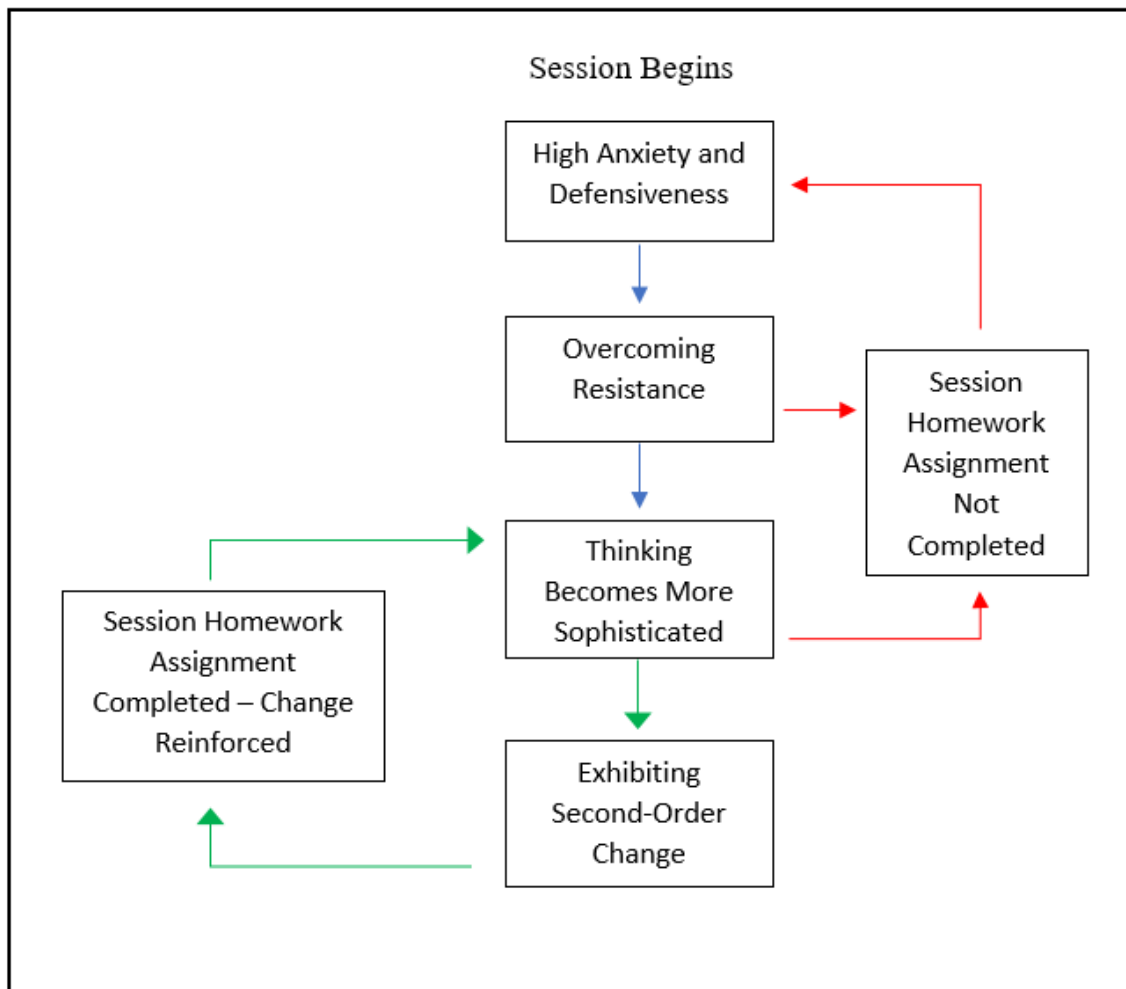


Figure 6.1. Understanding the Spiritual Change Process

other participants' spiritual change process did not go as smoothly. Gary, for instance, spoke about his experience with others in the group but said he did not speak with someone outside the group. He resisted completing the assignment but once he heard about the success of others, said that he would consider sharing in the future. After first resisting, he changed his mind and, by doing so, was able to make a second-order change.

Descriptive Analysis

The coding and memoing produced a rich description of change at work. To aid the description, the following questions became the foundation of the analysis: What were the ways in which change was expressed in the workshop? How was it evident, and to whom, where, how, and with what consequences? What conditions were central in changing the participants' attitudes, mindset, and behavior? What variations emerged, and when did they occur? What were the potential causes of the variations?³⁹⁴

The first concept, anxiety and defensiveness, came to light in several ways. For example, within minutes of arriving at the first workshop session, James said, "Maybe I'm not cerebral enough for this study." As the workshop progressed, James exhibited not just anxiety but also defensiveness. An example of defensiveness was John's almost complete silence throughout the Bible study. When an outside assignment that involved writing a short description of the participants' experience was described, John pushed back with feigned surprise, stating, "That was not mentioned," and he mumbled inaudibly. Further, when they became uncomfortable, both James and John often changed the topic. It seemed that the workshop either was something that they did not anticipate or

394 Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, "Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 276.

went too far into areas with which they were not comfortable exploring or discussing. The sample size was too small to conclude whether gender was a factor in their resistance. The women did, however, seem to express themselves more easily.

Most of the other participants, however, became comfortable very quickly. During the Bible study, Barbara took a view and considered it out loud. Then Mary challenged her, asking, “Are you sure?” Barbara answered, “Yeah,” holding firm and restating her conclusion. The interaction demonstrated that their anxiety had diminished and that they were eager to learn and reason without direction from the instructor. Another example came from the second workshop group. At the end of the first session, Allison, who had been very excited by what happened, said, “It just made me feel very warm and connected.” By lowering her anxiety and defensiveness, she could identify with others in the group. She was also one of the people who best completed the second assignment, in which people shared their experience with non-participants.

The second concept, resistance emerged in several ways at different points in the workshop sessions and for different reasons. James was a prime example of resistance. After he did not complete the second assignment, which was to share his experience with a non-participant, he continually made comments that pulled the group away from the topic that the others were learning or discussing. At one point, he asked about purgatory. Later, he asked about the Episcopal Church’s teachings about saints and where a specific saint that his mother liked was born. Next, he told a story about his mother and her love of religious relics. Then he said, “I don’t mean to digress, but may I ask one more question?” He also admitted, “I am a poster boy for tangents.” Although he had seemed resistant during the entire workshop, he wrote in the post-workshop survey that the

workshop “made evangelizing seem more natural and less theatrical” and that he found it to be a “good learning experience.”

Another participant, Pamela, who had never had a mystical experience, explained her resistance. She had entered the workshop with a lot of hesitation, stating that she was “suspicious” because she thought mystical experiences were an “indulgence.” By the workshop’s end, however, she commented that she had changed her mind. She wrote, “Okay, cool. I can read about this.” She was thankful.

Mary had not spoken about her experience previously. Her out-of-body experience was indescribable, overwhelming, and “weird.” The workshop helped her overcome her resistance to speaking about it. In her post-workshop survey, she wrote, “I want to be able to communicate my faith to my children not as a static statement of fact but as a living, changing, growing set of ideas.” She concluded, “Hearing others’ experiences strengthens my faith.” By the end, she was hopeful that sharing her experience with her children would build her faith and theirs, too.

Finally, there was the variation of the central concept that John exhibited. He was silent during most of the sessions. Even when the instructor asked him if he wanted to add a comment, he refused. When he asked a question, it was off-topic, not at all about mystical experiences or evangelism. After the first session, he surprised people by returning. In his mystical experience description, he wrote about his fiancée’s experiences of God and the Holy. In addition, he answered the post-workshop survey with one-word responses. He seemed resistant to the whole project, and it was unclear why he had participated at all. A conversation several months after the workshop revealed the reason for his resistance. A year or two previously, he had attended a

spiritual renewal retreat that had moved him deeply. It stirred emotions and feelings that he had never experienced. He wanted to repeat it, and to do so he went to Israel. On the trip, he asked to be “re-baptized” in the Jordan River and convinced a priest on the trip to do it. Once again, John was deeply moved, but this time the feelings left him quickly. He attended the workshop with hopes of reconnecting again. When that did not happen, he became frustrated. Spiritually he was stuck, trying to repeat his first experience and becoming resistant to the current experience when it did not yield what he expected.

In many ways, the thinking of the participants became more sophisticated. In the opening Bible study, participants in both groups went from answering the instructor’s questions to answering each other’s questions and then to analyzing the biblical passages for themselves. They were not simply answering questions but were engaged in complex thinking. At the end of the first session, Gary commented that what he learned gave him “a new way of thinking of how God might be involved in people’s lives.” He added, “You may be giving me a more concrete experience of other ways than what I thought of how God could be interacting or what I experienced God might be.” He learned new ideas about the sophisticated topic of divine agency.

Others developed their thinking by sharing mystical experiences. Mary said, “But it took somebody else....I got more color on my own experience.” She continued, “It helped me understand it in a way that made sense to me.” For Sarah, reporting on the sharing of her experience with her daughter made her pause: “I’m going to think about it now.” Participants learned both from the session lectures but equally from the discussions, the activities, and the reporting on the activities, all of which helped their thinking grow in complex and exciting ways.

In their reporting and commenting on the workshop, many participants indicated that they had learned a lot. Brenda stated that the workshop caused her to change her thinking: “I think a lot of times you say it was a coincidence, or I’ve come to say more that was a God moment, and you know, years ago, I never would have said that...never even thought about it. Yeah, opened your eyes a little more.” Charles stated that the workshop was “very educational, but also important for and strengthening my faith.” In sharing with her friend her experience, Barbara learned that her 38-year friendship had many more levels to be discovered. She wrote, “It became an opportunity to dive into a deeper relationship.”

Second-order change was the final step in the process. As previously discussed, there are two levels of change. Fraser and Solovey write, “The concept of first-order change explains the vagaries of sameness and how difficult it is to produce a view or action that is different from an established behavioral pattern.”³⁹⁵ Psychotherapy explores the issues surrounding times when a first-order solution does not help solve a problem or dilemma. Often a person will repeat the solution, thinking repetition of action will create the desired change. In a sense, the person becomes stuck. Fraser and Solovey explain, “In effect, it is this failed solution pattern (or first-order folly) that is the focus of attention in psychotherapy.”³⁹⁶ To break the failed pattern, a second-order change is needed to establish a new pattern. Two steps are involved. First, rationales are given to “explain how and why the symptom is occurring.”³⁹⁷ Second, the desired goals are validated. By working together, the patient and therapist collaborate on goals.³⁹⁸ Fraser and Solovey

395 Fraser and Solovey, 271.

396 Fraser and Solovey, 272.

397 Fraser and Solovey, 273.

398 Fraser and Solovey.

state, “The evidence shows that in many cases this [pattern] initiates the change cycle.”³⁹⁹ The same held true in the workshop. Second-order change happened when the participants learned about the how and why they were not growing spiritually. Then, as a group, they learned new spiritual goals that were validated by biblical and historical stories. At this point, many could begin evangelize.

For example, after learning about Peter and Paul, all the participants who had had experiences of God and the Holy were able to share their experiences with other participants. Additionally, after learning of the experiences of John Wesley, Hannah Whitall Smith and the others, Barbara, Mary, Sarah, Allison, and Donna successfully spoke to non-participants about their experiences of God and the Holy. James, Gary, Brenda, and Charles tried to speak to others but were not successful. During the last session, when individuals were reporting on their activities of sharing with non-participants, those who were not successful either spoke positively about sharing experiences or indicated they would do so in the future. For instance, Gary said there was “value in the sharing experience.” Brenda noted that she learned that mystical experiences are “not such an uncomfortable topic to discuss” and hoped that she “might recall past spiritual experiences to share with others.” In addition, Charles said he would be more “likely to discuss mystical/spiritual experiences with others” because of the workshop.

On the other hand, several variations need to be identified. The people who did not have mystical experiences were not able to complete the assignments, nor did they indicate that they would speak about spiritual experiences with others in the future.

³⁹⁹ Fraser and Solovey.

Pamela, and Margaret indicated that they would not share their experiences because they had not had any. Sharon and John also did not share. Sharon indicated that she enjoyed the first session but did not return. John resisted completing the assignment of sharing. The only significant similarity of both Sharon and John was their nearness to their experiences. Sharon was a new Christian, having recently converted from Judaism after a mystical experience. John's event had happened in the near past, and he wanted to repeat it. It seems likely that the nearness of their experience impacted their ability and produced a desire to share it with others.

Final Thoughts

In *American Personal Religious Accounts*, Alexander describes mystical experiences as a “transit of consciousness” by which people move from “one state of mind, action, belief, or existence to another.”⁴⁰⁰ The divine encounter “challenges their customary understanding or paradigm of things.”⁴⁰¹ His description fits with what happened to Mary while sitting with her baby, Sharon at her kitchen table, Sarah at the beach, Donna in the darkened church, and Charles in his bed. The experiences of Pamela, Gary, James, Brenda, and Margaret, however, did not include a “transit of consciousness.” On the other hand, the latter group never suffered through the “agonizing period of emotional and intellectual paralysis” that the former ones experienced, because they “seem to [become] caught between two worlds and torn in two directions.”⁴⁰² The encounters, therefore, have both upsides and downsides. Alexander acknowledges that

408 Alexander, 9.

409 Alexander, 10.

410 Alexander, 16.

the transit of consciousness that happened to most of the people he studied took time.⁴⁰³ This observation parallels the experiences of my groups, but the “paralyzed” in my workshop seemed to respond to the help and teaching they found in it and afterward discovered new avenues of ministry in addition to evangelism.

Unlike many of people Luhrmann studied, the participants that had had mystical experiences in my groups had experiences that came about differently. The experiences of the people Luhrmann studied often arose after “hard emotion work,” which preceded special moments when “God became more ‘alive.’”⁴⁰⁴ My participants’ experiences involved little to no emotional work. For Charles, his vision came while he slept and Mary’s while she sat with her baby. Even Gary’s experience of connectedness with the world and creatures around him while on an evening’s walk involved no work on his part. It would seem that sometimes encounters with God and the Holy just happen, but that does not nullify Luhrmann’s findings. As Newberg and Waldman found, practice and ritual can create the environment for mystical experiences to occur. It would also seem that space for and affirmation of both approaches is needed. God and the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to one method or type of experience.

In *The Logic of Evangelism*, Abraham describes a process for evangelism that is based on the “coming of the rule of God on earth.”⁴⁰⁵ In general, the process overlaps with the experiences of the workshop participants but with some differences. Abraham notes, “The primary agent in all evangelism is God” and it grows “out of the coming of

411 Alexander, 16.

412 Luhrmann, 125.

413 Abraham, 94.

the rule of God on earth.”⁴⁰⁶ The rule has a “radical transforming effect on the lives of individuals” and “those converted will likely want to witness to their experience of God’s love and grace manifest in their initiation into God’s kingdom.”⁴⁰⁷ He also explains, “Converts will carry out their witness both in terms of verbal testimony to what God has done in their lives and in deeds of mercy, compassion, and justice.”⁴⁰⁸ The final step in the process is the recognition of the “lifelong learning” that is involved in faith formation and spiritual growth.⁴⁰⁹ The primary difference between Abraham’s process and my findings is that of focus. He is concerned with the converted and I with the evangelist. While Abraham argues that converts will want to witness to what God has done for them, I take a narrower approach. Like Paul, I believe that some are called to evangelism but not all are called, or at least not all the time. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, some people are better suited to evangelism and some experiences of God and the Holy lend themselves to sharing better than others.

414 Abraham, 94, 168.

415 Abraham, 94.

416 Abraham, 95.

417 Abraham.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Phenomenological and Mixed-Method Analyses

Two Specific Moments of Change

At two points in the workshops, change became more pronounced. A phenomenological analysis identified the aspects of the change occurring in those moments. Creswell states why this method helps us understand such changes: “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.”⁴¹⁰ He adds, “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.”⁴¹¹ First, line-by-line analysis of the transcripts led to the data studied. From the data, significant statements gelled together to create formulated meanings. Next, the meanings were coalesced into themes. Finally, a description brought together the essence of the two phenomena.

The first phenomenon was measured after the participants gathered in a plenary discussion after the first time they shared their experiences. They answered the question “What was it like for you to hear about each other’s experiences?” Each person had an opportunity to respond. Transcripts of the participants’ conversations, which the researcher read several times, led to 27 significant statements, from which their formulated meanings generated three themes. Table 7.1 shows examples of those

410 Creswell, 76.

411 Creswell.

statements, and Table 7.2 shows formulated meanings that emerged from both phenomena.

Theme 1—Connectedness	Theme 2—Positive and Strong Feelings	Theme 3—God at Work
It just made me feel warm and connected.	It was definitely exceptional.	New way of thinking of how God might be involved in people’s lives.
It was binding.	Amazing.	A feeling that God is working in all our lives in different ways.
“Connected” is a good word.	Very powerful and moving.	Definitely more involved in God than I ever was before.
I like this group.	Awe-inspiring.	Over the past week I have been thinking about that.
Kind of like you lose your individual something for a little bit.	I feel very privileged.	[The workshop] also connects you to God on a deeper level.
Can we have a prayer to close?	A measure of relief.	

Table 7.1. Examples of Significant Statements from the Phenomenon of Hearing Another Person’s Mystical Experience

Theme One: Connectedness. After sitting in twos or threes, the participants indicated a strong connection to others (see Table 7.2) They could “see” and “envision” what the other person was describing and “understood” what had happened to him or her.

The experience produced a connectedness between the person sharing and the one listening because the listener was drawn into the experience. By envisioning what had happened, the listener gave the teller a firmer and more concrete feeling about the experience. The give-and-take of the sharing experience bonded them together and produced a feeling of connection.

Barbara's experience provides an example of the connection that grew in the act of sharing. She said, "I think the way John was describing the circumstances was very articulate, and the moment was very powerful and very moving." The instructor then asked, "And how was that for you to hear?" She replied, "It was like I...I could see this. I could envision this happening, and the overall feeling that he must have been feeling was 'Why did it happen?'"

When reporting in the plenary discussion, the group became excited, and a deeper feeling of connection occurred that enlivened the discussion. As everyone was speaking, others nodded in agreement. In one group, a person said that it made her "feel connected." Another immediately agreed, adding, "I definitely got that way as well." Another participant said, "It was special." Because he was overwhelmed, the eldest man in the group said, "I can't say anything." Finally, the group agreed with one woman who said, "I'm glad I'm here."

The result of the emotional and spiritual connections made by the group was positive and created an atmosphere in which people became more eager to learn more about mystical experiences. They wanted to come back to the second session, and all but one did.

Theme Two: Positive and Strong Feelings. Here, participants responded to what the other participant said. Hearing about the other participants' experience created strong emotions. The stories left them "amazed," "moved," "warm," and "awe-inspired." They felt affirmed in their own experiences. For some, what the other person said gave them relief. For example, one woman noted:

There was some *measure of relief* there for me because I always feel a bit weird about this thing that happened to me. I always felt faintly ridiculous. The language isn't adequate for the task. So actually speaking to somebody who could fill in the blanks because they felt the same sort of thing to them...that was *a nice experience*.

Part of the emotional response happened because they were not being judged. They reacted positively because what they could not put into words was echoed in the words that the other persons used to describe what had happened.

Those who had not had a mystical experience also expressed positive, strong feelings. One woman said she felt "very privileged" when she heard her partner's story. She thought that it was "dramatic" because "not many people have heard about it." To learn of the experience gave her a sense of the experience itself, and that moved her. Because of it, she could participate in it in a small way, and that was exciting to her.

Theme Three: God at Work. The third cluster arose through the expressions of participants' experiences of God and the Holy. They discovered new ways of thinking about God because they saw the different ways God is involved in people's lives. One woman remarked that hearing another person's experience gave her "a feeling that God is working in all of our lives in different ways. Some of it we see, some of it we don't." Although she had not had a mystical experience, she was an active Christian who was

involved in a weekly Bible study and prayed regularly. Even for her, however, hearing about another person's experience widened her understanding of mystical experiences.

Another participant, who had never had an experience but faithfully attended Sunday services, echoed what the woman had said. He noted that hearing about her experience gave him "a new way of thinking of how God might be involved in people's lives." Then he commented on his change of thinking: "I mean it's something I sort of thought about before, but you may be giving me a more concrete experience of others' ways than what I thought of how God could be interacting or what I experience God might be."

For another participant, hearing of her partner's mystical experience changed her belief in God. Both had experiences that happened to them suddenly. Drawing on the experience of Saul on the Damascus Road, she commented, "I think what we had in common was we both had sudden Saul moments. We both went from not questioning to questioning what had happened." She came away with an understanding that God can act in ways that she does not understand, causing her to question.

The stories about participants' mystical experiences enriched people's understanding of divine agency. They learned that God works differently than they expected, more immanently and more actively in the world, and is at work in surprising ways.

The First Phenomenon's Exhaustive Description

Central to phenomenological analysis is the exhaustive description reflecting “the participants’ ideas and feelings about each theme.”⁴¹² The reporting on the phenomenon of sharing mystical experiences among participants produced three themes that describe the common experiences of the participants. The events they that shared contributed to a feeling of connectedness. They reported positive, strong feelings, arising from an affinity of experience and a non-judgmental attitude of others. The participants also felt privileged to hear the others’ experiences. These two commonalities allowed for a lowering of anxiety and a lessening of defensiveness through which learning and behavioral changes could occur. Additionally, the participants gained or affirmed their theological understanding of divine agency. They came to understand that God is active, immanent, and personal, and intercedes unexpectedly into people’s lives.

The second phenomenon occurred when the participants reported on their encounters of God and the Holy with non-participants.

Theme—Connectedness	Theme—The Reaction to Sharing
I could see.	Surprised me
I could understand.	Just wonderful
I could envision	I became emotional.
I felt warm and connected.	It brought up these feelings.
	It was a turning point.

Table 7.2. Example of Two Theme Clusters and Formulated Meanings

412 Lynn Butler-Kisber, *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Informed Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), 53.

Between the second and third sessions, the participants were asked to speak about their mystical experience with someone outside the group. During the final session, the participants reported on what happened during these interactions. The analysis looked at the effect of sharing. At the final session, each person was encouraged to share his or her experience. Fifty-one significant statements emerged whose meanings could be divided into three themes that described the qualities of the experience for the participants and the reaction of the non-participants (see Table 7.3).

Theme One: The Reaction of Others. The first theme illustrated the reactions of the non-participants. First, their various reactions added to the experience of the teller. One person viewed it in more religious terms than the teller. Another exhibited joy, bursting into tears. Yet another woman heard the story, misread the situation, and wanted to help the teller get through her troubles. A teenager thought what she heard was “crazy.” Finally, another reacted in silence for an uncomfortable pause and then said that same thing had happened to her.

Regardless of their reactions, the non-participants listened to and considered their stories. They gave the teller a fair hearing. Each person took it seriously, even the teenager, who, in the end, went away saying that she had to think about it. The accounts of the experience drew in the listeners. They were engaged and interested in what the participants had to say.

Theme 1—The Reaction of the Other	Theme 2—The Reaction to Sharing	Theme 3—When Sharing Did Not Occur
He had a different take on it.	And I was like “Yes! That’s exactly what I’m trying to say.”	It got sidetracked.
And then I finish and she says, “That’s crazy, pretty much.”	It took somebody else....I got more color on my own experience.	I tried to explain the thing.
I’ve known her for 30 years, and it opened up a whole new branch of our friendship.	Well, I think the more you try to talk about it to tell people, the easier it is to talk about.	It’s been really tough to bring up.
Joy and emotion, just burst into tears.	I was so happy to reach out to her and talk about this to her.	My original plan was to talk to someone at the coffee hour at church.
Well, she wanted to help me.	I felt like hearing myself talk about it clarified something for me.	I was always a bit defensive of it.
He had much more of a religious view of it than I had had.	It was sort of beautiful something or other. It brings it all back.	It didn’t occur.
And she kind of looked at me at first and I was like, “Okay, maybe this wasn’t the right thing.”	It adds to the experience.	I should have done it.

Table 7.3. Examples of Significant Statements from the Phenomenon of Sharing with a Non-Participant

Barbara’s sharing of her mystical experiences illustrates what happened to their relationships. She explained excitedly:

I spoke to a friend of mine who I have known or she’s known me for many, many, many, many years, and we consider ourselves in this club

because we've both lost our parents....I shared my experience with a flower in the winter coming up when I needed some guidance, and what not, and I said, "Has this every happened to you?" And she kind of looked at me at first and I was like, okay...*this wasn't the right thing. I'm not going to know her forever now. But she did say and she went on to explain this experience she had.*

Barbara continued, "She was fascinated with it." Then she concluded, "I've known her for 38 years, and it opened up a whole new branch of our friendship, which was wonderful." Her experience shows the shift in relationship that happened when the participants told others about their experience of God and the Holy.

Theme Two: The Reaction to Sharing. The second theme identified the common experience of those who had shared their experiences with non-participants (see Table 7.2). The participants' reactions were all positive, and they were excited and relieved by the reactions of their listeners. One person said that sharing made her "happy." Another commented, "It was sort of beautiful." Through sharing, they learned more about the experience. One woman said that her husband's comment gave "more color on my own experience." Later she said, "I felt like hearing myself talk about it clarified something about it for me. And hearing a reaction also clarified it. It didn't change what happened in any way, but it certainly changed how I felt about it." Another said, "It adds to the experience." Another woman, who had spoken about her experience in the past only rarely, said, "But you've actually made me realize that the thing itself is bulletproof. I just accept that it happened where...what anybody else thinks about it or says to me about it really doesn't matter."

It also changed them in different ways. For the woman with the 38-year friendship, speaking with her friend changed their relationship. As she said, "It opened it up a whole new branch of our friendship." The woman who felt her experience had

become bulletproof went on to say that her view of her experience had changed. She commented that because she felt that some people “were going to treat me or act like I was a weirdo,” she would be defensive. After sharing her experience with her daughter, she felt that she would share it again because “it might help somebody else open up.”

Sharing the experience brought back the feelings that the participants had had during their encounters. One woman said, “It brings up those feelings, and you’re more connected because you’re thinking about it more.” A man added, “It always does reinforce my experience.” Another woman expressed that sharing her experience “was just wonderful.” The participants felt that bringing up their experiences with a non-participant made it easier to speak about it again. One participant said, “Well, the thing about it, I think the more you try to talk about it, to tell people, the easier it is to talk about.” Others agreed in their post-workshop surveys that they were more likely to talk about their experiences again.

Theme Three: When Sharing Did Not Occur. Some found it difficult to share their experiences with non-participants. They feared what others would think of them, and they felt sharing it would diminish their memory of the experiences. Their worry caused them to look for the perfect moment to speak with non-participants. In reporting, they said that they “tried to explain the thing,” “got sidetracked,” spoke about it “indirectly,” and said, “I should have done it.” These statements show a half-hearted effort that made them feel guilty. One person summed up his passivity by stating, “It didn’t occur.”

One man’s reporting typified the regret that he felt by not completing the activity. When the group was asked to speak about how they did in speaking with non-participants, he jumped in first. He said, “It was more...I think the discussion...at one

point, but I got sidetracked. And what I kept on trying to do, which was sort of fulfilling the homework assignment, was, I said, ‘Okay, so how can we take this negative situation and make something positive about it?’” At one point said, “That was about as close as...” but then ended, stating, “There’s got to be a silver lining in there somewhere.” He was unable to state why he did not complete the assignment.

Another man’s response also illustrated the ineffectiveness of several of the participants. He stated, “I didn’t get too far with my spiritual experience, but I’ll still tell you about it.” He was interrupted but then continued his reporting: “It didn’t occur...my original plan was to talk to someone at the coffee hour at church about it, but by the time Sunday had rolled around I had forgotten about it, and then it dawned on me Monday or Tuesday that I hadn’t done it.” After hearing the success of those who had completed the activity, the man felt guilty about not completing it and wished that he would speak with someone in the future.

Discrepancies

Those people, both men and women, who were worried about the response that they would receive, found it difficult to share their experiences of God and the Holy. Their failure to complete the activity more likely had to do with a lack of motivation. Those who completed the assignment shared the same worry. The powerful reporting of those who did complete the assignment, however, moved some of those who had not wanted to share in the future. In the end, though, the workshop was not successful in motivating all the participants to share their experiences with others.

The Second Phenomenon's Exhaustive Description

The second phenomenon occurred on two levels: first, when the participants shared their experiences with non-participants, and second, when they reported on their interactions. In successful instances of sharing experiences of God and the Holy, participants discovered that those people with whom they spoke took them seriously and themselves had a variety of responses ranging from disbelief to affinity. These participants were also motivated by the reactions that they had heard and gained confidence in and assurance about their experiences. Their view of the experiences changed from being closed, tightly protected events to ones that could be shared so that others might benefit from them. Those who did not complete the activity felt regret at their half-hearted effort. Afterwards, some decided to recommit themselves to sharing or at least learning more about mystical experiences.

Validation of Groups' Diversity

In the next step in the analysis of the workshop, I sought to determine whether the participants had had a wide range of mystical experiences. To verify the diversity, I used a mixed-methods convergent-design approach to analyze the experiences of the participants. The quantitative tool was the Tellegen Absorption Scale (TAS), and the qualitative tool was a phenomenological analysis of the short descriptions of the participants' mystical experiences.

The TAS is a true/false questionnaire of 34 items created by Professor Auke Tellegen of the University of Minnesota. Its purpose is to measure the ability of people to be absorbed in an activity. In their article "Openness to Absorbing and Self-Altering

Experiences ('Absorption'), A Trait Related to Hypnotic Susceptibility," Tellegen and Gilbert Atkinson write:

Absorption is interpreted as a disposition for having episodes of "total" attention that fully engage one's representational (i.e., perceptual, enactive, imaginative, and ideational) resources. This kind of attentional functioning is believed to result in a heightened sense of the reality of the attentional object, imperviousness to distracting events, and an altered sense of reality in general, including an empathically altered sense of self.⁴¹³

Absorption is important because it has been found to help some Christians experience God. Tellegen and Atkinson claim, "One would expect high-absorption persons to have an affinity for mystical experience, even if true *unio mystica* is, itself, a rare attainment."⁴¹⁴ From her research, T. L. Luhrmann concludes that absorption "helps the Christian to experience that which is not materially present."

Since high absorption has been found to correlate with mystical experiences, the TAS is a useful tool to determine whether the workshops' participants represented a range of experiences. The TAS is scored so that one with high absorption will answer most or all questions true and those with low absorption will answer most or all false. Thus, for the purpose of evaluating the diversity of the workshop groups, the participants' TAS must represent a wide range of scores.

The phenomenological analysis examined the self-reporting of the participants' experience of God and the Holy. The activity asked the participants to write a short description of their experience. Since they had already shared the experience with another participant, the activity sought to reinforce the sharing and learning that had occurred in

413 Auke Tellegen and Gilbert Atkinson, "Openness to Absorbing and Self-Altering Experiences ('Absorption'), A Trait Related to Hypnotic Susceptibility," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (1974): 268.
414 Auke Tellegen and Gilbert Atkinson, 275.

the first session. For the purposes of study validation, the descriptions also provided qualitative data about what had happened during their mystical experience and a way to determine the qualities of that experience.

Quantitative Analysis and Results

The results of the TAS were tabulated, compiled, and compared. A descriptive statistical method, “box plot and whiskers,” illustrated the results. In her article “Method for Presenting Statistical Information: Box Plot,” Kristin Potter explains, “Descriptive statistics are a quick and concise way to extract the important characteristics of a dataset by summarizing the distribution through a small set of parameters.”⁴¹⁵ The box plot and whiskers tool “is used to indicate the positions of the upper and lower quartiles; the interior of this box indicated the innerquartile range.”⁴¹⁶ Additionally, it is used to check “the symmetry of the distribution, the location of the central value, and the spread of the observations.”⁴¹⁷ These characteristics and measurements make it an ideal tool to verify whether the workshop participants had had a broad range of mystical experiences.

Using the box plot and whiskers, the analysis of survey resulted in the following measurements (see Table 7.4). The highest score was 33 true answers out of a possible 34. The low was 10. The median was 24. Q1 was 18, and Q3 was 26.5, meaning the first quartile ranged from 10 to 18, the second from 18 to 24, the third from 24 to 26.5, and the fourth from 26.5 to 33. The spread from the lowest score to the median was 14, and the spread from the median to the highest score was 9. The total range was 23. This produced

415 Kristin Potter, “Methods for Presenting Statistical Information: The Box Plot,” in *Visualization of Large and Unstructured Data Sets, GI-Edition Lecture Notes in Informatics (LNI)*, vol. S-4, edited by Hans Hagen, Andreas Kerren, and Peter Dannenmann, 97–106, (2006), 97.

416 Potter, 98.

417 Potter, 99.

a negative skew, meaning the lower half (the third and fourth quartiles) had a wider distribution than the upper half (the first and second quartiles). Additionally, the third quartile had a narrow range, indicating a bunching of the scores in that segment. A comparison of the whiskers indicated that the lowest quartile had a slightly wider range

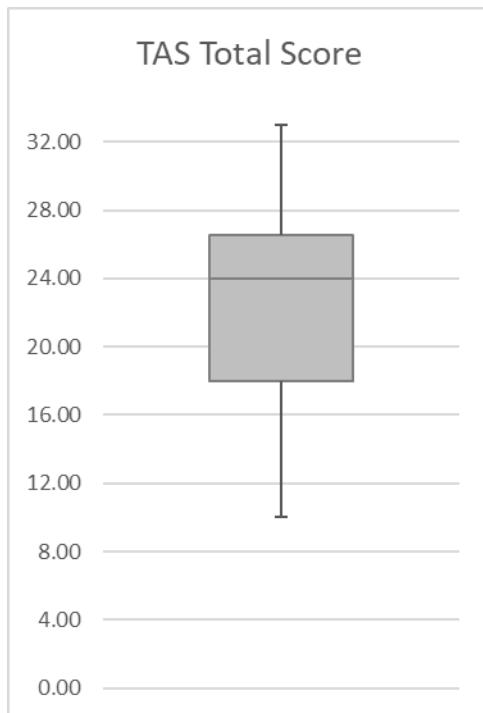


Table 7.4. Results of the Tellegen Absorption Survey in a Box Plot

than the top quartile. Additionally, the survey results produced a median (24) that was seven points higher than the median of the unscored scale (17). Both men and women scored in all quartiles. Gender therefore does not appear to be a factor in absorption scoring.

Several conclusions may be reached through from an analysis of the box plot and whiskers. The total range of the scores, from the lowest to the highest, was skewed

toward more true answers than false ones, meaning that all participants had some measure of absorption but that the range was broad. Except for the third quartile, the distribution within quartiles was also broad. The analysis showed that the participants had a wide range of absorption.

Qualitative Analysis and Results

Whereas the TAS measures the likelihood of a person's mystical experience, the participants' description of their experiences of God and the Holy illustrated the event itself. A phenomenological analysis determined the nature of their mystical experiences. It explored the qualities of the experience and its impact. From the thirteen emailed responses that gave short descriptions of the participants' mystical experiences, 113 significant statements were extracted. Table 7.5 lists examples of the significant statements. Their meanings merged into four themes. Table 7.6 provides examples from which the formulated meanings of each theme emerged.

Theme One—Voice. In this theme cluster, participants heard a voice or received a message that they could quote. What the voice said was personal and coherent. To the participants, it made sense and motivated them in a positive way. Their memory of the interaction was clear, even if it had happened more than a decade ago.

For one man, the voice addressed him by name. The voice challenged him, asking, "What are you doing for me?" He understood that God was asking him the question. The interaction motivated him to return to church and become an active member of the parish. To a woman struggling with guilt, the voice, who she interpreted was possibly Jesus's, said to her, "You're only human." The encounter relieved her guilt,

Theme 1—Voice	Theme 2— Resulting Feeling or Thought	Theme 3— Specificity of Memory	Theme—No Event
I heard and knew the words.	I thought I was losing my mind.	I was watching Christmas Mass on TV.	I do believe in a higher being, without doubt.
A voice spoke.	I was so in “awe”-fully shaken.	I suddenly woke from a deep sleep.	I do believe in the power of prayer.
The message I felt I had to take from it was something like...	I suddenly had faith.	I was sitting in the darkened church.	It was a long time ago; I don’t remember specifics.
A voice (Jesus?) said to me...	I felt tremendous peace and comfort.	While out for a nighttime walk...	I do, however, feel the presence of God in my life almost daily.

Table 7.5. Examples of Significant Statements from the Short Descriptions of Mystical Experiences

and she felt forgiven. A mother nursing her newly baptized child received a message that said, “Having this baby matters” and “You are part of something bigger than yourself.” A Jewish woman encountered the Holy while watching Christmas Mass from the Vatican on her kitchen television. The voice said, “God is real. Jesus is real. The Gospel is real. God is alive and active, and the Bible is truth.” The experience started her on a journey that led her to join an Episcopal church.

Additionally, participants neither spoke nor engaged in a conversation during the brief encounter.

Theme Two—Resulting Feeling or Thought. In this group of statements, eleven out of thirteen participants reported a feeling resulting from their experience of God and the Holy. Whereas several said that they did not have a mystical experience, they felt that their prayers had been answered in a way that elicited a feeling in them. Their responses have been therefore included in the analysis. Except for one woman who reported, “I thought I was losing my mind,” all other responses were positive. Several stated the feeling arising from their experience was either one of “comfort” or of “peace.” Others noted that the feeling was “overwhelming,” “all-encompassing,” or “tremendous.”

One woman’s experience illustrates the powerful feeling emerging from the experiences. She and her family had traveled to Ireland to have their daughter baptized at

Theme Two—Resulting Feeling or Thought	Theme Three—Specificity of the Memory of the Event
I thought I was losing my mind.	An indescribable brightness was all around me and enveloping me.
I often feel guided.	As I watched my young children playing on the beach, I realized I felt nothing.
I felt tremendous peace.	She smelled of chrism and looked very cute in her white dress.
The feeling was comforting.	On Maundy Thursday watch after her death, I was sitting in the darkened church.
I felt close to God.	Among the quiet farms with the animals resting in the fields and the stars shining in the sky.

Table 7.6. Examples of Two Theme Clusters and Formulated Meanings from the Short Descriptions of their Mystical Experiences

their family church. Afterwards, she had her experience while nursing her daughter and thinking that she had been baptized in the same church:

And then, all of a sudden, I was *not* sitting in the room. I had a different viewpoint (like a bird's eye view—but not exactly), from where I could see backwards and forwards in time, and I could “see” (or maybe “feel”?) all the mothers and daughters I was descended from—and I had a sense of each of them as individuals who were present in that moment—and I could also see *forwards* in time too, to all the daughters and mothers that would be descended from my daughter and me—and again, had a sense of them all as individuals who were there existing with me in that moment...I can't say that there was a sense of God (the God I think I know) in this—it was more like a feeling that something had been “*revealed*” to me, something I knew.

One result of the feeling was a widening and changing understanding of God. The woman had been a lifelong church participant. Her experience did not align with her understanding of God, but the experience “revealed” to her a different way in which God might be at work in her life.

Another illustration involves a man who wrote about his night encounter:

About ten years ago, I suddenly woke from a dead sleep and jerked bolt upright. A *light of indescribable brightness* was all around and enveloping me. A *voice spoke*—something to the effect, but not really clear—“Charles, what are you doing for me now?” I could not even try to sleep I was so *in “awe”-fully shaken*. I have always considered this to be a message from the Holy Spirit inclining me to return to the Church and to devote more time to serving others.

His experience shows the classic hallmarks of a mystical experience. It was sudden, short-lived, and hard to put into words. It also motivated him to return to church and to serve others more. The feeling arising from the experience spurred him into action.

Theme Three—Specificity of the Memory of the Event. Six participants could recall specific aspects of the experience of God and the Holy. Even though the event had

happened years or decades in the past, they remembered the event clearly. One was watching “Christmas Mass on the TV at the Vatican while in [her] kitchen drinking a cup of tea.” Another participant was watching her “young children playing on the beach,” and another was “sitting in her armchair nursing” her child.

The participants recalled the details of their experiences. Examples include “an indescribable brightness was all around and enveloping me,” and “on Maundy Thursday watch after [my mother’s] death, I was sitting in the darkened church.” Still another recalled “the animals resting in the fields and the stars shining in the sky.” The details point to the power of the experience and the way the brain can keep such a memory with all its details.

Theme Four—No Event. Four participants did not claim to have a mystical experience. One stated, “If the definition of a holy or mystical experience is one that involves a sensory quality (seeing light, hearing voices, feeling warmth, etc.), then I have never had one.” Another wrote, “My experience of God is only mystical in a very, very broad sense of the word.” Still another admitted, “It’s a tremendous amount (a.k.a. giant leap) of faith for me to believe that Jesus was absolutely the son of God.” In his emailed response to the assignment, he never acknowledged having a mystical experience.

Like all those who gave similar responses, he did affirm his faith. He wrote, “I do believe in a higher being, without doubt.” The woman who said she never had had a mystical experience stated, “I do, however, feel the presence of God in my life almost daily.” She added, “I often feel that God has placed me here and that I have an important role to fulfill.” A woman who could not recall a specific encounter noted, “I am sure I

have had some [mystical experiences].” Another wrote, “God is very real and present in my daily life through answered prayers and a feeling of connectedness.”

The Phenomenon’s Exhaustive Description

Whether they had had an experience of God or the Holy, nearly all the participants expressed a feeling resulting from their connection with God. To one degree or another, they felt connecting with the divine was an emotional sensation that produced an intellectual response. The participants interpreted their interactions in a positive way, but the degree of interaction did not necessarily have a corresponding degree of faith, devotion, or religiosity. A divine encounter was not necessary for one to be highly religious. For those who did have an encounter, it was not uncommon for them to have heard a voice that spoke directly to them. For those who were spoken to, the encounter was heightened. Additionally, they remembered the event clearly, including specific details. The events were sudden, short, and singular.

Merged Results

The two tools produced rich analysis from their respective data sets. The higher the TAS score, the more likely the person was to have had a mystical experience. This result confirms Tellegen and Atkinson in their article that those with higher absorption had “an affinity for mystical experience.”⁴¹⁸ Those with the highest TAS scores had the most intense experience, which included qualities such as hearing a voice, seeing light, or having an out-of-body experience.

418 Tellegen and Atkinson, 275.

Additional results included findings about the whole group of participants. No matter what the score, all participants could still feel close to God. The TAS score was also not predictive of faith adherence or practice. A high-scoring person was no more or less likely to pray, believe in God, or attend church services regularly than a low-scoring person.

With respect to the bottom two quartiles, even though they may not have had intense, singular experiences, persons scoring in those ranges at least had had experiences that produced feelings of peace and comfort.

Those in the third quartile, scoring in the second-highest segment, were best able to share. Perhaps those with the highest scores had had experiences so intense that they were not able to articulate them confidently to others, and those in the bottom quartile did not have a specific enough experience to point to when they spoke with another person.

Finally, the quantitative analysis of the TAS and the qualitative analysis of a phenomenological study of the short descriptions of the participants' mystical experiences confirmed that they had had a wide range of experiences. The two tools verified that the study was appropriately diverse. The mixed-methods study produced two different views regarding the diversity of the group. Using the latter method was more comprehensive than using only one approach. The two tools complemented each other, confirming that the participants' diversity could be determined.⁴¹⁹

419 John W. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015).

Implications for Evangelism

Some types of experiences of God and the Holy work better for evangelism than others. The TAS results illustrated that those in the third quartile were able to share their experience. Two reasons seem to explain why that is so. Some experiences generated either too much or no emotional response. Charles was not able to clearly explain his frightening experience in part because he was emotionally overwhelmed by it. Gary's experience, on the other hand, generated little emotional reaction because it was too ordinary. The experience needs to create an emotional sweet-spot to stir emotions and imagination. The TAS shows that absorption has a role to play in creating the sweet-spot. With the right experience, people are also able to appropriate the experience into their lives, becoming part of their life's narrative. Emotion plays a role in this aspect as well. Joy and gratitude frequently emerge from religious and spiritual experiences and are more easily shared with others. Awe and fear are more difficult to share because they can be harder to place within one's life story. Feelings of connectedness are more common and fade from memory more easily.

The effectiveness of evangelism seems to be based on the way evangelists have integrated their experiences of God and the Holy into their life story. Having hit bottom and discovered God, Sarah's experience on the beach became a story of return. When Barbara noticed the flower blooming in the winter, she remembered she was not alone, and when Donna heard the voice in the darkened church, she learned that she was forgiven. As McAdams argues, "Storytelling is sense making" and "gives us our identities." Because their experiences were strong enough but not too strong, these

participants were able to take possession of the experience to help them make sense of their lives and create new identities: returned, not alone, and forgiven.⁴²⁰

428 McAdams, 76.

CONCLUSION

It was warm—not the crisp air of New England in November, but the Texas sun was not scorching either. As we walked across the campus of a large school and church, a rector listened to my thesis. She agreed with my premise that we need a new way of evangelism. She struggled, however, to see the relevance of evangelism as a practice separate from conversion and church growth. She asked, “How does that help my church?” I didn’t have an immediate answer and thought about her question.

Without the forced crisis of conversion, evangelism may seem an extravagance. It is out of place, like a flower by itself growing in the woods. The more I considered what she said, however, the more I thought of the power of evangelism. What would a church be like if a hundred people sat in the pews on a Sunday morning who all shared their experiences of God and the Holy to others? What would they be like? What would God be like for them?

God would be different for them, and the Holy would be different, too. For people who have had experiences of God and the Holy, God can be strange, powerful, and fearsome. The Holy is the burning bush, and it is the healing shadow of Peter. For people who have shared their experiences, God is immanent, active, personal, and purposeful. God has interceded in their lives in unexpected ways that are real, and, through sharing their experiences with others, God has now given them new meaning, purpose, and the responsibility to help others who have had similar experiences. Their job is to assist others in understanding what happened in their brief, often unsettling experience. For these people, God is alive, and therefore the church is also alive. It has become a place

where people seek ways of expressing the impact of their divine encounters. What rector or pastor would not want to lead a church filled with people like that?

Paul and Peter's lives were transformed by their divine encounters. If they had not had their experiences, they would have been very different persons, and God would have been different for them as well. For example, Paul would have continued to persecute Christians, and his brutality would likely have increased. He went from approving the stoning of Stephen to seeking out ways to kill them (Acts 9:1). He would have been lost to violence in the name of God. Peter was also lost. Having been sent out by the disciples to Samaria from Jerusalem, Peter seemed to have lost his role as chief disciple (Acts 8:14). He continued to travel without direction and had no contact with the other disciples (Acts 9:32). Only after his rooftop experience at the house of Simon the tanner did Peter reemerged with the force, power, and purpose of the eventual leader of the church in Rome. Without his encounter, Peter would not have found his calling to evangelize the Gentiles and would have probably faded into obscurity.

Challenges

Using mystical experiences for evangelism is unorthodox. Some will likely look with skepticism at the approach outlined and tested in this thesis. Like the rector who wondered about how this form of evangelism would help her church, others may even wonder about its tie to Christianity. Some of the mystical experiences expressed by the participants seem to have little to do with Church. When someone sees a flower blooming in the snow of late winter that causes her to think of her deceased mother fills her with joy and peace, the tie to the Trinity may seem negligible. When someone has an experience of the Holy that leaves him or her wanting to repeat it over and over, the

connection to a church community may appear weak. The path from having a mystical experience to becoming a fully participating communicant may seem unlikely and unreliable.

Still others may worry about heresy. The mystical experience may produce a privileged feeling of knowing the divine and give some a feeling of superiority from their experiences. Some church leaders may see Gnosticism in some people's mystical experiences. Several participants identified a "conviction of knowing," as a result of their experiences. Others identified "a deepening sense of significance" and "extreme importance." These feelings could lead to the Gnostic attribute of "the supposedly revealed knowledge of God."⁴²¹

Mystical experiences also run the risk of deconstructionism. Critics may dismiss people's experiences of God and the Holy in a variety of ways. In the twentieth century, deconstructionists critiqued much of the Bible and discounted the veracity of many biblical stories.⁴²² Did Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego really survive the fiery furnace? Did Jesus really feed five thousand persons from only five loaves of bread and two fish? Did Jesus rise from the dead? Or do these and other such occurrences have logical explanations? The same question can apply to the experiences of the participants. Did the woman in the church late at night really heard a voice, or was her guilt weighing on her psyche? Did the woman nursing her daughter have an out-of-body experience or just a pleasant fantasy about motherhood? Did the man wake from sleep and hear a voice, or was it simply a powerful dream about finding purpose? Mystical experiences are

421 F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston, 683.

422 Oxford Biblical Studies Online, "Deconstruction," in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, W. R. F. Browning, ed., <http://0-www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/article/opr/t94/e503> (July 7, 2017).

events that stand outside of normal experiences and are difficult to describe. Their believability is therefore always open to doubt.

In the abstract, these challenges have merit. The practice of evangelism, however, involves human experiences and not formulas of just quoting scripture and dogma. In today's highly individualistic culture, a more personal, authentic, and dynamic experience of sharing is necessary. When people who are seeking meaning in their lives encounter others who, through their experiences of God and the Holy, have discovered meaning, they give value to what they hear.

Outcomes

First, Taves speaks about experiences "deemed religious," which in part means that context matters. Barbara Ehrenreich has struggled for many years to make sense of her experience. When she began to frame her experience as an encounter with the Other, however, she began to understand it. She then was able to write about it, basing her memoir on her experience and subsequent journey. The ability of a person to place the experience in context and within a spiritual or religious framework is crucial. When one does, one can speak about it more easily to others.

Having a priest lead the class lead helped validate the participants' experience. Perrin notes, "Mystics' insights...were held with the highest skepticism if their 'room with a view' did not fit into the 'established household,'"⁴²³ referring to the institutional church. For at least one participant, my clerical leadership helped her return to church services and leadership because she no longer felt her experience was outside the

423 Perrin, 447.

accepted norms of church life. Providing context for the participants' experiences was a benefit of the workshop and, in fact, is a central piece of the evangelism of the participants.

Second, Kallenberg affirms the role of context by adding the importance of interpretation. He writes, "The world will not be able to evaluate the claims of the gospel unless they understand clearly what is the nature of the community that speaks these claims."⁴²⁴ For example, Paul and Ananias needed each other, just as Peter and Cornelius did, to interpret their events. The workshop participants who translated their experience into language that was understandable to the listener had the greatest success in sharing. When Donna spoke to her friend about her experience, her friend misinterpreted what she was saying. When Donna later spoke to her family, however, her grandchildren contextualized the event in religious language and interpreted it correctly. When Mary spoke to her husband William, he was able to interpret the event in a new way for her. He framed it in religious language even though she had not, and helped her understand it better. In addition, Gary's inability to interpret his experience clearly may explain why he struggled to share it with others. The findings of the project illustrate the importance of interpretation. Without the ability to contextualize and interpret it, the event loses its evangelistic force.

The findings also suggest that a workshop teaching about mystical experiences helps. When people who are wondering about their mystical experiences to meet others with similar experiences, remarkable change can happen, and people can move forward spiritually. Because of her workshop participation, Shelly has returned to regular church

⁴²⁴ Kallenberg, 50.

attendance and has become an effective leader of a group of women who help prepare the church for worship. Mary, Barbara, and James have also stepped forward to be leaders of their church. Allison has returned to worshipping, if not regularly, much more frequently than her former once-or-twice-a-year pattern. Their actions suggest that the workshop helped them see purpose in their mystical experiences.

For many Episcopalians and perhaps many other Christians, evangelism does not come naturally. My findings, however, suggest that ordinary Episcopalians can indeed evangelize. For them to share how God has interacted with them, there are two requirements. First, training is essential. Since evangelism is not a natural activity, it must be taught. While the account in Acts 9 is different, Paul's description of his days following his mystical experience on the Damascus Road points to the importance of teaching. In Galatians 1:18, he writes, "Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days." It is likely that one of their topics during their visit was their mutual experiences that pointed them to evangelism. Teresa of Ávila also had the guidance of her spiritual director, who encouraged her to write about her accounts. John of the Cross used his poetry and commentary to teach his novices about the spiritual life. Teaching and the role of the teacher were important in the process of understanding, interpreting, and encouraging them to share their experiences. With the help of a teacher or mentor, people must learn both the practical steps of and the motivation for evangelism that work for them. When these two factors are present, people can change their mindset, and their attitudes and behaviors can change. They then can share their Good News.

The workshop showed that process is also important. Facilitators may present training material on evangelism, but it first must address more than education for several aspects of change to occur. The training program needs to bring about a decrease in anxiety and defensiveness. If it does not, positive feelings about the program will not emerge. The program must also address the participants' resistance. Spiritual change is difficult, and people can be resistant to altering their spiritual practices. Resistance can be overcome when people learn how others did it—for example, John Wesley and Hannah Whitall Smith.

The analysis produced a clear picture of the results of spiritual change. When people shared their experiences with non-participants, the experience became even stronger. It tapped into their emotions, even ones not that were part of the original experience. Their memory and understanding broadened when they interpreted it. They also realized that the memory of the experience held value—in fact, it was “bulletproof”—no matter what another person might say. These results excited the participants and made them want to share their experience with others. They hoped that it might help other people grow in faith and know themselves and God better.

The findings also suggest that not everyone should evangelize. In Ephesians, Paul argues that Christians have different gifts, some as evangelists (4:11). Only about half who attended the workshop evangelized. Although some of those who did not might do so in the future, it is unlikely that all of them would. In addition, not all the experiences lent themselves to sharing. In fact, the two people with the most moving and powerful experiences did not share. As they struggled to frame their experiences, however, they gained confidence to share them. The two people with the most recent mystical

experience also did not share. They seemed to affirm Paul's thinking on spiritual gifts but also suggested that some time might need to pass before they could share.

Who should evangelize is equally important to consider. The participants with experiences with God and the Holy several years in the past did a better job than those with recent encounters. The new Christian, who attended only one workshop and completed only one homework assignment, did not finish the workshop. Additionally, Donna's sharing after the workshop with her family resulted in several theological statements. These conditions suggest that mature Christians who are grounded in biblical and theological teachings are likely better candidates than those who lack such education. They will be better able to field the questions that the conversation may raise and will probably put their experiences in a context that aligns with Church orthodoxy.

Further Questions

I have raised several questions that need additional exploration. First, does the four-step process of spiritual change have other applications? It might be a tool to help spiritual directors lead their directees to new growth. Those who have been circling around one issue for a long time period might be doing so because of their anxiousness, defensiveness, or resistance. Would addressing their issues using the four-step process help?

The workshop was successful in part because of its purposeful training. Would other evangelistic approaches find success using training? Maybe one of the reasons that Episcopalians do not evangelize is that they do not know how. Regardless of the

underlying method or principles, more Episcopalians might evangelize if more they were trained in evangelism.

It is unclear whether the practice of mystical experience sharing is sustainable. Will participants continue to share their experiences? Will they need follow-up sessions to inspire them to share more or not? Would mentorship or similar support help?

Concerning the use of biblical experience as opposed to scriptural command or edict, do other stories of biblical evangelism exist? What are the features required for a biblical story to be evangelistic? What other stories might motivate people and why?

What about Peter? I have suggested that Peter had a mystical experience that motivated him to evangelize. I also identified fruitful veins of mystical theology in 1 Peter. How does the claim of Petrine mysticism change the way he is viewed, explain his writings more effectively, and make his message more powerful to today's readers? The mystical theology of 1 Peter points to a communal understanding of spirituality, formation, and worship that is a positive response to today's highly individualized culture. Do Peter's concept of "spiritual house" and "royal priesthood" balance the Paul's "God within" view? Do they point the church in a new direction?

Neoevangelism

The concept of neoevangelism brings Christians to one of the apexes of their spiritual life. Although there are other peaks, neoevangelism can unlock doors of perplexity for many Episcopalians. It lends itself to new faith formation and motivation and guides others who are unsure of their spiritual path. It also brings God into people's lives in new ways.

Neoevangelism is the concept of an active, personal, immanent God who interacts with people in sudden, unexpected, ineffable, and purposeful ways. It is a tool that God gives to people who are living in a highly individualistic culture. It is the means to share authentic experiences that others value and allows for individuals to find ways to grow based on their experiences. With it, they can find meaning in their religious lives, not by being dutiful but by expressing themselves as loved and honored by God. They learn to see the Holy beyond the sanctuary, but at the same time they seek to have the Christian community understand their experiences in the context of orthodox Christianity.

Neoevangelism connects Christians to the historical Christian community. Many Christians have not had experiences like those of the early church fathers. Peter and Paul have become mentors and motivators for evangelism, and their experiences validate the mystical experiences of today's Christians. Neoevangelism also connects Christians with those who lived in past centuries. Today's Christians may take heart in their forebears' willingness to share their mystical experiences with others. Like Peter and Paul, these historical figures are mirrors and models of evangelism in action and their works are practical guides for people to follow.

Because potentially half of all Americans have had a mystical experience, neoevangelism holds hope for the Church. The upside for Christians who learn its ways is immense. Regardless of the size of the congregation, people alive with God's love and purpose can shape the future of the church for the better.

APPENDIX A

An Explanation of God and the Holy

God and the Holy is a catchall phrase that describes a wide range of experiences that people may consider mystical. Experiences of God refer to encounters that include interactions with the divine person whom Christians call God. Whereas the Holy refers to experiences that involve feelings which often include connectiveness about the world or other people that develop a sense of sacredness. These may include positive or negative encounters that exist outside of normal everyday life.

Several scholars are helpful in this broad understanding of such experiences. In *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, Rudolf Otto explains that the experience of the holy can be best described as “the numinous,” and “its nature is such that it grips or stirs the human mind with this and that determinate affective state.”⁴²⁵ He describes the state as the “mysterium tremendum,” which produces a variety of feelings and conditions in people including “a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood,” a “burst in sudden eruption from the depths of the soul...to ecstasy,” “wild and demonic forms,” and “hushed, trembling, and speechless humility.”⁴²⁶ What is important to note from Otto is that a broad classification of experiences can be considered Holy. Otto’s arguments were influenced by the conceptions of religious experience posited by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who, Andrew Dole describes in “What is ‘religious experience, in Schleiermacher’s Dogmatics, and why does it matter,” as “the archetypal theorist of

420 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 7,11,12.

421 Otto, 12-13.

approaches” about religious experience.”⁴²⁷ Dole notes that at the center of Schleiermacher’s understanding are the “feeling of absolute dependence,” which is common to all religions, and “the experience of redemption by Jesus,” a solely Christian instance.⁴²⁸ With respect to God and the Holy, Schleiermacher’s view is narrow, describing two in a pool of many different types of encounters.

Other scholars, who classified mystical experiences, also illuminate the concept of God and the Holy. In *Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, Ralph Hood, Peter Hill, and Bernard Spilka separate these experiences into two categories, namely, spiritual and religious. They write, “The connotations of ‘spirituality’ are more personal and psychological than institutional, whereas the connotations of ‘religion’ are more institutional and sociological.”⁴²⁹ The difficulty with their classification is its attempt to define experiences either inside the context of religious institutions or outside them, but the duality they describe informs God and the Holy. In *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Walter Stace also identifies two types of mystical experience. The first is extrovertive mysticism, which is achieved through the use of one’s physical senses to perceive “the multiplicity of external materials...transfigured so that the One, or the Unity shines through them.”⁴³⁰ The second is introvertive mysticism, by which a mystic “seeks by deliberately shutting off the senses, by obliterating from consciousness the entire multiplicity of sensations, images, and thoughts, to plunge into the depths of his own ego.”⁴³¹ Stace focuses on the

422 Andrew Dole, “What is ‘Religious Experience’ in Schleiermacher’s Dogmatics, and Why Does It Matter.” *Journal of Analytic Theology*, vol. 4, (2016), 46.

423 Dole, 49.

424 Ralph W. Hood, Jr. Hill, Peter C., and Spilka, Bernard, *Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. 4th ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 9.

425 Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: MacMillan, 1960), www.Scribd.com/doc/70165808/W-T-Stace-Mysticism-and-Philosophy-Whole-Book. (October 18, 2017), 61.

426 Stace, 62.

actions of the mystic to create an experience. Extrovertive mysticism parallels the Holy, but introvertive mysticism does not relate to the experiences of the participants in my workshops. In *Exploring the Paranormal: Perspectives on Belief and Experiences*, three of præternatural categories of experience described by Peter Nelson better capture the experiences described by the phrase God and the Holy. They are “mystical experience,” “the sacred (numinous)” including nature mysticism, and “contact with the spirit realm (presences).”⁴³²

Finally, in *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, John Hick comes closest to articulating the meaning of God and the Holy. He defines religious experience as “a transformation of the ‘information’ generated at the interface of the between the Real and the human psyche” that includes two kinds of experience.”⁴³³ The first is when “‘information’ is mediated through our material environment” and is “experienced as having religious character or meaning,” and the second is when “‘information’ is received by a direct influence’ and “express the presence of the Real, not as manifested in our material environment, but as directly affecting the human psyche.”⁴³⁴ The former can be seen as the Holy and the latter as God.

One additional observation factors into the definition of God and the Holy. Each workshop participant completed the Tellegen Absorption Survey (TAS). It measures the absorptive ability of an individual. The results suggest a correlation between high absorption and powerful experiences. It also showed that those with lower scores still had

427 Peter L. Nelson, “A Survey of Mystical, Visionary and Remote Perception Experiences,” in *Exploring the Paranormal: Perspectives on Belief and Experience*, ed. George K. Zollschan, John F. Schumaker, and Greg F. Walsh (Garden City Park, New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1989), 196-201.

428 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 153.

429 Hick, 154, 156.

experiences that they deemed to be religious or spiritual in nature. Additionally, those with higher survey scores tended to have encounters with God and those with lower scores seemed to have encounters with the nebulous Holy. High-scoring individuals, for example, heard the voice of God or Jesus. The experiences of lower-scoring individuals included feelings of peace and gentleness that they considered holy or special. Using God and the Holy widens the parameters of experiences to include both kinds of experiences.

APPENDIX B

Logic Model Planning Material

**Logic Model Development¹
Program Planning Template**

5
Strategies
In the book of Acts, Peter and Paul have mystical experiences which become motivators for their evangelistic work to the Gentiles. In the past, there has been a strong thread of mystics who were also effective evangelists. The Apostolic Age and more recent use of mystical experience-based evangelism demonstrates its effectiveness.

6
Assumptions
The Episcopal Church has few homegrown programs tailored for evangelism. Evangelism is a central aspect for the spiritual growth of a person. In previous times in the Church, mystical experiences have been effective motivators for evangelism. The mystical experience is a better fit for Episcopalians than the current methods of evangelism. Formal training in practical techniques is necessary for any new method to be effective.

4
Influential Factors
The lack of evangelism training programs
The attitude Episcopalians have toward evangelism
The new Presiding Bishop's desire for a change in evangelism
The resistance to the word evangelism
The conflict between the top-down desire for evangelism versus the bottom-up resistance

1
Problem or Issue
There are significant number of Episcopalians who are resistant to the two main theological approaches and techniques of evangelism of recent history. These approaches are founded on motives that do not connect with Episcopalians. To meet the need for an increased number of Episcopalians an evangelism training program based on mystical experiences, that provides better motives, must be created.

2
Community Needs/Assets
Many in the Episcopal Church are not comfortable with evangelism, with the exception of foreign mission (Gortner 3). Few, if any, resources based on current evangelism training programs that exist are taught in Episcopal churches. The new Presiding Bishop has made evangelism a priority but there are few tested, practical, programs available.

3
Desired Results (outputs, outcomes, and impact)
The creation of a practical training program that has been tested and evaluated for effectiveness
Demonstrate increased participants' acceptance of and comfort to evangelize
Test the connection of mystical experience and evangelism found the Bible. Does the mystical experience-based evangelical techniques of the Apostolic Age still work
Determine if Episcopalians who have been taught how to evangelize will do it
Evaluate new motivations for evangelism, namely, the mystical experience

¹ W.K. Kallogg Foundation, *Logic Model Development Guide* (2004), p. 57.

Logic Model Development¹

Program Implementation Worksheet

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Impact
<p><i>In order to accomplish my set of activities, I will need the following</i></p> <p>Two churches to host one workshop each that include tables and chairs</p> <p>16 to 20 participants [half have expressed mystical experiences (ME) and the other have not]</p> <p>Biblical and Historical content to use in each session.</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry content and questions</p> <p>3 – 5 priests open to hosting workshops at their churches</p>	<p><i>In order to address my problem, I will accomplish the following activities</i></p> <p>I need to speak with priests to host and recruit participants at their churches</p> <p>By means of two surveys assess potential workshop participants for appropriateness</p> <p>Secure two sites to complete three workshop sessions</p> <p>Prepare teaching materials for workshop</p> <p>Create survey to measure pre-workshop attitudes and post workshop changes</p>	<p><i>I expect that once accomplished these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery</i></p> <p>Secure two locations for the workshops</p> <p>Recruit 2 groups of 8-10 screened participants</p> <p>Conduct 2 workshops that include three sessions each, a total of 6 hours in length</p> <p>Participants have learned about MEs and the biblical and historical ME tie to evangelism</p> <p>Have participants practice AI based and ME based evangelism</p> <p>Assess motivation of participants</p> <p>Participants have been retrained after their first attempt at evangelism</p>	<p>I expect that if accomplished activities will lead to the following changes immediately after the workshop.</p> <p>Participants show a more positive attitude toward mystical experiences.</p> <p>For those in the ME group, participants exhibit an increased willingness and comfort in speaking about MEs to other people.</p> <p>Participants have acquired the basic skills of speaking about their experiences of God and the holy.</p> <p>Participants feel more confident in actively engaging in conversations about their experiences of God and the holy.</p> <p>Participants have an increased interest in understanding the ways MEs draw persons into mission and ministry.</p> <p>The workshops successfully identify if certain people are successful evangelists.</p>	<p>I expect that if accomplished these activities will lead to the following changes in the long-term</p> <p>Participants have helped others understand mystical experiences</p> <p>The host parish is more open to speaking about experiences of God and the holy. It has a more open and positive perception of faith sharing and mystical experiences.</p> <p>Additional parishioners understand the biblical and historical ties of mystical experiences and evangelism.</p> <p>More parishioners are actively engaged in speaking about their experiences of God and the holy</p> <p>Host parishes have offered one additional training to teach parishioners to speak about their experiences of God and the holy and offer ways to increase mystical experiences</p>

¹ W.K. Kellogg Foundation. *Logic Model Development Guide* (2004).

APPENDIX C

Recruitment

I worked with five clergy members at four churches to choose locations. The original intent was to run two workshops with two different kinds of people, those with mystical experiences and those without. The plan did not work out. The two churches that were to host a group of people who had not had mystical experiences but who were interested in learning about mystical experiences and evangelism could not gather a group of more than one or two. The other two churches gathered people through direct invitation. In the end, the groups had sufficient diversity to support the thesis. What follows is the solicitation material used by the priests and deacon. The material for the two churches not seeking people with mystical experiences referred to either having peak experiences or learning about mystical experiences rather than wondering about mystical experiences they may have had.

All host clergy received several tools to help recruit participants. The tools included the following materials.

The following is an example of a sample bulletin announcement.

St. Matthew's Bulletin Announcement

Our former Associate Rector Bob Flanagan is completing his doctor of ministry degree at Virginia Theological Seminary and needs our help. He is looking for a small group from St. Matthew's to meet with him to learn about the mystical experience and evangelism. The workshop will take place at St. Matthew's meeting three Thursdays in December. Each session lasts 90 minutes. Participants will complete surveys at the beginning and end of the workshop. Bob promises you will learn lots and have fun. Please email Bob right away to sign up.

Another tool was a two-page fact sheet that included information that participants might ask about as well as sample language for an email invitation.

Questions and Answers for Host Rectors

Neoevangelism

Bob Flanagan's Thesis Project

What is the workshop about?

The workshop is a major part of the final paper for my doctor of ministry degree from Virginia Theological Seminary. The workshop will be a significant experiential, qualitative, phenomenological resource that will inform my reading and aide my defense of my paper.

In particular, I am interested in learning if training Episcopalians, who have had mystical experience or peak experience at church (depending on the group), in evangelistic techniques will increase their confidence in speaking about those experiences to others who do not attend church. Primarily, I am testing to see if the mystical experience is necessary for evangelism in today's culture. Secondly, by using two sites, I hope to see if training a person to evangelize encourages them to do so.

What the workshop does not cover?

This workshop is about the spiritual life as it relates to evangelism. Evangelism is an essential aspect of a person's spiritual growth and sorely underdeveloped in most Episcopalians. So the workshop is not about conversion nor church growth. The skills participants will acquire in the workshop will encourage them to speak about the experiences they have had.

What do you need from me?

In addition to classroom space, I need your help in recruiting participants. I suspect you will need to ask people directly to join the workshop. I don't think I enough people will sign-up based on notices in bulletin nor speaking about it at the announcements. Please feel free to place a notice in the bulletin and talk about it at announcements. But, your knowledge of the congregation and who would make good participants is what I need most to create the right group of participants.

Who are you looking for as participants?

Participants need to be older than 18. They need to be emotionally stable. I would prefer a mix of gender and age. They need to be members of the church, but the length of membership is not a factor. Importantly, they must self-identify as having a significant experience of God's nearness. The definition of the experience is purposely broad. When they had the experience does not matter. It may have been decades ago or recently.

What may I list in the bulletin?

Have you ever wondered about an experience of God or the holy you have had? Would you like to make more sense of it and learn how to speak about it?

If so, [CHURCH] is hosting a workshop led by Reverend Bob Flanagan, a doctor of ministry student at Virginia Theological Seminary and a priest of the Diocese of New York. The workshop is a part of Father Flanagan's doctoral research. In addition to what you learn, you will help him complete his doctoral degree work in Christian Spirituality. This three-session workshop is open to qualified participants who welcome the opportunity to be thoughtful and engaged in the process of spiritual growth. Please see _____ right away to sign-up.

How long will it last?

The workshop includes three sessions lasting an hour and a half each. The total time commitment is six hours which includes time to complete the online surveys, outside assignments and conversations. I would like to hold the workshops either over three consecutive weeks or the first two on consecutive weeks with a week off before the final session. I would prefer to start the workshops in September. If needed surveys may be completed at the church.

What is expected of participants?

Participants will need to be open to new experiences. They will be asked to share their mystical experiences with other members of the group and to participate in group discussions. They will be requested to sign an informed consent form which, among other things, will notify them that the workshops will be recorded. Additionally, they must complete a short pre-workshop online survey and a survey at the conclusion of the workshop. They may be asked to be interviewed as well. All meetings will take place at the host-church site.

Will everyone be accepted as participants?

It would be great to open the workshop to anyone who is interested. For the purposes, however, some people may not qualify.

What will be the impact on the parish?

The workshop may increase conversations about mystical or peak experiences and evangelism. Evangelism is a taboo word in the Episcopal Church so there may be some eyebrows raised. Some participants may want to become more active in the church as a result of their participation. Other D.Min. studies have shown that there is a chance a participant may leave the congregation because of their participation. I would expect more questions will be raised about spirituality as a result of the workshop.

For host clergy who were recruiting for the sessions about mysticism and evangelism, the following two-page fact sheet emphasized peak experiences rather than mystical experiences.

Questions and Answers for Host Rectors

Neoevangelism

Bob Flanagan's Thesis Project – Peak Church-Based Experience Site

What is the workshop about?

The workshop is a major part of the final paper for my doctor of ministry degree from Virginia Theological Seminary. The workshop will be a significant experiential, qualitative, phenomenological resource that will inform my reading and aide my defense of my paper.

In particular, I am interested in learning if training Episcopalians, who have had mystical experiences or peak church-based experiences (depending on the group), in evangelistic techniques will increase their confidence in speaking about those experiences to others who do not attend church. Primarily, I am testing to see if the mystical experience is necessary for evangelism in today's culture. Secondarily, by using two sites, I hope to see if training a person to evangelize encourages them to do so.

What the workshop does not cover?

The workshop is about the spiritual life as it relates to evangelism. Evangelism is an essential aspect of a person's spiritual growth and sorely underdeveloped in most Episcopalians. So, the workshop is not about conversion nor church growth. The skills participants will acquire in the workshop will encourage them to speak about the experiences they have had.

What do you need from me?

In addition to classroom space, I need your help in recruiting participants. I suspect you will need to ask people directly to join the workshop. I don't think I enough people will sign-up based on notices in bulletin nor speaking about it at the announcements. Please feel free to place a notice in the bulletin and talk about it at announcements. But, your knowledge of the congregation and who would make good participants is what I need most to create the right group of participants.

Who are you looking for as participants?

I need eight to ten participants who are 18 or older. They need to be emotionally stable. I would prefer a mix of gender and ages. They need to be members of the church, but the length of membership is not a factor. Importantly, they must self-identify as having had a peak church-based experience. The definition of the experience is purposely broad. When they had this experience is not critical. When they had this experience is not critical. It is most important that they have a positive passion for the church.

What may I list in the bulletin?

Have you ever wondered you feel so strongly and care so deeply about your church? Would you like to make more sense of it and learn how to speak about it?

If so, [CHURCH] is hosting a workshop led by Reverend Bob Flanagan, a doctor of ministry student at Virginia Theological Seminary and priest of the Diocese of New York. The workshop is a part of Father Flanagan's doctoral research. In addition to what you learn, you will help him complete his studies in Christian Spirituality. This three-session workshop is open to qualified parish members who welcome the opportunity to be thoughtful and engaged in the process of spiritual growth. Please see Father Joe right away to sign-up.

How long will it last?

The workshop includes three sessions lasting an hour and a half each. The total time commitment is six hours which includes time to complete the online surveys, outside assignments and conversations. I would like to hold the workshops either over three consecutive weeks or the first two on consecutive weeks with a two-week gap before the final session. I would prefer to start the workshops in September. If needed pre-workshop surveys may be completed at the church.

What is expected of participants?

Participants will need to be open to new experiences. They will be asked to share their peak church-based experiences with other members of the group and to participate in group discussions. They will be requested to sign an informed consent form which, among other things, will notify them that the workshops will be recorded. Additionally, they must complete a short pre-workshop survey and a survey at the conclusion of the workshop. They may be asked to be interviewed as well. All meetings will take place at the host-church site.

Will everyone be accepted as participants?

It would be great to open the workshop to anyone who is interested. For my purposes, however, some people may not qualify.

What will be the impact on the parish?

The workshop may increase conversations about peak church-based experiences and evangelism. Evangelism is a taboo word in the Episcopal Church, so there may be some raised eyebrows. Some participants may want to become more active in the church as a result of their participation. Historically, there is a chance that a participant may leave the congregation after completing a D.Min. research projects. I would also expect more questions will be raised about spirituality as a result of the workshop.

The clergy also had questions. The following is a typical example and includes a response from the researcher.

----- Message -----

From: Rector
Sent: Wednesday, August 31, 2016 8:18 AM
Subject: Re: Workshop Information
To: Bob Flanagan

Got your copy...and plan to start contacting this weekend IF we have a normal turnout. If it is really, really low due to being a holiday weekend, then I will begin the following week.

Question: I am going to be asked to define a "peak church based experience" so please, as it used to be said, "...explain it to me, Lucy."

I'll let you know how it goes.

Rector

----- Message -----

From: Bob Flanagan
Sent: Wednesday, August 31, 2016 11:34 AM
Subject: Peak Experience Definition
To: Rector

Great question. Thanks for asking. Here are my thoughts:

A peak church-based experiences is likely to be different for each person. So, I cannot give you a one-size-fits-all answer. But here are some likely commonalities. A peak church-based experience gives a person positive feeling toward God, the church, or the parish community. An example might be a worship experience after which someone comments about how spirit-filled church or another such positive emotion. A peak church-based experience creates meaning for the person. The person may identify a strong feeling of affinity toward the church after such an experience. He or she may find that it gives him or her purpose that deepens a person's involvement. It will likely be an experience that is remembered strongly. And happened not of their will; it was not self-caused. So, a person will not say, I came to church to meet God and met him.

While peak experiences may happen in all sorts of venues and situations, I am interested specifically in such events that happen at church or in the service of the church. It doesn't have to have occurred during a service. It could be during an outreach or mission activity. It could also occur at church but not during a service. For example, an altar guild member feels deep peace as he or she readies the altar elements for a service.

I hope that helps.

Bob

The following email exchange illustrates the recruiting work of the host clergy. It includes a response from a person who became a participant.

----- Message -----

On Sun, Sep 18, 2016 at 7:00 AM, The Rector wrote:

Dear Sarah,

Perhaps this is a bit premature in asking you to give consideration to the following proposal, but I immediately thought of you when having this discussion with Bob.

The Rev. Bob Flanagan is a long-time friend and colleague whose doctoral thesis is on evangelism. Bob is looking for mature people who have an experience of God's presence and who are interested in learning how to talk about that with others in a deeper way. And that "experience of God" can be widely described...that it doesn't have to be a "burning bush" type of experience (although it could be). He's looking to do three two-hour workshops with a group of people, time and place to be determined by the group that evolves. If you say yes, he'll be in touch to determine if you are a good fit and whether it will work in your schedule.

Interested?

----- Message -----

From Sarah

Date: Thu, Sep 22, 2016 at 0:04 AM

Subject: Re: proposition for you

To: The Rector

Hey Carol, sorry I didn't get back to you sooner about this. Can you pass him my email address? I am a little wary of signing up for too much 'churchy' stuff again, but this sounds intriguing. Thanks!

The following is an additional example of an email invitation and a response by a potential participant.

----- Message -----

From: Robert Flanagan <interim@ccrye.org>
Date: Nov. 21, 2016
Subject: Workshop Invitation
To: Participant List

Greetings and happy Thanksgiving!

Have you ever wondered about an experience of God or the holy you have had? Would you like to make more sense of it and learn how to speak about it?

If so, I am hosting a three-part workshop as a part of my research for my doctor of ministry degree at Virginia Theological Seminary. In addition to what you learn, you will help me complete my degree work.

I am contacting you because Deacon Smith and I believe you match my participant qualifications and would welcome the opportunity to be thoughtful and engaged in the process of spiritual growth. Let me know if you're interested right away.

The workshop dates are Wednesdays, November 30, December 7, and December 14. Please let me know if you prefer to start at 6:00, 6:30, or 7:00 pm.

Thanks!

Bob

----- Message -----

From: Allison
Date: Nov. 21, 2016
Subject: Re: Workshop Invitation
To: Bob Flanagan

Hi Bob,

I would very much like to take part in your workshop. My only concern is timing; I would probably have to start at 6:00 and end by 7:30. My husband is being taken care of at home by aids who work on 12-hour shifts--usually from 7:00 AM - 7:00 PM. I could probably work it out so that they could start and finish a half an hour later. However, that timing still may not work for you and for the other participants. If not, I would still love to hear what you are working on; it sounds intriguing. I am working right now on a paper/course on religious literacy but using Hinduism and Buddhism as my primary areas of focus.

Best,

Allison

The clergy who were unable to recruit participants explained why in the following emails.

|----- Message -----

From: Bob Flanagan
Date: Feb. 22, 2017
Subject: Participant Recruitment
To: The Rector

Could you give me a sentence or two about why the Wednesday group passed on my workshop?
I don't want a lot of analysis, just your reaction.
I need it at your soonest convenience.

Thanks,

Bob

----- Message -----

From: The Rector
Date: Feb 22, 2017
Subject: Re: Participant Recruitment
To: Bob Flanagan

My sense is that they are very private people and don't feel comfortable talking about their spiritual experiences.

Rector
Sent from my iPhone

Following is the response from the second clergy member who was unable to recruit participants.

Hey Bob

In a nutshell, as I prepare to head off and do a vestry retreat.

In my ministry to this community, I've slowly come to realize that they are either wealthy or wealthy wannabes, who live for job first, children's sports second, vacation third, and church is but another "thing-to-do" on the list of a busy week. This is true not for all but for a large majority of my people. They are all overstressed, overbooked, and while people come up with great ideas for the parish for me to do, they usually have a problem following through—and then remind me, saying "don't judge me" or "I don't need guilt" if they fail to do something that they themselves insisted they would do.

Here is how I recruited people. I was a week behind in asking because the first weekend (weekend before Labor Day), church attendance was abysmal so I waited. The following weekend I did make your request to both my congregations, and while there was a modicum of curiosity on the part of some, the immediate undercurrent was: OK...what days/times are they asking for and can I fit this into my already busy schedule or does it conflict with my chauffeuring the kids to here or there.

Then, I asked you for specific dates and times. This followed with one or another person saying that they could make 1 of 3 or 2 of 3, or the day of the week was wrong, or the time didn't jive with their train coming home from work (and this part is true: most of this parish that works does so in either NYC, White Plains or Danbury). No one, except for retired folk, work here and they are getting to be a smaller and smaller group because it is just too expensive to live here if you don't have two parties working and bringing home income. Others who seemed interested, once dates were known, just never even connected back.

I have the same issue trying to get folks to serve on vestry or work on this or that event.

Joe

APPENDIX D

Pre-Workshop Material

Before the workshop began, participants completed an informed consent and two questionnaires. The Tellegen Absorption Scale's questions may not be reproduced and therefore are not included.

Informed Consent Form

Your completion of this form is required for participation in the study: *Neoevangelism: Using Mystical Experiences to Invigorate Evangelism*.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by the Reverend Robert D. Flanagan. The purpose of this study is to seek to understand your personal experience(s) of God and the Holy, also known as Mystical Experiences or Peak Church Experiences, and train you in ways to more confidently speak about those experiences.

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Complete a two-page questionnaire.
2. Participate in a three-session workshop involving the sharing of experiences with other attendees and related exercises.
3. Complete the two-page Tellegen Absorption Scale survey.
4. Complete a two-page questionnaire at the conclusion of the workshop.

Each workshop session will be digitally recorded on one or two digital recorders. A transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality agreement, will transcribe the workshop sessions using a word processor. Your name will not be included in the interview transcript or in the final report. A pseudonym will be used instead. The names of cities or people you may mention and other identifying information will also be changed.

Audio recordings of workshop sessions will be stored on a password protected area of the researcher's computer. Printed transcripts of the interview may also be kept in a locked file for six months following the workshop. Findings, which may include quotes from your participation in the workshop sessions, will be prepared for educational or research purposes by Reverend Flanagan and may be included in published material.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may choose to leave the workshop session at any time without fear of any kind of reprisal. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is complete, material attributed to you will be destroyed.

No risk is expected but you may experience some discomfort or stress when sharing experiences of God or the holy.

There is no predicted direct benefit to you, individually, for participating in this research. One potential benefit of the research is that it may add to the body of knowledge on this topic. You may also learn more about your experiences.

You will not be compensated for your contribution to this study.

_____ (Initial)

Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate in this research.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions at any time about the study or its procedures, you may contact the researcher Reverend Robert D. Flanagan at P.O. Box 267, Bridgewater, CT 06752, growingasoul@gmail.com, or (914)882-3617. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Doctor of Ministry Program Office of Virginia Theological Seminary at (703)370-6600.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

1. What is your sex?

- Male Female

2. How old are you?

- 18 – 35
 36 – 51
 52 – 70
 71 – 87
 88 +

3. In what religion were you raised?

- Protestant
 Catholic
 Jewish
 None
 Other
 Buddhism
 Hinduism
 Other eastern
 Moslem/Islam
 Orthodox-Christian
 Christian
 Native American
 Inter-nondenominational
 Don't know
 No answer
 Not applicable

4. How long have you attended been a member of your current parish?

- 0 – 1 years
- 1 – 3 years
- 3 – 5 years
- 5 – 10 years
- 20 + years

5. How often do you attend religious services?

- Never
- Less than once a year
- Once a year
- Several 1 times a year
- Once a month
- 2-3x a month
- Nearly every week
- Every week
- More than once week
- Don't know or not applicable

6. Would you call yourself a strong Episcopalian or a not very strong Episcopalian?

- Strong
- Not very strong
- Somewhat strong
- No religion
- Don't know
- No answer
- Not applicable

7. Taken all together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are

- Very happy
- Pretty happy
- Not too happy

8. In general, do you find life

- Exciting
- Pretty routine
- Dull

9. Do you believe in religious miracles?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, probably
- No, probably not
- No, definitely not
- Don't know
- No answer
- Not applicable

10. Do you believe there is a life after death?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- No answer
- Not applicable

11. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Are you

- Very spiritual
- Moderate spiritual
- Slight spiritual
- Not spiritual
- Don't know
- No answer
- Not applicable

Note: Most questions in the pre-workshop survey were developed by the General Social Surveys (GSS). <http://gss.norc.org/>

Smith, Tom W, Peter Marsden, Michael Hout, and Jibum Kim. General Social Surveys, 1972-2014 [machine-readable data file] /Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigator, Peter V. Marsden; Co-Principal Investigator, Michael Hout; Sponsored by National Science Foundation. -NORC ed.- Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago [producer and distributor].

I acknowledge that this website was established to disseminate GSS data and to improve access and increase the use of GSS data files. I will therefore make responsible use of all data, software and documentation obtained from this site.

I acknowledge that NORC at the University of Chicago, and all parties associated with the General Social Survey (including the principal investigators), offer the data and documentation "as is" with no warranty and assume no legal liability or responsibility for the completeness, accuracy, or usefulness of the data, or fitness for a particular purpose.

APPENDIX E

Workshop Material

Lesson Plan for Session Workshops

A Thesis Project by Bob Flanagan

|

SESSION ONE

Major Outcomes for Session One

At the end of the workshop, participants will understand the mystical experience as found in the Acts of the Apostles, the qualities of the experiences of Paul and Peter, and identify correlations between Peter and Paul and their personal experiences.

Learning Objectives

At the of the of the first workshop, participants will be able to

- define the mystical experience.
- name some biblical figures who have had mystical experiences.
- identify the qualities of the biblical mystical experiences.
- better describe their personal mystical experience.

The Workshop: Discovering the Mystical Experience

Opening Activities (25 mins.)

- Introductions
- Completion of the Initial Consent Form
- Completion of the Tellegen Absorption Survey
- Description of Session Workshop

Lecture One: Discovering the Mystical Experience: Looking to the Bible for Help (30 mins.)

- An examination of Paul's Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:1-9)
 - Read aloud with group interpretation listed on newsprint
- An examination of Peter's Rooftop experience (Acts 10:9-17)
 - Read aloud with group interpretation listed on newsprint
- Discovering the commonalities and differences of the two experiences

Activity One: Describing Your Mystical Experience (15 mins.)

[Participants break into pairs. They take turns interviewing each other using the following questions. Interviewers take notes about his or her partner answers.]

- Can you think of a time when you had an experience like Peter or Paul?
- Tell your interview partner about it in as much detail as you can.
- What was that experience of sharing like for you?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Lesson Plan for Session Workshops

A Thesis Project by Bob Flanagan

Activity Two: Reporting to the Group (Group Discussion – 15 mins.)

[Each person describes their experience of interviewing their partner and summarizes what the person said. The facilitator lists the description on newsprint for the whole group to see.]

Individuals report about the interview experience.

Summaries of each story

What was it like to hear your partner's story?

The group reviews the results.

What commonalities do we see in the results?

Based on your experiences, how can we define the mystical experience?

Conclusion: Reviewing What We've Learned (Group Discussion – 5 mins.)

What was this session like for you?

What are some of your takeaways?

Describe homework assignment.

The Homework Assignment

Sit quietly with your eyes closed.

Picture your experience of God and the Holy.

Replay it in your mind.

What did it feel like? What did it look like?

Once you have remembered the experience as best you can, open your eyes.

In about five sentences, describe your mystical experience.

SESSION TWO

Major Outcomes for the Session

At the end of the workshop, participants will have a working definition of mysticism, be able to identify the ways their experiences fit into the tradition of mysticism, and understand the evangelical purposes of mysticism and the mystical experience.

Learning Objectives

At the of the of the second workshop, participants will be able to

- understand the impact of keeping mystical experiences private.
- list the qualities and results of mystical experiences.
- define the mystical experience using metaphors.

The Workshop: Understanding the Mystical Experience

Opening Activities (15 mins.)

- Check-in on homework activity
 - How did that experience feel?
- Review of the previous session
- Describe plan for the session

Lecture One: The Treasure Box (10 mins.)

- Description of the mystical experience as closed off from others.
- Explanation of Teresa of Avila's warnings to her novices.
- Identification of the impact when mystical experiences are kept private.
- Outline of the ways spiritual growth may be stunted.

Activity One: Mystical Experience Definition Activity (Group Discussion – 20 mins.)

- List of qualities and results mystical experiences (Newsprint).
- Explain who and why of the list
- Participants place stickers of different colors next to the qualities and results
 - each color represents a rank preference (first to third).
- The group discusses the results.
- A final list creates a working definition of mystical experience qualities and results.

Activity Two: Mystical Experience in Metaphors (Group Discussion – 20 mins.)

- Different metaphors illustrate traditional concepts of mysticism
 - Pie shape with arrow to show a circular progression from illuminative to purgative ending with unitive.

Celtic triple spiral to show the combining of the illuminative, purgative, and unitive with the ability to deepen in one area.

A double arrow line to show a multiplicity of experiences with equal value.

A rose flower with numerous pedals to illustrate a widening and deepening of experiences.

An illustration of a staircase going up and down to depict the upward and downward natures of mystical experiences.

Discussion of the features of each concept and its tie to the traditions of mysticism.

Participants name the pros and cons each metaphor.

Identification of the metaphor that speaks most to each participant.

Activity Three: Sharing Your Story and Asking Commonality Questions (20 mins.)

[The participants break into new pairs.]

Participants states their five-sentence mystical-experience description.

Commonality questioning: Have you ever experienced something similar?

If yes: "Would you tell me about it?"

If not, say, "I'm glad I am able to speak with you about this because I trust you and wanted you to know this about me." Let the conversation continue.

Concluding statement: "This experience is an important part of my life. It has shaped me faith and is why my faith is so important to me."

Conclusion: Reviewing What We've Learned (Group Discussion – 5 mins.)

What was this session like for you?

What are some of your takeaways?

The Homework Assignment

Speak to a non-participant about your experience of God or the holy.

Pick someone you are comfortable with sharing your experience.

Say to them, "I've been meaning to share something with you." Or "I would like to tell you about something that happened to me."

Tell them about your experience. Use the five-sentence description as a guide.

Ask the person if something like that has ever happened to them.

If yes, ask them to share it and see where the conversation leads.

If not, say, "I'm glad I am able to speak with you about this because I trust you and wanted you to know this about me." Let the conversation continue.

Concluding statement: "This experience is an important part of my life. It has shaped me faith and is why my faith is so important to me."

SESSION THREE

Major Outcome for Workshop Session Three

At the end of the workshop, participants will understand the ways people have used mystical experiences to motivate them to evangelize. They will also be able to name how evangelism allows for spiritual growth. Additionally, they will see how the church and the evangelist support each other.

Learning Objectives

At the of the of the second workshop, participants will be able to

- name several mystics in the Christian tradition.
- identify the evangelical actions of these mystics.
- describe how their mystical experiences invigorated their post-experience actions.
- see ways the mystics' experiences and their personal experiences overlap.
- express their feelings about sharing their mystical experiences to another person.
- identify the pros and cons of telling their stories.
- envision how they will evangelize in the future.

The Workshop: Using the Mystical Experience

Opening Activities (10 mins.)

- Review of the previous session
- Outline the plan for the session

Lecture One: The Mystical Experience in Action (10 mins.)

- Explanation of fundamental concepts (see handout).
 - Attainment and Purpose
- A metaphor of the mystical experience in action:
 - The lifecycle of the dandelion (illustration)
- Identifying the role of sharing mystical experiences.

Lecture Two: Examples of the Mystical Experience in Action (With Group Discussion – 20 mins.)

- Biographical sketches of John Wesley and Hannah Whitall Smith.
- Read excerpt from John Wesley's journal "Aldersgate Street."
- Read excerpt from Hannah Whitall Smith's Autobiography.
- Discuss how the reading speaks to the participants.
- Identify the characteristics of their mystical actions.
- Name how their experiences were catalysts for evangelism

Lesson Plan for Session Workshops

A Thesis Project by Bob Flanagan

Activity One: Reporting on Session Two Homework Assignment (Group Discussion – 30 mins.)

[Participants describe their experiences of sharing with a non-participant. The facilitator lists the description on newsprint for the whole group to see.]

Reporting on the experience

What was that like for you?

Having had this experience what do you anticipate doing in the future?

Activity Three: Celebrating your Mystical Experience (20 mins.)

Participants write three concrete wishes on a 3x5 card.

They share these wishes with the group.

Discussion of ways mystical experiences may make real these wishes.

How does your mystical experience help those wishes become reality?

Conclusion: Final check-in (10 mins.)

What has the workshop been like for you?

Do you have any final takeaways?

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Final Instructions and Thoughts (5 mins.)

Completing the survey

What's next?

Thank you!

Looking to the Bible for Help

The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1-9 NRSV)

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Peter's Vision (Acts 10:9-16 NRSV)

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Session One: Workshop – Discovering the Mystical Experience

Notes

What are the qualities of Paul's mystical experience?

What are the qualities of Peter's vision?

Session One: Workshop – Discovering the Mystical Experience

What are the commonalities and differences of the two experiences?

Describing Your Mystical Experience

Working in pairs, take turns interviewing each other using the questions that follow. Interviewers take notes on his or her partner's answers.

- Can you think of a time when you had an experience like Peter or Paul?
- Tell your partner about it in as much detail as you can.

Session One: Workshop – Discovering the Mystical Experience

Once the interview is complete answer the following questions:

- What was that experience of sharing like for you?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Group Reporting

Session One: Workshop – Discovering the Mystical Experience

The Homework Assignment

Your Mystical Experience in Five Sentences

Sit quietly with your eyes closed.

Picture your experience of God and the Holy.

Replay it in your mind.

What did it feel like? What did it look like?

Once you have remembered the experience as best you can, open your eyes.

In about five sentences, describe your mystical experience.

Email your instructor your description.

Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

The Treasure Box

A person has an experience of God or the holy;
treasures the experience;
but doesn't know what to do with it.
Therefore, tells no one about it;
And puts the experience into a box where it is safe,
comfortable, and idle.



Notes

Teresa of Avila's Warnings

Impact of Keeping Experience Private

Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

Defining Mystical Experiences

In Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism, Carole Dale Spencer writes, “No scholar as yet has come up with a satisfactory definition or criteria of mystical experience and there is no consensus on the nature of mystical experience.”

Qualities of the Mystical Experience

Immediacy

Unexpected and profoundly disturbing

Ineffability

Transiency

Passivity

Rare

Powerful instances of happy emotional collapse

Short-lived

Sense of being suspended in space and time

Suspension of the self-consciousness

Dynamic

Suddenness

Normal functions reassemble in novel conjunctions

Results of the Mystical Experience

Deepening sense of significance

Extremely Important

Conviction of knowing something more real and more true than any other knowledge

Entire lives are changed

Worldview askew

Life becomes more meaningful and rich

Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

Mystical Experience in Metaphors

Pie Shape

What are the features?

What are the pros and cons?

Does it speak to you?



Celtic Triple Spiral (Illuminative, Purgative, Unitive Combination)

What are the features?

What are the pros and cons?

Does it speak to you?



Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

The Continuum (One Universal Experience, Three Types of Experiences)

What are the features?



What are the pros and cons?

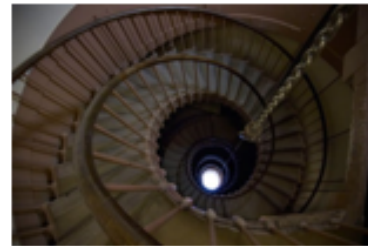
Does the metaphor speak to you?

Pedals or Stairs

What are the features?

What are the pros and cons?

Does it speak to you?



Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

Sharing Your Story and Asking Commonality Questions

Participants state their five-sentence mystical-experience description.

Commonality questioning:

Have you ever experienced something similar?

If yes: "Would you tell me about it?"

If not, say, "I'm glad I am able to speak with you about this because I trust you and wanted you to know this about me." Let the conversation continue.

Concluding statement:

"This experience is an important part of my life. It has shaped my faith and is why my faith is so important to me."

Review

- What was this session like for you?
- What are some of your takeaways?

Notes

Session Two: Workshop – Understanding the Mystical Experience

The Homework Assignment

Sharing with a Trusted Non-Participant

Speak to a non-participant about your experience of God or the holy.

Pick someone you are comfortable with sharing your experience.

Say to them, "I've been meaning to share something with you."

Or "I would like to tell you about something that happened to me."

Tell them about your experience. Use the five-sentence description as a guide.

Ask the person if something like that has ever happened to them.

If yes, ask them to share it and see where the conversation leads.

If not, say, "I'm glad I am able to speak with you about this because I trust you

and wanted you to know this about me." Let the conversation continue.

End by saying, "This experience is an important part of my life. It has shaped me faith

and is why my faith is so important to me."

The Mystical Experience in Action

Attainment

Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman’s research supports the idea that our brain is built in such a way that we can have occasional mystical experiences, but they suspect that the more intensely you meditate or pray, the more likely you are to experience a mystical or transcendental state (*How God Changes Your Brain*, 114).

Purpose

Hence something equivalent to the solitude of the wilderness is an essential part of mystical education. But, having established that communion, re-ordered their inner lives upon transcendental levels—being united with their Sources not merely in temporary ecstasies, but in virtue of a permanent condition of the soul, they were impelled to abandon their solitude; and resumed, in some way, their contact with the world in order to become the medium whereby that Life flowed out to other men (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 133).

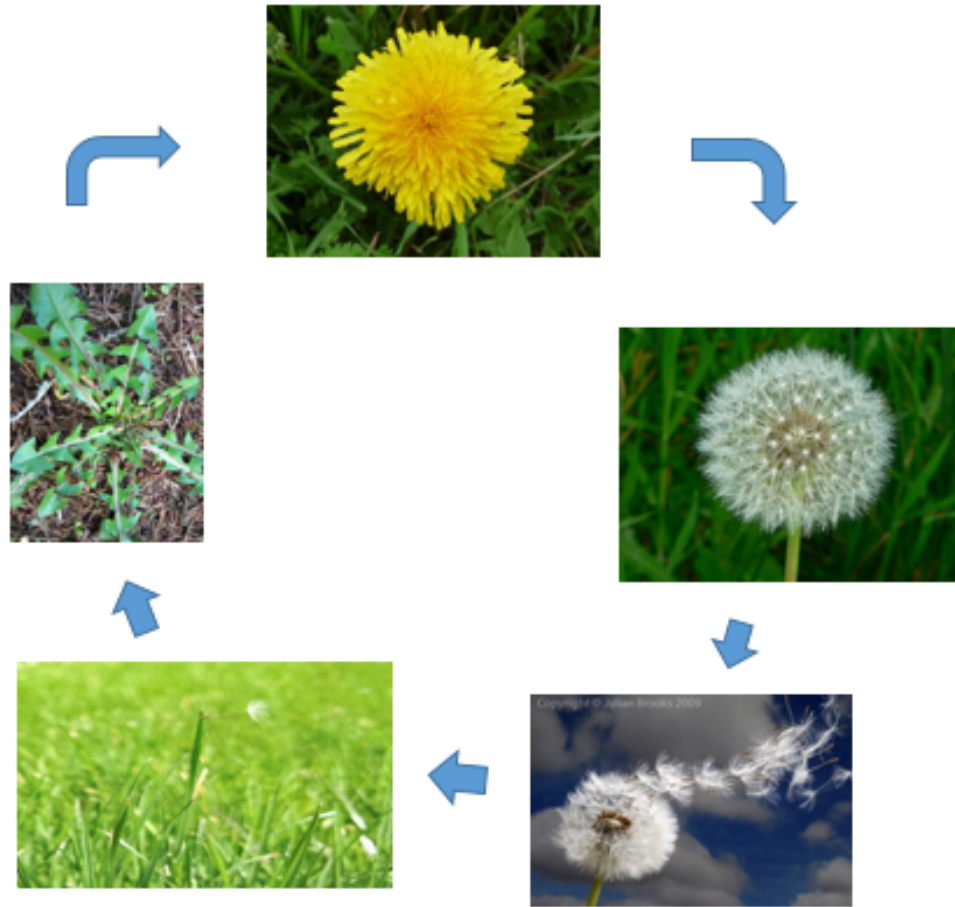
To go up alone into the mountain and come back as an ambassador to the world, has ever been the method of humanity’s best friends. This systole-and-diastole motion of retreat as the preliminary to a return remains the true ideal of Christian Mysticism in its highest development (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 133).

Considering attainment and purpose, what is the role of sharing mystical experiences?

Session Three: Workshop – Using the Mystical Experience

A Metaphor of the Act of Sharing the Mystical Experience

The Lifecycle of the Dandelion



Session Three: Workshop – Using the Mystical Experience

Examples of the Mystical Experience in Action

John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican Cleric and Theologian



In the evening [May 24, 1738] I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, "This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?" Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth, them according to the counsels of His own will.

After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations, but I cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He "sent me help from his holy place." And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.

Thursday, 25. —The moment I awakened, "Jesus, Master," was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him and my soul waiting on Him continually. Being again at St. Paul's in the afternoon, I could taste the good word of God in the anthem which began, "My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another." Yet the enemy injected a fear, "If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change? I answered (yet not I), "That I know not. But, this I know, I have 'now peace with God.' And I sin not today, and Jesus my Master has forbidden me to take thought for the morrow."

Session Three: Workshop – Using the Mystical Experience

Hannah Tatum Whitall Smith (February 7, 1832 – May 1, 1911)

She was lay speaker and author in the Holiness movement in the United States and the Higher Life movement in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. She was also active in the Women's suffrage movement and the Temperance movement.



Excerpt from *The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered it: A Spiritual Autobiography* (see handout).

What are the characteristics of their mystical experiences?

How were their experiences catalysts for evangelism?

Wikipedia contributors, "Hannah Whitall Smith," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hannah_Whitall_Smith&oldid=747802770 (accessed November 4, 2016).

Session Three: Workshop – Using the Mystical Experience

Homework Reporting

Describe your experience of sharing with another person.

What was that like for you?

Having had this experience what do you anticipate doing in the future?

Celebrating your Mystical Experience

Because of your workshop participation, name three concrete wishes you have for the future.

Write them on a card.

Share these wishes with the group.

How does your mystical experience help those wishes become reality?

Final Review

- What has the workshop been like for you?
- Do you have any final takeaways?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Final Instructions and Thoughts

Completing the survey

What's next?

Thank you!

APPENDIX F

Post-Workshop Material

Post-Workshop Survey

Dear Participants,

Thank you so much for participating the workshop. I am thankful for what you have shared. You have helped me greatly in my studies. I need one last request. Please answer the following questions and return them to me within the week. Let me know if you have any questions.

1. Knowing what you have learned from this workshop do you anticipate it having an impact on your work, family, or personal life?

If so, please explain.

If not, please explain.

2. Describe three wishes for your future spirituality.

3. How might what you learned in the workshop help your three wishes become real?

4. What has the workshop been like for you?

APPENDIX G

Research Agreements

Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

I, Gabriela Monticone transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from the Reverend Robert D. Flanagan related to his research study on the researcher study titled "Neoevangelism: Using Mystical Experiences to Invigorate Evangelism." Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Robert D. Flanagan.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Robert D. Flanagan in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

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Transcriber's signature 
Date 09/27/2016

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Nature of Research

Title of Study: Neoevangelism: Using Mystical Experience to Invigorate Evangelism

Detailed description of study, including major hypotheses and rationale for use of the instrument (approximately 200 words):

The thesis project will explore the relationship, if any, between participants who claim to have had a positive experience of the divine or supernatural and those who have not. The participants will attend three workshops at which they will learn about the nature of mystical experiences as well as the mystical experiences found in the Bible and Church history. They will describe their own experiences to each other and discover how their experiences fit along the continuum of mystical experiences. Those in the group not claiming to have had a mystical experience will study the same biblical and historical material but will explore, using Appreciative Inquiry, the ways they value their church and the positive meaning they gain from attending services. Both groups will practice explaining their respective experiences and values within their groups and will also explain their experience or values to a person outside of the group. At the last workshop session, they will report on their outside conversations.

The Tellegen Absorption Scale will be administered at the first workshop session. The purpose for using the scale is to determine if there is a relationship between the self-identified mystical experience the results of the survey. I seek to understand if those who have had a mystical experience produce similar results on the Tellegen Absorption Scale. Additionally, I seek to discover through the use of the instrument if there is a difference in the measurement results between the group with those who have had a mystical experience and those who have not had such an experience.

Detailed description of subjects to be tested, including number, age, gender, marital status, if a member of a specific group (for example, nonclinical community or student population; clinical inpatient or outpatient):

There will be two groups of 8 to 10 participants tested. They will be over the age of 18, mixed in gender and marital status. They will be members of Episcopal Church congregations. They will be screened to exclude people who have acute or severe mental health conditions.

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Study Site(s):

The study sites will be non-clinical settings where the test instrument will be completed in-person at two different churches

Length/Duration of study:

The study will be conducted over the course of a month involving three workshop sessions.

Please explain in detail how do you intend to score your results:

Using standard scoring as directed by the scale.

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