

10-2020

Introducing Contemplative Spirituality and Practices to a Pilot Small Group at Peace Hill Christian Fellowship

Peter Bauer
peterbauer@peacehill.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bauer, Peter, "Introducing Contemplative Spirituality and Practices to a Pilot Small Group at Peace Hill Christian Fellowship" (2020). *Doctor of Ministry Projects*. 438.
<https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/438>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.

Doctoral Project Approval Sheet

This doctoral project entitled

INTRODUCING CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTICES TO A PILOT
SMALL GROUP AT PEACE HILL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Written by

PETER BAUER

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Dr. Bandy Rowland
Content Reader



Dr. Kurt Fredrickson
Associate Dean for Professional Doctoral Programs

Date Received: October 22, 2020

INTRODUCING CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTICES TO A PILOT
SMALL GROUP AT PEACE HILL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PETER BAUER
OCTOBER 2020

ABSTRACT

Contemplative Prayer as a Spiritual Discipline to Create Intimacy with God, to Overcome Chaotic Anxiety, to Grow in Appreciation and Discernment and to Receive Grace

Peter J Bauer

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2020

This study sought to investigate the effects of contemplative prayer practices on three areas of the interior life: (1) the effect of contemplative silence on overcoming chaotic thought and anxiety, (2) the effect of contemplative practice of appreciative delight, focused on finding God in all things, on overcoming negative and depressive thinking, (3) the effect of contemplative rest in the finished work of Christ on the ability to overcome shame and distrust of God.

The creation account of Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 reveals contemplation as an essential element of God's character through which God overcomes chaos, delights in all of creation, and chooses to rest. Contemplation is an innate ability of human beings made in God's image and a necessary aspect of human life and thriving, without which life becomes chaotic, depressive and restless. These contemplative practices have been used in different eras of church history, but have, until recently, been forgotten in modern society.

The project attempted to reconnect a group of Protestants to historic contemplative spirituality. The hypothesis is that contemplative practices create a deeper connection with God and have a healing affect on those wrestling with chaotic thought and anxiety, negative and depressive thought, and guilt and distrust of God.

The thesis was tested on a small group at Peace Hill Christian Fellowship in Southeastern Virginia. Subjects took part in a ten week study, after which the affects of contemplative prayer were analyzed. The general conclusion of the study was that the introduction of contemplative practices did lead to greater intimacy with God and had some healing affect on areas of chaotic thought, depressive thought, and restless guilt. While the findings of such a small sample cannot be conclusive, the study hopes to open the way to further research.

Content Reader: Randy Rowland, PhD

Words: 292

To my wife, Susan, whose constant love, encouragement and editorial help has enabled me to find and redeem a part of my life I had lost

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION	2
Chapter 1. A CHURCH IN TRANSITION	9

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	26
Chapter 3. THE CONTEMPLATIVE IMAGE OF GOD	48

PART THREE: MINISTRY PLAN AND ASSESSMENT

Chapter 4. IMPLICATIONS, GOALS, AND PLANS	77
Chapter 5. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	91
Chapter 6. OUTCOMES, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS	106

APPENDICES	112
------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	119
--------------	-----

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years or more, the concept of spiritual formation has gained increasing attention due to the writings of Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and others. While “the spiritual formation movement has never become a unified movement [or entailed] a certain set of beliefs,”¹ it has started “a conversation... concerning what a distinctly evangelical view of the Christian life might entail.² The spiritual formation movement is a response to a Protestant Christian culture that has viewed spirituality “as a static possession rather than a dynamic and ever-developing growth toward wholeness in the image of Christ.”³ In essence, the spiritual formation movement is a move back towards Jesus’ call to discipleship and in particular towards attending to the interior life of the soul.

The concept of spiritual formation has given the church a way to understand and articulate something that is essential to pastoral ministry: the crucial question of how

¹ John H Coe, Kyle C Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation.: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice* (Downer’s Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 2019), 1.

² Ibid.

³ M.Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1993), 16.

people can change deeply and inwardly, at the level of the motivations and desires, or what Scripture refers to as the “heart.” The human, spiritual heart is one of the central concepts that runs throughout all of Scripture as a primary concern to God. Proverbs 4:23 counsels, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”⁴ Jesus describes the heart as that which is either far from or close to God (see Matt. 15:8), and that which is either pure or defiles a person (see Matt. 5:8; 15:18-19). Preaching and counseling address the heart to some extent. However, as Jesus makes clear in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23), the reception of the word that is preached, or given in a counseling situation, depends upon the state of the heart.

Over the last thirty years of preaching at Peace Hill Christian Fellowship, I have become increasingly aware of this dynamic. The ways in which people either receive or resist preaching and counsel has to do with the internal commitments, filters and paradigms which reside in the heart. Receptivity or the lack of receptivity depends upon how open the person is to messages that challenge natural inclination, pre-determined commitments, and inner feelings and desires which have been formed over a lifetime. As Dallas Willard has noted, “everyone receives spiritual formation, just as everyone gets an education.”⁵ Consequently, unless those who hear the Scriptures preached and receive counseling attend to the spiritual formation of their heart motivations, commitments, filters, and paradigms, true spiritual transformation is unlikely. Spiritual formation

⁴ New International Version

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 69.

focuses on changing the “soil” of the heart so that the word of God can be received more deeply and fruitfully.

The spiritual formation of the heart happens through contemplation and prayer. Henri Nouwen describes spiritual formation as, “an inward journey to the heart... to look within, reflect on our daily life, and seek God and God’s activity right there.”⁶ This “looking within” is a form of contemplation. Thomas Merton describes contemplation as

the highest expression of [a person’s] intellectual and spiritual life... fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive... spiritual wonder... spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant source.⁷

In essence, contemplation is the way in which human beings connect with the Spirit of God who resides within the human heart; a way of being in the presence of God experientially and mystically. Contemplative prayer “cleanses the mind and opens the heart to receive God’s truth, beauty, and wisdom [so that] the illusions of life are unmasked, and true vision is possible. Darkness is dispelled, and divine light shines through.”⁸

For a church like Peace Hill, which has always attended to the non-mystical aspects of faith such as Bible study and service, this language can sound like a descent into Eastern spirituality. Indeed, some conservative evangelicals characterize spiritual

⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York; HarperOne, 2010), xix.

⁷ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York; New Directions Books, 1961), 1.

⁸ Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 13.

formation and engagement in contemplative or mystical practices as a dangerous departure from biblical Christian faith. A predictable backlash among some evangelical and reformed, Protestant congregations and pundits automatically rejects anything that appears to be Catholic or mystical.⁹ Yet this kind of thinking limits the spiritual life to a kind of subscription to statements of faith which remain lifeless, far removed from the kind of faith expressed in the New Testament (see for example John 3:6; 1 John 1:1-4).

Faith, by its very nature, is mystical. In her book *Practical Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill gives a working definition of mysticism, describing it as “the art of union with Reality”¹⁰ and describing the mystic as “a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.”¹¹ Later Underhill relays an old story which illustrates the difference between the mystic and the non mystic:

The old story of Eyes and No-Eyes is really the story of the mystical and unmystical types. “No Eyes” has fixed his attention on the fact that he is obliged to take a walk. For him the chief factor of existence is his own movement along the road; a movement which he intends to accomplish as efficiently and comfortably as he can. He asks not to know what may be on either side of the hedges. He ignores the caress of the wind until it threatens to remove his hat. He trudges along steadily, diligently; avoiding the muddy pools, but oblivious to the light which they reflect. “Eyes” takes the walk too: and for him it is a perpetual revelation of beauty and wonder. The sunlight inebriates him, the winds delight him, the very effort of the journey is a joy. Magic presences throng the roadside, or cry salutations to him from the hidden fields. The rich world through which he moves lies in the fore-ground of his consciousness; and it gives up new secrets to

⁹ John Caddock, “What is Contemplative Spirituality and Why is it Dangerous? - A Review of Brennan Manning’s ‘The Signature of Jesus’,” Grace evangelical Society (September 1, 1997), accessed July 31, 2020, <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/what-is-contemplative-spirituality-and-why-is-it-dangerous/>.

¹⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (Columbus, OH; Ariel Press, 1914), 23.

¹¹ Ibid.

him at every step. “No Eyes,” when told of his adventures, usually refuses to believe that both have gone by the same road. He fancies that his companion has been floating about in the air, or beset by agreeable hallucinations. We shall never persuade him to the contrary.¹²

The story of Eyes and No-Eyes spells out the nature of mystical experience which Jesus describes to Nicodemus in John 3:8. Those who are “born of the Spirit” are born into the experience of the character of Eyes, who is inebriated by the sunlight and delighted by the winds as he walks along the roadside. Eyes wrestles with the same difficulty in describing his experience of the road to No-Eyes as Jesus wrestles with in describing the experience of being born again to Nicodemus. Jesus says to Nicodemus; “Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

Yet while Underhill’s story ends on what seems to be a hopeless note, the Bible assumes that human beings have spiritual eyes, or eyes of the heart, which can either be opened or closed (see Eph. 1:17-19), attentive or inattentive (see 2 Cor.4:18; Heb 12:2), and that these possibilities are dependent upon prayer and the willingness to “fix one’s eyes” or “set one’s mind” (Col. 3:1-2) on Christ and the things above. Contemplation, then, may be understood as the way to respond to the exhortations of Scripture through an intentional, sustained fixing of the spiritual eyes and setting of the mind on Christ and of life in the Spirit.

¹² Ibid., 29-30.

In 2015, after undergoing a difficult transition with the church at Peace Hill, I began a doctoral degree that changed my life. Until that time I had only been vaguely aware of writers like Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, and was unfamiliar with the spiritual formation movement. The readings, teachings and assignments introduced a way of attending to the spiritual life that I had never fully understood, but for which I had always been searching. The program reconnected me to a history of spirituality which I had been taught to discount as Catholic, works-righteousness theology, and strange mysticism. During my first years in the program my preaching began to change and the members of the congregation began to notice and express appreciation. Some began to express an interest or a longing for a kind of spiritual life that they had never experienced. During those first years my initial project idea was to create a contemplative retreat center at Peace Hill farm. However, as the program progressed I became increasingly aware that the more pressing need was to introduce the congregation at Peace Hill to contemplative spirituality.

The reason for my interest in this project is that most members at Peace Hill have grown up and been trained in a faith of subscription to non-experiential truth. While members believe that teachings about God's love and God's presence are real, most have not experienced these things in deeper ways. Intimacy with God and the ability to listen to God are foreign experiences for many members of Peace Hill. Yet, these experiential aspects of Christian faith are essential to spiritual transformation. The ultimate goal of

this project, then, is to invite and encourage members of Peace Hill into a deeper engagement with God through contemplative practices.

The ministry project is designed to reconnect members of Peace Hill to ancient, contemplative streams of spirituality. It focuses on the creation of a pilot small group that meets over a period of ten weeks in order to both introduce and practice spiritual disciplines, and to become familiar with different, ancient contemplative approaches to life in Christ. The purpose of the project is to expand the nature of a person's engagement with God through contemplative practices which focus on the experiential nature of relationship with God. These practices provide new ways of attending to God's presence and new ways of articulating faith. The goal of the project is to show group members how to attend to a God-given capacity which they already possess so that they are able to move beyond a faith that rests merely on subscription to doctrinal beliefs, to a faith of mystical engagement with the living God.

The first chapter of this project will describe the nature of Peace Hill's transition from its first years as an educationally focused teaching and discipleship church through its stages of development into a church focused on student ministry and active service, and finally to its present state of decline which has left members longing for deeper engagement with God. The second chapter will review literature that describes three historical streams of Christian contemplative spirituality as well as the transformational and prophetic nature of contemplative spirituality. Chapter three will lay a scriptural foundation for contemplative spirituality based on the first creation story from Genesis

1:1-2:3, and then will show how Christianity has manifested the contemplative image of God through its historical movements. Chapter four will discuss the theological implications of the contemplative image of God for ministry and describe a vision of Peace Hill in which Peace Hill becomes a prophetically peaceful community. Chapter five will describe the implementation of the project field test and the assessment of the project. Chapter six will briefly summarize and draw conclusions from the project, discussing next steps and recommendations for the larger Christian community.

CHAPTER 1

A CHURCH IN TRANSITION

Charles City County, in southeastern of Virginia, was founded in 1634 as one of the eight original counties of Virginia.¹ The 182.8 square mile rural county, located between the cities of Williamsburg and Richmond, boasts several historic plantations along the James River, and is bordered on its eastern side by the Chickahominy River, where Captain John Smith met Pocahontas. The historic nature of the county is mirrored by the county churches, some of which go back to the pre-Civil War era, and by congregations which consist of families who have gone to the same church for generations and whose ancestors are buried in the church cemeteries.

By contrast, Peace Hill Christian Fellowship, a newcomer in this rural county, was planted in Charles City in 1991. Two couples, my parents-in-law along with my wife and I, worked together to plant the church, which started with eight members meeting in a local library. My parents-in-law, physician Jay Wise and his wife, Jessie, an educator who helped to lead the movement to legalize homeschooling in Virginia, moved to

¹ Martha W. McCartney, *Immigrants and Adventurers 1607-1635: A Biographical Dictionary* (Baltimore, MD; Genealogical Publishing Company, 2007), 35.

Jessie's childhood home in Charles City twenty years earlier. They wanted to create a new kind of church in the county that would be different from the corrupt, spiritually dead, Baptist church that Jessie had attended growing up, but also different from the unstable charismatic fellowship which the couple had helped to serve and then parted with in the early 1980s as a result of controversy over the "Shepherding Movement."² Upon graduation from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1991, my wife and I moved down to Charles City help the Wises plant a new church.

When we began meeting in July we were deeply concerned to base the new church on the teachings of Scripture over and above denominational traditions and to create a fellowship that could both be inclusive and dedicated to Scriptural teaching. My wife Susan and I wanted to plant a church free from the overly scrupulous, denominational control that we had experienced in the Presbyterian church we attended during our seminary years.³ Consequently, we decided to use the Apostle's Creed as the church's statement of faith, and chose not to join the church to any denomination, but instead to be inter-denominational, a church that would welcome followers of Christ from

² "The Shepherding Movement refers to... a discipleship model in which every believer was to have a 'personal, definite, committed relationship with a shepherd' to enable personal pastoral care [in regard to} every aspect of he individual's life, not just their spiritual development."

Gareth W.D. Stewart, *Word and Power: Is the Theology of John Wimber Compatible with Presbyterian Theology and Practice?* (Eugene, OR; Wipf & Stock, 2015), 157.

³ In our last year in Philadelphia, the PCA addressed the question of whether a woman could read Scripture as part of a church worship service. The Session decided that a woman could read Scripture during a church worship service on three conditions: (1) A woman could not read the passage that was going to be preached that day, (2) A woman could not read Scripture from the front of the church where the pulpit was but must read from the congregation, and (3) A woman must be sitting down so as not to appear authoritative.

any denominational background. Peace Hill has existed now for almost thirty years and has experienced three fairly distinct periods or phases of ministry.

Early Years 1991-1997

During the early years of the church, the people who came were local, rural individuals and families who were life-time church attendees. Often those who visited the church on Sunday mornings were people who had been discontent elsewhere and who attended the church only for a week or two. Many of Peace Hill's attendees came from proof-texting, revivalist churches⁴ which sacrificed contextual understandings and turned every passage of Scripture into a salvation message. The level of ignorance and misinformation regarding the Scriptures among some of the church's early members was occasionally staggering. Many church members did not have even a basic, working understanding of Scripture, and the majority of the congregation's understanding of the nature of Christianity was largely uninformed and cultural.

In response to this situation the church leaders, most of whom had an academic or educational background, focused much of their energy on educating the congregation in the contextual backgrounds, biblical symbolism, and literary nature of the Scriptures. Inductive Bible studies and contextual preaching became a central feature of the church. Concentration on Biblical teaching was driven, in part, by the conviction that a more accurate understanding of the Scriptures would deepen the life and practice of

⁴ Churches focused almost solely on revival preaching and altar calls rather than on the development of the Christian life of graced obedience and sanctification.

church members. Instead, the focus on educating the congregation in Biblical literacy had a tendency to develop an unhelpful dependence in the spiritual lives of congregants. The focus on education taught members that intellectual mastery of the Bible was the key to growing closer to God. Church members collected and kept sermon outlines (which were always handed out during the sermons), so that they could refer back to them if they needed to understand a particular passage of Scripture. Some congregants worked to develop habits of reading through the Scriptures in a year, or of memorizing passages of Scripture in the attempt to be able to become more familiar with the Bible. But ironically, rather than becoming more adept at handling and understanding Scripture for themselves, most of the congregation came to regard the Bible as a book for experts. Many congregants continued to express an inability to get anything out of their own, personal Scripture reading or to be able to receive spiritual nurture from Scripture unless they were receiving it through counseling or instruction from some leader or author. This spiritual formation in dependence upon leaders and experts, tends to characterize most of the older generation at Peace Hill up until the present.

Another focus in the early years was worship. Many members of our young congregation had grown up in churches where worship consisted of preaching, an offering with some music, and a beginning and ending hymn, neither of which often had any connection with the message that had been preached. The idea of any kind of sustained worship of God through song and prayer as a response to the sermon was a foreign concept to them. Others had come out of charismatic churches where worship had

been energetic and lively, though often without any focus. These members had been formed in a very emotionally expressive practice of worship, and despite having left their charismatic fellowships for other reasons, longed to recapture the experience of worship that they had enjoyed previously.

From the beginning the worship at Peace Hill was designed to be intentional. The leadership desired to make worship a formative experience by creating a worship service that, on the one hand, captured the energy of lively, charismatic worship, but that on the other hand was thoughtful and theologically grounded. As a result, the worship at Peace Hill from its inception was an intentional response to the sermon themes. The worship songs, prayers and readings were all focused around the specific themes of the sermon and the passage preached.

In the same way the service itself was designed to lead the congregation through a coherent and connected process of worship. This worship process was developed with the help of the book *Worship is a Verb*, which describes worship as “a deliberately planned sequence.”⁵ The typical sequence of worship at Peace Hill was developed to lead the congregation through “a brief time of preparation, or an approach to God,”⁶ followed by the preaching of the Word of God, and a time of response to the themes of the sermon through song, readings, and prayer, and concluding with a closing blessing. The resources used in services include modern worship songs, older hymns, and

⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Is A Verb*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

ancient chants and liturgies, as well as prayers from different saints and individuals throughout the history of the Church. During the early years of the church, the worship was a labor. Those who had grown up with two hymns and a sermon were discontent with a service that had six songs, and complained about “all the singing.” Those who longed to recapture their experiences of charismatic worship complained that the worship did not have enough energy, or that the wrong songs had been chosen.

The third essential focus of ministry, established in the early years, was Peace Hill’s focus on community, inspired by Edith Schaeffer’s book *L’Abri* and the ministry modeled by Francis and Edith Schaeffer. This model combined communal living with open philosophical and biblical conversation and discussion. Communal living, particularly conversation around meals, was understood to have a sacramental character. Consequently, almost from the very beginning, the leadership at Peace Hill established a potluck lunch which took place after the worship service. Families and pastors sat around the table discussing life and the sermon and sharing food. The church sought to spend time working, living and eating together in order to foster spiritually meaningful conversation and connection. Both the Wises and Bauers made a point of welcoming church members into their homes.

During the early years those who came into the church were often unstable. The church struggled to survive as families involved in tax-revolt or white supremacy came in surreptitiously, only revealing their commitments over time, creating difficult pastoral situations, and often leaving when the pastors refused to subscribe to their ideals.

The charismatic elements within the congregation were often off on pilgrimages, seeking experiences in charismatic movements like the Toronto Blessing of the mid-nineties, or the Brownsville Revival. Other members who had come to the church out of a disaffection with their former churches, only remained a brief time. While the church struggled to survive in the early years, there were some positive aspects of church life as well. Despite the instability of some families, other supportive families and individuals who appreciated the teaching, worship and fellowship at Peace Hill came into the church.

The Student Years 1997-2007

Beginning in the fall of 1997, students from the College of William and Mary began to attend the church. During the 1997-1998 school year only a handful of students made the 25 mile drive out to the church. However, over the next few years more and more students began to attend. During these years the demeanor of the church changed. Peace Hill became a fellowship of 50-70 attendees, meeting in a large living-room. Several students began to lend their vocal and instrumental talents to the church's worship team so that the experience of worship became increasingly beautiful. These students also brought new music and new prayers and a new energy into the church. Worship services which had often been difficult to lead due to a lack of responsiveness and, occasionally, even hostile, critical responses, were suddenly joyful, energetic and beautiful. Preaching which had often met with resistance by some elements within the church, was received gratefully. Rather than having to defend the message of

the Gospel from issues like tax revolt and white supremacy, I began to spend time discipling students who wanted to grow in the spiritual life, and to address the questions of individuals who were searching for meaning and wondering about the life of faith. A number of both students and neighbors began to respond to the worship, the community and the teaching. These individuals experienced spiritual renewal, made professions of faith, and asked to be baptized. Church life took on a new vitality and excitement. Peace Hill became a rural church that people heard about in Williamsburg, twenty-five miles away. Ministers from other churches and college professors from William & Mary came out to Sunday services to visit the church, and some of those who visited began to attend Peace Hill regularly. Members began to be excited to invite friends and family out to the church. After a year of meeting in a private home it became evident that the congregation had outgrown the space. The decision was made to construct a timber-framed building on the family property that could house the church fellowship. The family, members of the church and students cut down trees on the farm and spent four years building the church.

Not long after the completion of the church, a number of students who were preparing to graduate decided that they wanted to find a way to remain in the area in order to continue attending the church. This desire fit in with the Peace Hill's mission to build community based on faith commitment and Christian fellowship. The difficulty, however, was that Charles City offered very limited employment opportunity. The nearest jobs were in Richmond and Williamsburg, both about twenty five to thirty-five miles from the church. Nevertheless, a number of couples found employment in either

Richmond or Williamsburg and, despite the driving distance, continued to be actively involved with the church.

The student population and ministry created sudden changes in the church, both in size and in nature. The new student ministry created increasing pastoral demands and pushed the members of Peace Hill to provide more food for church lunches. Pastoral work, which had often had a somewhat defensive posture in reaction to grumbling and power plays in the church, began to become more engaged with the kinds of life questions and issues that the students were dealing with: parental and family issues, relationship issues, questions about faith and science, and future vocation. The pastoral ministry focus shifted and the leadership began to see opportunities to have a more formational influence on the lives of students at the crux of the transition from childhood faith to adult faith. The leadership of Peace Hill began to be more open and less dogmatic and to engage with questions such as the Creation vs. Evolution debate with a more open mind towards Scriptural interpretation.

At the same time the church demographic began to change. Students who married and moved into the area, college professors, and others who came to the church during the student years, had different political affiliations, more socially liberal ideals, and different theological commitments. Peace Hill began to be a church in which social, theological and political differences existed between fellow worshipers. The church began to talk about the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God and the call to believers to love one another.

Post-Student Years 2007-2020

At the height of the student ministry, Peace Hill was a place of energy and excitement. Student ministry was challenging and exciting. Older members regularly entertained students in their homes. The worship, which in the early years had been led by a piano, a guitar and a recorder, was led by a veritable orchestra, including violins, a French horn, an oboe, flutes, guitars, piano, and singers. The church held square dances and social gatherings such as bonfires which were well attended. A prayer group was established with the students in which members prayed through the phrases of the Lord's Prayer. Students joined in the building of the church and afterwards in other building and service projects. Members of Peace Hill had plenty of ways to be meaningfully engaged in the life of the church. The church itself had become a place where students gained a new vision of what the church could be. Many who came to Peace Hill found the church to be a healing and inspiring fellowship. The church became, for many, a prophetic ministry, pointing to the kind of church life that they had never known before. The biggest continuing pastoral problem was that students who graduated were complaining that they could not find another church like Peace Hill. However, sometime between the years of 2007 and 2010 the student population began to decline at Peace Hill. At the height of the student years up to forty students had attended Peace Hill, however beginning in 2007-2008, fewer new students came to the church. By 2009-2010 the decrease in student attendance had become noticeable enough to become a pastoral issue.

Explaining the decline of the student ministry is not a simple matter. There are many factors that could be considered. However, two factors in particular may help to explain the changes that the church went through. First, the group of graduates who had remained in the area in order to stay near the church began to prove unstable. Interactions among some of the young married couples revealed a continuing college mentality of competition and comparison. As relationships began to destabilize, couples began to look increasingly towards professional development, which often required further schooling and a change of location. Gradually, all of these couples moved away. Single graduates who had remained in the area also began to marry and move away to other cities. Most found it difficult to find employment in rural Charles City and New Kent or the Richmond and Williamsburg areas and chose not to remain and raise families in a rural area with so few resources. Because these students were an important source of the church's connection to students at William & Mary, the college population began to decrease.

Another factor in the decline of the student ministry was the aging and shifting nature of the church leadership. A few years after the completion of the church building, age, illness and increasing family responsibilities required the leadership to make changes. Although I continued, for a time, to lead a college Bible study, eventually, as students graduated, the student demand for Bible studies ceased and I began to shift my attention to the older population of the church and to county ministry in conjunction with the other churches in Charles City.

Just as the student ministry began to decline the church hired two ministers, a husband and wife team, to come and help with the student ministry at Peace Hill. Justin Moore had been a student at William & Mary and had attended Peace Hill from 2000-2004. Upon graduation Justin had expressed an interest in pastoral work and, after interning at Peace Hill for a year, moved to Philadelphia to attend Westminster Theological Seminary. While at seminary, Justin met and married Melissa Partain. Upon Melissa's graduation in 2008 the couple moved to Charles City and were installed as Associate Pastors at Peace Hill.

Despite the fact that the student ministry was declining, the church continued to try to function as it had at the height of the student ministry. Justin and Melissa went with me regularly to the college to try to make connections with students. The worship leaders continued to create services for the kind of energetic singing and worship that had existed when the college students were attending, even though the congregation was older and the singing less energetic. The church leadership and congregation, for a number of years, continued to ask what had happened to the student ministry. Over all the church experienced a sense of confusion and bewilderment. Dr. Gerald May, in his book, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, writes,

An obvious question... is whether social systems might be said to have souls, and if so, whether they might experience something equivalent to a corporate dark night of the soul. If a group derives its being, energy, and characteristics from the mutual interactions of its constituents, then it can be said to have at least some soul qualities. More important to my mind are the actual experiences that occur in social systems. Some of these are undeniably similar to dark-night experiences.... these experiences are often obscure. The people involved feel confused, mystified, unable to get a grasp of what is actually going on, much less how to respond to it.

This happens frequently in corporate and religious organizations as well. Something shifts somewhere, things are not as they used to be, people lose touch with goals and mission, everything seems to have lost its moorings.⁷

May's words capture the essence of the experience of Peace Hill church beginning with the fall of 2007. Members and leaders alike had a sense that the church had lost its direction. The leaders tried various initiatives to reach out to new students or to connect the congregation at Peace Hill with the other county churches through mercy ministries or evangelistic outreach ministries. However the church was unable to recapture the sense of mission and excitement that had energized the congregation during the student days. This was a particularly painful and confusing experience for the Moores, who had been invited to come serve at the church as pastors, only to have the church decline before their eyes. As years went by, the congregation and leadership began to settle into an acceptance that the church had changed and was, once more, a small rural church. Attempts to connect with students on the college campus were eventually abandoned. The congregation aged and members began to experience health issues and to slow down. The sense of pride that the church had once had at having large numbers of students faded.

The Present State of Transition

The church culture, which changed dramatically during the student years, has begun to shift and change again in several ways. First, while many who were once drawn

⁷ Gerald G. May, M.D., *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2004). 176-177.

by the excitement of the student movement have left the church, some who found the church out in Charles City, either as students or parents of students, have relocated out to Charles City to be near the church. Those who either began coming to the church during the student days, or have relocated to come to the church because of their experience of the church during the student days, make up the bulk of the congregation at Peace Hill.

Secondly, some individuals and families who have been through damaging experiences, either through interactions with other churches and ministry organizations, or through personal situations such as failed marriages, loss or abuse, have moved to Charles City either to be near family or to be near the church. A significant number of these families and individuals have made it clear that they have moved to the area to attend Peace Hill in part, because of the rural, quiet, peaceful nature of the church. These individuals describe the church, and the farm on which it sits, as a refuge or retreat and they experience Peace Hill as a healing community where they are cared for, receive counsel, and are able to reevaluate the stresses and wounds of the past in a non-pressuring, family atmosphere. Peace Hill's interdenominational character makes the church a good place for this kind of ministry.

Consequently, the demographic of Peace Hill has changed so that the congregation, which had at one time been mostly local, is now mostly composed of individuals who either moved to the county during the student years, or who live outside of the county. Peace Hill can no longer be described as a community church. Rather it is a collection of individuals who have been attracted to the beautiful worship, teaching,

loving community, and peaceful setting of the church. Thus, the church is mainly composed of two groups: those who remember the life and excitement of the student days, and those who have come during the post-student days in order to find healing and to process the wounds of the past.

The ministry initiatives of the project address both of these groups. Many members of Peace Hill have experienced a transition from active and busy ministry, to a smaller and quieter church life. Those who were the vital, adult leadership of the church have gone through illnesses and have aged. Those who were caught up in the energy of the student days are slowing down outwardly and struggle to understand their purpose now as spiritual people in the absence of the energy and busy service of the past. In essence these church members are shifting from an externally active spiritual life, filled with service and activity towards a more reflective and quiet life. However, Peace Hill has not prepared them to attend to the interior life.

As members of the congregation who formerly found spiritual meaning for their lives in active service have begun to age and slow down, there has been a tendency among some to turn towards more political interests as a kind of spiritual center. Others have expressed a confusion over their desire to step away from Bible studies which they have attended for years because they do not know how else to connect with their spiritual lives. Still others, who have come to the church after negative service experiences on the ministry are trying to understand how to be devoted to God after they have left what they had considered their spiritual calling. Finally, there are a number of members in the

church who, despite their desire to connect with other believers, experience a deep loneliness that seems to prevent them from finding intimacy.

Members at Peace Hill need to learn how to enter into new ways of prayer and to expand their spiritual consciousness to include an awareness of the dynamics of the interior life. In the last few years, some of the older members of the church, who were vitally involved in the student days, have begun to notice a lack of intimacy with God. One man told me a few years ago, “I have never heard God speaking to me.” Another older woman, whose ministry of hospitality has touched almost everyone in the church over the years, has reached a stage in life where she is no longer able to practice hospitality. She has expressed a desire for a deeper relationship with God but has not known how to grow in intimacy with God.

The resources of Christian contemplative spirituality, which can be found in Ancient monasticism and Ignatian spirituality, and the early Reformers like Calvin and Edwards, are a way to introduce Peace Hill members to an interior spirituality. These spiritual traditions, particularly early monasticism, can enable members of Peace Hill who have slowed down outwardly to learn how to quiet down inwardly so that they can create the space to attend to the still, small voice of God.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW

Three Streams of Contemplative Spirituality

The spiritual life is, by its very nature, a life of reflection which seeks self-understanding and connection with God. The idea of connection with God has, in modern American evangelicalism, been articulated and described as a personal relationship with God. Yet this phrase has become freighted, for some, with examples of overly emotionalized and self-absorbed faith which can create a selfish response to the world. On the other hand, for others, personal relationship describes a faith relationship with the person of Christ that is opposed to a merely rational subscription to the ideals of religion.

Within the spiritual history of Christianity contemplative spirituality provides helpful ways of understanding the nature of the personal relationship with God. Three spiritual movements, ancient monasticism, Ignatian spirituality, and reformed spirituality, offer contemplative practices which both foster transforming relationship with and experience of God. This chapter will review a number of works that introduce the

contemplative spiritual thought within these traditions and offer their transforming practices to the modern church.

Early Monastic Spirituality

Roberta Bondi's book *To Love as God Loves* presents a particularly compelling view of the monastic movement in the early centuries of the Church. In this work, Bondi gives a contemplative vision of the spiritual life which positions both the commandment of Jesus in Matthew 5:48, to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", as well as the Great Commandment to love God and one's neighbor, at the center of Christian discipleship and practice.⁸

Bondi explains and tempers the command to be perfect, describing the ancient monastic understanding of perfection as progress in loving character. The progressive development of loving character gives definition and shape to the concept of relationship with God and the nature of spiritual growth.⁹ Spiritual growth is a matter of receiving God's love and expressing love to God and others. Such a focus captures both the personal interactive quality of personal relationship while avoiding a self-absorbed spirituality.¹⁰

Central to the pursuit of love is contemplation of the nature of the Gospel, "the fundamental biblical message... [that] 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for

⁸ Roberta Bondi, *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

us,”¹¹ and “that all human beings... are beloved creatures of God”¹² “each one loved by God in our frailty, sin, and all.”¹³ This contemplation, Bondi says, led the early monastics to an understanding of the Christian life in which all virtue, graciousness, peacefulness, joy and ability to love and persevere are a result of the gift of God’s loving action and presence.¹⁴ Such an understanding precludes any sense of “heroic self image”¹⁵ and the need to be above reproach¹⁶, or the tendency to be judgmental.¹⁷ All that the believer is and is becoming are received through the gracious gift of God given freely to the one who believes.

Growth in love is also a process of self-contemplation, a matter of prayerfully “observing ourselves to see what we think or feel or do that hurts us or makes us hurt others so that we can do something about what needs to be corrected, and strengthen what needs to be strengthened.”¹⁸ This prayerful self-watchfulness provides the content of confession and interaction which feeds the awareness of the believer’s need for God’s mercy and gracious help. Through self-observation and contemplation, the believer develops an awareness of the patterns of sin against others and of the inner darkness—

¹¹ Ibid., 42-43.

¹² Ibid., 42.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

both of which are obstacles not only to receiving the grace of God, but also to loving others in thought, word and action.¹⁹

Bondi's book helps to define the nature of relationship with God by tapping into ancient spirituality and describing it in accessible ways. Bondi brings the different aspects of ancient, contemplative monasticism together under the heading of love, connecting them to the great commandments of Jesus, so that the believer can understand the true nature and focus and goal of relationship with God as an interactive process of both receiving love from God and responding to God and others in love. This "love and humility" says Bondi, "provide human beings with a realistic and powerful way of disarming... a violent society,"²⁰ so that contemplative relationship with God can transform not only the individual, but their relationships in such a way that their faith has an influence on society.

Jesuit Spirituality: James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything:*

A Spirituality for Real Life

Compared to Bondi's description of ancient monasticism, Jesuit spirituality, as described by James Martin, provides a somewhat different, though no less compelling view of the believer's relationship with God. Martin's book, based on an awareness of God and the capacity to appreciate God's interactions in all things, is "a guide to

¹⁹ Ibid., 79.

²⁰ Ibid., 10.

discovering how God can be found in every dimension of... life”²¹: in the events and desires of the individual life, in the everyday events of the world, through creation, and in God’s ongoing callings of vocation and discipleship. Jesuit spirituality characterizes all of these aspects of life as God’s active communication to human beings²² (Psalm 19:1-4).

Contemplative awareness and appreciation which moves the believer to action is the centerpiece of Jesuit spirituality. Martin touches on the core of the practice of Contemplation, citing Walter Burghardt’s article “A Long, Loving Look at the Real.”²³ To pray in a contemplative manner is to enter unhurriedly into the loving presence of God with awareness, “looking” at, listening to, and receiving the communication of God. Such listening and looking requires a developed sensitivity of which many Protestants are suspicious, and which they have often learned to dismiss.

Citing the work of William Barry,²⁴ Martin describes the freedom with which the contemplative is able to listen to and interact with God through the same relational modes that apply to friendship²⁵: attentiveness²⁶, learning about the other through their interactions with others (the stories and testimonies of the struggling or the poor), and

²¹ James Marin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2012), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ Walter J. Burghardt, “A Long, Loving Look at the Real.” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J., (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 89-97.

²⁴ William A Barry S.J., *God and You: Prayer As A Personal Relationship* (Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1987)

²⁵ Marin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, 115.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

through accounts of their personal history (accounts of Jesus in the Gospels)²⁷, through honest self-revelation²⁸. The contemplative listens with sensitivity to emotions, sudden insights or intuitions, to memories, to feelings of peace or anxiety, to desires, even to physical bodily feelings—aware that God can and does communicate in these various ways at various times.²⁹ The filter for all of these listenings and experiences is the growing awareness of God’s presence and the active response of practicing loving relationship with God and others.

Jesuit spirituality sets contemplation and action in the context of the spiritual journey or pilgrimage. Martin describes a number of different styles of spiritual journey based on personality and experience: the path of belief,³⁰ the path of independence from formal religion,³¹ the path of disbelief,³² the path of return to God,³³ the path of exploration³⁴ or searching, and the path of confusion.³⁵ This understanding broadens the definition and understanding of spiritual life, affirming the value of each individual and revealing the importance of the contemplative stance of awareness which adds depth to the particular journey. At the same time, the suggestion of different types of spiritual

²⁷ Ibid., 116-122.

²⁸ Ibid., 122-126.

²⁹ Ibid., 126-134.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Ibid., 34.

³³ Ibid., 36.

³⁴ Ibid., 39.

³⁵ Ibid., 42.

journey opens up an important question of discernment for the believer regarding the nature of his or her particular journey with and towards God, a question often undefined or limited by evangelical Protestant and denominational theology and practice. Martin's book is helpful in broadening the understanding and appreciation of God's presence in the world, and in faith journeys. Ignatian contemplative practice opens up the possibility of engagement with God in situations and experiences which are liable to go unnoticed unless the believer is aware of the possibility of God's presence in all things.

Evangelical Contemplative Spirituality:

John H. Coe and Kyle C. Strobel:

Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice

The recent resurgence of contemplative teaching and practice has sounded alarm bells among some within the evangelical community. As a result, contemplative spirituality has been accused of being “New Age”³⁶ or “Catholic mysticism...developed in monasteries by men who rejected the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone by Christ's work alone.”³⁷ Ironically, this type of response is the result of a modern perspective which is disconnected from its reformed and evangelical heritage. Tom Schwanda, has observed that this type of evangelical resistance to contemplative

³⁶ See, for example, Steven Bancarz and Josh Peck, *The Second Coming of the New Age: The Hidden Dangers of Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America and Its Churches*, and Howard Peth, *The Dangers of Contemplative Prayer*.

³⁷ Chris Rosebrough, “Dangers of Monastic Mystic Meditation Practices”, in *Extreme Theology* (October 6, 2010), accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.extremetheology.com/2010/01/dangers-of-mystic-meditation-practices.html>.

spirituality actually reveals “a lingering contempt for anything even vaguely related to the Roman Catholic Church.... [an attitude with which] Martin Luther, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, John Newton, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon, to name only a few, would be shocked.”³⁸

John Coe and Kyle Strobel’s timely book, *Embracing Contemplation*, addresses reformed and evangelical fears regarding contemplation and contemplative practices. In his introduction, John Coe describes the recent interest in spiritual formation as a discussion which “has never become a unified movement, nor... a singular set of beliefs [but].... Rather... a conversation [that] has arisen concerning what a distinctively evangelical view of the Christian life might entail... [which] has led... to an explicit excavation of evangelicalism’s own spiritual history.”³⁹ Coe cites Richard Lovelace who “coined the term ‘the sanctification gap’ to speak to modern evangelicalism’s neglect of their own spiritual tradition.”⁴⁰ Somehow many evangelical and reformed believer’s have grown up in the church aware of the Reformation movement but divorced from the spirituality that their spiritual forebears practiced. This situation has produced a focus on theological orthodoxy largely at the expense of spiritual formation. While Coe admits that the spiritual formation conversation, “at its worst... has often failed to take theology seriously, focusing simply on disciplines or spiritual practices that it fails to

³⁸ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 97-98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

understand,”⁴¹ he also recognizes that “at its best, the spiritual formation conversation seeks to attend deeply to Scripture, the spiritual and theological traditions broadly, and... to provide a robust spiritual theology for the sake of faithfulness in the church today.”⁴²

Embracing Contemplation seeks to reintroduce contemplative spirituality to reformed and evangelical audiences. The writers use language and Scripture in ways that are accessible to reformed and evangelical readers, by connecting contemplative spirituality to life in the Spirit and by showing how contemplation was present in some of the earliest expressions of these traditions. In the early chapters of the book, Coe describes a “distinctively evangelical understanding of contemplation.”⁴³ First, Coe cites the Puritan writer Richard Baxter, who makes a distinction between the “active and contemplative”⁴⁴ callings in the spiritual life, and quotes Baxter, who says that “every Christian must use so much contemplation, as is necessary to the loving of God above all, and to be worshipping of him in spirit and in truth.”⁴⁵ Secondly, Coe discusses the nature of contemplation and contemplative prayer and the difference between the human capacity for contemplation versus the contemplation of God, in which “the believer is not generating anything... but takes on a receptive posture of openness to the work God has

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

done and is doing in the depth of one's soul.⁴⁶ These descriptions help to distinguish a Christian view of contemplation from other Eastern forms of meditation, such as Buddhism. However, at the same time, the authors are anxious to “generate the right sort of conversation”⁴⁷ by drawing “from various voices to foster a broader conversation [so that] differing viewpoints... [can] encourage a deeper and more theologically robust conversation about contemplation and prayer for spiritual formation in the evangelical church today.”⁴⁸

Coe and Strobel's book is important, not only because it seeks to bridge the gap between a reformed and evangelical audience suspicious of contemplative spirituality, but because it seeks to connect contemplation to a reformed and evangelical theology of the Gospel. Through the writings of various authors, the book approaches contemplative spirituality in a number of ways, reviewing different historical practices of contemplative prayer, critiquing them in the light of evangelical and reformed understandings of grace and the work of Jesus Christ. The second half of the book offers practical approaches to the practice of contemplation and contemplative spirituality in distinctively evangelical and reformed ways.

Transforming Peace Through Solitude

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The world militates against the contemplative life. Chaotic images, noise, distraction and urgency pervade modern culture and have become so much a part of modern life that solitude and silence seem to have become unnatural intrusions. Particularly in many Protestant traditions, where the practices of solitude and silence are relatively unknown, there is need for re-education and reorientation regarding the use of these practices and their place in the interior, spiritual journey. Both Sister Mary Cutri and Henri Nouwen speak compellingly about the fruits of solitude and silence and how these practices shape the soul.

The Transforming Nature of Solitude

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*

The hidden power of Jesus' life from which the Christian disciple must draw life, says Henri Nouwen, is found in solitude.⁴⁹ The follower of Christ who seeks to give himself or herself to others, whether in word or action, must first receive the wealth and depth of God's grace and love in the "lonely place."⁵⁰ Through prayerful contemplation the depths of the person are gradually addressed and healed before God so that their words and actions and presence convey the presence of, and the true participation in, God's Spirit. Without this participation, the follower of Christ is liable only to be formed by, and to bring to others, "an appearance of wisdom... self-imposed worship... [and]

⁴⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1974), 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

false humility” (Col. 2:23). Nouwen describes the gifts of prayerful solitude as healing, psycho-spiritual understandings, and movements towards spiritual reality, all of which take place in the presence of God.

The person who comes to God in prayer and solitude comes to the one in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Solitude is the place in which “we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone.”⁵¹

Solitude enables us to sit before God and receive the awareness that nothing which we have to give is our own. In solitude the believer can begin to take on the conviction of Jesus who confessed that, “all the power he had was given to him... all the words he spoke... all the works he did were not really his, but the works of the One who had sent him.”⁵² Within this reality, the believer gradually comes to accept the fact that life, and all that the believer is able to do or give, is the gift of God.⁵³ Success becomes God’s gift, not one’s personal possession. Failure becomes part of that process through which God is at work in the world and one’s own soul. As a result, the person who receives may freely give to others that which God has given first to her or him, without arrogance or fear.

Alone in God’s presence, the person becomes increasingly aware of God as the source of their being, and the self is both valued and emptied. The believer comes to

⁵¹ Ibid., 26.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid., 25-26.

see that he or she is, on one hand, God's unique creation, deeply loved and highly valued; while on the other hand, as God's creation, inseparable from the humanity of other people. Nouwen points out the ways in which human beings separate themselves from the needy, fearing that life and energy will be consumed by bottomless need, fearing the strangeness of the other.⁵⁴ Yet, in solitude, Jesus learned to be self-emptying and so he was able to touch the leper (Matt. 8:1-3), and to be with the poor and the outcast. In solitude, the ego's demand to set itself above or separate itself from others who would diminish its attempt to take center stage is quieted and slowly stripped away.

Solitude as a regular aspect of spiritual practice is largely unknown in reformed and evangelical circles. The importance of Nouwen's small book is that it powerfully describes the way in which solitude can free the person from psychological and spiritual forces that have a powerful effect on the spiritual life, yet often go unnoticed. By connecting solitude to the life of Jesus and describing its transforming work in the soul, Nouwen helps readers to understand the central importance of this spiritual practice.

The Transforming Experience of Silence and Solitude

Sister Mary Paul Cutri, *Sounding Solitude*

Solitude and silence, says Sister Mary Cutri, once discovered, entered into and experienced, becomes an entrance into a new kind of life. Sister Cutri describes this

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.

new life as a process in which the person is increasingly drawn into a new awareness so that they “no longer see as they saw before, no longer behold themselves or God as they did formerly.”⁵⁵ Through the practices of solitude and silence the noise of the world and the person’s own inner chatter die down.⁵⁶ Prayer becomes a conversation between the person and God in which their life is understood in the light of God’s character and presence. This deep conversation between the soul and God is what all people long for and seek. Somehow each person knows, on some level within themselves, that they are a mystery which longs to be discovered, and this truth underlies all human striving and desiring. Solitude and silence are invitations to a gradual and progressive discovery of this mystery.

Yet solitude, which is always at work within the person, is not a process of individualistic isolation. Rather, in solitude and silence one is always present to God and the love of God is drawing the person into community.⁵⁷ Without the inner quiet of solitude and silence, that noise which is within the person clouds awareness of the needs of anyone else. The soul’s own inner chatter and inner chaos drive out the ability to be present to others. Within the inner quiet of solitude, the person enters into the community of self-giving love and moves into other relationships of self-giving.

The process which draws the person into communion with God is, at the same moment, drawing the person away from the false self. As the inner mystery of the

⁵⁵ Sister Mary Cutri O.C.D., *Sounding Solitude* (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2010), 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

person is being revealed, so the inner lies of the ego are being exposed. The false self, which is sustained and obscured by one's inner noise, begins to take a clearer shape as the person is able to become more aware of who they truly are, and to see their life through the lens of God's love.⁵⁸ The light of God's presence and reality opens the individual to "self knowledge... the enlightenment that illusions are really illusions" and "the awareness that perhaps these illusions have power over us."⁵⁹ The more evident this truth becomes to the person, the more compelling the understanding that "these powerful illusions must be shattered if [the person is] to move from idol-worship to the true God."⁶⁰ This painful truth is the cross that each disciple of Christ must take up—the death that each must die so that they may be raised to new life.

Fortunately, this purgative and illuminative process does not depend solely on human initiative. The goodness and mercy of God tracks down each person, always pursuing (Ps. 23:6), always inviting each soul to become an incarnation of God's love. God, in immeasurable humility, "waits upon our willingness to respond"⁶¹, honoring and continuing to pay the price for the created freedom of each human soul.

Practicing Prophetic Peace and Rest

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52-53.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁶¹ Ibid., 91.

The idea of a prophetic peace or rest may sound strange to some, yet the spirit of the prophets speaks to issues in a society which draw it away from the gift and life of God. In the context of modern society the practice of contemplative spiritual life, in which one learns to reject the competitive urgency and striving of society can be both a prophetic protest and an invitation to renewal. This final section explores some of the dynamics of practicing formational, prophetic peace and rest.

Prophetically Peaceful Relationships

Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens*

Rowan Williams, reflecting on the spiritual lives of the early, desert monastics, describes a prophetically peaceful attitude towards community and relationships. Christian society often perpetuates a kind of competitive individuality. True prophetic peace requires the willingness to work out the hard edges of messy relationship in a way that promotes love and freedom, and which overcomes fearful isolation.⁶² In essence, a truly prophetic Christian peace must show the world something quite different, something that challenges the self-fulfillment message of society by offering a healing, communal vision of life. Rowan Williams, reflecting on the lives of the early desert monastics, lays some important groundwork for such a vision.

The practice of prophetic peace in community begins with a rejection and a continual putting to death of competitive spiritual pride, “self-obsession or self-

⁶² Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another* (Boston, MA: New Seeds Books, 2005), 11.

satisfaction.”⁶³ Williams points out the nature of spiritual pride in the human “readiness to judge and prescribe,” which “has its roots in... inattention to oneself.”⁶⁴ The beginning of humility, then, is the willingness to contemplate one’s life before the gaze of Christ and to see how one’s own life, when measured against the backdrop of Christ’s holiness, reflects the same needs and brokenness as the life of another.

This orientation informs the way one communicates with others in community. Williams recounts the story of Macarius, who dealt with a prideful old monk by confessing his own struggles with sin, which allowed the old monk the freedom to also confess *his* own struggles.⁶⁵ The free confession of one’s need for grace and mercy in this life breaks down human division and promotes the kind of sameness, whether in the prideful or the guilty, which any community must depend upon. The honesty of such a community speaks prophetically to a world that seeks life in competitive self-promotion or victimization. The Christian community becomes “a place where God happens for somebody else... in a life giving way... to put someone in touch with the possibility of God’s healing.”⁶⁶

Prophetic practice, in this way, relies upon an understanding of persons as the image of God, and therefore inherently valuable and innately connected communicatively to God. Each person is a unique expression of God’s image and expresses longing for and

⁶³ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

relation to God, whether consciously or unconsciously. Such an understanding of humanity speaks prophetically to a world that finds meaning only in utilitarian productivity, and comfort only in distraction and busyness. In contrast, Williams speaks of “the ‘peaceful worthwhileness’ of each person,” insisting that “individuals as they are at rest are worthwhile, just as they are.”⁶⁷ A community that is able to believe and trust in the biblical worthwhileness of persons is free to rest without productivity anxiety. A community with the freedom to be at peace and to rest without anxiety or compulsion must certainly be a prophetic presence in the world, too different not to be noticed.

At the same time, the conviction of the worthwhileness of persons in the image of God⁶⁸ allows for a prophetic kind of patience in relationship with others. The soul that is the eternal, created expression of God’s image has also a resonance, “a unique communication from God within the infinite self-communication that is the one eternal Word....its own logos,”⁶⁹ to which the community must learn to listen with long discernment so that it might know the wisdom of God. The patient willingness to listen to the soul of another for the Word which God speaks through them precludes the kind of controlling argumentativeness and striving for superiority that often characterizes the world and even the church.

Finally, the practice of prophetic peace depends upon the willingness to remain, in some substantive way, in the circumstances of a community. The desert monastics

⁶⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 82.

describe this as the willingness to “sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls.”⁷⁰ The increasing mobility of the world not only feeds inner restlessness, but breaks down the interior sense of remaining in one place with the settled recognition of oneself and one’s struggles. Individuals can be so used to changing where they live, work, or worship, that they are tempted to see their problems and struggles as a function of their locations, allowing dissatisfaction with who they are to be identified with their environment.⁷¹ However, the practice of remaining in the same relationships, the same church, and possibly even the same location, while taking responsibility for one’s own dissatisfaction, one’s own problems and failings before God, is essential to transformation, and in a society of restlessness, can be powerfully prophetic.

William’s book helps to define the prophetic nature of contemplative peacefulness. The church is “the light of the world,” and a “city on a hill” (Matt. 5:14), yet the message that the church often displays is a life of individualistic, competition no different from what the world already experiences. Williams challenges the roots of modern Christian spirituality, calling for a faith that “is about fullness of life... [rather than] about control.”⁷²

A Prophetic Call to Peace through Intimacy with God

Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action*

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁷¹ Ibid., 70.

⁷² Ibid., xii.

Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling write about the need for a personal, vital, mystical relationship with God, in contrast to the reductionistic, rational relationships which often characterizes the faith of many evangelical Protestants. Citing William James' book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Campolo writes that "mystical experiences transcend rational description, can defy verbal expression, and... can provide a special sense of intimate 'knowing' that has a profound effect on those who have them."⁷³ This intimate knowing, for Campolo and Darling, becomes the source of a transforming and prophetic peace which leads to three areas of conversion: "personal, interpersonal, and societal or political."⁷⁴ This vision of the Church as a place of prophetic peace and intimacy with God depends upon three movements.

First, the life of faith depends upon a contemplative, mystical connection with Christ. Life in Christ apart from the infilling life of Christ's Spirit, becomes moralistic subscription, narcissistic self-therapy, or self-righteous superiority. Peace with God as the personal-divine being who freely gives life and favor and absolution to "me" cannot be received only as a rational-conceptual ideal, but requires a kind of awakening which is mystical, personal and mysterious. Jesus himself describes the reality of spiritual rebirth in a way that sets it beyond human manipulation (Jn.3:5-8). Peace with God comes to the individual, whether through sudden onset, or through a more gradual process, creating a real and continuing interiority of new life in the soul. Christ the prophet speaks a new act

⁷³ Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

of creation, and continuing words of creation into the soul to which it responds in growing love and obedience.

Secondly, as Christ speaks the seed of peace and new life into the individual, a new kind of life begins to emerge through identification with the divine person of Jesus Christ. The soul, properly nurtured, is drawn to the teachings and program of Jesus. Campolo, in chapter three, suggests that the mystical relationship develops, within the believer, the same kinds of personal convictions and identity which was and is in Christ. Peace, which first comes to bring order and new freedom to the individual expands and grows into a desire for prophetic peace, expressed in a desire for healing and deliverance for “the poor and oppressed,”⁷⁵ and a willingness to “challenge institutionalized religion”⁷⁶ and “enter into one another’s sufferings.”⁷⁷

Thirdly, the life of prophetic peace is nurtured and fed by contemplative disciplines, which continue to open the individual to a listening relationship with God. Prophetic peace is sustained on three levels: (1) within the personal realm where God speaks prophetically and graciously to the soul,⁷⁸ (2) within the inter-personal realm where God speaks prophetically about God’s love for the neighbor/other,⁷⁹ and (3) within the societal-political-environmental realm where God speaks prophetically to the soul

⁷⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

regarding true justice, reconciliation and stewardship.⁸⁰ Without soul nurturing habits of “intentionality, over time with regularity, with the goal of being formed into Christ-likeness, with the result of growing in love for God and others,”⁸¹ true prophetic peace which flows out of the mission and character of Jesus Christ, can devolve into anxious activism or secluded self-absorption.

Campolo and Darling’s book helps to address the evangelical and reformed suspicion of mysticism. Campolo, as a popular, evangelical author, along with Darling, address this suspicion by showing that vital connection with Christ must be mystical and experiential. The authors describe a mystical-contemplative process that does not lead to navel-gazing or strange unorthodox beliefs, but deep experience of Christ, inner change of heart, and active obedience and action in the world

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁸¹ Ibid., 77.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTEMPLATIVE IMAGE OF GOD

What is contemplation and what does it mean to be contemplative? Jan Johnson provides a good first step in defining contemplation when she writes, “contemplation comes down to paying attention to God.”¹ This understanding of contemplation can be seen in the scriptural call to “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Thomas Merton further expands and deepens this understanding of contemplation writing that;

Contemplation is the highest expression of [human] intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source.²

Merton’s description of contemplation points to a reflective awareness upon the reality and presence of God in which the contemplative recognizes the significance of the reality

¹ Jan Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, 16.

² Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, NY; New Directions, 1961), 1.

of God. God exists, not as an abstraction, but as a real and present source of life and meaning.

Yet Scripture takes the definition of contemplation still a step further, calling people of faith to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). This metaphor suggests a kind of opening of the senses and the mind to the presence of God. Contemplation, is pictured as a kind of feast which is offered to those who are willing to open themselves up to God’s reality and presence. The nature of this opening to God is not a kind of rational exercise. Walter Burghardt writes, “I do not analyze it or argue it, describe or define it; I am one with it... I enter into it.”³ Burghardt describes contemplation in terms of “falling in love”⁴ and as a kind of “rest in the real”⁵ in which one’s “entire being is alive, incredibly responsive, vibrating to every throb of the real... [where] time is irrelevant.”⁶

Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveal God as contemplative: fully aware of and lovingly attentive to the creation, vibrating and throbbing with life, fully open to and appreciative of reality, and fully at rest. The first creation story reveals moment’s of contemplation in which God’s awareness and openness is turned towards the dark, chaotic waters, the creation, and rest. These acts of contemplation bear fruit by overcoming chaos and darkness, abundant and imaginative creativity along with appreciation of the created

³ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real, in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, and More*, ed. George Traub (Chicago, IL; Loyola Press, 2008), 92.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁶ Ibid.

world, and in holy completeness and rest. These fruits of contemplation, which are also available to God's image-bearers, through the practice of contemplation, are essential to spiritual life and thriving.

Contemplation, then, is an act of communication between God and human beings who are willing to be attentive and open to, and to rest in God's loving communication. This attentive awareness bears fruit and images God. Thomas Merton writes, "contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him... Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks into the depths of our own being... [so that] we are [God's] words that are meant to respond to Him, to answer to Him, to echo Him, and even in some way to contain Him and signify Him."⁷

This chapter will provide a theological basis for the practice of contemplation as an expression of the image of God, and will describe how three different aspects of the fruit of contemplation revealed in Genesis 1:2-2:3 have been manifested in various traditions in the history of the Church. Furthermore, this chapter will describe how the practice of contemplation can help to improve Peace Hill's ministry as both a restorative and prophetic church community.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 God as Contemplative Creator

Genesis 1:2 describes a scene of primordial chaos: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit God was

⁷ Ibid., 3.

hovering over the waters.” In the ancient mind the deep was understood as “a fearsome and alien abode of monsters and the source of storms... with connotations of fearsome and uncontrollable power... a mysterious realm where forces were hidden from human understanding.”⁸ The presence of chaotic waters is a common feature in creation myths of other cultures. The gods of Babylonian, Greek and Egyptian mythology emerged from the chaos of the deep, or the watery abyss,⁹ suggesting that they, themselves, were a part of the chaos of the world. Their emergence as gods implies that human striving against chaotic forces was and is an inevitable reality of human life.

Genesis 1:1 describes the same chaotic waters which are part of the Babylonian, Greek and Egyptian creation stories. However, while in the other creation myths, the gods are identified as being somehow part of the waters, the God of Genesis exists separate from the waters. Genesis begins with God hovering or brooding over the chaotic deep, contemplating the chaotic and formless emptiness. The Hebrew word קָוָה קָוָה קָוָה can also be translated “to vibrate,” suggesting that God’s contemplative energy, purpose and power over the chaotic waters. God’s gaze and attention are fixed on the chaotic depths and God is fully present to them. Whereas the gods of other creation myths have to make war with the darkness and chaos, God’s presence is enough to overcome darkness and chaos (see John 1:5). Out of this moment of contemplation God

⁸ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilholt, Tremper Longman III, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Images* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 200-201.

⁹ J.F. Bierlein, *Parallel Myths* (New York, NY: Wellspring, 1994), 71, 46-47, 51, .

speaks the word “Let there be light” (Gen.1:3), and the chaos and darkness are brought to order.

This opening scene appears to be unique among the creation mythologies of surrounding cultures. The author of Genesis presents God as one who overcomes the chaos of the earth and who brings order and illumination by words that come out of a moment of contemplation. The story of creation in Genesis proceeds in an orderly way, creating a literary structure or framework¹⁰ that is chiastic¹¹ in which (1) light, (2) sky and sea, and (3) land are created first and subsequently filled with (4) light-bearers (sun, moon and stars), (5) sky and sea creatures, and then (6) land animals and humankind.

Throughout the creation narrative the depth of God’s creative imagination is on display. God contemplates and imagines complex systems, creatures, even life itself. Beginning with the third day, God begins to evaluate each day of creation, contemplating or “seeing” what has been made. The phrase “God saw that it was good,” is repeated six times (vs. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and culminates in the seventh and final statement of Genesis 1:31; “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” This is, once again, a departure from the creation myths of the surrounding cultures where the creation tends to be created out of conflict and violence. The God of Genesis sees and discerns creation as good, which is to say that the creation reflects back the nature of God

¹⁰ Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL; Crossway Books, 2006), 84.

¹¹ Kenneth Matthews, *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Genesis 1-II:26*, Vol.1A (Nashville, TN; Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 115-116.

to God's Self. Through contemplation God delights in the creation and rejoices within the Godhead through an affirmation that the creation reveals God's glory.

On the seventh day, God again acts in a way unique from the gods of the other mythologies. Whereas Marduk defeats and punishes his rivals, creating "a savage man... charged with the service of the gods,"¹² and Ptah, the Egyptian creator, gathers all that he had made to himself in satisfaction,¹³ and "Zeus set[s] up his court on Mount Olympus as the uncontested master of the gods," the God of Genesis rests in appreciation of the creation, and separates the seventh day as a day of restorative appreciation. Thus, the account of Genesis begins and ends in the same way, in contemplation.

Within the first creation story the nature of God is clearly revealed to be powerfully creative, lovingly relational, filled with delight in the good, communicative, and contemplative. Consequently when Genesis 1:26 describes humanity (men and women) as the expression of God's image, it is referring to the ways in which human beings reflect God as specifically revealed within the text of the creation story. Human beings, as reflections of God, are made to be creative in a variety of ways, lovingly relational, delighted with what is good, communicative, and contemplative. However, while much could be said about any of these characteristics of God's image, it is the contemplative aspect of God's character that seems to prompt and weigh God's actions in Genesis 1. Indeed, in creating human beings in God's image, God puts at the center of the

¹² J.F. Bierlein, *Parallel Myths*, 72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

story of creation that which points back to and reflects upon God's Self, so that human beings cannot truly understand themselves or the story of the world without contemplating the God in whose image they are made.

The contemplative nature of God, furthermore, is revealed in the first Creation account through three kinds of contemplation: (1) contemplative hovering that overcomes chaos and chaotic forces, (2) contemplative imaginative creativity and subsequent valuation, or truly "seeing," that appreciates, delights and rejoices in creation, and (3) contemplative resting as a way of hallowing, or making holy, the day. Thus the Creation story does not merely include references to contemplation, but shows God to be purposefully contemplative throughout the "days" of Creation. The story reveals the essential importance of contemplation as an aspect of the image of God.

Practically, this means that human beings are created to participate in the divine nature through three types of contemplation. First, contemplative silence and stillness, and the experience of solitude, is of essential importance in overcoming the chaos of a fallen world and of the fallen person. Contemplation must be seen as a way to confront fallen situations, sinful desires, distorted understandings, and interior chaos and noise, in order to bring them into the light of God where they are set in order, revealed and clarified and silenced. Second, the contemplative ability of creative imagination is essential to that faith by which we know and enter into the presence of God. This is not to say that human beings dream up a god of their own imagining, rather this imaginative ability enables human beings to interact, by faith, with what is unseen through what can

be seen in creation (Romans 1:20). Contemplation reveals the mystery of God's goodness and presence in the world and enables human beings to appreciate and rejoice in what is truly good. Thirdly, the contemplative practice of resting in the love and mercy of God is essential as a way to find restoration for the soul. Contemplation is Sabbath restoration, and nurtures the soul through communion with God.

Although human beings eventually fall into rebellion in Genesis 3, the author of Genesis never says that the image of God is removed or destroyed. The innate abilities of imagination, creativity, relating, communicating, which are aspects of the image of God, have continued to be essential to human thriving throughout history. Contemplation also appears to be part of the image of God and therefore must also be essential to human thriving. The next section of this paper will attempt to show how each of the three ways of contemplation, revealed in Genesis 1:1-2:3, have characterized different historical spiritual movements in the life of the Church.

The Church as a Community Called Out of Chaotic Darkness and into Light

The church is called to be "the light of the world" and "a town built on a hill" (Matt. 5:14). The Apostle John wrote to the early church, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:5-7). The church is the community of those who have been set free from the

chaotic darkness of sin and blindness to walk in the light of God. The Apostle Peter, also, describes the followers of Christ, in the early church, as a people whom God has “called... out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). This call out of darkness of falsehood and sin in order to receive mercy is the basis of Peter’s call to holiness in the following verses. This marvelous, or awe-inspiring light surely has to do with a spiritual enlightenment, a way of entering into the light of God’s presence, which both exposes and heals the soul.

In the beginning, God overcame the chaotic waters and created light and order and life. The Church is the new creation in Christ. Those who come into the church are called out of a chaotic world, in which dark forces hold sway over those who are blinded by sinful passions such as greed, lust, pride and anger, and into the community of those who live in the light of Jesus Christ. The church is to be the community of those who know God and are known by God and one another. Yet too often the church is more like the community of those who gather for an hour a week as a community to participate in worship and to hear about God, and then to return to the chaotic world, and often, to chaotic inner lives.

Before the action of creation God hovers, or contemplates, the chaos of the deep. This moment, before the activity of creation, suggests a necessary dynamic for those who want to live a spiritual life: the dynamic of contemplative withdrawal (being called out of the world and into the presence of God) and active gathering (being called into the creative community of God’s worshiping people). These two movements,

together, nourish the soul. On one hand, contemplative withdrawal into God's presence quiets and overcomes the chaos of the demands of sin, and draws the believer into the transformed life, preparing him or her to enter into the community of God's people bringing order and light and creativity. On the other hand, the blessings of community, through the preaching of God's word, communal worship, and fellowship, nourish and challenge the believer to return to the chaotic world as a light in the world, and a sign of prophetic peace.

Members of Peace Hill are enthusiastic about gathering for worship, fellowship, and the preaching of the word. Some members of the church are avid readers of spiritual books. Some members are intercessory prayer warriors. Yet, as one of the pastors has said, "We get the congregation for an hour or two on Sundays, but most of them spend more time listening to the news, with its political commentary, or listening to social media, than to us." The world is full of chaotic messages of fear and anger, enticing images, invitations to live in luxury, hoard wealth, and compete with neighbors. Active service in the church, beautiful worship, and biblical preaching alone have done little to combat these messages on a deep level. Members of the church have focused on the spiritual life in an informational rather than a spiritually formational way. The desire to know and understand has been emphasized at Peace Hill, over the reflective practices through which God forms the soul. In the absence of contemplative prayer and practice the chaotic messages both without and within have remained unaddressed. Church members need a model of contemplative prayer that addresses the chaotic world.

The early model of Christian contemplative prayer, practiced among the ancient desert monastics of the 4th-7th centuries, is a clear echo of God's contemplative hovering that overcomes the chaotic waters in Genesis 1:2. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in an ancient story described by Jason Bysassee:

“There were three friends, serious men, who became monks.” Two do praise-worthy things commended by Christ himself in Scripture: one becomes a peacemaker, another a visitor of the sick. The third chooses the quiet of solitude. When they meet to consider their lives, the first two are weary and troubled. The third has a parable. He pours water, which only after a moment is still, allowing them to see their faces in its surface. [He then says to them]; “So it is with anyone who lives in a crowd; because of the turbulence, he does not see his sins: but when he has been quiet, above all in solitude, thence recognizes his own faults.”¹⁴

The desert monastics deeply valued solitude and silence. They left the cities, entering into the deserts around Jerusalem, Egypt and Syria, moving away from “a church grown soft in collusion with the powerful Roman Empire [and] trying to live out the risky vision discipleship glimpsed in the gospels.”¹⁵ Their contemplative watchfulness and interior vigilance were the means by which they sought to overcome their inner chaotic passions, the “conglomerate of obsessive emotions, attitudes, desires, and ways of acting”¹⁶ which, like spiritual cancers in the bloodstream of the soul, stir up sinful desires and ways of thinking and acting.

In order to still the internal chaos of the human spirit, believers must come to understand contemplative prayer and watchfulness as an essential aspect of living as

¹⁴ Jason Bysassee, *An Introduction to the Desert Fathers* (Eugene, OR; Cascade Books, 2007), 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, 57.

God's image bearers. Members at Peace Hill "need a quiet center in which [to] cultivate... inner freedom to live... life in the Spirit."¹⁷ The quiet center is nurtured through silent prayer as the believer listens, reflects and contemplates their own thoughts and desires in the presence of God. What happens in contemplation is "an existential and affective movement of the heart... a receptive act of receiving the love poured into one's heart by the Spirit (Rom.5:5).¹⁸ Silent contemplation "will open the believer's heart, in the midst of its brokenness and sin, to the reality of God and the indwelling corruption still at work."¹⁹ This honest and open confrontation of one's heart and the "discovery of [one's] sin is a great blessing, for it is the only way that leads to healing."²⁰ This is a healing that does not come through a better self-understanding and a rational approach to managing one's life more effectively, but rather through the presence of God who is the life and light of all people (see John 1:4). Gregory of Nyssa writes:

The person devoted to prayer has fellowship with God and comes into contact with him through a mystical holiness, a spiritual energy, and an inexpressible disposition. Taking the Spirit as our guide and fellow contestant, our love for the Lord is kindled, and we seethe with longing since no satiety in prayer is found, we are always burning with passion for the Good and stirring up the soul."²¹

¹⁷ Will Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection* (Mahwah, NJ; Paulist Press, 2006), 31.

¹⁸ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 178.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

²⁰ Matthew the Poor, *The Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way*, (Crestwood, NY; St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 198.

²¹ Christopher A. Hall, *Worshipping with the Church Fathers* (Downer's Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 2009), 82.

Contemplative prayer taps into the mystery of the presence of God. Members at Peace Hill are good at giving, serving, studying and understanding, singing, reading, caring and listening thoughtfully; however, contemplative prayer is about receiving from God what only God can give to the soul in solitude and silence and stillness. While solitude is possible in a rural location like Charles City, silence and stillness are difficult. Solitude can be found by leaving the presence of people and taking a walk, but stillness and silence are as much internal states as they are physical states.

Vassilios Papavassiliou writes that “the start of stillness is the rejection of all noisiness as something that will trouble the depths of the soul,”²² but what troubles the soul is, perhaps more internal than external. The real noise of the soul consists of inner demands, desires, and expectations that drive or inhibit, accuse or defend, create tension and anxiety and a need to perform or lecture. Such noise stirs up the soul, creating chaos through frenetic activity from which one cannot slow down, excessive talkativeness which is unable to listen and constantly interrupts others, and a distracted mind tossed back and forth between inner conversations.

Stillness and silence in solitude can begin to quiet down the internal noise of the soul and unmask the chaotic illusion of competitive, driven life. Members of Peace Hill have typically been busy people with active lives. However, many who formerly found their spiritual identity in active spirituality have aged and are slowing down so that they are no longer able to be actively engaged as they once were. While this reality can

²² Vassilios Papavassiliou, *Thirty Steps to Heaven: The Ladder of Divine Ascent for All Walks of Life* (Chesterton, IN; Ancient Faith Publishing, 2013), 212.

seem frustrating, Rowan Williams suggests that there is a “‘peaceful worthwhileness’ of each person... at rest... just as they are.”²³ If members at Peace Hill can believe Williams’ statement and learn a peaceful stillness, they can be a prophetic presence in a world that is driven by “the hurried urgency to possess and consume... [which points to a basic] falsehood and... misunderstanding of the kind of being[s we] are.”²⁴ If members at Peace Hill can become a people who set aside the urgency and productivity by which the rest of the world lives and, through prayer, recognize their true worth as the image-bearers of God, even at rest, Williams assures his readers, “God will move. God will create. God will change.”²⁵

The Church as The Community That Knows and Worships God

The church is the community of those who know God the Father through Jesus Christ, and who follow the way of Jesus Christ. One of the marks of the Apostles in the early church is that they were those who had “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Near the end of his ministry, Jesus, in his high priestly prayer for his disciples, says, “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Later, in the same prayer Jesus prays that the disciples “may... also be in us... I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought into complete unity [and

²³ Williams, *Where God Happens*, 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

that] the world may know that you (the Father) sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:21, 23).

The Church is meant to be a fellowship of those who know God deeply. This knowledge of God is more than knowledge about God, or about Scripture, which is often the focus of those who study Scripture. The disciples knew Jesus Christ experientially and personally. Jesus shared his life with the disciples during his earthly ministry and his last words to them were “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20).

The Apostle John, in the beginning of his first epistle, suggests that this shared experience of life with Jesus is the joy of the Christian life (1 John 1:4), and that it is available to those who were not physically present with Jesus during his earthly ministry. John echoes Jesus’ priestly prayer when he writes, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

However, while Peace Hill is a warm and friendly church where generous fellowship exists between church members, a significant number of those who attend the church report having never, or only rarely, experienced this promised presence of Jesus, whether at conversion or at any other time. These members have generally grown up in Christian households and have, at some point in life, come to identify with a group of believers, choosing to join the church, practice their faith, and serve faithfully. However, Ignatian spirituality teaches that God, who is present and communicating, is always

“trying to draw [people] into an awareness, a consciousness of the reality of who [they] are in God’s sight.”²⁶ William Barry writes that “God is encountered. But we are not always conscious of, or alert to, the presence of God,”²⁷ and that this is because, “the religious dimension of experience is supplied not only by the God who exists and is encountered, but also by a person of faith on the alert for God.”²⁸ Yet because many of the members at Peace Hill have been taught to distrust affective experiences, they have not practiced this kind of alertness throughout their Christian lives.

Genesis reveals a Creator who is intentionally and constantly aware, creating, and repeatedly pausing to contemplate creation in appreciation, discerning it as “good” and ultimately as “very good.” This proclamation of creation as “good” suggests that God, who alone is good (see Mark 10:18), sees God’s Self reflected in the creation and responds with praise. This recognition of God as present in all things is one of the central aspects of Ignatian spirituality. In Ignatian spirituality, spiritual consciousness of the presence of God is developed in two ways: through the imagination and through contemplative appreciation which is at the heart of the worshiping life. Members of Peace Hill need these broader understandings of the nature of spiritual experience as a way to open their deeper capacities to attend to the spiritual life.

²⁶ William A. Barry, *Finding God: in all things* (Notre Dame, IN; Ave Maria Press, 1991), 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Entering Into God's Story

Ignatian contemplation mirrors God's nature through an imaginative spirituality. Just as God repeatedly enters into the story of Genesis through creating and contemplating creation, so the Ignatian practice of Scripture meditation found in the Spiritual Exercises, uses the imaginative powers of the exercitant to be able to "enter into the vision of God [or] to place [herself or himself] fully within a story from the Gospels... [becoming] the onlooker-participant."²⁹ The exercitant becomes part of the scene, imaginatively interacting with the characters, making choices and decisions, asking questions, identifying with them in various ways. Imagination becomes the creative act of creating and entering into and a new reality — one in which the exercitant ceases to be a mere observer and becomes present, imaginatively, in the scene. This type of imaginative interaction with Scripture has a profound effect on the exercitant. George Traub explains that "there are parts of the human person (e.g., the 'right brain,' the 'unconscious')—crucial determinants of feeling, value, and action—that the rational controlling mind does not touch. Rather they are reached when the rational mind is 'in neutral' and the contemplative, aesthetic, and imaginative mode of knowing are allowed to operate."³⁰ Imaginative contemplation of Scripture allows the person to "connect with

²⁹ David L. Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago, IL; Loyola Press, 2008), 57.

³⁰ George W. Traub, ed., *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More* (Chicago, IL; Loyola Press, 2008), 118.

parts of [the self] that [are usually] closed off [allowing them] to connect with Jesus and the Gospel story.”³¹

Teaching at Peace Hill has paid attention to scriptural stories, understanding how God has been gracious and long suffering with others and focusing on grace. Yet such biblical stories remain the stories of others. Members of Peace Hill recognize the Gospels, and the stories of the saints of Scripture, as examples of God’s grace, yet remote from their own lives and experiences. Thus, while examples from Scripture can be comforting or encouraging, they fail to enter into the imagination and to become apart of the believer’s inner world and experience, creating an expectation of God’s presence and interaction. However, entering into the scriptural stories through Ignatian imagination creates, in a sense, new life experiences which then enable the believer to be open to new ways of believing and walking with God.

Secondly, Ignatian spirituality images God through a contemplative appreciation of the created world, which nurtures an awareness and connection with God necessary to human thriving. Johann Hari, in his recent book *Why You’re Depressed and How to Find Hope*, has written that “every one of the social and psychological causes of depression and anxiety... has something in common. They are all forms of disconnection... ways in which we have been cut off from something we innately need but seem to have lost along the way.”³² Hari goes on to list several areas of disconnection,

³¹ Ibid., 119.

³² Johann Hari, *Why You’re Depressed and How to Find Hope* (London, UK; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 71.

including disconnection from meaningful work, other people, meaningful values, through childhood trauma, from status and respect, the natural world, and a hopeful and secure future. Depression, says Hari, is suffering caused by “a social and spiritual imbalance in how we live... [and is] a necessary signal,”³³ of a “longing for connection that never goes away... a form of grief—for all the connections we need, but don’t have.”³⁴

Walter Burghardt suggests that one major culprit in this loss of connection is our culture’s neglect of contemplation, what William McNamara has described as “experiential awareness of reality and a way of entering into immediate communion with reality.”³⁵ Burghardt suggests that there is an “intuitive communion”³⁶ with reality which has been damaged by our culture’s indoctrination into the analytical and abstracting mind. Quoting McNamara, Burghardt writes, “to take a long, loving look at something—a child, a glass of wine, a beautiful meal—this is a natural act of contemplation, of loving admiration.’ The problem? ‘All the way through school we are taught to abstract; we are not taught loving awareness.’”³⁷

Members of Peace Hill have, for the most part, grown up formed by an abstracting spirituality, in which God has been reduced into doctrinal understandings. These doctrinal notions of God, in the absence of any practice of contemplative

³³ Ibid., 313.

³⁴ Ibid., 315.

³⁵ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real”, 91.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

appreciation of God's concrete creation, tend to create a sense of unreality between the person and God. Human beings deeply need to connect with God, whose very breath animates and sustains them, and human beings cannot connect with abstractions. Genesis 2:7 captures the necessary nature of connection between God and human beings beautifully when God gathers dust from the ground, forms a human being, and breathes God's own breath (spirit and life), into the man's nostrils. The result is more than mere animation of dust; it is the divine spark of life and connection that gives being to every person.

Ignatian spirituality, in particular, addresses this issue of the human need for connection through contemplative appreciation by inviting "a person to search for and find God in every circumstance of life, not just in explicitly religious situations or activities."³⁸ James Martin writes that "God is always inviting us to encounter the transcendent in the everyday. The key is noticing."³⁹ Members at Peace Hill have a tendency to notice the fallenness of the world and broken situations in society. While this perspective is important it can tend to create an anger and a sense of distance and disconnection with the world and society which, as Hari discusses, can lead to a depressive understanding of life. The practice of contemplation of the created world along with the expectation of finding God in all things, can lead to an appreciation and

³⁸ Traub, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, 48.

³⁹ Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, 86.

connection with God through the created world, bringing needed balance of perspective and a sense of a hopeful future.

The Church as a Community of Prophetic Rest

The church is a community of prophetic rest: a people of God who have come to Jesus Christ, weary of the burdens of sin and the brokenness of the world in order to receive gracious mercy and a living hope. In a frenetic society, tormented by political and social conflict, pandemic, global environmental issues and the like, the church celebrates a God who both restores troubled souls, and offers the hope of a final rest. This celebration and rest is not a detachment from the world, but rather the necessary stance of a confidence in God that enables the followers of Jesus to both welcomes the weary and burdened, offering them peace and rest, and to go out into the world as peacemakers.

As Genesis chapter 2 opens, the creation of the earth has been completed and God rests, blessing and sanctifying the seventh day. The idea of God choosing to rest is, once again, an oddity among the creation mythologies. The other gods choose to rule, to gather, but not to rest. This intentional day of rest appears to complete a three-part picture of God's reflective, contemplative nature, and anticipates the later commandment to "Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy" (Deut. 5:12 NASB). The commandment of Sabbath rest is an explicit call to the people of God, to image God in contemplation.

Ray Anderson explains that when the commandment to observe the Sabbath was given by Moses, it was given in the context of liberation from slavery, so that the Sabbath day became a day to practice liberation and freedom from the bondage of physical and spiritual struggle. Anderson writes,

When we understand that Moses was the first theologian... and that the liberation of the people from four hundred years of bondage and oppression in Egypt was the context, we can then discover the antecedent for the Sabbath.

The fall into slavery and bondage on the part of the covenant people was seen by Moses as the theological paradigm for the original creation and fall of humanity....

The liberation from this bondage through the mighty act and power of God brought forth a new name—Yahweh—and a new sacrament of covenant promise [given to]... the Israelite, liberated from Egypt but still struggling against the brutal forces of nature in order to survive... at the end of the sixth day, as the sun sets... [the] Israelite can suddenly stand erect and turn away from [his tasks] and say, “For twenty-four hours you have no power over me! For twenty-four hours I am liberated from this bondage and determinism of an unfriendly world. For the next night and day I am under Yahweh’s presence and power, and his will is to restore my health and heal my bruised humanity.”⁴⁰

When the Sabbath commandment is understood as a call to liberation from slavery the true meaning of the commandment is revealed. God’s desire is not enforced inactivity but a true rest that restores and heals human beings. This true rest finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ who calls to himself “all who are weary and burdened” (Matt. 11:28), from the slavery of sin, and offering them rest for their souls (Matt. 11:29). The Sabbath commandment, then, becomes a day in which God calls his people who are struggling with sin and condemnation to declare that sin has no power

⁴⁰ Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God’s People* (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22.

over them and to celebrate their liberation from the bondage of sin and death and the fear of judgment.

Peace Hill's own reformed and evangelical traditions understand the true Sabbath as liberation from the slavery and condemnation of sin and rest from the work of justifying oneself before God. Within the reformed tradition, contemplation and contemplative prayer are means by which the believer can reflect on these two themes, receiving and experiencing God's grace and consolation. Contemplation is a way of entering into and anticipating the final rest that is given through Jesus Christ. However, despite the fact that four of the six leaders of Peace Hill were trained in a reformed seminary, the history of this contemplative practice of receiving gracious rest through meditation on mercy and love of God through Christ was not taught. Peace Hill is detached from its own historical tradition of contemplative rest and consequently has developed a spirituality that is defined by much activity. The concept of Sabbath has been largely understood by the leadership of Peace Hill as a commandment fulfilled in Christ so that the spiritual imagery of liberation has come to be detached from any practice of rest. This state of affairs can be seen in the lives of many of the members of Peace Hill who have expressed an inability to rest or slow down.

John Calvin, the father of reformed theology, developed his understanding of Sabbath rest along the lines of Gospel liberation. Calvin understood the Old Testament Sabbath commandment as a command to observe a "certain day on which his people might, under the tutelage of the law, practice constant meditation upon the spiritual

rest,”⁴¹ suggesting that what must be retained in the believer’s understanding of the commandment is “the mystery... of perpetual repose from our labors.”⁴² This understanding of the essence of Sabbath as a constant contemplation of rest led Calvin to an understanding of Sabbath as a practice “not confined within a single day but [extending] through the whole course of our life, until, completely dead to ourselves, we are filled with the life of God.”⁴³ Ashley Cocksworth, commenting on Calvin’s understanding of Sabbath, writes, “to observe Sabbath is what it means to inhabit the image of God.... Just as God contemplated God’s completed work of creation on the Sabbath, so should we.... Sabbath, Calvin instructs, is first and foremost about ‘spiritual rest’ in which one sets aside all things to ‘contemplate [God’s] works.’”⁴⁴

In the same way, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), reinterpreted the sabbath as a day to contemplate and reflect upon the rest of God. Edwards understood the human ability to reflect and contemplate as part of the image of God and wrote that “Man was made for spiritual exercises and enjoyments, and therefore is made capable by reflection to behold and contemplate spiritual things.”⁴⁵ In keeping with this understanding, Edwards considered the Sabbath day as a day,

⁴¹ John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 1* (Louisville, KY; John Knox Press, 1960), 397.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 84-85.

⁴⁵ Anthony Uyl, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume I-II Revised, By Jonathan Edwards* (Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada, 2019), 62.

to meditate upon and celebrate the work of redemption... with special joy to remember the resurrection of Christ; because that was the finishing of that work. And this is the day whereon Christ rested and was refreshed, after he had endured those extreme labors which he endured for our perishing souls. This was the day of the gladness of Christ's heart; it was the day of his deliverance from the chains of death, and also of our deliverance; for we are delivered in him who is our head....

We should therefore meditate on this with joy; we should have a sympathy with Christ in his joy. As he was refreshed on this day, so we should be refreshed, as those whose hearts are united with his.⁴⁶

In both Calvin and Edwards it is clear that contemplation is focused on the work of God through Jesus Christ. However, Kyle Strobel more fully develops the reformed, evangelical understanding of contemplation in his chapter on “Contemplation by Son and Spirit: Reforming the Ascent of the Soul to God.”⁴⁷ Strobel describes contemplation as “partaking in the access we are given to the Father in Christ by the Spirit (Eph.2:18-19),” as well as “an act of faith by which we attend deeply to the divine revelation given in Christ by the Spirit.”⁴⁸ Yet the human act of “attending deeply” depends upon what Strobel describes as “a necessary reforming of [natural] contemplation... to this more perfect calling,”⁴⁹ which can only happen in those whom

⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath,” *The Works of Jonathan Edward, A.M.: With an Essay on His Genius and Writings, by Henry Rogers: and a Memoir by Sereno E Dwight, in Two Volumes, ed., Edward Hickman* (Paternoster-Row, London; John Childs and Son, Bungay, 1839), 103.

⁴⁷ Kyle C. Strobel, “Contemplation By Son And Spirit: Reforming the Ascent of the Soul to God, in *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*, p. 166-184, ed., John H. Coe, Kyle C. Strobel (Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 2019).

⁴⁸ Strobel., 167-168.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Christ has redeemed and given his Spirit. Thus, “contemplation is both receptive and responsive to divine revelation, and not primarily a generative act.”⁵⁰

This reformed and evangelical understanding of contemplation sets Christian contemplation apart, distinguishing it from all other types of contemplation, both secular and religious. In the reformed view, “contemplation is made possible in the economic movement of Son and Spirit to unite humanity to the life of God, first in the incarnation and then individually through union and communion with the Son in the Spirit.⁵¹ Thus contemplation finds its origin in the contemplation of God who looks on the individual in Christ, so that “the ultimate grounding of contemplation is being contemplated in Christ, being seen and known in the love of the Father on the Son (Jn. 17:26).”⁵² Consequently, contemplation is an entrance into the loving gaze of the Father through Christ, in order to love the one who first loved us (1 Jn.4:19), and whose “gaze is creative, generative, [and] originative.”⁵³

From this perspective, then, the Sabbath is not only, as Calvin suggests, to be observed as a practice of gospel rest, but it is, indeed, the establishment of God’s gaze of rest upon all of creation. Thus, the first creation account in Genesis begins with the contemplative gaze of God to overcome chaos, continues with the contemplative gaze of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 168.

⁵¹ Ibid., 169.

⁵² Ibid., 175.

⁵³ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison, (San Francisco, CA; Ignatius Press, 1986), 40.

God in discerning, imagining and appreciating what had been created, and is completed with the final contemplative gaze in which all creation is blessed and sanctified unto God. Each of these three contemplations of God also point towards the consummation of creation in which the chaos of evil and death are overcome, the creation is restored to its glory and joy, and enters into true liberation and rest.

Conclusion

During the student years, the members of the church at Peace Hill found their spiritual identity primarily in active service, Sunday worship, social gatherings, and participation of spiritual gatherings such as Bible studies and prayer group. The busyness and vitality of the church gatherings during those years gave the members of the church a sense of purpose and excitement which was a source of life to them. However in the absence of the student ministry, members of Peace Hill have begun to express a desire for a quieter and more reflective spiritual experience.

In October of 2018, the pastors decided to hold a discernment meeting with the congregation. The purpose of the meeting was to spend time prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Spirit, and then to ask the congregation to share their perceptions of the gifts and ministry of Peace Hill. While a few voices called for more programs and advocated advertising to bring more people into the church, most of the congregation expressed appreciation that Peace Hill had become a quiet, healing community. Afterwards, one man sent an email expressing his gratefulness for the meeting saying,

“Absent from last night’s ideas were ‘we need to build a lot of stuff in our community’ or young families asking for youth/children’s activities to keep their kids busy. In retrospect, this is the only way I have ever known how to express my faith to others: busyness and activity with the religious title of ‘ministries’.”

The external changes that have taken place at Peace Hill in the last years signal a need within the community for a new source of purpose and spiritual vitality. Many in the church have expressed a desire for a new and deeper understanding of how to practice their faith. Contemplative spirituality provides a new vision for how to live more graciously in the healing image of God.

PART THREE

MINISTRY PLAN AND ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS, GOALS, AND PLANS

Theological Conclusions and Implications for Ministry

The first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveals God as, among other things, a contemplative creator. God's actions throughout creation involve contemplative moments and contemplative action. The creation story also introduces the concept of humanity as God's image. Thus, understanding of God's image must be found in connection with the creation story and its presentation of God in action and character. Contemplation, in particular, appears to be both the impetus and the response of God's action throughout creation.

Human beings are created in the image of God, and are, therefore, able to reflect those qualities which are described in Scripture. Imaging God is not only possible for human beings, but is a necessary aspect of human wholeness. Being in the image of God and imaging God is a central aspect of what it means to be human; Jesus is the prime example. Imaging God's contemplative capacity, then, is an important aspect of human wholeness and thriving.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 appears to present three contemplative actions in God before, during and after the creation. First, God contemplates the chaotic darkness and, out of that contemplation, creates light and a new order. Secondly, God contemplates and appreciates the goodness of creation, praising the goodness of what has been made. Thirdly, God contemplates the finished work of creation, hallowing a day of completion and resting. These three contemplative movements are continuing expressions not only of what God does in creation, but of what God desires in this world: (1) for human beings to overcome sin and chaos and live orderly lives in the light of God's way and presence, (2) for human beings to appreciate God and creation, responding in thankfulness and praise, and (3) for human beings to find true restoration and peace in God's presence.

Human beings, as contemplative creatures, have a tendency to contemplate life in various ways. However, contemplative capacities, left to themselves in a fallen world, tend towards (1) confusion and chaos, (2) the worship of what is not God and, (3) either a continual sense of guilt or constant self-justification. Education and society train individuals in the value of "usefulness, the profit [one] can extract from an experience or a possession,"¹ which militates against natural contemplative impulses and ways of being. The result of fallen contemplation has been expressed by Romano Guardini (1885-1968):

As a rule, man's attention is broken into a thousand fragments by the variety of things and persons about him. His mind is restless; his feelings seek objects that are constantly changing....

¹ Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real", 90.

What is genuinely disastrous is the disorder and artificiality of present-day existence. We are constantly stormed by violent and chaotic impressions. At once powerful and superficial, they are soon exhausted, only to be replaced by others. They are immoderate and disconnected, one contradicting, disturbing, and obstructing another.

This state of affairs exists not only around us but within us. To a large extent man lives without depth without a center, in superficiality and chance. No longer finding the essential within himself, he grabs at all sorts of stimulants and sensations; he enjoys them briefly, tires of them, recalls his own emptiness, and demands new distractions. He touches everything brought within easy reach of his mind by constantly increasing means of transportation, information, education, and amusement; but he doesn't really absorb anything. He is happiest when in the thick of things, in the rush and noise and stimulus of instant results and successes. The moment quietness surrounds him, he is lost.²

Through disconnection with historical Christian, contemplative practices most members at Peace Hill know little or nothing of the practice of contemplative prayer, or how to pay attention to the interior life. The lives of many members in the church tend to be driven by the kind of distracted, chaotic, spiritual state that Guardini describes. Despite the practice of an active and intellectually thoughtful spirituality, most members at Peace Hill find it difficult to endure quiet and rest.

Through contemplation the believer enters into a “Christian realism— [so that the believer senses] God is with [them] in the Spirit and that [they] are truly with God in Christ?”³ Apart from a Christian practice of contemplation human ability to engage with God personally is limited. A ministry which reintroduces contemplative spirituality can begin to help members of Peace Hill learn, more fully, what it means to live in the image

² Romano Guardini, *Meditations Before Mass* (Manchester, New Hampshire; Sophia Press, 1993), 18, 19.

³ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 8.

of God and to have the mind of Christ. Resources which exist within both Protestant and Catholic traditions can also serve to reconnect members of Peace Hill with the larger Church and the rich traditions of spirituality from which it is currently separated. Through practices of contemplative spirituality members of Peace Hill can deepen their appreciation of creation, learn to listen to God's communication more deeply, experience God's presence more fully, and find a more profound rest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The New Ministry Initiative/Preferred Future

The new ministry initiative is an attempt to introduce new spiritual practices leading to a new contemplative understanding of the spiritual life for members of Peace Hill. The hypothesis of this project is that, through historically based contemplative practices, individuals whose faith has been largely a matter of subscription to right doctrine, intellectual-rational, non-mystical understandings, and practical service, can develop a new wholeness and experience a deeper sense of God's presence. Contemplative spirituality provides a paradigm which can serve as a lens through which the believer is able to open himself or herself to the always present Spirit of God. This lens allows the subject to notice and articulate experiences of God's presence in the world in the same way that a musician might notice that the character of a sad and soulful song is due to its minor key.

The future vision of Peace Hill, then, can be described in four connected movements. First, Peace Hill would reconnect to the larger, historical church and its

spiritual resources, becoming more truly an inter-denominational church. Secondly, the church community would become a more peaceful community by quieting inner noise through the practice of contemplative stillness and prayer. Thirdly, members of Peace Hill would be cultivating a growing thankfulness and praise through contemplative appreciation, which would not only be expressed in corporate worship, but would become a part of regular interaction and conversation. Fourthly, members at Peace Hill would grow in a deepening confidence in the mercy and love of God through the practice of contemplative rest.

Reconnecting to the Historical Church

First, the contemplative resources of ancient monasticism, Ignatian spirituality and reformed spirituality would serve as a doorway, not only into the practices of contemplative prayer, but also into the historical spiritualities of the larger Church. Members at Peace Hill tend to have an ahistorical understanding of Christian faith, due to the fundamentalist influences of conservative spirituality which have emphasized “individualism and... [an] effort to return to the “Bible alone.”⁴ Despite the use of ancient liturgies, creeds, and chants during the corporate worship, most members of Peace Hill remain almost wholly ignorant of any spiritual tradition, including their own. However, through connection with the historical spiritual traditions of the Church, not only can Peace Hill deepen its understanding of the Church and Christian faith, but it can also

⁴ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford, New York; Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

become a truly interdenominational and healing movement, owning the church's past failures and sharing in its blessings.

Becoming a Community of Prophetic Peacefulness

Secondly, Peace Hill can become a community of prophetic peace. In a world that is driven by achievement and success and ceaseless activity, members of Peace Hill have the potential to form a truly peaceful community through the practice of stillness. Quiet orderly lives are exceptional, not only in the world but within the church. Yet the world, which longs for peace but does not know how to find it, is drawn to places and communities of peace. Peace Hill can be a sign to the world, a place where a community has truly learned how to slow down and to be still in the presence of God.

Peace Hill also needs to become a prophetically peaceful community in its unity. Currently there are political and social issues of conflict within the church. Peace Hill seeks to focus on God's kingdom as the true allegiance for Christian faith where members of different political and social opinions can worship together in unity. However, there are members at the church who continue to be driven by anger and fear over political and social issues. These contentious issues bubble under the surface and have, at times, created less than charitable attitudes, words and actions as the chaos of individuals overflows.

In the past these issues have been addressed through individual conversations and attempts to reason. However, rational conversation has not been able to address the deep

feelings of fear or anger, or the contentious spirit that resides in the heart. The practice of interior peace through contemplative prayer can be a healing resource, enabling members of the community to learn to quiet the passions and to develop a deeper allegiance to the kingdom of heaven as they come to trust God more fully.

Cultivating the Attitudes of Thankfulness and Praise

Thirdly, members of Peace Hill can learn to cultivate a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation for God's presence and God's works, both in creation and in world. The intimate experience of God's presence is the lifeblood of joyful and grateful worship. However, while the corporate worship at Peace Hill is often joyful and uplifting, few members at Peace Hill, even among the leadership, profess to have the kind of experiential awareness and communion with God described in John 17:21, 23, or 1 John 1:4. At times this lack of experience has been put down to differences in personality yet, as noted previously, the lack of experience is more likely to be the result of a trained suspicion of affective experiences, and a lack of training in ways of being alert to the presence of God. Thus, as individuals at Peace Hill learn how to be alert and attentive to the presence of God through contemplative prayer and practices, worship can become an ongoing experience for members throughout the week, transforming the way they live and see the world around them.

Becoming an Evangelistic Presence in the County

Fourthly, Peace Hill can become an evangelistic presence in the county. The church has tried to do evangelism in the county before, with very few members being willing to take part. Normally, those who have come to faith through the church have responded to the preaching and the worship rather than any person's joyful testimony of God's grace. The leadership and members at Peace Hill put great value on the gospel of Jesus Christ and express a need to hear about grace regularly, yet only a few people regularly report finding rest in Christ. There is often an expression of burden and guilt among the members of the church despite its emphasis on the gospel of grace.

Basil the Great suggested that "failing to contemplate leads to a lackluster spiritual life"⁵ and wrote that "the carnal man, who has never trained his mind to contemplation, but rather keeps it buried deep in the lust of the flesh, as in mud, is powerless to look up to the spiritual light in truth."⁶ Contemplative spirituality offers a way for the believer to receive grace from Christ himself through "an existential and affective movement of the heart... an ascent of love within the person of the Son, by the Spirit, to the Father... a receptive act of receiving the love poured into one's heart by the Spirit."⁷ The practice of contemplative rest as a kind of regular Sabbath of the soul can

⁵ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 201.

⁶ Saint Basil, *The Sacred Writings of Saint Basil* (Deutschland, Laschberg; Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck), 29.

⁷ Coe and Strobel, *Embracing Contemplation*, 178.

create a joy in the gospel that is infectious. Peace Hill can become a church full of those who do experience this joyful rest.

Components of the New Ministry Challenge

The new ministry consists of three components: (1) An instructional component that introduces and reflects upon contemplative spirituality, (2) A practical component in which subjects learn and become more adept through practical experience, and (3) A reflective component in which subjects reflect upon and learn to articulate their own experience.

First, because historical traditions of contemplative spirituality are unknown, a major aspect of this ministry is introductory in nature. Many members at Peace Hill have been raised to view Catholicism as a heretical system of works-righteousness, and therefore to think of any spirituality from before the Protestant Reformation as suspect. Introduction of new material, therefore, will require careful explanation. Church members will need to learn to trust that spiritualities which are coming out of the Catholic tradition are not antithetical to the Gospel. Part of the goal of introducing spiritualities from other traditions is to create a new sense of openness and appreciation towards those traditions and to break down an overly critical and rigid spirit regarding theology. In order to introduce new material, the group sessions will include formal instruction. This instruction will cover the three aspects of contemplation and give the group members opportunities to ask questions.

The first four weeks each include a presentation which covers some aspect of desert monasticism focused on quieting down. The group begins to learn about solitude, silence and stillness as ways of both entering the presence of God and listening to the thoughts and movements of the heart. Instruction discusses issues such as the passions and virtues, interior noise and distraction, how to open oneself to God, and meditation on the love of God. The second four weeks each include presentations on Ignatian spirituality focus on appreciation through contemplation. The group learns about contemplation of nature, Ignatian contemplation of Scriptures and the life of Christ, and contemplation on their own spiritual life and experience the self-reflective exercises (e.g. Margaret Silf's River Exercise⁸). The final two weeks include two presentations focused on gospel rest. The group receives instruction and practices contemplation of their belovedness in God through exercises like Trevor Hudson's "Belovedness Charter."⁹

The second component of the new ministry is the practical component. In this component subjects put into practice what they are learning. After each weekly presentation subjects are given an opportunity to practice contemplation in a way that is connected to what they have just learned in the presentation. Peace Hill has no staff and is located on farmland, so that subjects have plenty of room and space for privacy. At the end of the practice a bell is rung and subjects are able to share their experiences and ask questions. The initial practice is then presented as homework for subjects, who are

⁸ Margaret Silf, *Landmarks, An Ignatian Journey* (London, UK; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1998), 47-50.

⁹ Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Your Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved* (Downer's Grove, IL; IVP Books, 2010), 29.

expected to spend anywhere from ten to thirty minutes at home each day practicing what they are learning about contemplative prayer.

The practical component, however, is more than a practice session. God hovers, God appreciates, God enjoys rest. Subjects, in their practice of contemplative prayer are imaging God in various ways. These practices should have a renewing effect on those who practice them.

The third component of the ministry is reflective. Subjects are given three stages of reflection. First, subjects are expected to journal about their experiences of contemplative prayer as part of the homework. The journaling stage encourages subjects to articulate, in a personal way, what happens during their time of prayer. Secondly, subjects are expected to come to the meeting prepared to share, giving them an opportunity to articulate more publicly what has happened in prayer. Thirdly, each member of the group meets once a month for spiritual direction so that they can reflect on what is happening in their prayer lives. The reflective component enables subjects to learn from their experience. Trevor Hudson has said that “we do not learn by experience, but by reflecting upon experience.”¹⁰ Reflective articulation allows thoughts and experiences, which might otherwise remain chaotic or unformed, to be processed and made orderly.

¹⁰ Trevor Hudson, Spiritual Direction Cohort, Sp722, Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, CA, 2015.

Target Population

Peace Hill is a small rural church which has just under forty members, including children. Almost 71% of church members, or twenty-nine out of forty-one members, are over forty years of age. This group breaks down into two subsets: (1) those aged 40-69 and (2) those aged 70-80 plus. These two groups were the target population of the study because the members of each group had entered into the more reflective second half of life.

Ideally I wanted both of these subsets to be included in the study, yet for different reasons. Those in the 70-80 plus age subset include individuals who have been active in the leadership of the church over the last twenty years, but who, due to health and age, are slowing down. This group, in particular, is looking for a way to live the spiritual life that does not depend upon activity and busyness. This group also has tended to be more conservative regarding the spiritual life. A tension exists between a desire for a greater intimacy and confidence in relationship with God, and the willingness to move beyond a lifetime of spiritual life experience into something new.

The 40-69 age subset, which comprises almost half of the church (46%), while perhaps more open to stepping outside of comfort zones and previous ways of spiritual practice, have extremely busy, professional lives and either young or teenage children. However, this group is also the present leadership of the church and will continue to set the direction and course of the church for the foreseeable future. The ability or inability to

set aside chaotic ways of thinking and reacting, to be able to be alert to and appreciate the presence and movement of God, and to be people who can live out of Gospel rest, will have a profound affect on the church and the kind of ministry the church can become. At the same time, this demographic group has shown a great resistance to taking on new commitments.

The goal was to identify eight to ten individuals from among these two groups, weighted towards the 40-69 age subset, who would be willing to participate in the project. The pastors put together a proposed list of subjects who were identified as individuals who had displayed an interest in prayer and an openness to exploring the contemplative spiritual life.

Timeline

Potential participants were recruited over the months of November and December 2019. The pastors created a list of potential subjects by October, and began praying for God's guidance and calling for those who should be in the study. The project was announced on November 16, 2018, and members who were interested were asked to make a final decision by mid-December 2018.

Four participants committed to the small group. Ten small group meetings took place between February 25, 2019 and May13, 2019. The introductory meeting on February 25 and the final meeting on May 13 lasted approximately five hours each. The

other eight regular meetings which took place between February 25 and May 13, were held at Peace Hill Church on Monday afternoons between 2:00 and 4:00 pm.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Field Test

This project was an attempt to effect a major shift in ways of seeing and understanding the spiritual life. Consequently the first meeting was held in a different from the usual church setting. The intention in choosing a venue different from the church building was to help participants to view the project as something more than just another Bible study or prayer meeting. The first meeting was held as a half-day retreat at the home of one of the participants, only twenty minutes away from the church.

The initial retreat took place on February 25, 2019. After opening with prayer, the time began with an introductory description of the Desert Fathers and Mothers as a way of introducing the concept of interior peace. The session was also a way of introducing the group to pre-Reformation Christian spirituality. Modern evangelicals are often ignorant of ancient spirituality and tend to identify it and dismiss it as Catholicism, to which they are often antagonistic. The session allowed subjects to consider ancient monasticism in a safe environment with a trusted instructor, and to ask questions.

After lunch the group was asked to participate in an exercise of prayerful silence and stillness. Previously the group had been familiar with intercessory prayer and with liturgical prayer, as part of public worship. Some within the group had also taken part in the church prayer group, which used the Lord's prayer as a pattern in order to pray through each phrase of the prayer in turn. The unfamiliar contemplative practice of prayerful silence and stillness was described as a more receptive practice of God's presence, requiring faith and a cooperative spirit.

In preparation for this exercise, a resource handout was given out on "Prayer, Distraction and Silence."¹ Time was taken to go over the handout and to describe contemplative prayer as a way of listening and opening oneself to God. Subjects were introduced to the concept of inner noise and distraction and given some helpful thoughts on practicing silence. Subjects then retired to different areas of the house for a fifteen minute time of silence. A bell was used to signal the beginning and end of the time of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence the group gathered back together for sharing. At this point principles for group sharing were explained. Subjects were asked to be attentive to those sharing and to receive what others were saying without interruption — except perhaps to ask for clarification. After sharing the group would hold silence for a minute as the listeners reflected on what was said. After silence, observations and

¹ See Appendix A

encouragements could be respectfully offered, however correction or criticism would not be welcome in the group. All sharing would be held by the group in strict confidence.

As individuals shared their initial experiences of silence, most found it difficult to articulate much about the experience, which was not surprising given that this was the group's first exposure to silent, contemplative prayer. Subjects appeared to need time on their own to process the experience of contemplative prayer, which would have been more possible in a retreat setting. Instead, after the contemplative exercise and time of sharing, the group was encouraged to continue to practice contemplative prayer over the next week, using the handout resources for guidance. Subjects were reminded to sign up for individual spiritual direction, as part of the course, and were encouraged to call me if there were any questions. The retreat ended with prayer.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the project was shortened from a sixteen week series of meetings to a ten week series of meetings. Fewer available weeks for the project meant that the curriculum would have to be amended to cover less material than previously planned. Initially the curriculum was planned to include different aspects of desert spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, the enneagram, and elements of spiritual formation. The modified version of the project included four sessions on the contemplative practices of desert spirituality, four sessions on contemplative practices of Ignatian spirituality, and two sessions on contemplative practices in spiritual formation.

Ten weekly meetings, which included the beginning and ending retreats, took place from the end of February through mid-May 2019. Except for the two retreats, the

other meeting followed a regular format: (1) an opening time of silence, (2) a time of group sharing of prayer experience over the past week, (3) a teaching on contemplative spirituality, (4) a group contemplative exercise, (5) and a closing prayer. Members of the group met in the church building at Peace Hill Farm from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm on Monday afternoons.

The initial reticence of the group towards sharing was quickly overcome beginning with the very first meeting. The sharing sessions tended to last for about an hour for each session with subjects describing their prayer experiences and struggles and individuals in the group responding with encouragements and observations. At the end of the sharing time, I briefly summarized what each subject had shared and gave encouragement regarding the growing nature of prayer life in each subject. The sharing sessions were recorded with the consent of the group.

After a brief break, the group regathered for a time of instruction. The curriculum for the course² covered historical concepts of contemplative spirituality (ancient monastic, Ignatian, and Benedictine), as well as more modern spiritual formation teachings from Trevor Hudson and Dallas Willard. The teaching sessions were approximately 15 minutes long and subjects were encouraged to ask questions.

After the teaching session, subjects were led in a group contemplative exercise. The exercises were times of contemplative prayer and contemplation, most often designed as a response to the teaching. Subjects were invited to stay in the meeting room

² See Appendix B.

or use other parts of the building, or to go outside on the property for contemplative prayer or reflection. Contemplative exercises lasted from 10-30 minutes, after which the group would regather and discuss what had come out of their time of contemplation.

The final retreat was held at the house of a different subject than the one who had hosted the first retreat. The final retreat focused on introducing two elements of a “rule of life”:³ (1) A statement of belovedness³ and (2) A Vision, Intention, Means⁴ statement. The retreat began with a time of sharing focused on the prayer experiences of the previous week. The first teaching session was a presentation on the statement of belovedness. After the presentation, subjects were given opportunity to spend an hour in prayer and Scripture meditation (with Scriptures provided) to begin to contemplate and develop their own statement of belovedness. Time was taken before the lunch break for discussion of this exercise.

Following lunch, the group was presented with a second teaching on Dallas Willard’s concept of Vision, Intention and Means as a way of approaching spiritual formation. After the presentation, the group was asked to spend 10-15 minutes in prayer, asking God for insights and encouragements to give to the other members of the group. During the group encouragement each subject, in turn, was encouraged by every other member of the group. After ten weeks together sharing spiritual experiences and prayer lives, this was a powerful time of affirmation and encouragement for all of the subjects.

³ Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*, 30.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO; NavPress, 2002), 85.

After the final retreat all subjects were given exit surveys and were asked to prayerfully reflect on their experience with the project group and then to answer the survey questions and return them within two weeks.

Resources

The meeting place for all of the weekly meetings, with the exception of the retreats, was Peace Hill's church building. Because Peace Hill is a small church, no regular staff work in the building and there are no telephones other than those individuals bring with them. The main hall of the church, where the group met, is a timber-framed space where one table was set up. Peace Hill is a hundred acre farm with livestock and orchards. As the weather became warmer in Southeastern Virginia, during April, members of the group were able to go outside for contemplative exercises.

The two retreat spaces took place in different homes. The first was a beautiful home in a quiet neighborhood. The home, which belongs to a couple who have been associated with the church for more than twenty years, has been a place of regular hospitality and was centrally located for our first meeting. The second home, where the final retreat was held, is located on the Chickahominy River. Both homes were very quiet and well suited spaces for the small group.

Four different types of written resources were used to create the project sessions. First written descriptions of classic spiritual practices, quotations and understandings of

the spiritual life were used to introduce subjects to both ancient monastic and Ignatian spirituality. Among these were such resources as Benedicta Ward's books *The Desert Fathers* and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* were used to provide descriptions of monastic life and monastic sayings in order to present a view of contemplative monastic spirituality. The Ignatian Rules for Discernment were adapted from Timothy M. Gallagher's book *Spiritual Consolation*, was used to help subjects to reflect on and discern interior spiritual movements of the soul, and to recognize the communications of God.

The second type of written resources were descriptions and exercises from books describing both Ignatian spirituality and ancient spirituality. Jan Johnson's book, *When the Soul Listens*⁵, provided an excellent description of how to enter into contemplative prayer. Margaret Silf's book, *Landmarks, and Ignatian Journey*, provided a "river" exercise which helped subjects to reflect on the journey of their lives and the presence of God within that journey.

The third type of written resources were assignments and resources that were given to the spiritual direction cohort.⁶ The "Group Spiritual Direction Process" handout was used as a resource to develop the introductory teaching for the weekly group sharing. Cohort assignments such as the first year, "Spiritual Identity Assignment," in which students were asked to create a "Beloved Charter," an assignment taken from Trevor

⁵ Jan Johnson, *When the Soul Listens* (Colorado Springs, CO; NavPress, 1999).

⁶ Pattie Pierce, "Group Spiritual Direction," SP728: Spiritual Direction Cohort. Class lecture at Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, CA, September 25, 2017.

Hudson's book, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*, and the second year "Rule of Life" assignment in which students drew up a rule of life using Dallas Willard's Vision, Intention and Means paradigm, were developed as spiritual formation teachings for the final retreat.

The fourth type of written resources came from websites. One website, bible.org, provided a working definition of the intentional nature of "spiritual formation." Another website, www.ignatianspirituality.com, helped to provide a useful description of the reflective life of the contemplative in action.

Project Assessment of Goal Attainment

The project sought to understand and measure how the introduction of contemplative spirituality and practices would affect a subject's prayer life and spiritual experience. Assessment tools used in the study were intended to measure change from pre-project to post-project states of prayer and experience of God. The measurement tools included pre-project and post-project surveys, reported experience shared during group time, and an exit interview. Subjects were informed that their comments during sharing time would be recorded and that their survey answers and exit interviews would be used for the project study. All participants agreed to this and signed consent forms.

Pre-Project Survey

The questions of the first survey⁷ focused primarily on the subjects' personal spiritual history, descriptions and perceptions of spiritual growth, and spiritual practices and disciplines. The initial survey revealed that, for the most part, regardless of how long a subject had identified as Christian, spiritual activity tended to center around less reflective practices such as Bible study, church attendance and intercessory prayer. However, when asked to reflect on their desire for spiritual growth, half of the subjects expressed an outward, entirely service-oriented understanding of Christian spirituality, while the other half expressed an unmet desire for connection and intimacy with God or a fearful sense of isolation and difficulty in trusting God and responding to God's love. In essence, the pre-project survey revealed that subjects either did not tend to pay attention to the interior life or were frustrated in their attempts to attend to the interior life.

Post-Project Survey and Exit Interviews

The post project survey and exit interviews focused on three areas. First the survey and exit interviews sought to determine whether the subject's prayer habits and subjective experiences of God were impacted by the course. The project was designed to encourage a deeper experience of intimacy with God through contemplative practices and prayer. Subjects were asked in the survey whether the project course had reshaped not only their understanding of prayer but also their experience in prayer. The exit interview

⁷ Appendix C

also allowed for a more in-depth conversation to discuss the nature of the prayer experiences and to determine the extent of the changes or lack of change.

Secondly, the project was designed to introduce a broader view of the spiritual life and to reconnect the subjects to historical spiritual practices which many members of the church at Peace Hill were taught to dismiss. The survey and exit interviews sought to determine how the introduction of these broader, Catholic spiritualities had been received. Subjects were asked whether the course had changed their attitude towards Catholicism, and also given an opportunity to express criticism towards material with which they disagreed or found unhelpful. The exit interview was used to revisit these questions in more depth.

Thirdly, the project was designed to encourage higher levels of self-reflection and perception so that subjects would have a greater discernment of their needs as spiritual people. Consequently the survey and exit interview sought to determine what, if any, change in self-perception had occurred over the course of the project. These questions addressed issues such as perceived need for further growth and required reflection on what subjects had learned about themselves as spiritual persons. The exit interview enabled further exploration of this question.

Assessment Plan

The project analysis asks five questions related to the introduction of contemplative prayer and practice:

- (1) Did the introduction of contemplative prayer and spirituality lead to a greater awareness, experience and intimacy in the subject's prayer life?
- (2) Did the introduction of the contemplative resources of ancient monasticism, Ignatian spirituality serve as a doorway not only to practices of contemplative prayer but also serve to spur a broader interest into the historical spiritualities of the larger Church?
- (3) Did the introduction of contemplative prayer and spirituality raise the subject's awareness of interior noise and chaos and a greater desire for stillness?
- (4) Did the introduction of contemplative prayer help to cultivate a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation for God's presence in all things?
- (5) Did the introduction of contemplative prayer and spirituality enhance the subject's ability to receive grace?

The questions of awareness, experience, and appreciation, on which this study focuses, can only be measured by a subject's reported, subjective perception of change, and by an evaluator's observation of change in the subject's demeanor, tone and reported comprehension. These questions were assessed by the author of the study based on

1. The reported answers from the subjects in the exit survey and interview, and
2. The noted changes in demeanor tone and description of spiritual experience of subjects recorded and noted during group sharing sessions.

Results of the Field Test Project

Did the Introduction of Contemplative Prayer Help Subjects Gain a Greater Awareness, Experience and Intimacy with God?

Changes in awareness, experience and intimacy were measured by differences in the language subjects used to talk about their spiritual life and relationship to God between the first and second surveys, and by reported changes of experience with God in the second survey, in the exit interview, and during the sharing times. For three out of four subjects language and tone about their relationship with God changed from an impersonal tone to a much more personal tone. One subject, who in the first survey, described relationship with God as static and “coasting,” and felt unable to connect with God, noted in the second survey a greater comfort towards God and described relationship with God as “friendship.” Another subject who also reported a lack of close connection with God and praying to make requests to a distant God “in heaven above,” in the first survey, reported later that “the course taught me to connect to God,” and reported that “I feel closer to God and I feel God cares for me.” A third subject, who struggled with a sense of distrust towards God and the unpredictability of life, reported “a heightened awareness of God’s presence throughout the day” and a greater enjoyment of prayer.

Did Subjects’ Perception of the Church Become More Ecumenical?

Two of the four subjects reported a change in attitude and perception towards the Church in general. One subject, during sharing time, reported a bias against organized religion in general. However, at the end of the course in the second survey, that subject described a change of attitude, writing “the course helped me recognize that there were some very good schools of thought in the Catholic Church.” Another subject wrote “I have realized that I threw out a lot just because it was labeled Catholic,” a statement which the author believes reflects the attitudes of many evangelical Protestants.

Did Contemplation Make Subjects More Aware of Interior Noise and Chaos, and Create a Desire for Interior Stillness?

Two of the four subjects repeatedly reported an increasing awareness of interior noise and chaos during the sharing times. One subject repeatedly discussed her struggle with contemplative silence and stillness. This question also was the focus of spiritual direction with the subject. Even though the subject struggled with stillness and prayer throughout the study, she did grow in awareness of the extent of inner chaos and began to recognize some of its effects on her life.

A second subject reported positive change in the areas of chaos and anxiety. The subject’s first survey reflected a significant amount of fear and anxiety regarding her personal safety, perfectionistic tendencies, distrust in relationships with others along with subsequent loneliness, and distrust of God. In the exit interview the subject reported that

silence and reflection, as well as Ignatian rules for discernment had been very beneficial in addressing these areas of distrust and reflected a much calmer and joyful attitude towards God and a greater appreciation towards people in the group.

Did Contemplation Cultivate Thankfulness and Appreciation of God's Presence and in All Things?

Every subject in the group, in their responses given on the second survey, mentioned a new appreciation of either God's creation, the gifts and blessings of life, or other people as a result of contemplative prayer. One subject reported that "I have feelings of loneliness and find that conversational prayer and contemplating God's many blessings helps put my loneliness into perspective." Another subject wrote in the second survey, "I didn't know how little I knew the hearts of other people." A third subject, as the course progressed, began to describe an increasing appreciation of creation during their time of contemplative prayer on the back porch of their home.

Did Contemplative Prayer Enhance Subject's Ability to Receive Grace?

Only one of the subjects reported experiences of gospel rest through specific contemplative practices. The subject reported "experiencing a new rhythm of breathing out my sin and breathing in my sufficiency in Christ's death/resurrection...seeing, in a fresh way, his enough-ness." Other subjects made more contradictory statements in their descriptions of grace. One subject reported a sense of God's love and nearness, but when

asked what they had learned from the course, listed a number of things that they needed to do to grow in the spiritual life, rather than a sense of peace with God. A third subject did not report a sense of growing grace. Rather, their difficulty in practicing contemplation seems to have added to a sense of spiritual failure.

Success and Degree of Application to the Ministry

The results of the surveys and the exit interviews suggest that the introduction of contemplative prayer and practice to a small group over a ten week period was effective in producing some positive changes in the interior lives of subjects. Changes included deeper ways of engagement with God and, for the most part, more intimate relationships with God, some success in learning to overcome chaotic and troubling thought, some success in overcoming depressive and negative patterns of thought, and some success in receiving a sense of God's grace and favor. While results are mixed and probably require a longer study with a larger subject sample in order to come to a more firm conclusion, the goal of establishing a contemplative small group was successful. After the study all members of the group expressed a desire to continue to meet, using the same format. The group met bi-weekly up until March 2020, when the Covid 19 crisis and social distancing necessitated a halt.

CHAPTER 6

OUTCOMES AND INSIGHTS

Summary and Conclusion

There is no question that contemplative practices and paying attention or learning to listen to God in a number of ways enabled most subjects to experience God in new ways. Perhaps the most effective practice, which impacted every member of the group, was Lectio Divina. Subjects who had spent all of their spiritual lives studying the Bible found this listening and conversational approach to be very helpful in being able to hear from God in personal ways.

The aspect of the project meetings that became most important to every member of the small group was the group sharing. Sharing at the initial retreat was hesitant and brief. Members of the group struggled to talk about their spiritual experience and did not have much to say. However, as the group practiced and reflected on contemplative prayer the group sharing became longer and more engaging. By the end of the study group sharing was running just over an hour.

Language and the ability to articulate is important. The ways in which individuals talk about experience of God most often draws a circle around expectation of the

experience of God. One of the major outcomes of this project was that it expanded the spiritual vocabulary of the subjects, and thus the conceptual framework of the group so that they could conceive of, and have an expectation of, being in the presence of God in new contemplative ways.

Previously most of the group wrote and spoke about God in various ways using language that emphasized the impersonal over the personal. Subjects spoke about God in a way that emphasized human action directed towards the transcendent. God was conceptualized more as object than as personal, emphasizing the transcendent nature over any sense of intimacy. Subjects spoke about their relationship with God in abstract, legal terms, which tended not only to depersonalize God, but which tended to emphasize the legal arrangement. Objective language can appear to be a more respectable way of talking about theology and faith, yet it limits the conceptual framework in which individuals can interact with God.

While phrases like “personal relationship” do exist in evangelical circles, such language does not fit well with the kind of objective language that is often used to describe relationship with God. This creates confusion for some and causes a negative reaction in others who feel that such a phrase is modern and tied in with a certain kind of “touchy-feely” spirituality which is considered to be shallow and childish. The introduction of new language from desert and Ignatian-Jesuit spirituality, in particular, reveals an experiential linguistic framework that allows the believer in Christ to move beyond objective relationship. As the group’s vocabulary expanded along with their

practices, to include words and concepts like silence, stillness and inner noise, or “finding God in all things,” members of the group became more sensitive and aware of experiences with God.

Another important outcome was the way in which the use of imagination opened up the possibility of spiritual experience for subjects. Members of Peace Hill tend to know and experience God in non-imaginative ways. Imagination and the imaginative life appear to be a less respectable way of knowing God than cognitive-rational approaches to Scripture and the spiritual life. Yet there is evidence that the ability to process spiritual life through the “impulsive and powerful, if sometimes illogical . . . emotional mind,”⁸ leads to a healthier spiritual and psychological state. Human beings are more than rational-scientific creatures and “psychologist Daniel Goleman argues that “research findings in the field of neurology... show that how well we do in life is determined by both rational and emotional intelligence.”⁹

As subjects began to approach Scripture through the imaginative practices of Ignatian meditation, placing themselves within the stories and conversations of the text, new appreciations of the spiritual life emerged. Subjects came to understand themselves as part of the historic story of faith, their lives as the continuation of the stories of Scripture. They began to connect the messages of the prophets and psalmists to their own lives and experience. Such practices direct the spiritual life towards a more “holistic

⁸ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*, (Mahwah, NJ; Paulist Press, 2006), 47.

⁹ Ibid.

approach... [which] takes seriously the knowledge-bearing capacity not only of the mind but also of the body, emotions, senses, imagination, feelings, intuition, and dreams.”¹⁰ Ignatius encourages the individual to listen to God through a “unification of intellect, feeling, and action [which results in] a felt knowledge that pervades the whole of one’s being.”¹¹

Next Steps

After the cessation of the project the group asked to continue to meet together and to learn more about the contemplative life. One of the longer term goals of the formation of the small group was to spur interest in the larger congregation and draw others into the group. This did begin to happen over the following weeks, as one man approached me and began to ask to join the group. Two others had expressed an interest in joining the group when the corona virus pandemic shut down public gatherings. As a result of the shut down the group had to discontinue physical meetings.

Internet access and streaming is not widely available in Charles City. Most of the members at Peace Hill have email; however only a few have the capacity to participate in online streaming meetings, such as Zoom, or a strong enough signal on their phones to use FaceTime or Duo. Even as some states and localities have begun to relax restrictions

¹⁰ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, “Refining the Acoustics of the Heart,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More* (Chicago, IL; Loyola Press, 2008), 193.

¹¹ Ibid.

regarding public gatherings, the age and health of many of the members of Peace Hill, and most of the members of the small group, have made group gatherings inadvisable.

Consequently Peace Hill has set up a Facebook page where interactions can take place and teachings can be posted. The next immediate step, in the pandemic context, is to find a way not only to continue to offer contemplative teachings and practices to the community, but to figure out a way to provide a platform for the group reflection and sharing that was so valuable to subjects during the project.

Recommendations and Implications of the Project for the Larger Christian Community

There are many churches like Peace Hill that function in a myopic, historical bubble in which either a fundamentalist understanding of “the Bible alone” or one historical spiritual movement, like the Reformation, serves as the foundational understanding of spiritual life and practice. Such fellowships run the risk of either being defined in reaction to or sympathy with culture or of operating out of a too narrow historical framework. The current ecumenical understanding of history is connecting present day believers and churches to a spiritual past and inheritance which informs and enriches faith. This study provides a coherent scriptural framework that supports an ecumenical understanding of Christian history by connecting movements in the larger history of Christian spirituality with the contemplative image of God.

A study which reveals that contemplation as a central aspect of the image of God, running through the entire narrative of the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3, has significant implications for the way human beings are to live as spiritual people. The Genesis creation stories are foundational to a Christian understanding of God as well as a Christian understanding of what it means to be human. Genesis reveals that contemplative spirituality is not a peripheral or inessential aspect of the spiritual life, but a central aspect of prayer and relationship with God.

The church is beginning to reclaim this practice which can have a prophetic impact on both the church and the world. If Christians become people who, through contemplative practice and prayer, find true peace in the face of chaos, true appreciation and delight in the face of a negative, depressive society, and true rest in the face of a frenetic, workaholic world, then the world will be drawn to a beauty and a peace for which it longs, and the Church will fulfill the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov: “Acquire inward peace, and thousands around you will find their salvation.¹²”

¹² Gary Moon, *Apprenticeship With Jesus: Learning to Live Like the Master* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Books, 2009), 231.

Appendix A Prayer, Distraction and Silence

Opening Ourselves to Contemplative Prayer

An important part of prayer is learning to listen to God. Often we do not listen to God because we are too busy filling in God's side of the conversation, telling God what we think God should do, or being so distracted by every thought and fear and idea that runs through our minds that we leave no room for God to speak. We are like a cup overflowing, so full of our own thoughts and words and worries and notions that nothing else can be poured in. Listening is about learning to quiet down enough to hear the God who is present and communicating to us - personally and individually. Before we begin to pray we need to open ourselves to two attitudes...

1. **Faith:** I need to open myself to the reality that God is present, here and now through the Holy Spirit, and interested in my life and in healing my heart, mind and soul. God is personally interested in reshaping me so that I can become more truly alive. This is not about an experience or feeling something, but about our willingness to accept and act as though Christ were present and lovingly listening to me. Hebrews 11 tells us that faith is the conviction that what we cannot see is nevertheless real, and that our faith pleases God.
2. **A Cooperative Spirit:** I need to be open to cooperate with God! God wants to work with me to help me become the person God made me to be – this is incredibly important to God. That means I need to be willing to approach God with real honesty about how I feel, what I really believe (not what I think I should believe), and to speak honestly to God – who is not going to be surprised or threatened by anything I say. God loves me and is not offended, even when I am resistant. God is patient with me and willing to let me go through what I need to go through to become the person I am made to be.

Distractions and Inner Noise

Most people don't realize how much noise and distraction is going on all around them and within them...

Busyness: Even if you aren't working a full-time job, life tends to be busy, crowded - more than we realize. Much of our busyness can be self-generated, and many people keep busy, in part, because they dread quiet, boredom and being left alone with themselves.

The Conviction that Only Productivity and Efficiency are Meaningful: We live in a world where efficiency and productivity drive the way most people live. Most Americans have bought the message that unless your activity is producing something it is not only a waste

of time - it is immoral. Prayer is neither a productive nor efficient activity, and seems of little or no value to most people.

Noise and Crowd: There is a lot of noise in our lives, tv, radio, phones ringing, construction and machinery, conversation and activity going on around us. Finding a quiet space to pray and pay attention can be difficult.

Disruptions: Normal days are full of demands for our attention, at home, at work. These demands tend to drive out other less demanding concerns like prayer.

Digital Distractions: email, your phone, the internet – some people spend so much time trying to process and react to all the news from the internet, to all their emails, that most of their day is spent distracted by these.

Lack of Intention: This may be the most common reason people who want to know God don't take time to pray. Unless we are willing to set aside time to pray that is unhurried and quiet, we will find that the days just get away from us and prayer never really happens.

Internal Noise: Internal voices (not audible) information, opinions that filter everything we hear, distracts us from being still enough to hear the voice of God.

Some Helpful Thoughts for Practicing Silence

Silence is not something we are used to, here are some ways to think about silence that may be helpful...

- * Silence is not about emptying the mind, but rather about quieting the inner turmoil and voices and distractions of the mind so that the heart can be focused on the presence of God.
- * Silence means being still in quiet reverence before the God who made us, has made God-self known to us, and loves us completely and unreservedly. As we are still and open to the presence of God, God may bring gracious and healing thoughts to our minds, or may give us a sense of deep peace or hope or conviction, or even an image through which God speaks to us. However, the point is to honor God through our stillness and reverence (see Ps.46:10).
- * Condemning thoughts are not from God. in Christ, there is no condemnation (Rom.8:1). Rather, thoughts that are from God, the still quiet voice of the Spirit, will be gentle, not demanding, and in agreement with the way of Christ and the Gospel and the Scriptures.
- * Do not focus on trying to *experience something*. You may experience God's presence in some way (and if you do you should receive that with thankfulness), but for many

people silence is an act of faith - believing that “*God is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him*” (Heb. 11:6) – this pleases God.

- * If you do have some experience of God in stillness and silence, do not try to repeat it. Understand that our experiences of God tend to be fleeting – our response is then to take up these experiences and respond to them with faith, love, joy and obedience.
- * Be patient with yourself. Silence and stillness take time to cultivate. Initially you are likely to find it hard to sit for even 5-10 minutes in silence. It will seem pointless, and you will suddenly remember many urgent things you have to do or write down or remember. But as time goes on you will find that silence begins to be important to you - that you need this time with God.

Appendix B
Course Curriculum

Session #1: Opening Retreat: February 25, 2019

- * Teaching: Introduction to Desert Monasticism
- * Teaching: Prayer, Distraction and Silence
- * Group Exercise: in Silent, Contemplative Prayer
- * Teaching: Rules for Group Sharing and Time of Sharing Group Sharing
- * Closing Prayer

Session #2: March 11, 2019¹

- * Teaching: Silent Contemplation and Prayer
- * Group Exercise: Lectio Divina and Group Discussion
- * Homework: Praying with Scripture

Session #3: March 18, 2019

- * Teaching: Monastic Ascetic Discipline: Vigil, Fasting and Silence
- * Group Exercise: Silent Reflection on the Nature of Discipline, Group Discussion
- * Homework: An Experiment in Discipline: Vigil, Fasting, or Silence Praying with Scripture

Session #4: March 25, 2019

- * Opening Silence and Group Sharing
- * Teaching: Perfection in Love and the Passions
- * Group Exercise: Contemplative Prayer Regarding the Passions and the Call to Love
- * Homework: Silent Prayer and Meditation Regarding the Passions, Talking Back Journal

Session #5: April 8, 2019

- * Teaching: Life as a Spiritual Journey
- * Group Exercise: Contemplation of Your Life as a River²
- * Homework: Ignatian Conversational Prayer, River Exercise

Session #6: April 15, 2019

- * Teaching: Ignatian Discernment

¹ With the exception of the two retreats, all sessions followed a regular pattern: (1) Opening Silence (2) Group Sharing, (3) Group Instruction, (4) Group Exercise, (5) Homework Explanation, (6) Close in Prayer

² Margaret Silf, *Landmarks, An Ignatian Spiritual Journey* (London, UK; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1998), 47-50.

- * Group Exercise: Examen of Consciousness
- * Homework: Praying with Scripture

Session #7: April 22, 2019

- * Teaching: Identifying with Jesus
- * Exercise: Ignatian Contemplation of Mark 4:35-41
- * Homework: Ignatian Contemplation of Selected Scriptures

Session #8: April 29, 2019

- * Teaching on Spiritual Freedom, Simplicity, Purity and Submission
- * Group Exercise: Reflection on One of Three Paths of Spiritual Freedom
- * Homework: Reflection on Three Paths of Spiritual Freedom

Session #9: May 6, 2019

- * Teaching on the Spiritual Discipline of Mindfulness
- * Group Exercise: Contemplation of Convictions and Desires
- * Homework: Developing Areas of Mindfulness

Session #10: Closing Retreat, May 13, 2019

- * Opening Silence and Group Sharing
- * Teaching: A Rule of Life (Statement of Belovedness)
- * Group Exercise: Beginning to Develop a Statement of Belovedness
- * Group Discussion
- * Break for Lunch
- * Teaching: A Rule of Life (V.I.M. Statement)
- * Group Exercise: Contemplative Prayer to Develop a Word of Encouragement to Group Members
- * Group Encouragement
- * Closing Prayer

Appendix C
Survey #1

This survey is intended to help me to understand our spiritual journey and your progress as we go through these sessions. You may, if you wish, share your answers with others, however I will keep these completely confidential.

Before you begin his survey, please...

- * Stop and make space and time to pray and ask God to direct your thoughts.
- * Answer as honestly as you can
- * If there is an important question I haven't asked that will help you to describe your faith journey, please write it out and tell e about it on a separate sheet of paper. I want to know!

Describe You Spiritual Journey by Answering the Following...

1. When were you first exposed to faith?
2. How long have you been a Christian?
3. Who taught you to pray, and how were you taught to pray?
4. Describe the significant moments or stages of spiritual growth throughout your life (feel free to use another sheet of paper).
5. Are there any spiritual disciplines, practices, or resources that you use to encourage spiritual growth in your life?
6. Do you have a sense of where you need to grow as a Christian?
7. What are your fears or hopes about your faith and spiritual life?

Appendix D
Survey #2

1. Has this course changed the way you think about prayer?

2. Has your experience or practice of prayer changed over the last ten weeks? If so, explain.

3. Has this course changed the way you think about the Catholic Church?

4. What has been most meaningful to you in this course?

5. What have you disagreed with or thought unhelpful about this course?

6. What have you learned about yourself in this course?

7. Do you have a sense of where you need to grow as a Christian?

After you have completed this survey, please turn it in and then schedule a time to meet with me for an exit interview. Thank you!

Bibliography

- Anderson, Ray S. *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Au, Wilkie. And Noreen Cannon Au. *Discerning the Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. 2006.
- “Refining the Acoustics of the Heart,” in *an Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and more*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008.
- Bancarz, Steven, and Josh Peck. *The Second Coming of the New Age: The Hidden Dangers of Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America and Its Churches*. Crane, MO: Defender Publishing, 2018.
- Barry, William A. *Finding God in All Things*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991.
- *God and You: Prayer As A Personal Relationship*. Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1987.
- St. Basil. *The Sacred Writings of Saint Basil*. Deutschland, Laschberg: Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck, 2012.
- Bierlein, J. F. *Parallel Myths*. New York, NY: Ballantine Wellspring, 1994
- Bondi, Roberta. *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987
- Burghardt, Walter J. “A Long, Loving Look at the Real.” In *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*. edited by George W. Traub, SJ., 89-97. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008.
- Byassee, Jason. *An Introduction to the Desert Fathers*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007.

- Caddock, John. "What is Contemplative Spirituality and Why is it Dangerous? - A Review of Brennan Manning's 'The Signature of Jesus'," Grace evangelical Society (September 1, 1997), accessed July 31, 2020, <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/what-is-contemplative-spirituality-and-why-is-it-dangerous/>.
- Campolo, Tony, Mary Albert Darling. *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Coe, John H. and Kyle C. Strobel. *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.
- Cutri, Sister Mary, O.C.D. *Sounding Solitude*. Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2010.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M: With an Essay on His Genius and Writings, by Henry Rogers: and a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight, in Two Volumes*. ed. Edward Hickman. Patternoster Row, London: John Childs and Son, Bungay, 1839.
- Fleming, David L. SJ. *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008.
- Guardini, Romano, Matthias Grünewald Verlag, trans. *Meditations Before Mass*. Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 1993.
- Hall, Christopher. *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*. Downer's Grove, L: IVP Academic, 2009.
- Hari, Johann. *Why You're Depressed and How to Find Hope*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
- Hernandez, Will. *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006.
- Hudson, Trevor. *Discovering Your Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.
- Johnson, Jan. *When the Soul Listens*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999.

- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Martin, James S.J. *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2012.
- Matthew the Poor. *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Matthews, Kenneth. *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Genesis 1-11:26*, Vol.1A. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.
- May, Gerald G. M.D. *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2004.
- McCartney, Martha W. *Immigrants and Adventurers 1607-1635: A Biographical Dictionary*. Baltimore, MD; Genealogical Publishing Company, 2007.
- McNeill, John T. ed. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol.1. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1960.
- Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York, NY: New Directions Books, 1961.
- Moon, Gary. *Apprenticeship With Jesus: Learning to Live Like the Master*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.
- Mulholland, Robert, M. Jr. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1993.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1974.
- . *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010.
- Papavassiliou, Vassilios, *Thirty Steps to Heaven: The Ladder of Divine Ascent for All Walks of Life*. Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2013.

- Pierce, Pattie, "Group Spiritual Direction," SP728: Spiritual Direction Cohort. Class lecture at Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, CA, September 25, 2017.
- Poythress, Vern. *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL; Crossway Books, 2006.
- Rosebrough, Chris. "Dangers of Monastic Mystic Meditation Practices." *Extreme Theology* (October 6, 2010). Accessed December 5, 2019. <https://www.extremetheology.com/2010/01/dangers-of-mystic-meditation-practices.html>.
- Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilholt, and Tremper Longman III, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Images*. Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 1998.
- Silf, Margaret. *Landmarks, An Ignatian Spiritual Journey*. London, UK: Longman and Todd Ltd, 1998.
- Stewart, Gareth, W. D. *Word and Power: Is the Theology of John Wimber Compatible with Presbyterian Theology and Practice?* Eugene, OR; Wipf & Stock, 2015.
- Strobel, Kyle C. "Contemplation By Son And Spirit: Reforming the Ascent of the Soul to God." In *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*. edited by John H. Coe and Kyle C. Strobel. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.
- Traub, George W. SJ. ed. *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on Ignatius, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*. Chicago, IL: 2008.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*. Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1914.
- Uyl, Anthony, ed. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume 1-11 Revised, By Jonathan Edwards*. Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada, 2019.
- Von Balthasar, Hans, Urs., trans. Graham Harrison. *Prayer*. SanFrancisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986.
- Webber, Robert E. *Worship Is A Verb*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985.
- Willard Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.
- *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New

York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Williams, Rowan. *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another*. Boston, MA: New Seeds Books, 2005.